Programme and Course Handbooks Policy

Purpose of Policy

To confirm the status, purpose and core content of programme and course handbooks.

Overview

The main aim of this policy is to ensure that students know where to find particular information on their programmes and courses through the provision of core content in handbooks. Programme and course handbooks are part of the academic governance framework of the University. Additionally, there are external requirements in relation to the provision of information for students that the University must follow.

Scope: Mandatory Policy

This policy applies to all staff who are producing programme and course handbooks and applies to both taught and research programmes.

Contact Officer	Nichola Kett	Head of Enhancement Team, Academic Services	Nichola.Kett@ed.ac.uk

Document control

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Section responsible for policy maintenance & review		Academic Services			
Related policies, procedures, guidelines & regulations		Creating Accessible Handbooks Guidance			
Alternative format		If you require this document in an alternative format please email Academic.Services@ed.ac.uk or telephone 0131 651 4490.			
Keywords		Programme, course, handbook			

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Status of Programme and Course Handbooks

Programme and course handbooks are part of the academic governance framework of the University and are referenced in the Degree Programme Regulations. Therefore, as well as providing information for students on their programme and courses, they can be used to stipulate requirements. Once approved and published, the details set out in programme and course handbooks must be adhered to by students and staff for the academic session to which it applies.

A **programme** of study is the sum of all the elements leading to a defined graduating curriculum. A **course** is a unit of teaching and learning formally offered within the University, which carries credit expressed in credit points and which may contribute to a University award.[1]

Requirements

It is the responsibility of Schools to determine how best to provide students with programme and course information. The "home" School must ensure that students are provided with all the necessary information to cover their programme and courses (of particular importance for joint awards). Additionally, consideration should be given to ensuring that students who are taking outside courses are provided with all necessary information. It is not a requirement that handbooks are created for all programmes and courses, but students must be provided with the core content detailed below using an appropriate combination of programme and course handbooks. It is of particular importance that formal agreed assessment and feedback activities (as detailed in the course descriptor) and any related requirements are explicitly communicated in written form at the outset of each programme or course. This does not preclude additional formative assessment and feedback opportunities.

Other types of handbooks are not part of the academic governance framework of the University and are not required to adhere to this policy. Additionally, other types of handbooks (e.g. School or year level handbooks) should not contain any regulatory or academic compliance requirements.

Programme or course handbooks do not need to be physical documents. It may be that information is held on a website, wiki or virtual learning environment and forms the equivalent of a programme or course handbook. Students should be made aware of which form(s) of media their course and/or programme handbooks are held. This policy applies to all forms of media.

The Creating Accessible Handbooks guidance should be followed for programme and course handbooks. There are no other design requirements in relation to programme and course handbooks.

The core content listed below must be included in programme and course handbooks and can be presented in any order. Core content can be supplemented with any other information the School wishes to provide.

Where information is owned and maintained by another area, links should be provided rather than cutting and pasting it into handbooks. This approach aims to reduce the risk of misinforming students and also to reduce the time taken by staff to produce handbooks. Particular examples include course and programme information on the Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study (DRPS) and academic regulations, policies and guidance.

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[1] University Glossary of Terms

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Programme and course handbook content must align with the information on the DRPS (including the Degree Programme Specification, the Degree Programme Table and the course descriptor) which forms the definitive record of programme and course information.

Final versions of programme and course handbooks must be made available to students at the start of a programme or course. The Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy requires reading lists (at minimum indicative core texts) be made available at least four weeks before the start of the course (with additional reading that indicates priority/relevance provided nearer to the start date of the course). Therefore, if reading lists are only contained within handbooks, these need to be made available to students within this timeframe. Arrangements should be made to provide handbooks in an alternative format upon request.

Approval Process

Boards of Studies have responsibility for the formal oversight of programme and course handbooks. In practice the approval of handbooks can be delegated to members of staff within a School as part of an approvals process that ensures accuracy of information and all handbooks are approved prior to the commencement of a course or programme. Boards of Studies need to have formal oversight of the approvals process and would be expected to record that handbooks had been approved at the relevant Board of Studies meeting.

Changes

Exceptionally, changes may need to be made to a programme or course handbook after publication. In this case, all students who are affected by the change must be informed as soon as possible. Changes which differ from the approved programme and course information in the DRPS (including the statement of assessment) are not permitted.

Purpose

Programme Handbooks

- A source of information and guidance for students on a specific programme or group of programmes.
- Work in conjunction with degree programme tables, degree programme specifications, degree programme regulations, and assessment regulations to provide students with all the information they require for their studies.
- A collection of information and "signposts" to information that exists elsewhere.
- Contain core content.
- An information resource for staff, external examiners, and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

Course Handbooks

- A source of information and guidance for students on a specific course or group of courses.
- Work in conjunction with the course descriptor to provide students with all the information they require for a specific course.
- A collection of information and "signposts" to information that exists elsewhere.
- Contain core content.

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- An information resource for staff, external examiners, and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

Core Content

Core Content	Description/further information		Reference/Source
Session that the Handbook applies to	State the session that the handbook applies to and make it clear that the University may make changes to the course / programme for future sessions.		
Organisation (for accessibility)	Contents page Glossary[2] **Standard text** (in Arial 14 bold): "If you require this document or any of the internal University Of Edinburgh online resources mentioned in this document in an alternative format please contact [name and contact details]" It is good practice to provide two methods of contact e.g. phone number and email or email and postal address		
Details	**Programme** Name, date of publication	**Course** Name, code, level and credits, date of publication	[Path](#) Course descriptor in the [DRPS](#)
Overview*	**Programme** Structure and core courses, aims, learning outcomes and graduate attributes	**Course** Timeline of activities: lectures; tutorials; laboratories; placements; syllabus; learning outcomes	Degree Programme Tables and Degree Programme Specifications in the [DRPS](#) Course descriptor in the [DRPS](#)
Assessment and feedback information^	To include: submission and feedback deadlines, extensions procedures, late penalties, word count, submission procedures, dissertation (or equivalent) arrangements (including supervision), and exam diet dates		[Statement of Assessment in Taught Assessment Regulations](#)

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[2] Can assist with the Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy requirement: Key technical words and/or formulae shall be provided to students at least 24 hours in advance of the class.

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Core Content	Description/further information	Reference/Source
PGT handbooks only **Dissertation or research project supervision**	**Standard text:** "The dissertation/research project is an independent piece of work. You will be allocated a supervisor, who will provide you with advice and guidance in relation to the dissertation/research project, but you should remember that the sole responsibility for the academic quality of your dissertation/research project lies with you. You should research and develop your own ideas, and discuss your proposed approaches with your supervisor. Feedback you receive from your supervisor is intended as guidance, and must not be interpreted as an indication that your work will receive a particular final mark/outcome. You may be allocated a supervisor whose area of expertise is not a precise match for your chosen area of research, but who has the required expertise to supervise a dissertation/research project. All supervisors are experienced and knowledgeable regarding academic writing." Provide information regarding: • Expected timelines relating to supervision, e.g. when supervision starts and ends; • The number of meetings students can expect with their supervisor; • Expectations regarding email contact with the supervisor; • How many draft chapters the supervisor will review and comment upon; • Whom students should contact if they experience problems with their supervision.	
Referencing guidance	Add referencing guidance	
Marking scheme^		[Extended Common Marking Scheme](#)
Prioritised reading list[3]^	Or learning resources It is a requirement of the Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy that reading lists shall indicate priority and/or relevance.	[Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy](#)
Contacts	Key programme staff contact details It is good practice to provide two methods of contact e.g. phone number and email or email and postal address	
Dates+	Important dates not detailed elsewhere (including timescales for online distance learning students)	
Timetable^	Link to student-facing timetabling service	• [My Timetable](#) • [Course Timetable Browser](#)

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[3] Please note the Accessible and Inclusive Learning Policy requirement: Course outlines and reading lists shall be made available at least 4 weeks before the start of the course. Reading lists at this stage may focus on the core texts only (where they are used). Additional reading may be provided nearer to the start date of the course.

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Core Content	Description/further information	Reference/Source
Lecture recording	If the course involves lectures, inform students which of their lectures will be recorded or not. An appropriate explanation should be provided to students where a lecture will not be recorded.	Lecture Recording Policy Virtual Classroom Policy
Key locations	Teaching Office, laboratories, online environments (VLE, etc.), etc.	
Progression requirements and award criteria		Degree Programme Regulations in the DRPS
"Local" requirements+	College, School, programme, or course-specific requirements	
Attendance requirements	Please note there are particular requirements for UKVI sponsored students: Schools should ensure that students are made aware of their attendance, engagement and on-campus obligations. Handbooks should include this information, together with guidance on how all students should submit requests for absences (special circumstances, interruptions of study, leave of absence, etc.).	Student Immigration Service
Reference to relevant University regulations	Add links to University regulations, policies and procedures	Academic Regulations Complaints Handling Procedure Academic Appeals Academic Misconduct (including plagiarism) Special Circumstances Dignity and Respect For general information on rules, regulations and policies: Student Contract webpage
Student Support	Including what happens when things go wrong	School Personal Tutoring Statements

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Core Content	Description/further information	Reference/Source
Student Wellbeing	**Standard text**: "As with all transitions in life, applying to and studying at university can be both exciting and challenging – whether it is your first time at university or you are returning to higher education, and whether you have a pre-existing mental health condition or not, it is important to look after yourself. University can be busy and stressful at times, this can in turn cause our state of wellbeing to fluctuate. We all have strategies for coping with ups and downs in life and it is important to continue using and revising these skills, to help support and maintain your wellbeing which is crucial to allow you to experience a positive and happy university journey. We provide a range of evidence-based resources, workshops and support which are available to you and can enable you to cope with the ups and downs of university life. These are provided by a number of different services, including the Centre for Sport and Exercise, Chaplaincy, Student Counselling & Disability Services and the Edinburgh University Students' Association."	Health and wellbeing student webpages
Student Feedback	Detail the opportunities available for students to provide feedback on their experiences and how they will be informed of action taken in response to feedback provided	Student Voice Policy
Student representative structure	**Standard text**: "Student representatives – both Programme and Elected Representatives – work closely with staff to ensure your voice is heard on the issues that matter to you, from teaching and learning, to student support, key services, and your sense of belonging to the University community. Throughout the year, representatives will gather feedback from you, share that feedback with relevant staff and other student representatives including the five full-time Sabbatical Officers, and work to enhance your student experience. Your School will facilitate communication between you and your representatives, in-line with this guidance. Student representatives are trained and supported by staff within the Students' Association." Include the name only of the School Representative(s) as appropriate.	Students' Association Your Voice

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Core Content	Description/further information	Reference/Source
Peer Support+	**Standard text (edit as appropriate to course/programme):** "Peer Learning and Support in the context of the University means a student with more experience sharing their knowledge, skills, abilities and expertise with a new or less experienced student. Peer Learning and Support Schemes may focus around advancing your academic work, providing 1-2-1 mentoring, or opportunities to socialise with other students within your School or offering additional support to ensure your wellbeing while at University. The Students' Association, in partnership with Schools and University Services, provide some of these opportunities, facilitated by trained student volunteers, at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level of study at Edinburgh. Other peer support opportunities are also provided by the University. **Peer Assisted Learning Schemes** (more commonly known as PALS), involve trained volunteers in second year and above who plan and facilitate structured study sessions for other students. These academic sessions cover a variety of topics, including settling into university life, study skills, course content, module choices, assessment and the skills students need to excel in their degrees. **Peer Support Schemes** (e.g. academic families, buddies, clans or similar) aim to building a sense of community for students, enhance student well-being and enrich the university experience. Peer Support Schemes are based on a model where higher year's students plan and run regular sessions to foster a sense of community and belonging through the integration of the year groups. Sessions can vary depending on the Scheme, but sessions usually have a specific well-being or academic focus, while others provide more social opportunities to facilitate meeting new people. **Peer Mentoring Schemes** are a form of peer support that take place in a 1-2-1 environment, whether this is in person or online. Peer Mentoring Schemes usually have a pastoral/welfare or academic focus, however we do also have some identity based Schemes available for example our LGBTQ+ Peer Mentoring Scheme." Detail available Peer Support opportunities	Peer Learning and Support Peer Learning and Support schemes
Reference to University and Students' Association Support Services	Provide information via the thematic student website	Students Students' Association – Advice Place Link to A to Z of University Student Services

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Core Content	Description/further information	Reference/Source
Accreditation to external bodies, discipline-specific career/industry information+	Detail here as appropriate	
Name, position and institution of External Examiner(s)^	Where an External Examiner is appointed to fulfil a role on behalf of a professional body, this will also be stated. Students must be informed in the handbook that they must not make direct contact with External Examiners, and that other routes exist for queries about the assessment process.	External Examiners for Taught Programmes Policy
Health and safety	**Standard text:** "The University has a duty, so far as reasonably practicable, to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all employees and students while at work, and the safety of all authorised visitors and members of the public entering the precincts of the University. The University Health and Safety Policy is issued upon the authority of the University Court and contains the Health and Safety Policy statement and summary of the organisation and arrangements of health and safety within the University. The successful implementation of the University Policy requires the support and co-operation of all employees and students - no person shall intentionally interfere with, or misuse anything provided by the University in the interest of health, safety or welfare. **The University Health and Safety Policy** The University Health and Safety Policy is supported by a Framework document published in two parts on the Organisation and Arrangements of health and safety within the University. Individuals are required to comply with any procedures or arrangements formulated under the authority of this Policy. Any questions or problems about matters of health and safety can be taken up initially with the School Safety Adviser. Further guidance on health and safety matters can be found on the Health and Safety Department website at http://www.ed.ac.uk/health-safety including contact details for all professional staff within the corporate Health and Safety Department." Provide information on local health and safety arrangements (including for online distance learning students).	Health and Safety Policy

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Core Content	Description/further information	Reference/Source
Data Protection	**Standard text:** "Under Data Protection Law, personal data includes all recorded information about a living, identifiable individual. Students using personal data as part of their studies must comply with the University's data protection policy and the related responsibilities as outlined in the linked guidance. Before using personal data as part of their studies students must become familiar with the linked guidance, discuss implications with their supervisor and seek appropriate ethics approval. They must also obtain consent from the data subjects to take part in the studies. Failure to comply with the responsibilities under the policy is an offence against University discipline. A breach of the University policy can cause distress to the people the information is about, and can harm relationships with research partners, stakeholders, and funding organisations. In severe circumstances the University could be sued, fined up to £20,000,000, and experience reputational damage." Provide information on local data protection arrangements (including for online distance learning students).	Student responsibilities when using personal data
PGR handbooks only		
Supervision	Information on supervisory arrangements and expectations, including annual progression review.	
Thesis (or equivalent) requirements	To include local context on expected thesis length	
Training and development	To cover: research culture; professional development; research skills training; and teaching.	Policy for the recruitment, support and development of tutors and demonstrators
Code of Practice	Provide a link to the Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students	Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students

+ If applicable
* As applicable for research programmes
^ Taught programmes only