

## Guidance on updating departmental handbooks (revised edition, March 2013)

### 1 Introduction

In previous years, the Teaching and Learning Centre has offered guidance on the production of departmental handbooks for undergraduate, MSc and research students. This guidance note summarises, at Appendix 1, the most recent of this guidance (July 2006) and includes some additional advice from the Academic Registrar's Division, aimed at ensuring that handbooks do not include any information that conflicts with School information provided in the Calendar on degree classification/regulations. Serious problems can arise where this occurs.

**Note: Departmental handbooks should ideally be made available to students in hard copy and electronically - via the web and/or Moodle. Please keep in mind how students taking a departmental course but whose "home" department is different will access your handbook, as it will contain information on practices which may be quite distinctive. In particular, you may wish to offer the "assessment" section of your handbook as a separate document to be made available to all students who follow courses in your department.**

### 2 Information on programme regulations

Several departments have opted to include some information on programme regulations in their handbooks. In future, we recommend that departments either simply include a web link to the relevant School website - <http://www.lse.ac.uk/resources/calendar/Default.htm> (and/or to the undergraduate/MSc/research student sections within) - or request the appropriate material from TQARO. Relevant items are:

- Classification schemes
- Regulations relating to academic study

### 3 Assessment

The Codes of good practice on teaching, learning and assessment include information on assessment. Some departments include the relevant Code (for undergraduate or MSc students) in full. Where this is the case, please ensure you have the most up to date version of the Code from TQARO, or simply provide students with the appropriate url (from the undergraduate/MSc sections of the Calendar: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/resources/calendar/Default.htm>). Indication as to the likely assessment students can expect is included in the course guides. Again, it is important that departmental handbook course guide descriptors are identical to the information on the School's Calendar.

A common theme in TLAC reviews coming from students is their desire for more guidance on all aspects of assessment. Most handbooks now include detail on: different forms of assessment and what is expected; assessment criteria;

assessment regulations, including any penalties eg for late submission or exceeding word length; specifications on format, style, citations and referencing. It is important to think this information through clearly and fully, as what you say may have implications for, eg, School internal procedures such as assessment offences and also, in the worst case scenario, when students submit complaints or appeals to external bodies such as the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. Four areas where elaboration may be useful are:

- departmental practice as regards opportunity for formative assessment and for feedback on both formative and summative assessed work;
- plagiarism;
- guidelines on submission;
- adjustments for students with disabilities

### **3.1 *Departmental practice as regards opportunity for formative assessment and for feedback on both formative and summative assessed work***

A recent analysis of departmental handbooks found that while virtually all departments now provide students with some written advice on assessment, only 25% indicate what students can expect by way of feedback.

At both undergraduate and MSc levels, formative feedback – in other words, feedback on course essays, presentations, problem sets, etc., which do not count towards the final degree grade - is indicated as “an essential part of the teaching and learning experience” (Codes of good practice, para 2.8), and the volume of formative work expected must be publicised in course guides. It is worth clarifying to students that this formative work is described as “written work” in the course guides. Feedback should normally be provided within two weeks (Codes of good practice, para 2.9).

While formative feedback is a standard part of the undergraduate experience, in recent TLAC reviews concerns have been raised about some MSc programmes which provide only limited feedback to students before they submit summatively assessed work. The TLAC working group on assessment recommended that “in normal circumstances all postgraduate students should have an initial formative assessment either before the end of the Michaelmas Term or before their first piece of summative assessment, whichever is sooner” (WGA Recommendation 9). Ideally this should be reflected in handbooks, or an explanation provided where this is untenable.

In para 4.3 of the undergraduate and MSc Codes it is noted that, for summative assessment, it is up to departments to decide their own policy on feedback and state this in their handbooks.

### **3.2 *Plagiarism***

Three points to consider for handbooks are:

1. Ensuring that the School “definition” of plagiarism is included (paras 1-5 of Regulations on assessment offences: plagiarism:  
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/resources/calendar/academicRegulations/RegulationsOnAssessmentOffences-Plagiarism.htm>):

1. All work for classes and seminars as well as scripts (which include, for example, essays, dissertations and any other work, including computer programs) must be the student's own work. Quotations must be placed properly within quotation marks or indented and must be cited fully. All paraphrased material must be acknowledged. Infringing this requirement, whether deliberately or not, or passing off the work of others as the work of the student, whether deliberately or not, is plagiarism.
2. The definition of a student's own work includes work produced by collaboration expressly allowed by the department or institute concerned or, at MPhil/PhD level, allowed under the Regulations for Research Degrees. If the student has not been given permission, such work will be considered to be the product of unauthorised collusion and will be processed as plagiarism under these regulations.
3. Students should also take care in the use of their own work. A piece of work may only be submitted for assessment once. Submitting the same piece of work twice will be regarded as an offence of 'self-plagiarism' and will be processed under these regulations. However, earlier essay work may be used as an element of a dissertation, provided that the amount of earlier work used is specified by the department and the work is properly referenced.
4. Each department and institute is responsible for instructing students on the conventions required for the citation and acknowledgement of sources in its discipline. The responsibility for learning the proper forms of citation lies with the individual student.
5. The LSE's Statement on editorial help for students' written work sets out what the School considers is and is not permissible by way of editorial help with their written work. Contravention of the statement, whether deliberately or not, is plagiarism.

In addition to these statements, it is then helpful to include department/discipline specific guidance (eg on referencing conventions; how to handle specific types of citation such as internet sources, government publications, "grey" publications, interviews, personal communications, etc.; what might reasonably be considered "common knowledge").

2. Including a note on "self-plagiarism", ie the extent to which students may/may not re-use their own work either from within a course of study and/or from other studies. See para 3 of the Regulations (above).

3. Including an indication of departmental use of plagiarism detection tools. Several departments are now using the JISC Turnitin software as one of their approaches to detecting plagiarism, and the School uses iThenticate software for MPhil/PhD work. If you plan to use these, you are advised to explain how you plan to use it with students (eg Will student formative work be submitted, so that students can learn from any mistakes they make in proper referencing at an early stage? Will all assessed essays/dissertations be submitted?).

### **3.3 Guidelines on submission**

Most handbooks already include information on submission. This should include: where, when and how work should be submitted, what the system is for recording receipt of submission, and what the penalties are for late submission.

### **3.4 Adjustments for students with disabilities**

Guidance on adjustments to assessment arrangements for students with disabilities is clearly set out in the Calendar (see para 4.4 of the undergraduate Code and para 4.3 MSc Code). It would be helpful to actively promote this advice in departmental handbooks, as part of the School's Single Equality Scheme.

## **4 Tutorial/supervisory arrangements**

The majority of departmental handbooks now include advice on their tutorial and supervisory system (as expected by the undergraduate and MSc Codes, para 1.2). Ideally, this should include clarity on:

- the role of the academic adviser/MSc supervisor/dissertation supervisor (NB on MSc programmes, it is particularly helpful to explain the distinction, if there is one, between the student's supervisor and his/her dissertation supervisor; on the latter, some indication of how the department allocates students to dissertation supervisors and ensures reasonable equality of supervision support can be helpful);
- probable frequency and length of meetings between advisers/supervisors and students,
- information on whose responsibility it is to set up such meetings,
- the range of issues that it is appropriate to bring to them;
- (for undergraduates) how LSE for You works in relation to tutorials;
- expectations on the preparation of reference letters (eg it would be reasonable to expect students to give notice, and provide an up-to-date CV – they now have the facility to put this online in LSE for You to make it easily accessible; undergraduate students now also have the possibility of creating a Personal Development Aide Memoire, which records extra-curricular skills and experience, in LSE for You);
- what students should do if they have difficulty in meeting their academic adviser/supervisor (eg problems with office hour timing and/or accessibility of the office);
- what students should do if they are dissatisfied with the quality of tutorial/ dissertation supervision they are experiencing.

## **5 Equalities legislation**

When reviewing and updating handbooks, it is worth considering where it may be helpful to include particular mention relevant to students with disabilities, race and ethnicity, and other equality and diversity issues. Some of these have already been noted in the sections above. Other points to consider include

- offering the handbook (and indeed course materials) to be made available in different formats (eg electronic, large print, Braille);

- including a note in the section on teaching methods about staff views on recording lectures, and steps students should take to request the opportunity to record as a reasonable adjustment for a disability;
- describing in the handbook any department specific system for receiving, recording and acting on Individual Student Support Agreements (ISSAs);
- where courses include a fieldwork element or Cumberland Lodge weekends, etc., giving advice on how this is managed for students with disabilities
- pointing students to the Disability and Well-being Service;
- pointing students to the School's anti-harassment procedures:  
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/antiHarassment/>
- ensuring an adapted form of the School's Equality Statement is included, with weblink: "The School seeks to ensure that people are treated equitably, regardless of age, disability, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation or personal circumstances."  
(weblink: <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/intranet/staff/equalityAndDiversity/home.aspx>)

## **Appendix 1: Departmental handbooks: suggested contents list**

**Key dates and deadlines** for the programme (you may consider putting this up front and having it as an easily updateable document that is placed somewhere obvious on your website and/or Moodle)

### **Welcome/introductions**

Arriving in the UK and London: some useful information eg cross ref to School new arrivals website:

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/studentServicesCentre/newArrivals/>

Introduction to LSE (optional – there are plenty of other sources for this)

Introduction to the department

Introduction to the programme(s) – most depts have a single undergraduate handbook; where a department has more than one MSc programme, useful to clarify what makes each distinctive – and also where they have elements in common

### **Orientation programme**

Dates/venues (School, departmental, particular facilities if appropriate – eg subject specialist library orientation, Language Centre testing)

Mention of the Student Mentoring Scheme (undergraduate handbooks only)

(if appropriate for MSc handbooks) Contact details of PhD students who have recently undertaken the MSc and could be a source of advice for new students

Initial meetings with academic advisers/supervisors

### **Who does what in the department**

Key members of staff most associated with programmes/courses and their roles/responsibilities (eg departmental tutor/programme director, programme administrator, convener, departmental manager, possibly Dean of Undergraduate/Graduate Studies, General Course)

Departmental “communications” - email, pigeon holes, offices, what’s on website/Moodle and how to use them

Departmental staff directory (ideally with photolist, office numbers, email (if appropriate) and extension; also some mention of research interests, particularly where this is relevant for dissertation supervision purposes

Procedures on how to change academic advisers/supervisors should the need arise

### **Introduction to the programme**

Introduction to the discipline and some preliminary reading

Programme calendar – key dates (if not included earlier)

Programme aims

Course details/descriptions (**as they are described** in the Calendar – or simply link to Calendar entries)

Teaching methods (what is a class/seminar/lecture; office hours; specific reference to Moodle where appropriate, and a prompt for students with disabilities who require some “reasonable adjustments” to be made to teaching provision to contact the Disability and Well-being Service and/or talk to their academic adviser).

Tutorial/supervisory arrangements: likely frequency/duration of tutorials, possible issues that can be raised, how LSE for You is used, reference writing (what the department expects), what to do if problems arise with relationship with adviser/supervisor.

Link/cross ref to School Codes of practice, plus any local adaptation of the Codes as appropriate

If relevant, mention of “extra-curricular” seminars, Cumberland Lodge trips, research seminars etc of potential interest, or how to find out about such departmental events

### **Assessment (including formative assessment and feedback and formal "summative" examinations, essays and dissertations)**

Brief overview of departmental assessment approaches, including emphasis as appropriate on course work/written work requirements as well as formally assessed course work and exams

Explanation of departmental approach to feedback on assessment

Assessment criteria (signify if different criteria used for different types of assignment)

Examination regulations – in particular, when/where/how to submit course work, any “late submission” penalties, cover sheet requirements, School plagiarism policy (**NB: departments are expected to include the School’s plagiarism definition (above) in full, and then may wish to give further details which gives students clear guidance as to how this relates to the particular academic discipline).**

Making special arrangements for examinations/assessment for students with disabilities

Any specific requirements on submission format and binding (including copies of cover sheets, dissertation title submission forms, etc., and where to find downloadable versions)

What to do in the case of failure of exams/course requirements

Departmental guidance on job/further degree application referees (NB some departments now clearly state that they expect students to give good notice when requesting references, and supply an up to date CV to the tutor on request)

### **Study advice and development opportunities**

Several departments now produce their own subject specific guidance on various topics, but students can also be reminded of the Teaching and Learning Centre’s centrally run advice and events, for instance

- for undergraduates and MSc students, the year-round study advice and self-development programme - <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/TLC/undergraduateMScStudents/studyAdviceAndSelfDevelopmentEvents.aspx> - and resources on Moodle's Learning World (<https://moodle.lse.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=698>);
- for undergraduates, LSE GROUPS – an opportunity to take part in an original social science research project – and LSE Peer Support, that offers training to become a Peer Supporter (both are part of the School's Maximise Your Potential initiative, that takes place in Weeks 9 and 10 of Summer Term: <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/APD/personalDevelopmentAideMemoire/maximiseYourPotential.aspx>);
- for MSc students, MSc Dissertation Week (Week 10 of Summer Term) that offers a full week of events aimed at supporting students to plan, write and make the most of their dissertation: <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/TLC/undergraduateMScStudents/MScDissertationWeek.aspx> ;
- for research students, the Academic and Professional Development Programme - <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/TLC/TLCPhD/APDprogramme.aspx> - that supports students in their thesis writing and helps them to build impact for their research

Students might also be reminded of the various central services that provide advice and support:

Student Services Centre  
 Research Degrees Unit  
 Language Centre (especially any subject-specialist provision)  
 Students' Union  
 Disability and Well-being Service  
 Careers  
 Library  
 ITS  
 Student Counselling Service  
 Chaplaincy  
 Access to study space on campus/on-line room booking facility  
 Race equality statement

### **Student representation in the department and the School**

Staff student committee  
 Student role in departmental meetings (if appropriate)  
 Student representation on School committees  
 Student feedback surveys – what the department does with the results  
 TLAC reviews: how students are involved and how they receive feedback



**Practical/social matters**

Information on funding (particularly any department-specific opportunities)

Accommodation

Visa/passport/immigration guidance

SU/University of London facilities

Health and safety

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