

LTC15D005

Title: *Course and Module Update for 2016/17*
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1. Issue

An update on the range of factors that will need to be taken into consideration during course and module update for 2016/17 delivery.

2. Recommendation

Recipients are invited to note the timetable for work and to consider:

- 1) the factors influencing course design;
- 2) the summary of actions identified as being necessary during the course and module update process and whether any additional actions should be added to the list.

3. Resource Implications

Course and module update is an annual process and the key mechanism by which Teaching Directors and Heads of School can improve and enhance course delivery, improve student outcomes and assessment and feedback. This year there are a number of influences which are coming together which will require Course Directors, Teaching Directors and Heads of School to undertake a more thorough review of courses than in previous years.

4. Risk Implications

There are a number of factors which if not addressed in this year's course and module update process risk harming the University's performance in a number of areas. One example, most immediately, is in the assessment and feedback section of the NSS. In addition, if the complexity of our course offer is not addressed we will continue to have severe timetabling issues each year so impacting students and staff alike.

5. Equality and Diversity

The course and module update process itself does not have any equality and diversity implications. Course Directors will need to consider equality and diversity issues when re-designing their courses.

6. Timing of decisions

There are deadlines associated with the course and module update process as follows:

- Module update changes deadline: 8th January 2016
- Course profile update deadline: 12th February 2016.

7. Further Information

Please contact Dr Andrea Blanchflower (a.blanchflower@uea.ac.uk, x2618) for further information.

8. Background

Course and module update is an annual process and the key mechanism by which Teaching Directors and Heads of School can improve and enhance course delivery, improve student outcomes and assessment and feedback.

The process requires Course Directors to review and update their course profiles, and confirm that they continue to meet the stated learning outcomes of the course, the requirements of the relevant subject benchmark statement(s) and are in compliance with the University's BIM regulations and therefore meet the requirements of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

On a practical level it requires Course Directors to reflect upon the outcomes of QAR processes, and the outcomes of School meetings on assessment and moderation in order to:

- determine the course learning outcomes and course level assessment strategy;
- advise on the range of modules necessary, and volume of choice, for coherence of the course;
- advise on module content to achieve course learning outcomes; and
- advise on module assessment to implement course level assessment strategy

Programme specifications will require review and updating where necessary as they provide a concise description of the intended outcomes of the course, how these are achieved and demonstrated and describe how the course meets the relevant qualification descriptors, subject benchmarks, and the national credit framework.

In practice the process requires Module Organisers to also reflect on the QAR process and the School meeting on assessment and moderation and to review and update their module, taking into account guidance from the Course Director(s) who include the module on their courses. In particular, they will be looking to update module assessment patterns and module delivery patterns. By updating their Module Outline*, they will demonstrate how the module meets the requirements of the FHEQ in terms of level of study, credit value and student effort hours.

The whole process is iterative as the Course Directors will need to work with Teaching Directors and Heads of School to consider academic staffing plans and workload implications which may affect module availability. They will also provide guidance to Module Organisers on necessary changes to align modules with course level learning outcomes and assessment strategy. Because modules may be available in option ranges on a number of courses, and sometimes on courses in other Schools, in order to facilitate communication within and between Schools the updating of information on SITS will be undertaken to two deadlines as follows:

- Module update changes deadline: 8th January 2016
- Course profile update deadline: 12th February 2016.

Key reference documents

Internally

- BIM regulations
- CMF regulations
- University general regulations (awards)
- Programme specifications
- Module Outlines
- Completed QAR forms
- Reports from School meetings on assessment and moderation

Externally

- Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. See: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Framework-Higher-Education-Qualifications-08.pdf>

- Subject benchmark statements. See: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements>
- Qualification Characteristic Statements (e.g. for Masters Courses). See: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/characteristics-statements>

* using the template approved by LTC during 2014/15 and available via the following link

<https://portal.uea.ac.uk/learning-and-teaching/documents/course-module>

9. Discussion

There are a number of factors, including three particularly significant influences, which will need to be taken into account during the 2016/17 course and module update processes: the New Academic Model, practical delivery issues (timetabling), and assessment and feedback concerns. These, together with other factors, are detailed below.

9.1. New Academic Model

The key elements of the New Academic Model are detailed in Appendix A ('NAM at a Glance').

There remain a number of courses which do not fully conform to the vision and requirements of the New Academic Model and it would be helpful to use this opportunity to ensure all courses embrace all aspects of the NAM philosophy. There are two main areas of difficulty:

- a) There are a number of courses where the sheer volume of module choice makes it difficult to define the course level outcomes and to design a course-level assessment strategy. This can also have unintended consequences for the management of these courses. Delivering a high number of modules to small groups of students can create a situation whereby the academic resource is stretched to the extent that it is difficult to cover for staff illness or other staffing issues arising. It also contributes to a situation whereby we have a high number of students studying unique combinations of modules. This causes timetable problems, as we seek to deliver a timetable which enables students to attend their module choices. It also has implications for the examination timetable (see later).
- b) Secondly, there are a number of courses where queries have come forward about re-assessment and the requirement upon students to pass all modules. In designing the course assessment strategy, and considering assessment at the level of the module, Course Directors are also determining the reassessment strategy. Under the BIM degree regulations, which embody and give effect to the New Academic Model, students failing a module are asked to undertake reassessment in all failed items of assessment on that module and those who fail at reassessment are withdrawn from their studies.

Another feature of the New Academic Model is the requirement to reduce the number of examinations and the University has committed to having a four week examinations period in 2016/17. Following reductions made last year the examinations timetable can be accommodated within a five week period in 2015/16 and a further reduction of approximately 65 exams is required to achieve a four week examination period in 2016/17. There will be different ways of tackling this in each School and Faculty but one suggestion is to consider the academic rationale for examining modules taught in the Autumn semester in the summer examinations period.

The situation is complex as the length of the examinations timetable is not solely a function of the number of examined modules and the length of their exams. It is also complicated by the range of student's option choices and so the higher the number of unique (examined) module combinations taken by students the harder it is to accommodate within 4 weeks.

9.2. Assessment and Feedback

As everyone will be aware, our assessment and feedback ranking has fallen further from 50th to 56th among English mainstream universities. It is clear that students are relatively satisfied with the fairness of our assessment (where we rank 16th). It is timeliness that remains the biggest problem.

The University's stated objective is that coursework is returned as soon as possible, ideally within 15 working days, and certainly within 20 days,

In determining the course level assessment strategy and designing module assessments Course Directors will need to work with Teaching Directors and Heads of School to consider the staffing resource required to meet this expectation and to forward plan academic workloads taking assessment loads and turnaround times into account.

9.3. Timetabling

In summary, the problems with timetabling and room-booking experienced in September 2015 can be attributed to a number of factors coming together. The net loss of teaching accommodation this summer was a key contributory factor. With 'sufficient' rooms, we would have been able to manage the other problems. However, as the intensity of room utilisation increases, so the other factors had, and will continue to have, a disproportionate impact. These other factors include technical issues, some process issues, a high number of late changes and organisational issues in a timetable that is hugely complex. Work is underway in all these areas and the Course and Module Update process provides an opportunity to address the complexity of our offer and issue of late changes.

a) Late changes

A major cause of late timetable changes is the late enrolment of students on modules and this happens for a variety of reasons. Sometimes this can be planned for, such as additional student numbers, and sometimes there are genuine late arrivals. However, other late module enrolments are as result of course design with students choosing modules just prior to arrival or shortly thereafter. At the moment, the number of late changes is overwhelming and a high priority is being given to tackling this problem which has a significant impact on both students and academic staff.

In discussing this issue the University's Executive Team have confirmed that undergraduate courses should have a common and compulsory first semester and that module choice, where it is necessary to deliver course outcomes, takes place in the second semester such that students can be fully briefed and supported when making their module choices.

Consideration will also need to be given to improving the offer made to visiting students. Modules need to be sufficiently flexible to easily accommodate these additional students such that their choices can be confirmed as early as possible.

b) Other organisational issues.

A back-to-basics approach is required to improve timetabling. As part of the update process, Course Directors will be asked to carefully consider their course profiles, and work with their fellow Course Directors where modules form part of option ranges on more than one course, and determine which modules can and cannot clash in the timetable. They will need to assign all modules to one of the main timetabling or timetabling sub-slots only (for example slot AA or BB, or sub-slots CJL, BGJ etc) and the timetable will be constructed accordingly. Course profiles can be created to guide student choice through this landscape such that they choose modules that can be delivered at different times and will not clash.

Due to the rooming situation we will commit to timetabling modules that are in different main slots such that they can be taken in combination with each other but at this stage,

given the intensity of our room use, we cannot commit to rooming the events in the precise times associated with the slots and sub-slots.

At the moment, the timetabling strategy asks for module patterns that do not change during the delivery of the module. The Executive Team were supportive of a proposal that we reduce the variation in module delivery patterns to improve timetabling. Course Directors are asked to carefully consider the delivery pattern of any new modules generated from the closure or merger of others as part of this process with a view to having a commonality with whatever the standards patterns are for the School/Faculty. (A project will develop a number of models for module delivery patterns by the end of the 2015/16 academic year in order to inform Course and Module Update process for the 2017/18 academic year, which will take place in the autumn/winter of 2016).

The objective of all this work is to release a finalised and fully roomed timetable for staff and students earlier than now and in advance of the start of the academic year. Reducing the complexity in our business model will allow for true flexibility and choice in our degrees for the benefit of students.

As a reminder, the Timetabling policy can be found on the Portal <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/8480269/uea-timetabling-and-room-booking-policy.pdf/54bb5526-3920-4ca9-9041-28a44d65c527> with the linked Appendix 1. <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/7417860/Timetable+Slotting+System.pdf>

9.4. Growing student numbers

The University is seeking to grow student numbers over the next five years and aims to recruit a similar number of students in 2016/17 as in 2015/16. As a consequence the student population will grow as the cohorts progress through their courses. Discussions are taking place with Deans and Heads of School as to where growth will take place.

Given this context, it is timely for all Course Directors to consider the design of their courses, which may have suited a cohort of a particular size and establish whether the course design would easily accommodate an increase, or a further increase, in cohort size or whether a change in either course design or delivery methods is necessary. The ability to be able to easily flex the size of modules is also critical to being able to accommodate visiting student choices.

9.5. Academic workloads

In reviewing the University's performance Senate has noted the continued need to be agile and smart in making more efficient and effective use of resources and in particular staff time. Senate has focussed its attention on both courses and modules with low student numbers. Senate noted that the overhead in running such modules was high and that considerable academic time could be generated by re-designing modules and module content to enable them to be run with larger group sizes.

Course and module update provides an opportunity to design courses and modules that can be delivered more efficiently so reducing academic workloads. Course Directors, Teaching Directors and Heads of School are asked to:

- a) withdraw unpopular modules, i.e. those with enrolments of ≤ 10
- b) withdraw unpopular courses
- c) re-design other modules to facilitate more team teaching and other tactics to achieve better academic cover – teaching itself and in marking and moderation.

A report on progress with this work will be considered by Senate in November 2015.

To assist in the review process Teaching Directors will be provided with lists of modules that attracted small numbers of students in 2014/15 and of course 2015/16 data can be accessed

via Evison. Reasons why the modules should be retained should fall into one of the following six categories and will only be allowed to continue with the approval of the relevant Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching:

- a) A new course has been established and is in the first three years of running and there is a credible business plan which will ensure that enrolments will have reached at least 11 students on all modules by its third year.
- b) A particular, but time-limited, issue affected recruitment to a course which has meant a dip below 11 enrolments on some modules, but there is a clear and convincing explanation of how the numbers will be returned to above the threshold within two years.
- c) The module is part of a specialist research training Masters programme that is currently part of doctoral training provision accredited by a research council
- d) The module is a compulsory part of a course that is currently accredited by a professional body (and there are more than 20 students enrolled overall on the course)
- e) A robust business case can be made for the viability of the module. For example a specialist course that shares 80% of their teaching in well-populated modules and where there are two less well attended course-specific modules that create the specialist course. Ceasing those two modules would thus cause the loss of the course, the students and entire course fee.
- f) The module is commissioned and has been priced accordingly.

9.6. Summary of actions required during Course and Module Update for 2016/17

To summarise all of the above we are asking Course Directors to work with their Teaching Directors, Heads of School and fellow Course Directors to undertake the following actions during the course and module update processes:

- a) Cease offering unpopular modules i.e. those recruiting ≤ 10 students;
- b) Consider how to enhance the flexibility of other modules such that they can more easily accommodate increases in student number and visiting students;
- c) Reference the subject benchmarks in reviewing course level learning outcomes, and determine which modules may be surplus to requirements in their current form;
- d) Where necessary, re-design Year 1 such that compulsory/core content is delivered in the Autumn semester and moving elements of choice through to the Spring semester;
- e) Determine which modules can and cannot clash in the timetable by looking at common student pathways;
- f) Review course profiles and guide student choice via option ranges;
- g) Reduce the number of exams;
- h) Review assessment (and therefore reassessment) strategies, and the balance of formative and summative coursework;
- i) Consider the academic resourcing associated with the delivery plus the assessment of the module and the provision of feedback;
- j) Consider the University's aim for more research based teaching and the employability agenda.

The Committee is asked to consider the above list and comment on whether this is a comprehensive list or whether further guidance would be helpful.

Attachments

Appendix 1 - The New Academic Model – At a Glance

The New Academic Model – At a Glance

The New Academic Model is the name for a wide-ranging set of reforms to UEA's undergraduate learning & teaching regulations which were agreed in 2011 for implementation from 2013/14. The reforms were the outcome of a review and consultation process that extended over several years.

The key objectives of the reforms were:

- ***To set high expectations for students on the basis that they will be encouraged to engage well with their studies;***
- ***To move emphasis from the module to the course as the principal unit for curriculum and assessment design and management; and***
- ***To reduce where possible the number of summatively assessed pieces of work and to increase the number of formative assessments and to enhance the quality of feedback given to students.***

They key elements of the reforms are:

1. Programme-level Outcomes: All courses have Programme-level outcomes and the ways these are to be assessed should be clear for all.
2. Summative and Formative Assessment: All courses to make more use of formative assessment and less use of summative assessment, with the number of the latter being reduced, wherever possible, to the **minimum necessary** in order to assess programme-level outcomes and differentiate between students in terms of their performance.
3. Assessment to Support Learning: All courses to indicate how feedback on formative and summative assessments will work to promote learning and how feed-forwards will operate to prepare students for their summative submissions
4. Induction and Transition: All courses to include an effective induction of students into the University's 'community of scholars' and activities to support students in transitioning from year to year and to employment or further study.
5. Progression between Stages: Students are required to pass all modules in order to progress to the next year of their course. Modules follow a clear progression from levels 4, to 5, 6 & 7, which aligns with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
6. Reassessment: Students need to meet specified thresholds (normally a minimum mark for the module of 20% at the first attempt for Stage 2 and above), before being offered a reassessment opportunity. Stage 0 and Stage 1 students to have an automatic reassessment opportunity even if the module mark is lower than 20%. Students eligible for reassessment will be offered a reassessment opportunity in all failed components of the failed module, in the form of the original assessment wherever possible.
7. Minimum Module Size: The minimum module size is 20 credits.
8. Course Option Choices: Course profiles option choices contain appropriate modules as defined by Course Directors.
9. Joint Degrees: Joint degrees have a Course Director from the School in which students are registered and Assistant Course Directors from other Schools contributing to the course.
10. Assessment Period: A planned reduction in the May/June assessment period from 6 to 4 weeks by 2016/17, with an interim 5 week period in 2015/16.
11. Credits: Each BA/BSc (Hons) degree comprises of 360 credits, with at least 90 credits at level 6 and no more than 20 credits at level 4 in Stage 2. Each Integrated Masters degree

comprises of 480 credits, with no more than 20 credits at module level 4 in Stage 2, at least 90 credits at level 6 in Stage 3 and 120 credits at level 7 in Stage 4.

12. Assessment and Classification Rules: Assessment and classification rules simplified, with the use of algorithms and a reduction in the discretion available to Boards of Examiners. Item and module assessment marks are recorded as two decimal places throughout. Where module, stage or award marks are up to 0.5 below a whole number, they will be treated as if rounded up to the integer. Year weightings for all UEA 3-year Bachelors degrees are 40:60, (Stage 2: Stage 3). Year weightings for all Integrated Masters degrees are 20:30:50 (Stage 2: Stage 3: Stage 4).