

FACT SHEET DISTRIBUTED EDUCATION

Developments in technology have created new options for student learning, particularly for those living in remote and/or rural locations. By using technology and other strategies students can participate in a formal education program and be separated from instructors and each other. One mechanism used by universities and colleges to provide enhanced educational opportunities is distributed education programs.

Definitions

Distributed Education

Distributed education is a broad concept that includes both education delivered wholly off-campus and elements of traditional education made available remotely. The distributed education model can be used in combination with traditional classroom-based courses, with traditional distance learning courses, or it can be used to create wholly virtual classrooms

Distance Learning

Distance learning is considered to be a subset of distributed education. In physiotherapist education programs distance learning is defined as a structured educational process in which students and instructors are separated by geographic distance or time, and which is supported by communications technology such as online delivery or synchronous videoconferencing.

New Physiotherapy Education Program

A new program is considered to be one that is:

- A newly developed program that has its own governance, funding, admissions processes, faculty, and exit credential; or
- A currently existing program with changed exit credentials.

Distributed Education Program

A distributed education program is one in which a program is offered concurrently at two or more sites that share governance, funding, admissions processes, faculty, and the same exit credential.

Scope of Distributed Education

Examples of options for distributed education include:

- i) establishment of satellite education programs;
- ii) online instructional modules that supplement or replace in-person instruction in a course or multiple courses;
- iii) videoconferencing or teleconferencing for instruction where students are located at dispersed clinical sites or a branch campus; and
- iv) online instruction to replace other instructional methods for individual students who are dispersed regionally, nationally, or internationally, as part of a “virtual” education program.

Accreditation of Distributed Education Programs

ACCPAP considers the development of distributed education to be a substantive change in an education program that requires submission of a Program Report of Substantive Change.

In a distributed model, the education program as a whole is accredited and all sites must meet accreditation criteria.

The accreditation review of a physiotherapist education program that has a distributed learning component will include an on-site visit by the Peer Review Team to the site or sites that are off-campus.

The education program will be responsible to pay the additional costs for the Peer Review Team to conduct the on-site review of the distributed education program component.

Considerations for Development of Distributed Education Programs

- The institution must:
 - support the development of distributed education programs, and related academic and administrative requirements; and
 - take whatever steps necessary to ensure that a student registered in a distributed education program is the student actually completing the work.
- Distributed education differs from traditional on-campus education in substantive ways, e.g., pedagogy, assessment. Cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills need to be taught and assessed differently depending on the mode of delivery.
- All courses offered through distributed education must
 - Be part of a comprehensive curriculum plan that demonstrates effective integration between educational components offered on-campus and at a distance,
 - Be taught by qualified faculty,
 - Result in learning appropriate to the rigor and breadth of the degree awarded, and
 - Provide for appropriate participation and interaction between and amongst faculty and students.
- Students participating in distributed education should:
 - benefit from consistency in course design, communication, technology, and assessment; and
 - have equitable access to support such as library resources, counselling services.
- Faculty should have access to appropriate resources for instructional design and delivery of distributed education.
- Program staff should be able to support the implementation of distributed education.
- Technology should be adequate to ensure the quality and effectiveness of the learning environment.