# FutureLearn Academic Network (FLAN) Terms of Reference

## **Drafted November 2017 These terms of reference will be reviewed annually at a FLAN meeting**

**Purpose**

The FutureLearn Academic Network (FLAN) was established in 2013 by a group of academics in order to connect academics and research students based at FutureLearn partner institutions, share research, and explore shared research opportunities. These include: joint research bids and publications, comparative studies using shared FutureLearn data, course designs, and methods to analyse and evaluate courses.

**Membership**

* The Network is open to staff and research students based at FutureLearn partner institutions with an interest in research related to the FutureLearn platform
* FutureLearn staff are encouraged to attend and participate, although they will not be responsible for the research direction of the group.
* When FLAN members leave a partner institution, they may continue to attend and participate, although they will not be responsible for the research direction of the group.
* Every FutureLearn partner should be aware of FLAN meetings. Communication about these will be carried out by the FutureLearn Content Team as well as by FLAN members.

**Benefits for members**

Benefits of participating in FLAN include:

* Knowledge of other partners’ research.
* Opportunities to build collaborations with other partners.
* Opportunities for research students and research-active staff to work on new challenges in education, present and discuss research.
* Opportunities for research students and academics to build their academic profile.
* Opportunity to influence the development of FutureLearn and to strengthen the pedagogy of the platform.

**Benefits for FutureLearn**

* Awareness of partner research that can be publicised externally
* Research insights that can improve FutureLearn
* Evidence about effective learning on the platform
* Awareness of how to support researchers
* Opportunities to understand the needs of academics and educators
* Raise FutureLearn’s profile and academic credentials

**Independence**

* Research carried out by FLAN members is independent of FutureLearn
* FutureLearn will not put constraints on partners’ research
* FutureLearn will not influence FLAN’s academic direction
* If FutureLearn approaches FLAN members to carry out research for FutureLearn, the nature of the relationship and the scope of the research will be made explicit from the start.

**FutureLearn support for FLAN**

FutureLearn

* Identifies a named person who: coordinates with the Academic Coordinators of FLAN to: sends out invitations prepared by the FLAN Academic Coordinators, promote FLAN (membership & meetings) via the Partners site, support partners and FLAN Academic Coordinators to confirm dates and venues, and supports/ensures venues are catered and that sessions are live streamed and recorded.
* Hosts occasional FLAN sessions in FutureLearn’s London office, when approached to do so.
* Helps recruit research participants
* Contributes presentations on FutureLearn research projects
* Disseminates FutureLearn research among the partnership
* Co-authors research with partners. This may include proposing the research topic, in which case the nature of the relationship and the scope of the research will be made explicit from the start.
* Co-ordinates outputs. These may involve features on the FL research insights page and publicity placements with FutureLearn communications team, in which case FutureLearn retains editorial control.
* Makes full summaries of FLAN research available on the FLAN section of the Partners site, if supplied in suitable format by FLAN partners.
* Makes it clear what kinds of data can be collected, either via the platform or via partner surveys; what procedures must be followed to ensure that the data collection is compliant with the law; and how FutureLearn can help with data collection.
* Coordinates with FLAN in order to keep the ‘Research Ethics for FutureLearn’ guidelines up to date and openly available.
* Provides a communication channel between FutureLearn and FLAN in order to address any misunderstandings or discontent, and to pass on ideas and information.

**Meetings**

* Meetings are typically held four times a year at different partner institutions. All meetings are livestreamed so they are accessible to members who cannot attend in person
* The summer meeting has a focus on promoting and supporting the work of postgraduate students
* The agendas of meetings are contributed by members in response to an open call circulated to all partners
* FutureLearn provides administrative support for FLAN meetings, without influencing their academic direction

**Information sharing**

* A digest for a non-expert audience of relevant research papers is shared on the ‘research’ section of FutureLearn.
* Links to full presentations from each FLAN event are made available on the FutureLearn Partners site, unless a presenter requests that this is not done. These links are also be available to FutureLearn staff.
* FutureLearn is making a Library of FutureLearn-related research available on its Partners site.