



## **University Policy for Distance Education**

### **Definitions of Distance and Continuing Education**

Distance education is a mode of delivering educational programmes to learners without relying on regular guidance from an instructor and with either synchronous or asynchronous interaction between learners and instructors. Continuing education refers to the programmes/courses that are conducted outside a regular university curriculum, usually aimed at specific groups of participants with a completed end product that include non-degree career training, workforce training and formal personal enrichment courses with a perspective of self-directed learning. Continuing education also caters to lifelong learning / adult education that aims at learners, who surpass traditional undergraduate age group. This policy document combines both distance and continuing education as distance education.

Distance Education Programmes of the University of Peradeniya (thereafter referred to as the University) follow the principles of Open and Distance Learning (ODL). According to Commonwealth of Learning, the core features of ODL format are (a) learner centeredness, (b) lifelong learning, (c) flexibility, (d) provision of learner support, and (e) removal of barriers to access.

### **University Policy for Distance Education**

The University is committed to the following policies for all distance education programmes to ensure their quality and relevance. The proposed policies are based on the relevant UGC circulars, SLQF and University Senate guidelines for conducting distance education programmes (i.e. *Commission Circular No. 932, code of practice on external degrees 2010, Commission Circular 20/2017, Manual of Best Practices, Standards and Guidelines for External Training Institutions, 2014*). It also incorporates important characteristics of ODL.

1. **University Strategy and Distance Education:** The distance education programmes of the University are aligned with the mission and institutional goals of the university.

- a. The Centre for Distance and Continuing Education (thereafter referred to as the CDCE) is the only agency of the University that has mandate to deliver external undergraduate degree programmes.
- b. The university's plans for developing, sustaining and, where relevant , expanding distance education programs are integrated into its regular planning and evaluation processes.
- c. Planning documents are explicit/ transparent about the goals to increase the number of distance education programmes as well as student enrollment in new and existing distance education programmes.
- d. The university promotes and designs market-driven undergraduate degree programmes and job-oriented/job-related diploma programmes, certificate courses, short courses and also hosts many outreach activities.

2. **Governance and HR Development:** Distance and continuing education is incorporated into the University's systems of governance and academic oversight.

- a. The distance education programmes of the University are governed by a Board of Management (BoM) under the chairmanship of the Vice Chancellor with representatives from the UGC, Council and the Deans of participating faculties, Chairs of academic programmes, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Registrar, Bursar and general administrative officers of the CDCE.
- b. The administrative matters including programme budgets are evaluated by the BoM and the Finance Committee of the University to ensure the rigor of the distance education programmes and the quality of the operational structure.
- c. The Faculties are expected to link with the CDCE through Boards of Study to offer the external degrees.
- d. The faculty members have a primary role in designing and implementation of the University's distance education programmes.
- e. Approval of distance education programmes follow standard procedures used in the University that include Board of Study, Faculty Quality Assurance Cell, Faculty Board, Senate Academic Development committee, the Senate and the UGC.

- f. Financial procedures are clearly stated and comply with the University policy of self-financial activity.
- g. There are budgetary procedures in place for effective allocation of resources and monitoring expenses.
- h. The Distance education programmes are subject to periodic evaluation to ensure its quality and sustainability, and its alignment with University's priorities.
- i. There are clear lines of responsibility and accountability within the university for the administration of distance education programs and the roles of staff are clearly defined.
- j. Induction training shall be arranged for all distance education teachers who are in need for distance mode of teaching.
- k. Terms of reference shall be provided for each teacher in distance education.

3. **Programme Design and Development:** Curricula for the University's distance education programmes should comply with the academic rigor of similar programmes offered on campus for internal students.

- a. The curriculum specified for the study programme must be developed on the basis of predetermined graduate profile/qualification descriptors as per the guidelines of SLQF.
- b. Programmes are developed and modified on the basis of student needs and feedback, need assessments and consultation with industry and professional bodies.
- c. For maintaining academic standards, factors such as admission standards, well-prepared instructional materials, sample exercises, etc. should be provided.
- d. For each distance education programme there is a description, which includes the aims and learning outcomes, target group, teaching-learning processes, scheme of marking, mode of delivery, support services, credit and time requirement.
- e. The curriculum is coherent in its content and sequencing of courses. Scheduling of courses for distance education programmes provides students with a dependable pathway to ensure timely completion of degrees.
- f. Distance education programmes offer greater flexibility to its stakeholders and students than that by on-campus programmes, particularly in the combination of

subjects leading to Diploma, Higher Diploma and Degree. These opportunities need to be fully exploited in the interest of sound distance education system.

- g. The University has established and enforces a policy on faculty-student ratio in distance education courses to support effective student learning.
- h. Curriculum design and delivery should build the teacher in the study materials and it must also assist student-student and teacher-student interaction.

4. **Students Feedback, Assessment and Quality:** The University periodically evaluates the effectiveness of its distance education programmes in relation to its quality and relevance.

- a. Student course evaluations are routinely administered and response analysis contributes to course improvements.
- b. The University regularly evaluates the effectiveness of the academic and support services provided to students in distance education courses and use the results for continuous improvement.
- c. The University documents its success in implementing changes informed by assessment and evaluation at institutional and programme levels.
- d. There is an effective system of student support services and communication for distance learners:
  - i. Applications, enquiries and complaints are dealt with quickly, fairly and efficiently.
  - ii. The enrolment procedures are clear and efficient and include provision of accurate, comprehensive and helpful to students.
  - iii. The production and delivery of course materials are timely, reliable and of good quality.
  - iv. The assessment and evaluation system is reliable and ensure integrity.

5. **Blended mode of teaching and technology for teaching:** The University has adequate facilities in place to ensure teaching in distance education programmes through an appropriate blended mode.

- a. The University shall provide suitable and administrative support for faculty members to prepare self-instructional materials, manuals, online teaching, live audio/video conferencing, video, DVDs, etc.

- b. The teaching and learning needs for each element of the course are identified and take into account new technological developments, especially for increasing communication between participants.
  - c. Effective support is available for faculty members in distance education pedagogy and the use of technology during programme delivery.
  - d. Research into new technology is encouraged to prepare the University to make informed choices about the introduction of new technology to the distance education programmes.
6. **Student Support Services:** The University provides effective student and academic services to support students enrolled in distance education programmes and courses.
- a. The University's admissions process for distance education programmes provides students with a Handbook and effective web-based information to follow courses and assists them in developing skills important to succeed in distance education.
  - b. Students Orientation Programme for each distance programme is designed for the benefits of students.
  - c. Support services are provided to students in formats appropriate to the delivery of distance education programmes.
  - d. Students using distance education have effective access to learning resources appropriate for the programme such as e-library and information resources.
  - e. Approved Rules and Regulations for each programme shall be prepared and approved by the University Senate that includes sections on student complaints, code of conduct, and appeal processes.
  - f. The University assures the academic integrity of its distance education programmes through well-defined rules and regulations.
  - g. Publications and advertising for distance education programmes are accurate and contain necessary information such as programme goals, other requirements including any face-to-face expectations, academic calendar, and on-ground work.
  - h. Between or within University/Higher Educational Institution, it is recommended to explore the possibility of introducing credit transfer schemes to external distance

- education degrees, enabling the students to claim credits earned in internal or other external degree programmes of the same University/Higher Educational Institution.
- i. The institution makes clear in writing that the academic integrity processes protect student privacy and notifies students at the time of programme admission and course registration of any projected additional costs associated with the verification procedures.
  - j. The University maintains confidentiality of students' information and students' database.
  - k. The University is aware of and responds to learners with special needs.