

7. Learner Support

Learners are provided with a range of opportunities for real two-way communication through the use of various forms of technology for tutoring at a distance, contact tutoring, assignment tutoring, mentoring where appropriate, counselling (both remote and face-to-face), and the stimulation of peer support structures. The need of learners for physical facilities and study resources and participation in decision-making is also taken into account.

Elements of the Criterion

Academic support

- 7.1 Learners are encouraged to create and participate in 'communities of learning' in which the individual learner thinks and solves problems with others engaged in similar tasks. This is facilitated through a range of learner support mechanisms – peer support sessions, tutorials/contact sessions, teaching on assignments, support in the workplace (mentoring), email and Internet communications, for example.
- 7.2 Academic support is built into the design of the course materials.
- 7.3 Learners are carefully oriented to the teaching and learning methods on the programme, particularly if electronic learning methods are used.
- 7.4 Where appropriate, the development of competence in the use of information and communication technologies is built into the learning outcomes of the programme.
- 7.5 In selection of venues and times for contact sessions, travel time and expense for learners are considered. Care is taken to place suitable sites of learning close to where learners live/work.
- 7.6 Tutors are selected and trained for their crucial role in encouraging active engagement of each learner in the course/programme through:
 - establishing and maintaining a supportive relationship with each learner in their group;
 - mediating learning from the course materials;
 - teaching on assignments by give constructive feedback.
- 7.7 Tutor training places particular emphasis on equipping tutors to analyze and assist learners with language and learning difficulties.
- 7.8 The tutor/learner ratio is sufficiently small to enable tutors to know their learners as individuals, be able to support them in their studies and monitor their progress.
- 7.9 There are sufficient contact sessions to ensure that the learners are able to achieve the outcomes of the course.

- 7.10 Contact sessions are integrated into the course design, rather than being an add-on extra.
- 7.11 The teaching and learning activities at contact sessions acknowledge learners' existing knowledge and experience, and provide opportunities for guided integration of the new knowledge and skills as contained in the course materials.
- 7.12 There are opportunities for individual academic support for learners either by telephone, by appointment, or online.

Counselling support

- 7.13 Learners have access to counselling for personal difficulties/advice related to their study before and during their course or programme, as well as after its completion.

Administrative support

- 7.14 Administrative staff are trained to be helpful, clear and consultative in the way they relate to and make arrangements for learners.
- 7.15 The obligations and responsibilities of learners and the educational provider are made clear at registration. It is clear what resources and equipment the provider will supply, and what the learner will have to supply personally.
- 7.16 Where possible, arrangements are made to meet learners' needs for physical facilities for study, tutorial, and resource space.
- 7.17 Learners have access to facilities (for example, libraries) and equipment that are necessary for their successful learning.
- 7.18 Learners are provided with technical support for educational technology hardware, software, and delivery system required in a programme.

Learning centres as part of learner support

- 7.19 Both academic and administrative functions of learning centres are taken care of in the way that learning centres are managed.
- 7.20 Learning centres, to the extent that they become fixed structures, and particularly fixed structures with technological equipment, are accessible to the broader community, rather than merely to a provider offering a formal programme.

Monitoring/quality assurance

- 7.21 Before each critical phase of a course/programme (for example, before the first assignment, contact session, examination), each learner is contacted and encouraged to participate.
- 7.22 Learner performance is monitored and learners at risk identified. Timeous educational intervention is provided for such learners.

- 7.23 Performance of tutors and attendance of both tutors and learners at contact sessions is monitored regularly. The work of mentors in supporting and assessing learners in the workplace is also monitored by the provider. Monitoring data is analysed and acted upon.
- 7.24 Feedback is sought from tutors/mentors as well as from learners for the review of courses and programmes.
- 7.25 Learner structures, such as learner/student representative councils and faculty associations, are established, recognized and empowered to represent learners on structures of institutional governance.