Quality Assurance Policy for Distance Learning Module Materials

This document outlines the revised Quality Assurance arrangements for distance learning module materials. It is appreciated that the development and maintenance of distance learning module materials are time-consuming tasks in which departments have long standing and well-developed expertise. This is essential to ensure a high standard of learning materials, which are particularly central to the experience of distance learners. For the majority of distance learning departments, the following quality checks will be already embedded in practice; a consistent University-wide approach is an important step in protecting and upholding our strong distance learning reputation (in addition to strengthening our compliance with the QAA’s Quality Code).

1. New distance learning modules

Following on from the Programme Approval Process, the Head of Department is responsible for allocating the task of writing distance learning module materials to an appropriately qualified member of staff, or appointing associate tutors/external consultants to undertake this work, where internal resources are not available. It is expected that any external associates/consultants will be selected and recruited using the standard departmental HR processes. The Head of Department will take advice from the Programme Director and other members of the Programme team or academic staff, as appropriate. The Head of Department will also be responsible for the overall monitoring of the progress of the development of module materials, although responsibility for day to day management may be devolved to the Programme Director or module convenor, as appropriate.

Members of staff responsible for developing module materials should receive the necessary briefing and training to enable them to perform the task. This will include briefing on copyright requirements and plagiarism. Support is available for departments on copyright and related issues from the Leicester Learning Institute and the Library.

Heads of Department will be required to sign off materials (paper based and online) for each component module of a programme. Module authors will also be required to sign these forms to confirm that copyright of the content they have written lies with the University of Leicester, and that appropriate third party permissions have been received, where necessary.

The Head of Department will continue to put in place a system of “internal” review before signing off. This system should include (a) putting module materials through Turnitin, (b) checking for copyright issues, and (c) subjecting work to internal peer review.
The Head of Department will be responsible for identifying a suitably qualified Internal University Reviewer, outside of the development team, as part of the Programme Approval Process.

An Internal Reviewer is required for each module. This Internal Reviewer will act as the academic assessor, commenting on the content, design and delivery of the module. He/she will be required to produce a brief report commenting on all the module materials available (paper copy and online) including e-learning technologies and multimedia items if appropriate. It is envisaged that this process will normally take place after programme approval, with the exception of those modules submitted as part of Programme Approval.

The Head of Department will receive the report from the internal reviewer and will, if appropriate, sign off the materials as being ready for issue/presentation to students.

Programme approval and monitoring of internal review
Internal scrutiny of module materials will be carried out as part of the University’s programme approval process for DL provision. Programme approval panels will be required to review module materials for the first DL module(s) that will be taken by students, of at least 30 credits weighting.

Programme development teams will agree a suitable timeline for the development of new module materials, to complement the schedule of delivery for the new programme, with a view to receiving final sign off eight weeks prior to first delivery. This process will be monitored by the Secretary to the programme approval panel and by APC.

On-going monitoring and review
Academic Policy Committee will be responsible for the monitoring of this process. Once signed off, module materials will be subject to the standard QA processes in departments, and it is expected that regular updating and review will take place as part of Annual Developmental Review. The coherence and quality of overall programmes, including modules, will continue to be reviewed through ADR, as is already the case.

The internal annual monitoring process of the student learning and teaching experience (Annual Developmental Review- ADR) provides a regular health check of the quality and standards of module learning materials. This is achieved through the consideration of key monitoring information which includes: external examiners’ reports, student feedback, module and programme reviews and assessment and feedback.

APC will receive the annual summary reports on ADRs and External Examiner reports which will highlight any key issues for further consideration by the University. Departments will need to give careful consideration to the timescales for materials development in order to ensure that sign off is in place in good time for the materials to be released to students.