

Distance Learning Policy

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Document Summary

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Statement of Distance Learning Policy and Scope

1.1. The City College is committed to delivering high-quality distance learning programmes through online platforms, ensuring access for a diverse range of students and meeting a wide range of educational needs.

We are dedicated to maintaining parity of academic standards and learning outcomes for our distance learning provision, ensuring it is equivalent in rigour and quality to our on-site or blended learning programmes.

All distance learning programmes offered by The City College—specifically those leading to a Higher Education award such as Pearson Higher Nationals—must be delivered, supported, and assessed entirely online, without requiring students to attend classes, events, or assessments on-site.

These programmes require formal approval from the Senior Leadership Team, the Academic Board, and the relevant external awarding bodies and regulators.

For Pearson courses, completion of the Distance Learning Self-Assessment (DLSA) form is mandatory for both new and existing programmes. This ensures compliance with Pearson's quality indicators and regulatory expectations.

Any programme that includes both online delivery and mandatory on-site attendance is classified as Blended Learning and therefore falls outside the scope of the Distance Learning programme.

This policy supports compliance with Ofqual's General Conditions of Recognition and SQA Accreditation Principles, as outlined in Pearson's regulatory framework.

Course Design and Delivery

2.1. This policy covers provision leading to an award, delivered, supported and assessed through means which do not require the student to attend classes or events on site. The City College is committed to ensuring that online courses meet the same rigorous academic standards as our on-site and blended learning courses. This includes clear standards for curriculum development, course structure, content delivery, and assessment methods, ensuring constructive alignment with learning outcomes.

Students enrolled in distance learning programmes will receive comprehensive support, including digital materials, interactive content, reading lists, and IT assistance.

This includes:

- Access to our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) SharePoint/Moodle.
- Digital learning materials, interactive content, and core reading lists.
- Guidance on accessing and utilising these digital resources, including IT support.
- All digital learning materials will adhere to our Accessibility and Inclusivity guidelines (Section 4).

- Interaction and Engagement will be encouraged through online seminars, discussion forums, video conferencing through Microsoft Teams and the VLE.
- Regular interaction and engagement between students and instructors, and among students themselves, is encouraged and facilitated through:
 - Scheduled synchronous online seminars and live video conferencing sessions (e.g., via Microsoft Teams).
 - Asynchronous discussion forums, collaborative online activities, and group projects are facilitated through the VLE.
 - Clear expectations for student participation in both synchronous and asynchronous activities.

Assessment and Evaluation

3.1. Assessment will be through assignments, discussions, presentations and other methods of assessment. All Assessments will be designed to ensure fairness, security, and authenticity, with robust measures to verify student identity and originality of work.

This includes:

- The College uses e-portfolios to support assessment and progress tracking. These are securely hosted on Moodle and SharePoint, with access controls in place to ensure data integrity and compliance with Pearson's standards.
- The mandatory use of signed declarations of authenticity for all submitted work.
- Utilisation of plagiarism and collusion detection software.
- Identity verification processes for key summative assessments
- Design of assessment tasks that promote critical thinking and discourage over-reliance on generative AI, along with clear academic integrity policies regarding AI use.
- Validity and Reliability: Ensuring that assessment methods accurately measure the intended learning outcomes and that grading is consistent and impartial across all assessments and assessors.
- Transparency: Clear communication of assessment criteria, marking rubrics, and submission deadlines.
- Feedback will be provided on submitted work, and Academic Integrity will be supported through tools such as plagiarism detection and advice during induction and study skills sessions. Timely, constructive feedback will be provided on all submitted work.
- All assessment records, learner evidence, and internal verification documentation will be retained for a minimum of three years, in accordance with Pearson's standards verification and audit requirements.

Academic integrity will be robustly supported through comprehensive advice during induction, live classes, study skills lessons, and ongoing guidance from lecturers, and through the enforcement of the College's Academic Misconduct Policy, which outlines clear procedures and penalties for plagiarism, collusion, and other forms of academic dishonesty.

Where applicable, externally set and marked assessments will follow JCQ inspection protocols or Pearson ICE requirements to ensure compliance with national standards.

3.2. Internal and External Verification: All assessment processes, instruments, and decisions are subject to internal verification processes. For Pearson Higher Nationals, these processes will strictly adhere to Pearson's requirements for Internal Verification and will be subject to external scrutiny by Pearson's Standards Verifiers/External Examiners to ensure national standards are consistently met.

Accessibility and Inclusivity

4.1. The City College will accommodate students with disabilities or special needs in the distance learning environment by:

- Allowing students to access online materials at their own pace and ensuring they are given clear schedules for unit submission deadlines.
- Providing transcripts of video material if necessary.
- Developing individualised learning plans and addressing specific needs and accommodations, when required.
- Ensuring there are regular opportunities between lecturers and students to monitor progress and identify any challenges they may face.
- Ensure signposting is in place so students are aware of internal and DSA support available.

Technology Requirements

5.1. Applicants for all programmes at The City College are required to have access to a laptop in order to undergo the recruitment process, including an online interview and English test. However, once accepted onto a programme, students can download the Microsoft Office Software Package free of charge for use during their time as a student.

Applicants are informed that they require reliable internet/wi-fi during their time on the course. The College also commits to maintaining a robust and secure technological infrastructure to support distance learning reliably.

Should applicants have a disability that means they may require assistive technology, DSA support is signposted, and assistance in applying for DSA support is provided if required.

Support and Resources

6.1. Support and Resources for Distance Learning students are outlined to students, initially during the recruitment process, then through induction and study skills classes.

6.2. The Student Welfare Officer gives a talk during induction for new students, and there is a Welfare Page on SharePoint, which students can access, as well as information on student support on the College website.

6.3. Students whose course is funded by Student Finance are eligible for DSA support, which is signposted if required.

Student Finance Guidance

The City College will provide clear and accurate information regarding student finance for distance learning students.

Tuition Fee Loans: Students on designated distance learning programmes may be eligible for a Tuition Fee Loan from the Student Loans Company (SLC)/Student Finance England (SFE), subject to their individual eligibility criteria

Maintenance Loans: It is crucial to note that students on distance learning courses are generally NOT eligible for a Maintenance Loan (for living costs), unless they are unable to attend in person due to a disability, or other specific exceptional circumstances (e.g., certain armed forces personnel).

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA): Eligible distance learning students with disabilities can apply for DSA, and the College will provide guidance on this process. In addition, the programme has been built with Reasonable Adjustments in mind. However, if students need additional support, they can contact the welfare team.

Students are advised to consult the official SLC/SFE websites for the most current and detailed eligibility criteria.

The City College also offers internal support through Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations (RASC). This is discussed during induction and in the student handbook, and students are encouraged to contact the Student Welfare Officer if they wish to discuss support or individual needs.

In addition, academic resources and support are available to students and explained during induction and live sessions. 1:1 academic support can be provided if requested in addition to the regular check-ins, and all staff emails are available in the student handbook. Staff are also contactable through Microsoft Teams.

External Adjudication: Students have the right to complain to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIAHE) if they remain dissatisfied after exhausting the College's internal complaints and appeals procedures. Information on the OIAHE and our internal complaints process will be clearly communicated.

7.1. Student attendance and engagement will be monitored through:

- Regular live sessions
- 121 tutor sessions.
- Active engagement with course materials and activities within the VLE (tracked via VLE analytics).
- Timely submission of assignments.

This monitoring aims to support student progression and identify early intervention needs.

Students who fail to engage with course materials or attend live sessions/tutorials will be contacted and support offered if required. A clear escalation process for non-engagement will be followed, with documented stages of contact and support offers.

Expectations for attendance and participation are made clear to students during interviews and induction regarding engagement and attendance, to ensure clarity.

Failure to meet expectations after warnings can result in students being suspended or withdrawn from the course. The formal procedures for such actions, including rights of appeal, will be clearly outlined in the Student Handbook and relevant College policies.

Progression and Intake Rules

Progression rules, academic timelines, and intake transitions will be defined per individual programme specification and governed by funding body requirements where applicable (for example, aligning with Student Loans Company guidelines for funded pathways versus flexible entry points for self-funded programmes).

Continuous Improvement

8.1. Feedback will be collected regularly from students and faculty through module questionnaires, student meetings, and online platforms. This input will help enhance the distance-learning experience for both students and staff. All feedback will be actively reviewed by the Academic Board and relevant programme teams annually to inform curriculum development, policy updates, and improvements to student support.

Staff will be encouraged to pursue ongoing professional development to stay up to date with local trends and technologies in online education. Staff involved in distance learning delivery will be provided with ongoing professional development opportunities to keep current with the latest pedagogical approaches, technologies, and best practices in online education, reflecting national and international trends.

Policy Review: This Distance Learning Policy and Procedure will be formally reviewed annually, or more frequently if necessitated by changes in legislation, regulatory requirements (OfS, Pearson, SLC), internal procedures, or significant feedback from students and staff.

The City College is steadfast in its commitment to providing a high-quality, supportive distance-learning experience that enables student success and meets the rigorous standards expected of Higher Education provision by students, awarding bodies, and regulators alike. This policy outlines the framework and continuous improvement processes in place to achieve this.