Implementation notes for departments and faculties in relation to the *Policy and Guidance on course information*

Contents

This document, published at the start of June 2017, consists of extracts of an implementation guide which was first published in June 2015. Obsolete sections have been removed.

1. Introduction

1.1. The *Policy and Guidance on course information (P&G course information)[1]* applies to all **undergraduate** and **graduate taught** courses.

2. Background

2.1. The new *P&G course information* and the template for examination conventions (Annex I of the *P&G examiners[2]*) have been written to help make sure that students are provided with the essential information about their course that they need, and on which they can rely. The guidance also reflects national quality assurance expectations and the University's legal obligations.

2.2. The information contained within course handbooks is legally binding on the University. Guidance from the Competition and Markets Authority (formerly the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) has highlighted the importance of providing high quality information for students.[3] *Part C: Information about higher education provision* of the UK Quality Code also sets expectations relating to the information provided to current students.

3. Structure and content

3.1. The *P&G course information* has been written to focus on the **content** of course handbooks, not specifically their format or structure. However, course handbooks need to be clear to which group of students they apply, and in most cases, should not need to be changed substantially during the period of study of that cohort.

3.2. For the majority of undergraduate courses it will be easiest and simplest to provide a course handbook for the FPE and a separate one for the FHS, as some elements may change between the two parts of the course. In relation to course changes affecting on-course students, please note the applicable guidance (Annex I: Vested Interests of the *Policy and Guidance on new courses[4]*).

3.3. For courses with a multi-part FHS, there are a number of ways to construct the course information. It could be provided with separate 'part' course handbooks, as changes may be made to the course between Parts – for example, final year options for four-year courses may not be confirmed until the third year. In this case, an indicative list could be published in the course handbook covering all parts, which would be subject to the release of a confirmed final year syllabus at a later date. Alternatively, a single handbook could cover all students in a particular academic year containing all generally applicable information, with separate sections covering the course structure and assessment relevant to each sub-set of students.

3.4. PGT handbooks could be structured in a number of ways:

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[1] http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pandgoncourseinformation/
[2] http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pgexaminers/
[3] www.gov.uk/government/collections/higher-education-consumer-law-advice-for-providers-and-students
[4] www.admin.ox.ac.uk/edc/policiesandguidance/pgnewcourses

- an all-encompassing handbook for PGT and PGR programmes;

- a general graduate taught handbook with a separate handbook for each course; or

- a complete handbook for each course.

3.5. It is deliberately left up to each department/faculty to structure the information in the way that they think most appropriate. There is **no requirement** to use the order or exact titling of the sections in the template as long as the necessary content is included and it is clearly labelled.

3.6. Once the structure of the handbook(s) is decided, the next step is to work through the new template and tick off where each category of information is covered (or where it should be covered if it is missing). Where there are different types of handbook (see section 5.4 above) it may make sense in some cases that some items are in both, although duplication of information should be kept to a minimum.

3.7. It is assumed that in many cases, handbooks will be PDF documents. These should contain a table of contents which is hyperlinked to the sections of the document to allow easy navigation. Links to some useful tutorials on creating a hyperlinked table of contents in MSWord and PDF format documents are provided in Annex A.

3.8. If the department/faculty currently uses a set of webpages or part of a WebLearn site as its handbook(s), it can continue to do this if systems and mechanisms are in place to deal with:

- ensuring that information applying to each cohort is clearly differentiated, so that students are clear about the information they can rely on; and

- being able to meet the archiving and version control requirements set out in sections 10 and 11 below.

4. Publication

4.1. **All course handbooks and examination conventions should be available either publicly or to any user with an Oxford Single Sign-On**. Please ensure that the settings for any website/intranet/WebLearn sites where the course handbooks are hosted allow access (see Annex B for guidance on WebLearn).

4.2. The 'Oxford Students' section of the University's website provides a central index of undergraduate and graduate course handbooks.[5]

4.3. To make this indexing possible, it is important to host or link all the course handbooks and examination conventions for each department/faculty on or from either a **single landing page or two landing pages (one for undergraduate and one for graduate taught courses)**. The address (URL) of these pages should be stable and not change from year to year, with the content (PDF documents or links) being updated each year.

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[5] For undergraduates: www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/undergraduate/handbooks
For postgraduates: www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/graduate/handbooks

This may require the addition of one or more website/intranet/WebLearn pages to contain an index of links to other existing (course-specific) pages.

4.4. The page should host or link to the handbooks and examination conventions applicable to all current students, organised by cohort.

4.5. For joint schools, both departments' landing pages should include a link to the course information.

4.6. The landing page might look something like this if the department concerned operates one FPE/FHS, is involved in two joint schools and offers an MSt.

Undergraduate courses

Course information for BA in XXX

Information for students starting FPE in 2017/18

- Course handbook (link or pdf)
- Examination conventions (link or pdf)

Information for students starting FHS in 2016/17

- Course handbook (link or pdf)
- Examination conventions (link or pdf)

Information for students starting FHS in 2015/16

- Course handbook (link or pdf)
- Examination conventions (link or pdf)

Course information for BA in XXX and YYY (link)

Course information for BA in XXX and ZZZ (link)

Graduate taught courses

Course information for MSt XXX in historical perspective

- Course handbook (link or pdf)
- Examination conventions (link or pdf)

Previous versions of course information are available here (link).

4.7. An alternative landing page, in a case where a department already has existing pages for each course, would just contain links to existing course-specific pages, where both the course handbook and examination conventions can be found. The crucial thing is that a user navigating from a department name as listed in the central index page on the 'Oxford Students' section of the University website should be able to follow an unbroken trail of links to the course handbook and examination conventions for any course run by the department.

4.8. Please provide the web/WebLearn address (URL) of the department/faculty landing page(s) to the AAD Communications team (AcademicAdmin.Comms@admin.ox.ac.uk) as soon as it is available, and by the start of Week 0 of Michaelmas term at the latest, to enable them to update the index.

4.9. If at any point the address of the landing page(s) changes, the new address will need to be sent to the AAD Communications team.

5. Version control

5.1. Any change made to a course handbook should be recorded at the start of the document (or the home page if the information is presented as a series of web or WebLearn pages) with the nature and date of the change stated and consistent version numbering used. It is very important that this information is recorded, and included in all course handbooks, as it relates to the University's legal obligations (see section 2).

5.2. Minor updates can be notified to students via normal communication channels, that is, through a notice or announcement on the website/intranet/WebLearn page or via a routine email. Any change of substance should be notified directly to students by a specific email and must observe any applicable vested interests requirements (see section 3.2 above).

5.3. A version table for a course handbook for students starting FHS in 2015/16 might look something like this:

Version	Action	Date
Version 1.0	Published start of MT15	05/10/15
Version 1.1	Minor correction: email address	01/11/15
Version 1.2	Minor correction: web link updated	13/02/16
Version 2.0	Course change: withdrawal of 3rd year option due to staff changes	25/05/16
Version 3.0	Revised student representation arrangements	03/10/16

6. Archiving

6.1. Previous versions of course handbooks and examination conventions that relate to students currently on course should be available to students on an archive web/intranet/WebLearn page if possible, or otherwise should be available on request. Where a course handbook is provided as a series of WebLearn or website pages, the applicable content also needs to be able to be archived in a suitable format and version control maintained.

6.2. For archived versions available to students for reference, the file name itself should indicate that it is an archive version (i.e. FPE course handbook 2013-14 ARCHIVE);

the first page of the document should be clearly marked to show that it is not the most recent version; and a link to the most recent information should be included.

6.3. When the course handbook or examination conventions are updated, the current file should be renamed, marked and added to the archive page. In the process of updating course handbooks and examination conventions this summer, please take the time to search your sites for out of date or 'ghost' files which may not have been removed when new versions were uploaded.

6.4. Course handbooks and examination conventions should be retained for seven years after the graduation of the cohort of students to which they relate.

Annex A Tutorials on using a table of contents

To be able to use MSWord's automatic table of contents system you need to use Headings, which are a type of Style.

- Using Headings:
  https://support.office.com/en-nz/article/Add-a-heading-3eb8b917-56dc-4a17-891a-a026b2c790f2
- Information on using styles more generally:
  https://support.office.com/en-nz/article/Style-basics-in-Word-d382f84d-5c38-4444-98a5-9cbb6ede1ba4
- Create a table of contents automatically from Headings:
  https://support.office.com/en-in/article/Create-a-table-of-contents-or-update-a-table-of-contents-eb275189-b93e-4559-8dd9-c279457bfd72#__create_a_table
- Make sure your table of contents is set to hyperlinks:
  http://blogs.adobe.com/acrolaw/2011/03/ensuring-that-word-tocs-create-hyperlinks-in-acrobat/

If you use the 'Save As' function in MSWord to create your PDF your hyperlinks will be kept in the PDF.

Annex B Making your information on WebLearn accessible to all Oxford users

If your department/faculty's course handbooks and examination conventions are made available to students via WebLearn, the easiest way to arrange the course information documents/html pages is within a single folder on the WebLearn site. This can be made accessible to all Oxford users by configuring the settings of the folder in which it is contained.

Getting started
- Go to the Resources tab of the site in the left hand vertical menu bar (if this is not visible, add it as a tool: click on 'Site Info' in the left hand menu; click the 'Edit Tools' button, and select 'Resources'; then press 'Continue' at the bottom).
- To create a new folder use the 'Add' drop down menu and select 'Create folder'.

To change the permissions of the course information folder:
- Click the drop down menu 'Actions', to the right of the folder.
- Select 'Edit Details (Properties)'. Settings for this top level folder are inherited by the folders and documents that are in it so this only needs to be done once for everything in this folder to have the same permissions.

In the page that opens, select the radio button 'This folder and its contents are viewable by all Oxford users'.

This page also gives you the URL of the folder to send to the AAD Comms team. Select the 'Short URL' button to give a shorter URL.