

## **FLEXIBLE LEARNING: STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES**

Flexible learning is part of The University of Queensland's overall strategy to deliver an *enhanced, student-centred approach to learning* by applying the most effective, flexible and appropriate teaching and learning modes and technologies. The aim at The University of Queensland is *to encourage independence, creativity and problem solving* in students, to prepare them for the future, through flexible approaches to learning.

### **(i) Characterising flexible learning**

*Flexible learning* is an overarching approach which emphasises an education where learning opportunities and options are increased and where students have more control over the learning process. It focuses on improving learning outcomes and maximising student engagement in learning by using the most effective, varied and appropriate teaching and learning modes.

*Flexible delivery* is the term used to describe means by which facilitation of effective, student-centred learning may be implemented (eg methods to deliver course content in new and novel ways). Flexible delivery includes the provision of resources and the application of technologies to create, store and distribute course content, enrich communications to enable more effective learning to occur and better management of learning by the learner.

The aim of flexible learning is to broaden the scope of students' learning interactions through providing a better mix of learning situations. Students are aided to develop new learning strategies through courses which enable and empower them to explore a variety of modes of interaction. These learning strategies should be consistent with ensuring appropriate depth of knowledge, as well as advancing the broad graduate attributes expected at the University of Queensland.

### **(ii) Aspects of flexible learning**

Flexible learning involves a number of pathways to achieve learning objectives and the development of teaching and learning processes that maximise outcomes for all learners. It does not presuppose that any particular teaching and learning approach is superior, nor does it render certain approaches unavailable for use. Rather, flexible learning requires that all teaching and learning approaches should be available for use in the appropriate circumstance.

In this context web-enhanced, on-line and distance learning are considered to be aspects of flexible learning, but are not the only aspects. Nevertheless, there are important opportunities for enhancing flexible learning information access and self-managed learning through the effective use of information and communications technologies.

Implementing flexible learning approaches may involve choices about flexibility in more than one way. Below are a series of dimensions on which those choices may be made.

- modes of delivery of materials and interaction;
- development of program structure;
- content of the program;
- pace of the program
- amount of contact and interaction learners have with the lecturer and each other;
- type and mix of media employed to deliver resources;
- extent of self-direction learners must employ in order to complete the program;
- time and space constraints on access to program materials or other learning experiences.

Curriculum development involves making choices on various dimensions about delivery modes, materials, resources, assessment and content. It is expected that the aspects of flexible learning evident in any course or program will be employed where developments in disciplinary pedagogy and an assessment of the suitability of the student cohort combine to demonstrate that these changes will enhance student learning. It is desirable that there is *a coherent approach to the introduction and development of flexible learning practices at the program level* that underpins course design.

### **(iii) Aspects of web-based flexible learning**

The use of web-based resources enables flexibility that may be introduced into course materials. The web should be used where it increases and promotes more active engagement and interaction, or provides easier or more equitable access by students to university resources, administrative systems and course materials.

The use of the on-line resources to facilitate flexible learning can occur in a number of ways and at various levels. The following broad distinctions can be made about the modes<sup>1</sup> of use of the web in course delivery:

- ❖ Web supplemented, where participation on-line is optional for the student, but information on courses and programs, including course outlines and overviews, assessment information, reading lists and other on-line resources are made available via the web.
- ❖ Web dependent, where participation on-line is required for the program. This participation may be by using course material, which contains major educational content, or by interaction and communication between staff and students or among students, or all of these elements. On-campus, face-to-face interactions remain part of the course.

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<sup>1</sup> These distinctions are employed by DETYA for purposes of reporting about on-line courses.

- ❖ Fully on-line, where there is no face-to-face on-campus component, and all content, activities and interactions are integrated and delivered on line.

While these aspects of web-based flexible learning are all available, it is expected that on-campus face to face interaction will remain a significant feature of undergraduate programs at the University of Queensland.

#### **(iv) Priorities for the University of Queensland**

The University of Queensland must consider how flexibility on the range of dimensions listed in (ii) (above) may be facilitated. Its priorities will therefore include:

- examining established teaching and learning practices for relevance and currency, and updating them to ensure enhanced options for students;
- keeping pace with changing delivery technologies, and facilitating the University community's ability to access them;
- maximising the potential of online delivery to provide materials and enable group communication;
- identifying areas of priority for development of web dependent and fully on-line materials;
- maintaining high quality educational experiences for all students, whether learning on-campus or at a distance;
- increasing flexibility in administrative approaches to student entry, enrolment, progression and assessment; and
- providing appropriate planning, resourcing and staff development initiatives for flexible learning.