1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose
This document sets out general guidance for writing modules for students studying through the Block-Release (BR) or Part-Time (PT) modes. As a general guidance, this document is not intended to be prescriptive and exclusive as to stifle innovation or to preclude any other approaches which may enhance the quality of modules produced for BR and PT students. We present here a generic template which specifies only the minimum standard.

1.2 What is Block-Release Mode?
In this mode of delivery, courses are not spread out over a semester but are offered in a ‘block’. The courses are offered in a very condensed time, usually one to two weeks.

1.3 What is a Part-Time Student?
A part-time student is one whose study within the reference period represents an academic value (number of study units towards a qualification) that is less than would typically be achieved with full-time commitment of time by the student and if they would normally be expected to be in the programme for the entire academic year. A full-time commitment of time equates to 75% or more of the typical academic weeks as it applies locally at that level of education.

1.4 Learning Characteristics of Block-Release and Part-Time Students
Block release and part-time students attend lectures in condensed time periods and are not on campus for prolonged periods. This puts a distance between them and the learning infrastructure on campus, such as contact with lecturers, access to the library and personal interaction with fellow students. The face-to-face student/lecturer interaction is limited in these modes. These modes have more of asynchronous than synchronous learning.

Periods when students are on campus are condensed with activities, lectures, and group work. A large amount of intellectual exchange happens in a short time, and many students find it difficult to absorb.

1.5 Need for Supporting Learning Material
Recognising the need to provide BR and PT students with comprehensive materials to support self-directed learning when they are not on campus, the University recommends that all departments in the University with such programmes develop special supportive modules. This is to ensure that the students receive supportive information that will guide their off-campus learning.
2. MODULE DEVELOPMENT

2.1 What is a Module?

A module is a self-contained ‘block’ of study material that has a defined number of credits at a particular academic level and comprises the curriculum and content that must be covered in order to be awarded the credit for the module. It specifies the curriculum from learning outcomes to assessment criteria.

2.2 Module Specification

2.2.1 General approach to module writing

The module should be designed to provide a coherent, consistent and systematic way of communicating to students the following:

a) What the module is about and how it is to be delivered
b) Factual information about the module
c) Indicative content that will guide learning

Aspects to be covered in the module include: module author(s); title (narrative and code); notional hours; credit value of module; level; pre- and core-requisites; description and purpose of the module; learning outcomes; indicative syllabus; indicative content; assessment; and indicative reading.

2.2.2 Module author(s)

The author(s) of the module must be stated. The conventional practice is to use ‘given name’ and ‘surname’, and if there is a middle name, only the initial is required. For example, ‘Ronald M. Nyava’, with no titles given. Please note that the authors are not automatically assumed to be identical to module lecturers or tutors. Other staff may teach the module.

It is strongly recommended that each module be developed by a team of experts in the discipline.

2.2.3 Module title

The module title should be clear and resonate with the content being covered. The alphanumeric code of the module must also be given. The code is normally a seven-character string (e.g. CUEB 601) comprising four letters of the mnemonic pathway, followed by three digits. The first digit indicates the level of the course (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 for undergraduate levels and 6 for graduate levels), and the last two digits indicate the course number.

2.2.4 Notional study hours

These indicate the estimated time that should be spent by the ‘average student’ to achieve the specific learning outcomes of the module. For example, one module may have a total of 120 notional hours and the other 80 notional hours, and so forth. Notional study hours
disaggregated into educational components will guide students in budgeting and organising their study time.

A good way of presenting notional study hours is shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Component</th>
<th>Notional study hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class contact</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guided study (group case studies, etc)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-directed study</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for assessments</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tests</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2.2.5 Credit value

The number of credits associated with a module indicates the total notional learning time necessary for the average student to achieve the learning outcomes of the module. The convention adopted by the University is that one credit is assumed to take the average student at a given level ten notional study hours. For example, a module with a total of 120 notional study hours will carry \( \frac{120}{10} = 12 \) credits. Total notional study time should be devised ‘bottom-up’ by considering how long the student will actually be ‘academically-engaged’ with the module in terms of class contact, guided and independent study, preparation for assessments, revision, tests, and examinations. Often this approach leads to a figure in excess of the anticipated credit value and a ‘top-down’ adjustment is necessary to restrict the credit value to what can actually be achieved within the constraints of the whole programme.

### 2.2.6 Level

The level of the module is an indicator of its relative intellectual demand, complexity and depth of learning and of the degree of learner autonomy required. Zimbabwe does not yet have a National Qualifications Framework that provides level descriptors. The University has its own level descriptors. Level 1, though to 5 correspond to undergraduate study and level 6 is graduate studies. A generic typology of level descriptors is given in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>– Acquire broad knowledge incorporating: theoretical concepts; transferable skills; evaluate information and use it to understand situations and phenomena; taking responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>– Acquire abilities to: generate ideas through analysis of concepts at an abstract level; command of skills to respond to and formulate solutions to abstract</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
problems; and ability to achieve individual and/or group outcomes.

3  – Analyse and evaluate information, exercise significant judgement across a broad range of situations and phenomena and accept responsibility for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes.

4 – 5  – Critically review, consolidate and understand a systematic and coherent body of knowledge; critically evaluate new concepts and evidence from a range of sources; transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills and exercise significant independent judgement in a range of situations and accept accountability for determining and achieving group and/or personal outcomes.

6*  – Display mastery of a complex and specialised area of knowledge and skills; employ advanced skills to conduct research, or advanced technical and professional activity; use empirical evidence and accept accountability for all related decision-making.

*Exit qualification is a Masters degree

The level descriptors help to pitch the module at the correct level. Thus, the content of the module must be commensurate with the level at which it is taken. Level descriptors are generally assessment criteria for a module at a particular level and can be used to formulate the module’s learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

2.2.7 Prerequisite and core-requisite modules

A prerequisite module is one which must be successfully completed prior to registration in the module for which it is required. Only those specific modules which are directly linked to the current module by way of essential prior knowledge, understanding or skills should be listed as prerequisites.

A core-requisite module is one for which it is necessary for the student to study contemporaneously with the current module. This facility is not very common but is quite valuable where options are offered. It might be necessary for two options that are interrelated to be taken together.

2.2.8 Description and purpose of the module

This section is important for students to understand the purpose, rationale and contribution of the module to their study for the specific programme. It is a laconic and comprehensible description of the module. It covers mainly the aims of the module, rationale of the module, summarising module content, encapsulating the main aspects of the learning outcomes and mentioning any special features of learning, teaching and assessment.

This section provides answers to the following questions:

– Why should students study the module?

– What does studying the module involve?
This section must be written in a captivating manner that motivates the student to take an interest in the module.

2.2.9 Learning outcomes

(a) What are they?

This section typically gives most module authors the greatest difficulty and yet it is the most important element in an outcome-based approach to education. Learning outcomes (LO) describe what the learner should know, understand and be able to do on completion of the module. They typically specify the knowledge, skills and attitudes (SKA) students will acquire on completion of the module. Learning outcomes indicate an end-result and not the learning process itself.

Learning outcomes are classified into three domains:
(1) Cognitive (intellectual or thinking skills)
(2) Psychomotor (physical skills or performance of actions)
(3) Affective (attitudes and values)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>What do you want the graduate to know?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>What do you want the graduate to think or care about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychomotor</td>
<td>What do you want graduate to be able to do?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) How are they written?

Learning outcomes should be of maximum relevance and utility and be motivational and enriching for the student. The clear features of a learning outcome are:

(1) An action verb or phrase;
(2) An object; and
(3) A context and/or condition.

For example; ‘critically evaluate (action phrase) the roles (object) managers play in modern business (context)’. A good way to present this section will be to say:

‘When you have successfully completed the module you will: .....’ (Examples):

- Describe and illustrate the philosophies underpinning contemporary business management
- Outline and discuss what is meant by market research and its applications
- Construct a management model designed to turnaround failing companies
– Evaluate the relationship between company directors and shareholders
– Present an opinion orally in a group setting

Please note the logical sequence of the LOs from simple knowledge-based ones to more complex ones which articulate synthesis and evaluation competences. The last one is about transferable skills (communication in this case). It is advisable to aim for between four and six LOs. Once you go beyond eight, it might be a case of ‘one too many’. There are numerous arrays of verbs that can be used to craft LOs. Authors are advised to be familiar with these. All LOs associated with the module should actually result from the learning encompassed by the module and they should be realistic, achievable and appropriate to the level of the module.

(c) What to avoid in crafting learning outcomes

It is advisable not to use evaluative words like ‘good’ and ‘adequate’ as they are more associated with assessment criteria. Use of ambiguous words like ‘understand’, ‘be aware of’, ‘appreciate’ is not recommended as these are unobservable cognitive processes. You must also avoid LOs which are not easily assessable.

2.2.10 Indicative syllabus

This section should provide a good indication of the subject topics to be covered. It contains material that will guide the student in his/her learning activities. The traditional approach is to present the subject topics in list form or a string of one or two-word topic descriptors. This practice is not very illuminating for the student or a new lecturer/tutor who might teach the module.

There should sufficient information (synopses) to help the student appreciate the range of perspectives, theories, methods, techniques, skills, and so forth, which will be covered in the module. You do not need to be too specific in this section.

2.2.11 Indicative content

The main thrust in this section is to give a more detailed and specific description of the module content. This is very important for BR and PT students. You should give sufficient information on each topic in order to help the student appreciate the scope and depth of the attendant issues. Rather than pointer statements given in the section on ‘Indicative Syllabus’, in this section you must give more content on each topic. The level of specificity should not be such that the module quickly becomes dated, or that the delivery of the module cannot respond to current events or developments.

The content must be laid out in a manner that is easy for students to read. Cross referencing between topics will help students to follow the linkages between topics. It is useful to state any key references for each topic in order to give specific guidance for further reading. State the reference source only, for example, ‘a good reference for this topic is McAthur et al 1972. Make sure that the full reference details appear under the section on ‘Indicative Reading’. Peer review of the content given in this section is good academic practice.
Note that sections 2.2.10 and 2.2.11 include the term ‘indicative’ in their headings. This is to allow some flexibility in selecting the topics and material and the way they are dealt with over time. Use of an ‘active voice’ in delivering the content is more personal and enticing for students with limited face-to-face interaction with lecturers.

2.2.12 Assessment criteria

Assessment is directly correlated with LOs. The LOs make it clear what the student will achieve by studying the module and assessment criteria specify how this achievement will be judged. It is possible that different LOs and assessment criteria could potentially be used in a module with the same syllabus content and vice-versa. Neither do learning outcomes nor assessment criteria need to reflect absolutely every topic covered by the module.

Assessment criteria should help to establish clear and unambiguous standards of achievement for each learning outcome. Assessment criteria are not the same as assessment methods. The latter are the tools used to enable the student to demonstrate that they have fulfilled assessment criteria. Assessment methods are the means by which lecturers, tutors and examiners make judgement that the student has satisfied the assessment criteria.

Assessment criteria reduce the LOs to observable behaviours which are measurable. Hence, the verbs used must indicate this attribute. Avoid verbs which refer to internal cognitive processes and are not directly observable and measurable, e.g. understand, be aware of, think about, consider, reflect on, etc. Assessment criteria are an indication of achievement rather than an exact measurement. A manageable number is about three assessment criteria per learning outcome.

The key features of clear assessment criteria are:

- An action verb (analyse, identify, create, obtain, show)
- Content
- Performance qualifier

It should be clear to students and their lecturers how each LO will be assessed. The example below illustrates this important point.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Assessment Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>When you have successfully completed this module you will:</strong></td>
<td><strong>To demonstrate that you have achieved the LO you will:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Describe and discuss what is meant by the two-factor motivation theory.</td>
<td>– Outline the main aspects of hygiene and motivating factors, identifying their appropriateness to particular situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Explain their applications and implications in human resources management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessment criteria unpack LOs into observable behaviours that provide students with a clear indication of what they have to do to demonstrate that they have achieved the related
LOs. It is important to link the assessment criteria to the level of the module. Thus, appropriate verbs that provide evidence of different cognitive-intellectual skills must be used. The list below is indicative and by no means exhaustive.

(a) **Evidence of knowing (what do you want students to know?)**

Define, describe, extract, identify, know, label, list, match, measure, name, organise, outline, present, recall, recognise, record, recount, relate, repeat, reproduce, select, state, and write.

(b) **Evidence of comprehension (can students convey what they understand?)**

Clarify, classify, compare, contrast, convert, defend, describe, discuss, distinguish, estimate, explain, express, extend, find, formulate, generalise, give examples of, identify, illustrate, indicate, infer, interpret, judge, justify, locate, name, paraphrase, perform, predict, present, recognise, report, represent, restate, review, rewrite, select, summarise, tell, translate.

(c) **Evidence of application of knowledge and understanding (can students use a theory or information in a new situation?)**

Act, apply, assess, change, choose, compute, construct, demonstrate, discover, draw, employ, exemplify, explain, find, give examples of, illustrate, interpret, manipulate, modify, operate, predict, prepare, produce, relate, select, schedule, show, sketch, solve, use, verify

(d) **Evidence of analysis (can students break down ideas or material into their constituent parts, showing how they are organised and relate to each other?)**

Analyse, break down, calculate, categorise, compare, conclude, contrast, diagnose, differentiate, distinguish, elucidate, examine, experiment, identify, illustrate, infer, inspect, investigate, point out, question, recognise, relate, resolve, select, separate, solve, test

(e) **Evidence of synthesis (can students work with elements of materials or theories and create new structures or patterns?)**

Account for, alter, argue, re-arrange, combine, compile, compose, conclude, re-construct, derive, design, develop, devise, explain, formulate, generate, hypothesise, integrate, manage, modify, plan, prepare, present, propose, put together, relate, report, restate, synthesise, teach, tell, write

(f) **Evidence of evaluation (can students construct an argument, compare theories and evidence, and make judgements based on evidence?)**

Appraise, assess, choose, compare, conclude, contrast, criticise, debate, defend, determine, discriminate, estimate, evaluate, explain how, judge, justify, measure, question, rate, resolve, review, revise, score, select

It must be re-stated that it is not assumed that LOs and assessment criteria must cover the whole syllabus. The approach is minimalist in that LOs and assessment criteria should define the minimum that should be reasonably expected of a student in order to grade them as a pass and award them the credit for a module. Achievement of all assessment criteria defines the minimum threshold for awarding credit for the module. There will be students graded beyond the minimum achievement. This is essentially for feedback and classification purposes and is not necessary for the award of credit.
2.2.13 Assessment methods

These are tools used to enable the student to demonstrate that they have fulfilled the assessment criteria and through which judgement can be made that the student has satisfied the assessment criteria. This section must specify the range and relative weights of the various assessment methods to be used. These may include assignments, tests, examinations, etc.

2.2.14 Indicative reading

Give a list of the key titles for further reading. Use normal conventions in listing the material, e.g. books, chapters, journal articles, websites, etc.