Open and Distance Learning Policy 2020

BACKGROUND

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and its exponential spread across the globe ignited concerns regarding the future of work which has been a hot topic of discussion for management scientists over the past few years. Unexpectedly, this outbreak has brought the future way too soon for industries and organizations that are bound to re-think and re-shape their policies, processes, and working mechanisms. The field of education has been equally affected by the outbreak and universities and colleges, globally and in Pakistan, are highly concerned about the delivery of their courses to students. A key concern for Pakistan is the issue around internet connectivity since a large part of the country still remains unconnected with networks that are needed to connect universities to their students.

Being the largest public sector university of the province and with a student base of 16K+, the University of Balochistan is seriously concerned about the future of its students and consequently, the delivery of its curriculum to students in this unprecedented times of COVID-19 pandemic, which has been estimated to last a few months at least which means the suspension of traditional learning and teaching activities at the university. Therefore, in the pursuit of continuing the regular educational activities of the university, and in obedience of the guidelines of the Hon'ble Governor Balochistan / Chancellor UoB, the Hon'ble Vice Chancellor has constituted a committee to devise a robust policy and operational plan for the delivery of online classes by the university. The committee has been tasked to devise a detailed Open and Distance Learning (ODL) policy document along with operational mechanism for the delivery of online education at the university.

SCOPE OF POLICY

The scope of this document is to provide policy provisions for the delivery of ODL programs to the students of University of Balochistan, its campuses, and affiliated colleges across the province of Balochistan. The policy will guide the university into the future of blended learning and digital education by extending its current delivery mode to distance and online education. Although the policy is being developed to address the current need of continuing educational activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, however it is expected that this policy will continue to guide the university into its future of becoming a leading institution of online and distance learning in Pakistan. This is essential in an age driven by technology where staff and students expect flexibility in teaching/learning and engage in life-long education which wasn't previously possible in the absence of technology. Since the University of Balochistan has an excellent Department of IT (DIT) possessing rich resources and human capital to convert the university's vision into reality, this policy has been developed.

VISION AND MISSION

To provide students with the opportunity of accessing and engaging in quality education via distance and online learning. The university's core aim is to extend its revenue stream by expanding into different modes of education i.e. online and distance learning which will assist the university in becoming financially independent in the future. Being a geographically scattered province, the opportunities of online and distance learning are immense.

GOALS OF ONLINE EDUCATION AND DISTANCE LEARNING

The university aims to engage in online education with the following goals:

(i) To help the university in continuing to offer its education online during the COVID-19 pandemic.

(ii) To provide access to education to students who are physically out-with the geographical jurisdiction of the university and are unable to attend the university itself or any of its campuses spread across the province.

(iii) To expand its income stream to become financially independent.

(iv) To tap into new student markets where the university is physically not present.

(v) To attract more students to the university by providing greater flexibility in learning and giving access to programs via the use of technology.

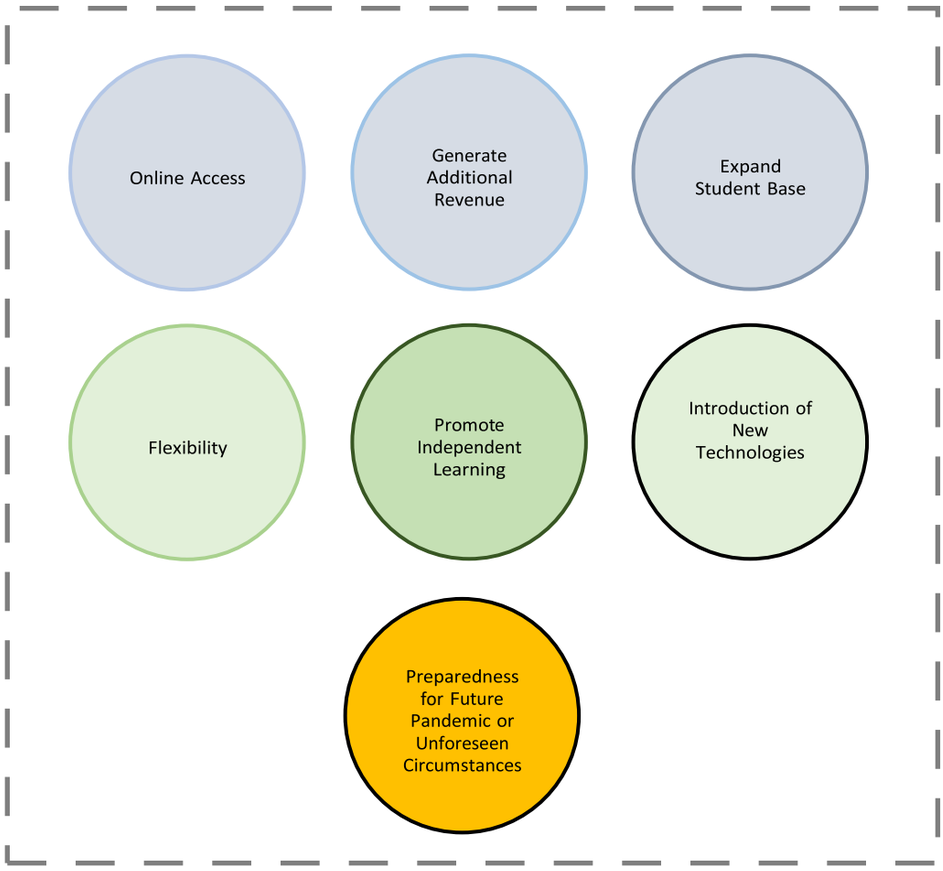
(vi) To provide greater flexibility to staff for working and delivering their courses from out-with the university. This shall provide work-from-home opportunities to teaching staff to enable them to operate effectively from distant locations and conducting their classes and engaging students from a distance.

(vii) To develop the intellectual capabilities of our students by promoting the independent learning aspect of education. The ODL mode shall allow students to be more self-reliant and get in the habit of self-learning.

(viii) To introduce staff and students to various technologies and learning platforms to better equip them in moving into the technological future.

(ix) To be prepared and well-equipped for any future pandemics or disasters that may halt the traditional educational system yet again.

Goals - Online Education & Distance Learning



CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

(i) The ODL curriculum developed at UoB shall conform to the guidelines of the HEC. All Deans of Faculties and Chairpersons of teaching departments will bear responsibility of this.

(ii) Departments will ensure that formality and flexibility of the programs are wellbalanced. The credit schemes will be formally developed whereas the duration of the ODL programs can be flexible.

(iii) The online courses will have the same objectives and learning outcomes as traditional courses.

(iv) The university will develop an online teaching framework/instructional design consistent across all faculties and departments which shall include the following:

i. development of the program plan
ii. a breakdown of the teaching plan and schedule
iii. elaboration of the course delivery components such as online interaction and face-to-face components, and instructional materials
iv. Self-test questionnaires

(v) Instructional design will include digital material, tutorial support system, and use of audio/visual technology.

(vi) Online and e-learning designs must be infused within the credit schemes already approved without compromising the pre-requisites of the courses/programs.

(vii) As an alternative to the face-to-face interaction, particularly for laboratory component of the teaching, simulations and online classroom environments can be established.

(viii) The curriculum and instructional designs must be approved by the relevant statutory bodies of the university and the faculty/department concerned.

TEACHING CONTENT/MATERIAL DEVELOPMENT

(i) Teaching content/material must be developed as per the need of the program/course. It is absolutely fine for different programs and courses within a faculty/department to have different material for online delivery. This can vary from the content of the traditional course.

(ii) The content chosen for online delivery must clearly align with the objectives of the course. E.g. when teaching the concept of teamwork, the content must reflect this in online delivery by engaging students in teams.

(iii) The content for distance education must be engaging, enabling, progressive, and transformational.

(iv) Credit hours shall be distributed in: self-study material; self-assessment activities; multiple media content; face-to-face/online tutorials; and workshops (can be digital or physical).

(v) The use of Open Education Resources (OER) under Creative Common Licenses shall be adopted in the existing course materials.

COURSE MATERIAL PREPARATION AND COMMUNICATION

(i) All information shall be shared with students using multiple communication methods. E.g. Email and Post.

(ii) Transparency and secrecy shall be maintained by the university in collaboration with DIT.

(iii) A range of contemporary digital methods and tools must be used for online delivery. This shall be done to facilitate communication between students and their teaching departments. The concept of Virtual Classrooms can be used to facilitate interaction between teacher and students. This can be done using the simplest software such as WhatsApp where teachers can create groups (as classrooms) being the Group Administrator and students added as participants. Teaching and learning activities be encouraged in these groups where students can ask questions from their teachers for quick response. Dedicated email accounts can also be used for this purpose.

(iv) Availability of staff beyond the normal university timings must be to facilitate ODL students.

(v) Training and teaching manuals must be prepared by each department to facilitate staff and students.

(vi) The Department of Information Technology (DIT) shall take the lead in developing virtual learning platform for all faculties and teaching departments. DIT will ensure all teaching material received from departments complies with the ODL policy of the university and is in deliverable state.

(vii) DIT will ensure the availability of online delivery material to teaching staff and students and shall provide training to them for the use of such systems and platforms. DIT may use any relevant platforms for such use including Zoom, Skype, Dropbox, Google Drive, Emails, any other portals commonly used for ODL.

(viii) Dean Faculty shall act as the Head of ODL Programs (focal person) of their relevant faculties and ensure effective communication between their teaching departments and DIT.

(ix) In collaboration with the Chairpersons, the Dean Faculty shall nominate a number of Subject Experts (SE) for each teaching department who will be the key persons responsible for development of online material for the different courses within the department. The SEs will transform traditional teaching material into online teaching material. Therefore, it is essential for the SEs to be proficient in IT and contemporary software and learning platforms.

(x) The SEs must be spared off their existing teaching load to dedicate their time towards the preparation of ODL study material. The Vice Chancellor may approve additional remuneration for SEs if need be.

COURSE DELIVERY MECHANISM

(i) All degree programs including B.S. (MPhil/PhD in future) using ODL route must be offered on Self-Study basis with limited synchronous component (if needed). All teaching material will be made available to the students at the start of the course and student will have to complete the course within a set time frame.

(ii) The teaching material must be made available online to the student as well as mailed out (in printed form) in case the student has issues accessing the online material due to poor connectivity issue or unavailability of a computer.

(iii) For courses where the entire teaching content can be delivered using selfstudy or asynchronous mode, there shall be no need for live teacher-student interaction using live video calls, video or in-camera lectures. However, if synchronous medium is needed for delivering a course of part of course effectively, they should be made available.

(iv) Programs and courses where student engagement is essential, such as MBA programs, additional arrangements must be made e.g. using Discussion Boards or any other means to facilitate student engagement and discussion.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT MECHANISM

(i) Multiple assessment components must be used for student evaluation at multiple delivery points.

(ii) The assessments and evaluations must include, and not be limited to, course assignments, quizzes, face-to-face/online activities, participations and presentations, group discussions, simulations, and examinations (mid and end of term exams).

(iii) The conduct of examinations for ODL programs must strictly comply with the general examination policy and rules of the university and Semester Examination policy.

(iv) All assessment, evaluation, and exam related procedures must be communicated to students at the time of registration for the ODL program.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

(i) The ODL programs shall undergo and fulfill all the quality assurance requirements as the traditional programs.

(ii) The QAAD office shall provide assistance in quality assurance.

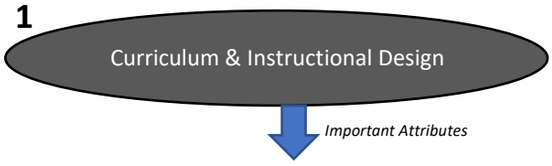
(iii) All ODL programs must be approved by the relevant statutory bodies and must meet HEC guidelines.

(iv) The entire responsibility of quality assurance must rest with the relevant Dean Faculty who shall act as the Head of ODL Programs.

(v) The University of Balochistan shall comply with Policy and Regulations for Open and Distance Learning (ODL) developed by the HEC.

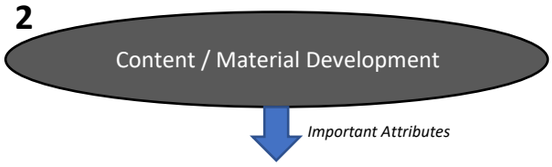
Fundamental Processes with Key Attributes

1



- HEC Guidelines
- Formality & flexibility of Programs
- Uniform objectives & outcomes
- Online Teaching framework
- Instructional design (Synchronies and / or Asynchronies)
- Online & E-Learning Design
- Approval by Statutory Forums

2

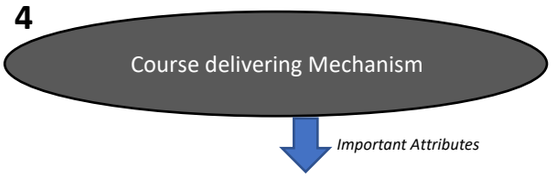


- As per need of programs / courses
- Online delivery aligned with objectives
- ODL (Engaging, enabling, progressive & Transforaminal)
- Distributed credit hours
- Use of Open Educational Resources (OER)
- Self testing Questioners

3

- Multiple Mediums (E-Mail, Post, Web Etc.)
- Contemporary Online Digital Methods & Tools
- Training & Teaching Manuals
- Virtual Learning Platforms
- Intime online delivery of Materials
- Dean as head of ODL Program
- Nomination of Subject Experts

4



- Route to Self Study
- Deployment of teaching material online & in hard form
- Where Applicable: synchronies Teaching mode
- Must: Asynchronies Teaching mode

5

- Multiple Assessment Components
- Incompliance with University and semester rules
- communication of Rules & procedure to all stakeholders including students

6

- Adhering of All Quality Assurance Requirements
- QAAD Assistance
- Compliance of Policy & Regulation

OPERATIONAL PLAN

Online Academic Council (OAC)

The purpose of Online Academic Council (OAC), as prescribed by the HEC, is to approve online courses and faculty and to rule upon disputes and complaints. The council is also responsible for ensuring smooth operations of the online and distance education at the university. Keeping in view the guidelines of the HEC and its recommendation, the committee constituted by the worthy Vice Chancellor may be notified as University of Balochistan's OAC for the approval of online courses during the current pandemic. The worthy Vice Chancellor may grant prior approval to the recommendations of the committee with pending final approval from the university's Academic Council once the COVID-19 is over. The OAC will work as governing body for impartment of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Technological Readiness

1. In accordance with the HEC Covid-19 Guidance No.3 - TSC- Final Approved Working Paper, University of Balochistan has in-house adopted and deployed the Moodle Learning Management System (LMS) along with integration of video conference solution, with all such useful features as recommended by the TSC, thereby the LMS is ready for Synchronous as well as Asynchronous mode of online lecture delivery. This LMS will prove beneficial not only during the current pandemic situation but also become a useful tool for promoting future blended and distance learning approaches in the long-term. Furthermore, the UoB IT infrastructure that is connected directly with PERN, already facilitates and provides a number of services including Access to Digital Library resources through VPN and open access of online books catalogue of UoB central library, as deemed essential during the lockdown under Covid-19 pandemic.

2. A series of recurring online trainings on LMS have already been initiated for faculty members. Additionally, training resource materials are being provided to faculty members in the form of tutorial documents, videos etc. Furthermore, an LMS demonstrative course has been setup on UoB Moodle, populated with training materials to initially facilitate the faculty members.

3. The Process of faculty/teacher registration is already in process and expected to complete by 30th April 2020.

4. Course design process is also in progress and expected to be completed within the given timelines.

5. The student registration process will begin and complete in phases, as planned. Subsequently, tutorial documents and demonstration videos on using LMS will be floated online for students through various electronic means.

Quality Assurance

The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Directorate (QAAD) shall be responsible for monitoring and maintaining the quality of ODL programs at UoB. QAAD will be involved throughout the policy design, development and implementation process to avoid any concerns around the quality of online teaching and learning at the university. The QAAD will play the following roles in the design and implementation of ODL programs:

1. Ensure implementation of policy guidelines in line with the prescribed policy by the HEC.

2. Monitor internal evaluation of standards and procedures for ODL programs.

3. Enhancement of quality assurance processes at institutional and program levels in the University.

4. Recognize quality tier with the help of common rubrics that distinguishes between "Basic", "Effective", and "Exemplary" standards, as per guidelines.

5. Ensure the slight variations in quality standards and requirements of conventional courses in general and online courses in particular. The quality parameters will ensure that courses are appropriately designed and organized, relevant support and resources are provided to students, instructional design and instructor quality meet the required standards, assessment and evaluation are in line with the policy guidelines, innovative use of technology is in place, course learning outcomes are being met, and student feedback is received and well taken care of.

6. Capacity building mechanisms are in place to enhance the standards of quality assurance at UoB.

Curriculum Readiness

The ODL curriculum developed at UoB shall conform to the guidelines of the HEC. All Deans of Faculties and Chairpersons of teaching departments will bear responsibility of this. The OAC shall only approve those courses that are strictly in line with the flowing guidelines/SOPs:

1. Course: All courses developed for ODL programs must include:

    i. introduction
    ii. learning objectives
    iii. grading policy
    iv. course pre-requisites (if any)
    v. textbooks
    vi. lesson plans along with reading materials for each lecture
    vii. assignments
    viii. Power Point slides and other handouts

    A key task of the OAC will be to ensure that all the above conditions are met prior to approving any course for online delivery.

2. Faculty: Since online teaching is different to the traditional face-to-face teaching, special attention needs to be paid to certain of its attributes including its unique challenges, techniques and supportive resources. A faculty member offering an online course must take relevant training courses which may enable him/her to appropriately address these challenges and situation. The OAC must ensure that faculty members delivering online courses have undergone the relevant training programs offered by the Faculty Training and Development Centre (FTDC), in conjunction with the Directorate of Information Technology (DIT) at UoB.

3. Evaluation & Assessments: The evaluation and assessment methods of online education are different from traditional methods. The assessment methods in online education should be explicit and include assignments, group activities and engagements, discussion boards, self-assessments and quizzes, which are built in the structural design of the course. In this regard, HEC will issue a set of guidelines to all universities in the near future, which will be followed by UoB. However, in the meantime, the following evaluation and assessment structure must be followed by all online courses to ensure consistency in methods across the university:

Quizzes (LMS)	10%
Assignments/Reports (LMS)	15%
Attendance + LMS Log	10%
Discussion Forum/Video/Audio Engagement	15%
Mid Term Examination (Oral Exams and Presentations)	20%
Final Examination (Oral Exams and Presentations)	30%

4. Laboratory & Practical Instructions: The laboratory work, research projects, or internships require physical presence of the student and direct supervision. Such courses may be avoided and be ruled out during the lockdown phase. HEC will issue detailed guidelines and subsequently be placed before the OAC for implementation.

5. Course Formality & Flexibility: Departments will ensure that formality and flexibility of the course are well-balanced. The credit schemes and grading policy will be formally developed which would be explicit throughout university.

   Each course shall have 15 week lecture plan as per the following proforma:

Week	Topics	SLO	Knowledge	Understanding	Application

   Each lecture shall preferably include:
   a. One hour/credit hour pre-recorded video with lecture slides for each week
   b. Audio-video interactive learning material
   c. Two graded assignments/credit hour
   d. Weekly reading materials of 1 hour/credit including additional videos (if any)
   e. At least one discussion topic/credit hour
   f. Two graded quizzes /credit hour

6. Responsibility: The Chairpersons of teaching departments, with the consultation of respective Deans, shall nominate faculty members and assign specific courses for online delivery which are strictly in accordance with the above parameters and guidelines. The developed courses will be placed before the OAC by the relevant Deans for formal approval.

7. Training: Upon the formal approval of the courses by OAC, the responsible faculty members will be offered training courses by FTDC and DIT.

Implementation/Practical Issues

1. Students who are unable to register for/attend online courses during the COVID-19 due to any reason, will be allowed to complete their missed courses through LMS in parallel to their normal on-going semester once pandemic is over. Such students will carry credit hours for online semester as if semester is frozen and will not affect their CGPA if result of other students who attended the online semester is declared.

2. Students who do not register for offered online courses will have to provide reasonable justification as to why they are unable to register. Such students will have to seek formal approval from the OAC for continuing their missed online courses in parallel to the regular semester after returning back to the university.

3. For attendance monitoring purposes, students will have to login to the LMS (Learning Management System) or in combination participate through other widely used mediums such as WhatsApp, Email etc. subject to the confirmation by the concerned teacher.

4. Students can drop course/courses before mid term, after mid term, they will not be allowed.

5. In areas and districts where Internet accessibility is an issue, UoB will sort out a mechanism in its campuses and other local universities to provide technological access to the students for downloading or accessing the online materials. Moreover, the Colleges, Higher and Technical Education Department of Government of Balochistan has established more than one government facility (such as College or School) in different districts as Cluster head which has the facility of Computer Lab. In

negotiation with the Education Department, proper engagement plan may be designed to enhance students' access to internet in marginalized areas/population.

6. All other semester issues will be dealt with in accordance with the existing semester rules of the university.

7. The policy of online education duly approved by the OAC of UoB will be implemented in its campuses, constituent colleges and affiliated colleges accordingly.

8. The ODL policy is subject to change from time to time and only after the formal approval from OAC. Any approved changes to this policy shall be communicated to the stakeholders from time to time.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Department of Information Technology (DIT)

(i) DIT will acquire support from Technology Support Committee (TSC) of HEC for:
    (a) preparing a connectivity map to identify problem areas
    (b) collaborate with service providers to find solutions to connectivity challenges in remote areas
    (c) collaborate with service providers to arrange preferential access to educational websites and materials

(ii) DIT will try to get access National Knowledge Bank (NKB), which will include databanks of curriculums, online materials (textual as well as audiovisual), and questions and problems. These materials will be later provided to faculty

(iii) DIT can approach the TSC at covid19-tsc@hec.gov.pk for acquiring the LMS. Technical Support Committee (TSC), HEC issued the "COVID-19 Technology Support document", identifying requirements and process for the establishment of LMS

Teaching Faculty

(i) Faculty members will select online tutorials from the recommended list provided by NAHE

(ii) Submit their own materials (syllabuses, PPTs, video lectures, and exam questions and quizzes) for incorporation into the National Knowledge Bank (NKB)

FTDC

(i) FTDC in collaboration with NAHE will identify and recommend online tutorials for faculty members on online teaching and evaluation.

QAAD

(i) QAAD will utilize the Monitoring Framework which HEC has directed HEMIS to establish on syllabus, teaching, and evaluation, in order to identify and trouble shoot quality challenges in online delivery.

(ii) QAAD in collaboration with DIT will submit real time data on the online portal on courses as well as exams and quizzes, in order to obtain assistance on emerging challenges.

(iii) QAAD, UoB in collaboration with QAA, HEC will arrange regular performance evaluations to assess quality of curriculums, instruction, and evaluation in various institutions in order to protect students' interests.

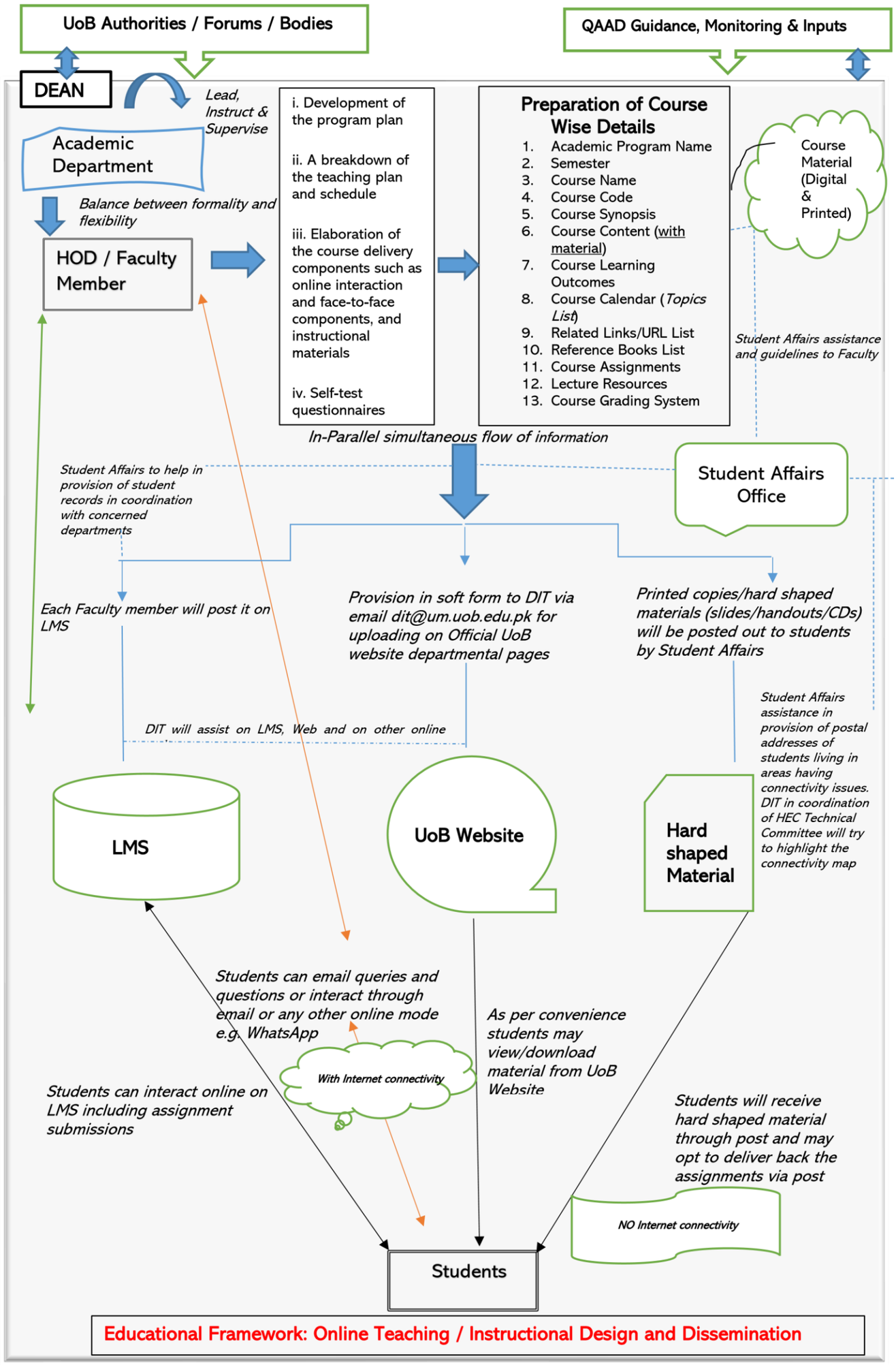
(iv) QAAD in collaboration with other relevant offices (Especially GSO & UGSO) will provide data needed on faculty and students registered on LMS, faculty trained on online teaching and assessment practices, and other requirements prescribed by HEC to safeguard the quality of learning.

(v) QAAD to implement HEC provided standard guidelines for assessment/ evaluation of quality of online teaching and for the said purpose standards and rubrics are drafted.

University Administration

(i) Universities must exempt faculty members from attendance except for essential tasks

*A detailed diagram explaining the overall design of ODL program of University of Balochistan is provided on the next page:


UoB Authorities / Forums / Bodies
QAAD Guidance, Monitoring & Inputs
DEAN
Lead, Instruct & Supervise
Academic Department
Balance between formality and flexibility
HOD / Faculty Member
i. Development of the program plan
ii. A breakdown of the teaching plan and schedule
iii. Elaboration of the course delivery components such as online interaction and face-to-face components, and instructional materials
iv. Self-test questionnaires
Preparation of Course Wise Details
1. Academic Program Name
2. Semester
3. Course Name
4. Course Code
5. Course Synopsis
6. Course Content (with material)
7. Course Learning Outcomes
8. Course Calendar (Topics List)
9. Related Links/URL List
10. Reference Books List
11. Course Assignments
12. Lecture Resources
13. Course Grading System
Course Material (Digital & Printed)
Student Affairs assistance and guidelines to Faculty
In-Parallel simultaneous flow of information
Student Affairs Office
Student Affairs to help in provision of student records in coordination with concerned departments
Each Faculty member will post it on LMS
Provision in soft form to DIT via email dit@um.uob.edu.pk for uploading on Official UoB website departmental pages
Printed copies/hard shaped materials (slides/handouts/CDs) will be posted out to students by Student Affairs
Student Affairs assistance in provision of postal addresses of students living in areas having connectivity issues. DIT in coordination of HEC Technical Committee will try to highlight the connectivity map
DIT will assist on LMS, Web and on other online
LMS
UoB Website
Hard shaped Material
Students can email queries and questions or interact through email or any other online mode e.g. WhatsApp
With Internet connectivity
As per convenience students may view/download material from UoB Website
Students can interact online on LMS including assignment submissions
Students will receive hard shaped material through post and may opt to deliver back the assignments via post
NO Internet connectivity
Students
Educational Framework: Online Teaching / Instructional Design and Dissemination