Guidelines on the Production of Student Handbooks for Taught Programmes

The Guidelines on the Production of Student Handbooks for Taught Programmes are produced, on behalf of the Academic Policy Committee, to assist departments in the preparation of student handbooks for taught programmes and ensure that students receive information about their departments and courses, and the University generally - including its regulations - that is relevant, comprehensive, timely and accurate.

The Guidelines are divided into three sections.

Editors must consult all three sections when preparing student handbooks.

Section 1 – General principles defines the University’s agreed principles about the content, presentation and publication of student handbooks for taught programmes;

Section 2 – Specific guidance about content contains specific guidance about required and recommended content for each handbook heading

Section 3 – Template standard text entries

Additional resources: A range of other resources now accompany the Guidelines to assist handbook editors. These include a cover/title page template, a font style guide and a web-site publishing help-document.¹

The pages below comprise section 1 of the handbook guidelines.
Section 1: Principles about student handbook production

Template

To achieve a common visual identity for student handbooks (taught programmes), all departments are requested to use the provided handbook template (Section 3 of the Guidelines on Handbook Production). Centrally supplied text for student handbooks has been pre-inserted.

Training requirements

Training in using the template is available from IT Services for all new student handbook editors and editors who have previously been on the student handbook training course and wish to refresh their skills. Editors who have not previously attended the Word 2013: Create a Student Handbook training course in either the 2016-17 or 2017-18 academic year must attend the course before using the 2018/19 handbook template. Training is necessary in order to ensure that functions such as auto-text updates work properly.

Accuracy of content

Standard text entries

Centrally supplied/standard text entries have been deliberately worded for accuracy and relevance to the majority of the student body. Occasionally, it may be necessary for a handbook editor to omit a whole section altogether or to make minor amendments to the default text entry to ensure a handbook is applicable to its specific target student readership. Examples may be deleting the special equipment section for a course with no such requirements or removing a sentence/section relevant only to campus-based study if the handbook in question is for distance learning students. This is perfectly acceptable providing the revised text remains accurate and appropriately regulatory compliant.

If editors are in any doubt about the suitability of a proposed amendment they should discuss it with the contact named in the guidance section (where given) or with the relevant College Academic Advisor in the Quality Office.

Compliance with Regulations

Departments must pay close attention to Senate Regulations when preparing student handbooks. All student handbook content must be compatible with regulations, excepting where special dispensation from a specific regulation(s) has been formally granted by the Academic Policy Committee.

Passages supplied in Section 3 of these guidelines to inform students about key regulatory issues are deliberately succinct in order to direct students to read the applicable Senate Regulation and, when available, a Student and Academic Services student information webpage about the regulation.

Ensure that information in student handbooks about the following, in particular, is regulatory compliant:

- attendance and engagement (see Senate Regulation 4)
- course/programme details (see approved versions of programme and module specifications, available on the SAS website and recorded on SITS)
- late submission of coursework (see Senate Regulation 7);
- mitigating circumstances procedure (see Senate Regulation 7);
- normal and maximum periods of registration (see Senate Regulation 2);
- PGT scheme of progression and award (see Senate Regulation 6 NB: applies to all students who commenced their studies in the 2015-16 academic year or later);
- Previous schemes of assessment which may apply to students, for example PGT students who commenced their studies between 2012 and 2015 will be on a different scheme of assessment to those who commenced in 2015/16;
- student discipline (see Senate Regulation 11).
Additionally, course and module particulars must match those specified in programme specifications and module specifications (see the Student and Academic Services website for the formally approved versions of these documents: http://www.le.ac.uk/sas/courses/documentation).

Version control
Readers must be able to clearly identify the academic year(s) to which the handbook relates and the version number or date of issue so that different copies can be distinguished if it is necessary to issue an updated version within an academic year. Version information should be provided in the document header.

Presentation and writing style
All handbooks should look professional, pleasing aesthetically and conform to the University’s visual identity. The presentation of electronic student handbooks should be such that their content remains legible if readers chose to print out any pages to read off-screen.

Hyperlinks
In preference, hyperlinks should display the full URL of a webpage to enable the reader to type the URL into a browser if required (i.e. “Guidelines on the Production of Student Handbooks for Taught Programmes (www.le.ac.uk/sas/quality/handbooks)” rather than “Guidelines on the Production of Student Handbooks for Taught Programmes”). If a URL is awkward to publish in a handbook because it is especially long, consider making a request to IT Services for a shortcut URL to be provided. This is worthwhile only if the page in question is frequently visited).

Tone and style
Handbooks should be written in a suitably straightforward style. The general tone should be welcoming and reassuring. Avoid using colloquial language and jargon and where specialist terminology is necessary consider providing a glossary.

Dense blocks of continuous prose should be avoided. To increase readability, use headings, bullet points, tables, checklists, etc., as appropriate. Summarising key points at the end of a section can help readers to absorb the most important information.

Title/cover page
A standard of title/cover page template is available (see Resources for Student handbook editors). These have been produced by Design Services especially for electronic student handbooks.

*Please note that there is a new cover template available for 2018/19 handbooks*
Editors should replace the existing cover with one created from one of the new templates. The new template no longer utilises a picture on the front cover and there is only one template available.

Heading ordering
After the first topic (Welcome/Introduction), the order is generally not significant and sections can be combined or further sub-divided if required.

Handbook sign-off and publication

Sign-off of handbooks
Handbooks for 2018/19 are not required to be signed off for publication by the Quality Office prior to release to students. However, Heads of Department should nominate a member of staff who is responsible for ensuring handbooks meet the requirements of the guidelines and for signing them off on behalf of the department.
Blackboard publication

Please note that student handbooks must be made available electronically to current students via Blackboard only. Approved information about courses is made available to prospective students, and other external audiences, via the Study With Us pages. In order to preserve the accuracy of public information, the Study With Us pages act as a single source of up-to-date information, and therefore student handbooks will no longer be made publically available on departmental websites.

It is essential that students can easily locate and access electronic student handbooks. Navigation to electronic handbooks on Blackboard should therefore be straightforward. Refer to the Publish a Student Handbook guide for details about where to position a student handbook on Blackboard (available via Resources for Student handbook editors).

Printed/hard copy handbooks

Departments are required to provide student handbooks electronically as PDFs that include bookmarks for each heading. Printed/hard copy handbooks may be issued at a department’s discretion providing these are made available in addition and not instead of electronic handbooks. If your department does wish to produce printed handbooks for 2018/19, contact Print Services for information about printing options and price quotations (printservices@le.ac.uk, ext. 2442).

Send your published student handbook to the Quality Office

Please send the hyperlink or PDF of your finished/published student handbook to the Quality Office for reference purposes; the Quality Office aims to keep a copy of all (departmental/programme) student handbooks for consultation purposes by the Quality Office and relevant external bodies, such as the QAA and OIA.

The Quality Office conducts an annual review of student handbooks for taught programmes on behalf of the Academic Policy Committee for quality assurance and enhancement purposes.

Queries about the Guidelines/handbook content

Please direct any queries about handbook content to your College Academic Advisor in the Quality Office (contact them directly or via qualoffice@le.ac.uk). They are available to check, on request, additional content added to text about regulatory matters; whenever possible, please discuss such content once it has been prepared rather than waiting until the full handbook is ready for publication.

As mentioned above, handbooks for 2018/19 are required to be checked and signed-off for publication at departmental-level by the member of staff to which the Head of Department has assigned this responsibility. Handbooks are not required to be approved for publication by the Quality Office prior to release to students.

Technical queries about the template should be directed to Hazel Guyler hmg6@le.ac.uk

Quality Office
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1 The Guidelines on the Production of Student Handbooks for Taught Programmes (Sections 1, 2, and 3) and accompanying additional resources are published at: www.le.ac.uk/sas/quality/handbook-production.