

Learning and Teaching Support Handbook

Chapter 6 - Guidelines for constructing a code of practice in teaching and learning

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Teaching is an important aspect of academic life, and it is the input from the personal scholarship and research expertise of the academic staff that distinguishes university education. Nonetheless, there must be a transparent and logical structure underlying programmes, the modules of which they are composed and the teaching, learning and assessment methods that they employ, so that staff, current and prospective students are all clear about what is expected of them. The programme and module structure should be explicit and made clear to all in the form of a Code of Practice for teaching and learning.
- 1.2 This paper sets out guidelines for good practice that should be addressed in the design and management of programmes of study and in designing the modules that comprise the programme, and applies to all undergraduate and postgraduate taught modules and programmes.
- 1.3 Every taught programme of study leading to a University of Exeter Award has a Programme Specification, describing the programme aims, the intended learning outcomes (ILOs), the learning, teaching, and assessment methods, the course structure and the rules of assessment.
- 1.4 Every Module has a Module Descriptor to describe and define clearly what the students are expected to learn, how they will learn it, how their learning will be assessed and how the criteria used to judge achievement are aligned to the intended learning outcomes. It should be clear how learning activities will enable students to develop knowledge, experience, transferable skills and subject specific skills. It should also be clear how each of the intended learning outcomes will be assessed.
- 1.5 These guidelines can be adapted to generate a local Code of Practice that will underpin the management of teaching and learning in each discipline. To this end, an appendix to the paper consists of a number of checklists which may be tailored by deletion or addition to suit local needs for a Code of Practice, and which may be used by staff responsible for the design and operation of programmes and modules.

1.6 Most of these guidelines refer to the responsibilities of the staff toward the students, but the successful operation of a programme of study is a shared, co-owned activity between the staff and students. This paper concludes with guidelines for the responsibilities of the students toward the staff.

1.7 The following definitions are used throughout these notes:

- **Programme:** the aims, the intended learning outcomes, the learning, teaching, and assessment methods, the course structure and the rules of assessment followed by a student leading to a named award of the University of Exeter. The programme may be one of a number of established pathways or may be unique to the student.
- **Module:** a discrete segment of a programme, the learning outputs from which are assessed at completion against the criteria appropriate to a particular level.
- **Level:** the position occupied by a module in terms of academic progression; it relates to the standard of work demanded and the intended learning outcomes, and not necessarily to the year in the programme of study in which the module is being taken. A particular module may be experienced at different levels. Levels are defined by the Qualifications and Credit Framework.

2. Management of a Programme of Study

2.1 A clear written statement of the aims of the programme and a synopsis of the content of the programme must be available to all prospective participants, lecturers and students, before the start of the academic year. Adequate time must be allowed before the start of a programme so that all those contributing to the programme can prepare and co-ordinate the module components for which they are responsible. Human and material resources should be properly identified, bearing in mind the demands of the programme in relation to the research and scholarly activities of the department. Please see the University of Exeter Approval and Revision of Taught Modules and Programmes Handbook for detailed information.

2.2 So that students can make informed decisions, they should be provided with information about programme structure, including:

- Prerequisites.
- Required module components and other core elements.
- Optional module components and opportunities for choice.

The University's Programme Specification and Module Descriptor templates must be used and will help departments in compiling this information.

3. Design and Operation of a Module

- 3.1 The educational aims and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) of a module should determine the learning/teaching activities you choose, through which the module is experienced by students. The learning/ teaching activities should be matched to the activities required of the student in attaining the ILOs of the module. Since a module will normally have several intended outcomes (usually no more than 6), different components of the module will be suited to different learning/ teaching activities. Such a module should be presented through a variety of appropriate methods so far as resources allow.
- 3.2 Learning and teaching activities should also be supported by methods of assessment that are appropriate to those learning/ teaching activities and to the academic level(s) of the module ('constructive alignment'), facilitating both assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning. The method by which a student's performance in a module is assessed strongly influences the student's perception of the purpose of the education being provided and must be regarded as an important part of the learning process.
- 3.3 Different people have different learning skills and abilities, and it is important to provide a range of learning/teaching activities that can accommodate this diversity. It is important to recognise that students, particularly in the early stages of study at University, may not have the experience or the confidence to develop individual approaches to learning. Teaching staff should be sensitive to the need to help students learn how to learn, to clarifying what is expected and to how students can be successful. When considering how assessments may impact students with different individual learning plans, teachers should aim to set inclusive and flexible assessments that are accessible to all students and do not require the establishment of alternative assessments.
- 3.4 Modules should employ a variety of staff-student contacts (classes, lectures seminars, lab sessions, etc.), with formal staff-driven contacts balanced by informal student-driven contacts. At the Postgraduate Researcher level, it may be expected that the emphasis will be on student-driven contacts.

- 3.5 Before the start of any module, a completed module descriptor must be made available to each participating student, including:
- The educational aims and academic level(s).
 - The Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs), i.e. what the student should have achieved by the end of the module.
 - The personal transferable skills which the module supports.
 - Academic and/ or experiential prerequisites for enrolling on the module.
 - Links between this module and earlier, parallel and later modules.
 - Indicative contents, and the personnel involved.
 - Any optional or negotiable components.
 - An indication of a student's time commitment and the proportion of the modes of delivery that the student will experience (including independent study).
 - Resources that the student should have available at the start of the module, e.g. module texts, instruments.
 - The modes of assessment of a student's performance, including consequences of failure to meet them, criteria of assessment, weighting between components of assessment, contribution toward assessment in the programme overall, consequences for progress to later modules, and possibility for recovery of unsatisfactory performance.
- 3.6 If the module is delivered by a team of lecturers, it must be clear to the students which lecturer can provide definitive guidance concerning the contents or assessment of the module (the module convenor).
- 3.7 All students must be made aware of their progress on the module to include any areas of poor performance that may put them at risk of failing the module. In particular, students must be able to receive comment on their written work within a reasonable time (maximum of three working weeks). Comments should clearly identify and explain strengths and weaknesses and outline how students can develop and improve their work. All students should have the opportunity to discuss their work in more detail with the lecturer if they so wish.
- 3.8 At the completion of a module there should be a method of seeking student opinion of the module, and of their experience of the module, so that this can feed back into a process of review and improvement. It should be made clear to students what mechanisms are in place for them to give their evaluation of the module. Instruments of evaluation must be designed with care in order to obtain meaningful information on the

effectiveness of the module in meeting its aims and ILO. This is usually carried out using the on-line Accelerate tool for communication and gathering feedback from students. It is good practice to collect student feedback during the module sub-sections or following individual classes. In-module feedback can be collected in a range of ways including written evaluation forms, use of clicker response ware or a 'stop/start/continue' method and these options are possible using Accelerate. Students can also provide feedback via their disciplinary SSLC.

The outcomes of module evaluation should be:

- Reported to all staff and students participating in the module and its evaluation.
 - Reported in detail to the Faculty Pro-Vice Chancellor and Executive Dean in confidence, who may then relay more sensitive information to the staff engaged in teaching the module. Such reports should be held in a confidential file for not more than five years.
- 3.9 The quality and the popularity of a module are not necessarily connected; the overall evaluation of the quality of a module must take into account the student opinion of the content, skills, processes and relevance, as well as the educational challenge that the module provides. However, the outcomes of student evaluation of a module should be compared and contrasted with evaluation by the staff presenting the module and with evaluation by informed colleagues.

4. Projects

4.1 A project is defined here as any substantial self-directed study involving the student in research, either as an individual or as a member of a small team. It is a teaching method that can provide a rich learning environment for the student, but that requires careful and proper planning and management to achieve successful results. A good project provides a platform for many kinds of experiential learning and can, for example:

- Consolidate earlier learning.
- Develop research skills.
- Foster self-motivated study.
- Give practice in communication skills.
- Develop interpersonal skills, especially in group projects.
- Give greater awareness of personal skills.

4.2 Proposals for project topics can be generated by staff or by students, but joint negotiation of the aims and scope of a project is more likely to result in a good project.

Experienced staff should give guidance on the realistic formulation of the project, without limiting the student to compliance with the lecturer's directives. Students should be properly prepared for project work and must be made well aware of the support available to them.

- 4.3 In taught postgraduate modules, the student should have basic responsibility for the topic and scope of a project or dissertation. However, the supervisor must be satisfied that it involves an appropriate level of research activity and can realistically be completed in time and these factors should be discussed with the student at the outset of the project.
- 4.4 Guidelines for the presentation of the project must be clearly stated and must specify the assessment criteria to be used in marking the project. If presentation is in the form of a scientific or scholarly paper, detailed instructions on format, style and acceptable length must be given. If presentation is by seminar, then details of time, place and audiovisual resources must be given well in advance. If presentation is by a combination of methods then the proportioning of assessment between these methods must be clearly stated.
- 4.5 A lecturer/ supervisor should discuss the progress of the project at regular, timetabled, intervals with the student. The student(s) working on the project should be encouraged to submit draft reports for discussion with the supervisor before any final report is prepared.
- 4.6 **Student placement**, widely used in vocational programmes, has many of the attributes of the project as defined here and requires the same high standards of preparation and management. Projects are generally popular with students, and the students' perception of professionalism in the teaching programme is strongly influenced by the proper management of placements and of project work. Placements increasingly form a part of non-vocational programmes in order to provide opportunities for the development of transferable and employment skills and experience.

5. Responsibilities of students

- 5.1 A programme of study must be an active collaborative partnership between staff and students if it is to achieve its educational aims and intended learning outcomes. These guidelines have addressed the responsibilities of the staff towards the students, but the students must be in no doubt of their responsibilities toward the staff and to each other.

Students are not merely recipients; they are major contributors to the quality of the educational provision.

- 5.2 Students must regard enrolment on a module as a contractual agreement which they are expected to take to its conclusion. They must ensure that they are prepared for the module in that they satisfy its stated prerequisites and undertake any required preliminary study.
- 5.3 Students are expected to attend all scheduled activities, such as lectures, tutorials, seminars, practical classes etc. They are expected to observe common courtesies to teaching and ancillary staff. If they are prevented by illness from attending a scheduled activity, or if they are going to be late, they should inform the appropriate staff as soon as practicable.
- 5.4 Students are expected to meet agreed deadlines for assigned work. If they are unable to meet an agreed deadline, they should inform staff in advance but should not assume that the deadline will be negotiated. Students attending postgraduate and other modules taught through seminars should ensure that seminar papers are available for distribution to the seminar group in good time.
- 5.5 A member of staff who considers that a student is acting irresponsibly towards the staff, fellow students or to the module in general, should endeavour to have a reasoned discussion of the situation with the student. If this is not possible, or fails to improve matters, the member of staff should inform the student's Academic Tutor (also known as Personal Tutor), or the Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education as appropriate. Detailed guidance on the student code of conduct can be found in the [University's Regulations](#).
- 5.6 Students who consider that a member of staff is acting irresponsibly towards the students or to the module in general, should endeavour to have a reasoned discussion of the situation with that member of staff. If this is unsuccessful, or cannot realistically be dealt with in this way, the students should inform the Programme Director or the Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education as appropriate and without delay. Detailed guidance on the student complaints procedure can be found in the [University's regulations](#).
- 5.7 Responsibility for engaging in an appropriate style and quantity of study to complete the module successfully rests with the student. A student who recognises the need for guidance in these matters should approach his/her Academic Tutor (also known as

Personal Tutor) who will advise on the facilities available for further counselling if necessary.

Lists of Questions to Guide Decisions about Codes of Practice provided below:

1. Questions for a Code of Practice - management of a programme of study

Where will (prospective) students find a statement of the educational aims and of the prerequisites for the programme?

How are students informed of pathways through the programme, in terms of required, optional or negotiable components or modules, and how to seek advice on choice of pathway?

How are students informed of the consequences or outcomes (e.g. in qualification, external validation) of choice within the programme?

How are students informed how the assessment of components of the programme is combined to evaluate a student's performance in the programme as a whole and thus to provide classification of the degree?

How are appeals and grievance procedures made known to students?

Where will students, during the programme, find statements about the availability of the following?

- Support through subject/Academic Tutors (also known as Personal Tutors), including the procedure for requesting change of Academic Tutor.
- Remedial support in the subject.
- Guidance in study skills.
- guidance in the effective use of resources, including those related to placement or study abroad, particularly through the use of the online Exeter Learning Environment (ELE).
- counselling and welfare services.
- other support services available from the Guild of Students.

What information is given to students on local arrangements for the operation, and remit, of a Student-Staff Liaison Committee?

What information is given to students on the way(s) in which they can give feedback on their experience of the programme as a whole after completion of the programme, and (some time) after graduation?

2. Questions for a Code of Practice - design and management of a programme of study

How secure would a claim by the programme providers be in response to the following criteria?

- The learning outcomes, knowledge and skills associated with the various components combine to make a logical progression and structure to the programme as a whole.
- The demands made by components of the programme on students' time and workload are well distributed and do not combine unfavourably at any time so as to become unreasonable.
- The demands of the programme on staff time and workload are realistic and properly distributed in relation to other teaching programmes and research activities.
- The programme is supported and enhanced by the research and scholarly activities of the staff.
- There are adequate human and material resources available to ensure that the programme can be operated successfully.

3. Questions for a Code of Practice - operation of a module

Where will students find a statement of the rationale/educational aims of the module?
Where will students find a statement of the intended learning outcomes of the module in terms of, for example, knowledge, skill or insight that the student will be able to achieve?

Where will the students find a statement of the personal transferable skills which the module supports?

Where will students find a statement of the module's academic or experiential pre-requisites?

Where will students find the indicative contents of the module, and the personnel involved?

Where will students find a full bibliography, including preliminary reading that should be undertaken before the start of the module?

Where will students find information on resources that they should have available at the start of the module, e.g. module texts and instruments?

How are links between this module and earlier, parallel and later modules made known to students?

How are students informed of any components of the module that are optional or

negotiable (for example, in order to allow the module to operate at different academic levels)?

How are students informed of the balance between the modes of delivery that they will experience (including independent study)?

In relation to the assessment of students, how will students be made aware of the following?

- Modes of assessment employed in the module.
- Criteria of assessment.
- Deadlines for assigned work, and consequences of failure to meet them.
- Weighting between components of assessment.
- Consequences of assessment for progress to later modules.
- Possibility for recovery of unsatisfactory performance.

How are the students made aware of the expectation of their time commitment for the module, distinguishing between directed time, including required independent study, and expectation of personal study time?

What statement is made about the expectation that students can have of provision of regular information on academic progress, and of any inadequacy in their academic performance that may put them at risk of failure?

What statement is made about the turnaround time that students can expect for the return to them of assigned work with assessment and comment?

What information is given to students on the way(s) in which they can give feedback on their experience of the module during its operation and/or after its completion?

4. Questions for a Code of Practice - module design and operation

In preparation for the module:

- Have the educational aims and intended learning outcomes of the components of the module been identified and agreed by the teaching team?
- Does the module support the development of identified personal transferable skills beyond the skills specific to the subject?
- Have the appropriate teaching methods and learning activities been identified for each of the components of the module in order to support its intended learning outcomes and/or personal transferable skills?

- Has an appropriate method of assessment been identified for each component of the module in order to support the learning process associated with its intended learning outcomes and/or its personal transferable skills?
- Have the selected methods of teaching and learning activities enabled a variety of approaches to teaching and learning?
- Does the module give some freedom to individual students to choose or negotiate personal preferences for styles of learning?
- Does the module allow less experienced students to receive help in developing the skills of learning?
- Does the module give reasonable timetabled opportunity for students to meet in small groups or individually for informal discussion with staff about the module?
- Is there a schedule, published to the students that will allow individual students reliable access to members of the staff who are involved in the module?
- Is there a mechanism for ensuring that assigned work is returned to students with constructive comment, within a reasonable, stated, time?
- Is there a mechanism that enables students to be aware of their progress on a regular basis, and to receive early warning of any inadequacy that might put them at risk of failure?
- Is there any process built into the module that enables students to monitor their own progress through, for example, self-assessments?

5. Questions for a Code of Practice - projects

What statement is made to the student about the following?

- The allocation of a project supervisor.
- Negotiating and agreeing in writing the scope of the project at the start.
- Establishing regular meetings between the supervisor and the student.
- The balance of responsibilities between supervisor and student in the operation and management of the project.
- The arrangements for monitoring the progress of the project, e.g. interim statements on targets, processes and achievements..

In the case of placements, what statement is made to the students about their roles and responsibilities in the placement, and of the facilities available to them during the placement?

How are the students informed of what is required for the presentation of the project in terms of the following?

- Format, style and acceptable length of a report.
- Time, place and audience of seminar or viva examination.

What statement is made to the students about the criteria of assessment of the project, including the weighting given to different components of the project?

In the case of group projects, what statement is made to the students about how they will be assessed as a group and how they will be assessed as individuals, and the relative weighting of these components?

In respect of project work, is there an established policy for the following?

- Encouraging each student, or each group, to undertake a self-assessment of performance and progress in the project.
- Requiring interim written or spoken presentation so that the student may have practice of the required form of presentation of the project.
- Ensuring that interim or other assigned work that forms part of the project is returned to students with constructive comment, within a reasonable, stated, time.
- Moderating the assessment by staff of projects so that the potential for error in subjective assessment is reduced.

6. Questions for a Code of Practice - responsibilities of students

How are the students made aware of their responsibilities for these areas?

- Checking to see if there are stated prerequisites for a module, and taking any necessary action to make sure that they satisfy these prerequisites.
- Completing the required preparatory reading for a module, if any is given.
- Attending all classes and tutorials scheduled as part of a module.
- Completing work assigned as part of a module to given deadlines and appropriate standards.
- Observing common courtesies of behaviour (keeping appointments, keeping time, completing work that you have agreed to do, etc.) towards colleagues and to staff.
- Supporting the teaching and directed learning associated with a module with an appropriate style and quantity of self-directed study.

- Taking the initiative in seeking help in the event of difficulty in coping with the module, by approaching Academic Tutors (also known as Personal Tutors), and, if necessary, following this by approaching the counselling or study methods counselling services.
- Raising any concerns about the quality of the educational provision or the student experience without delay through Academic Tutor (also known as Personal Tutor) Subject Tutor, departmental education lead, or Student-Staff Liaison Committee, as appropriate.
- Participating constructively in module/programme evaluations and reviews in order to improve the quality of educational provision and the student experience.