



HE Distance Learning Policy

September 2025



SIGNIFICANT CHANGES FOLLOWING REVIEW

PAGE NUMBER OR HEADING NAME	DETAILS OF SIGNIFICANT CHANGE	CHANGES MADE BY

Senior Leadership Responsibility	Adam Fahey
Policy Author	Sharon Dunphy
Roles Responsible for Reviewing	Deputy Executive Director HE and Quality
Issue date of current version	September 2025 (V1)
Date to be reviewed	September 2026
Type of Policy	Public / Internal

Equality Impact Assessment

The aim of an equality impact assessment (EIA) is to consider the equality implications of any new or amended policy, procedure, practice, project, function on different groups of staff, students and visitors to the college. This EIA tool provides a simple framework that helps evaluate whether the change may inadvertently disadvantage protected characteristics and identify ways to proactively advance and promote equality.

You will need to consider each of the equations and provide information as to consideration and any changes made in relation to Equality, diversity and inclusion.

Date EIA completed.	September 2025
Name of person responsible for completing the EIA	Sharon Dunphy
Role of person responsible for completing the EIA	Deputy Executive Director HE and Quality
Who is affected by the policy	Student, Staff, Visitors and External Partners
What's the reason for the new policy / change in policy, practice, process etc.	Delivery of Distance Learning for BTEC Higher Nationals Programmes

You will need to consider whether its possible that the proposed new policy / change in policy /procedure/practice etc could discriminate or unfairly discriminate or disadvantage people. You should consider:

Who gets to participate	Who does not, or who now does not due to the changes proposed / made.
Who is at an advantage	Who is at a disadvantage, and again has this changed?
Who will benefit	Who will not benefit (or who did and now doesn't due to the changes proposed in policy
Who can access the policy	Who cannot, or now cannot.

Protected Characteristic	What degree of impact does the change have (score 1-5 with 1 the lowest and 5 the highest)	What is a potential positive, neutral or negative impact? Include what you have considered. Are there any barriers?	What action will be taken to address any negative impact or remove any potential barriers identified? Note if we are not able to resolve anything identified.	Date by when and whom will this action be taken.
Age	1	Neutral: accessible policy, formats available	None identified	N/A
Disability	4	Positive: online learning provides flexibility and multiple formats. Potential negative if accessibility requirements (e.g., screen readers, captions, adapted assessment) are not met.	Digital accessibility barriers, compatibility with assistive technology, digital poverty.	Ensure all materials meet WCAG 2.1 AA standards; staff training on inclusive design; offer alternative formats; Pearl, Programme Leaders & IT Teams – ongoing; monitored by programme partnership manager (PPM).
Gender (Sex)	1	Neutral: online learning applies equally to all genders.	No direct barriers identified.	Monitor engagement by gender in case of hidden disparities (e.g., caring responsibilities affecting participation). Widening Participation Officer – annual monitoring
Gender Reassignment	2	Neutral to Positive: anonymity and online engagement may feel safer. Possible risk if names/pronouns are not respected in digital platforms.	Risk of misgendering in digital systems (e.g., incorrect names displayed).	Ensure student records are updated; train staff on inclusive practice; allow students to update display names. Registry & IT, staff development – within 6 months
Marriage or Civil Partnership	1	Neutral: no identified impact.	None	N/A
Pregnancy / Maternity	3	Positive: online learning offers flexibility for students with childcare or health needs. Negative if assessments or	Potential barrier if live sessions are rigid or assessment deadlines inflexible.	Build in flexibility for assessment extenuating circumstances/recorded sessions; provide clear maternity/paternity support guidance. Programme Leaders & HE examinations - ongoing

Protected Characteristic	What degree of impact does the change have (score 1-5 with 1 the lowest and 5 the highest)	What is a potential positive, neutral or negative impact? Include what you have considered. Are there any barriers?	What action will be taken to address any negative impact or remove any potential barriers identified? Note if we are not able to resolve anything identified.	Date by when and whom will this action be taken.
		engagement monitoring do not account for absence.		
Race	3	Positive: online learning enables access to wider resources. Potential barrier if content is not culturally inclusive or if international students face digital access issues.	Digital poverty; cultural bias in learning materials.	Review teaching materials for inclusivity; monitor attainment gaps; provide digital access support for international students. Programme Leaders & PPM– annual review
Religion or Religious Belief	2	Neutral: online format provides flexibility, but clashes with religious observance (e.g., prayer times) could affect engagement.	Live session scheduling may conflict with religious observance.	Offer recordings/asynchronous options; timetabling sensitivity where possible. Programme Leaders – ongoing
Sexual Orientation	1	Neutral: no direct barriers identified.	Possible risk of online harassment in forums.	Monitor digital spaces in line with Code of Conduct; provide reporting routes. Student Support & Programme Leaders – ongoing

Note:

1. The terms stated under protected characteristics are the terminology used in the Equality Act 2010.
2. As part of the policy approval process Executive Board will consider the EIA assessment and any potential barriers which we may not be able to overcome and whether the action proposed will mitigate sufficiently within legislation or whether we decide to not implement the new policy if the risk are significant. If the policy is approved the EIA is also approved.

Applies To: All staff and students engaged in online or blended learning

1. Purpose

This policy sets out the University Centre South Essex approach to the delivery of teaching, learning, and assessment through online and blended methods. It aims to ensure that online learning is inclusive, engaging, high-quality, and aligned with our mission to “provide knowledge, education, and skills development for all.”

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All HE programmes delivered fully or partially online
- Staff involved in planning, delivering, or supporting online provision
- Students undertaking programmes or modules through online delivery

It includes live (synchronous), pre-recorded (asynchronous), and hybrid formats of delivery.

3. Principles

The College is committed to ensuring that online delivery:

- Maintains academic quality and rigour equivalent to face-to-face delivery
- Supports student success, progression, and employability
- Promotes digital inclusion and is accessible to all learners
- Aligns with strategic goals, especially Goal 1 (teaching and learning), Goal 4 (brand equity), and Goal 5 (collaboration)

4. Key Standards

4.1 Teaching and Learning

- Online delivery will be designed to support interactivity, collaboration, and independent learning.
- Learning materials must meet accessibility standards i.e. web content accessibility guidelines (WCAG) and be available via approved platforms (e.g. Teams, Pearl Platform).
- All staff must complete digital teaching CPD appropriate to their role.

4.2 Student Engagement

- Engagement includes attendance at live sessions, participation in online forums, completion of tasks, and digital communication.

- Analytics and learning data may be used to monitor engagement and intervene early where needed.

4.3 Assessment

- Assessments delivered online must retain integrity, fairness, and validity.
- Students will receive clear instructions, deadlines, and appropriate feedback via digital platforms.
- Contingency plans must be in place for digital failure or access issues.

4.4 Digital Safety and Wellbeing

- Safeguarding practices must apply equally in online spaces (see Safeguarding Policy).
- All interactions must comply with the Student Code of Conduct and IT Acceptable Use Policy.
- Staff must use only College-approved tools for teaching, communication, and assessment.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Programme Leaders	Ensure curriculum and assessments are designed for online delivery
Teaching Staff	Deliver content, support students, monitor engagement, Assess learning, give timely feedback to students, IQA in timely manner.
IT and Digital Teams	Provide technical support, training, and infrastructure
Students	Engage fully, meet expectations, and raise any access concerns promptly
Programme Partnership Manager	Monitor academic standards and gather feedback for improvement

6. Student Support

- All students will be offered digital skills support as part of induction.
- Personal tutors and HE support services will remain accessible through online or blended channels.

7. Quality Assurance and Evaluation

- Online programmes will be validated and reviewed with the same rigour as face to face courses.
- Student feedback, attainment data, and external examiner input will inform improvements.

- A consistent approach to online learning standards will be applied across the institution.

8. Related Documents (These can be found...add link on pearl system.....)

- Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy
- Pearson Assessment Regulations
- Pearson Assessment, Verification and Moderation Policy
- Safeguarding and Prevent Policy
- Student Code of Conduct
- Admissions Policy
- IT Acceptable Use Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- HE Attendance and Engagement Policy

9. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be monitored by the Higher Education Executive Board and reviewed biennially or following significant changes to delivery methods or regulations.



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