Course design for increased student satisfaction

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Preface

Good course design is fundamental to successful teaching and the maintenance of standards. Students are at the heart of everything we do at Leeds Met, and this booklet is designed to ensure that the design and operation of courses are transparent to all. If students clearly understand the scope, content and structure of courses from the outset, they are more likely to be satisfied with results. We need to ensure that our course design, approval, review and delivery are undertaken effectively and with rigour, by involving both the staff who deliver programmes and the colleagues who assure quality. This publication is a contribution to assuring and enhancing the quality of our courses.

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Course design for increased student satisfaction

Introduction

Only when we are initiating brand new courses do we have the opportunity to design a new programme of study from scratch. Much more often we are:

- putting together a programme using existing modules, and perhaps a few new ones
- designing a new module, to meet an identified student demand or perhaps a request from employers.

Most often we are redesigning modules:

- in response to feedback or to external changes in syllabus, for example from a professional body
- to enable the modules to be re-used, for example by blended learning or distance learning; or
- to make them fit an additional programme as well as their current programme(s).

Whatever your starting point, this booklet is intended to help, with principled, practical advice. The booklet uses and builds on ideas in *Writing and using good learning outcomes*, also by David Baume and published by Leeds Met Press.

Collaboration

Most of this booklet explores and describes the qualities of a good course. It offers processes that you and colleagues can use to design good courses, which will work well and lead to increased student satisfaction. ('Course' is generally used here to mean both 'programme of study' – for example, a degree – and a module within a programme.)

The words "...and your colleagues..." are vital. It may be tempting to write your new course on your own. The resultant course may be very good. But the course will probably be even better if you develop it with colleagues, for at least three reasons:

- Colleagues will bring new ideas, new information, new perspectives, new questions
- If the people who will deliver, manage and monitor the course are also involved in its design, they will check the feasibility of course ideas, check that they know how to make it work well, and check that the students can achieve the outcomes and are satisfied with the course as a whole
- They will also be more committed to the course than if it is simply provided for them to deliver, however brilliant it might be.

Collaboration in course design can extend beyond your immediate colleagues. If the course is vocational, employers and/or staff of the relevant professional and subject bodies may be willing to contribute

and respond to draft course designs. If you know somebody running a related course in another university, they may be willing to make helpful suggestions – most people have a few ideas for things they would like to have done in their own courses, but for some reason couldn't include, which might be helpful to you in your approach.

An external examiner may also be willing to help with advice and critique.

Students, whether potential students or those taking similar courses in the university, bring many good ideas, so should be consulted where possible – for example, course reps on similar courses.

Summary of the approach to course design

Introduction

This section assumes that you have researched the course, and identified the timeline and process for course approval.

You will be able to use this course design process whether you are writing a new programme or module from scratch or modifying an existing one.

Each of these seven steps is described in detail later. They suggest a process for designing a course. University course approval processes generally specify the kinds of information and the formats in which they want this information. But course design is more than filling in forms. Your answers to the questions below can be used to complete the required course documentation.

1. Aims and rationale – what is the course for?

Potential and current students want to know:

- what the course is about
- what the course is for
- what the course will do for them
- how it builds on what they already know
- how it will help them get where they want to go next, whether that is the next module or programme or employment.

How will you answer these questions for your new course?

2. What are the intended learning outcomes?

The learning outcomes of the course describe what students need to be able to do to complete the course successfully (see also *Writing and using good learning outcomes* by David Baume, 2009). Not what they need to know, appreciate or understand – although students will certainly need to know and apply and critique knowledge, and develop critical appreciation and good understanding of the subject – but what they can *do*.

Looking ahead, students will be assessed on the basis of what they can do.

As briefly and as clearly as you can, say what students will need to be able to do to pass your course. To put it another way, what will it mean for students to be able to 'do' the topic of your course, and do it well?

Do these learning outcomes match the aims you wrote? If not, change one, the other or both until they match.

3. What are the assessment tasks?

Assessment must be considered early in the design process to ensure that the outcomes you wrote can be assessed.

Could you in practice assess whether, and how well, students have achieved this outcome?

What would an appropriate assessment task be?

If you can't construct a suitable assessment task, then it's best to modify the learning outcome until you can. If you can't assess it, it isn't a learning outcome.

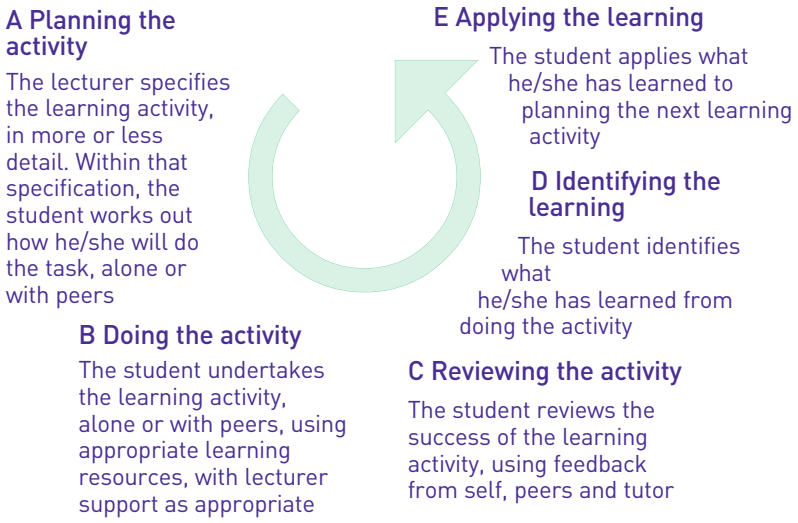
4. What are the student learning activities?

Students learn partly through being taught, but mainly through work, reflecting on their work, receiving feedback, reviewing their feedback, drawing implications for their understanding and for their work, then doing the next piece of work, building on what they have learned – and so on.

From this perspective, course design means designing and sequencing the work that students will do, and the ways in which this work will be supported and fed back on, resourced and assessed.

This model shows activity-based learning on a course.

This should be a spiral, not a cycle, because this suggests progress. The scale and complexity of the task and the learning increase with each successive turn.



5. How will you support the learning activities?

The lecturer's role, in summary, is to provide appropriate support, challenge, input and feedback at each stage of the course:

A Planning the activity

The lecturer needs to set the scene, say why the learning activity is important, and answer questions about the activity.

B Doing the activity

The lecturer's roles are monitoring progress and answering questions.

C Reviewing the activity

As well as giving feedback, the lecturer should ensure that students review their own and each other's feedback.

D Identifying the learning

"What have you learned (from doing this and from previous activities)?" is a powerful question.

E Applying the learning

The course should let students apply what they have learned to authentic contexts.

6. What are appropriate learning resources?

The course guide should include a guide to learning resources. At Leeds Met we are committed to producing and using Open Educational Resources, having had Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) support to help us to do so. It is generally better value for staff to locate and annotate resources, rather than produce original learning resources from scratch. This is explored in more detail later.

7. Documenting the course

The course documentation and guide should anticipate as many student questions as possible. This documentary resource should grow year by year as more questions are asked and answered. University requirements concerning course documentation are described later.

Researching the course

Revising an existing programme or module

If you are starting from an existing programme or module, you need to know as much as you can reasonably discover about it, including:

- original course documentation
- changes over time and why they were made
- admissions criteria
- recruitment to the course
- teaching notes and presentations
- online resources
- assessment results
- samples of assessed student work
- student feedback.

You will be interested in how, and how well, the current course is working; what students are being taught and how they are being taught it; the nature and quality of work produced by students; and what students think of the course, along with any suggestions for improvement.

Demand for a new course

A course may be suggested by a particular employer or employment sector. Colleagues in your Department may have a research-based belief, or a gut feeling, that there is a need – or, not the same thing, a demand – for the course. As well as being educationally good, a new course also needs a solid business case.

How do the costs of producing and running the proposed course compare with likely income in these uncertain times?

Professional body requirements

Professional body requirements need to be approached with both respect and caution. It is necessary to identify which are requirements, and which merely suggestions. What weight does the professional body attach to the suggestions? A conversation with the professional body at an early stage is usually wise and can save time later.

There are two ways to address professional body requirements, for example in relation to course outcomes. The first is to adopt the professional body outcomes as written. The second is to devise learning outcomes which the course team feels to be academically and professionally appropriate and well matched to the students the university intends to recruit. These programme outcomes can then be mapped to professional body requirements, showing how these requirements are met.

QAA subject benchmarks and level descriptors

These are extremely important. As with professional body requirements, Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) benchmarks and level descriptors can be used as a recipe for course planning. Alternatively, they can be used as a guide. Whichever route is chosen, it is important to demonstrate how QAA requirements have been satisfied. Towards the end of the design process, check that nothing vital or desirable has been missed.

University policies and requirements

These are described in the Appendix at the end of this booklet.

Why this course?

Introduction

When they are thinking about coming to the university, and then when they are considering taking a particular course, students may ask questions including:

1. "What is this course for?"
2. "Who is this course for?"
3. "Why should I study it?"
4. "Will it interest me?"
5. "Will I be able to do it?
6. "Will I be able to pass it?"

We should welcome, indeed encourage, such questions. Students who get and use truthful and helpful answers to the first three of these questions are more likely to make good choices of course. They are also more likely to succeed on the course.

The course handbook should enable students to answer questions 1-4 for themselves. How can students be helped to answer question 5? One way is to ensure that the handbook is clear about what skills and knowledge the course assumes that students will bring to their studies. If a student meets the entry requirements, and assiduously completes the course work and other requirements, for example group work, the answer to 6 should usually be yes.

- *What questions do students ask about your course?*
- *What questions would you like them to ask?*
- *How will you answer these questions?*

The aim of the course – a generic example

"This module will introduce the main ideas in … It will give students ability and confidence to apply some of these ideas, reflectively, in varied professional settings."

This generic module aim would, with the topic identified, answer question 1; question 2 (only for those who know whether or not the topic interests them); question 3 (only for those who already knew that they wanted to develop these abilities and this confidence); probably not question 4 without more information about the course; and probably not questions 5 or 6. But it's a start.

There is no formula for writing a course aim. Clear, explicit language helps. So do insights into students' questions.

The rationale for the course

"The construction of ideas and practices about 'race' is a major feature in the operation of the media and popular culture in post-imperial Britain. This module introduces students to theories of 'race', culture and difference (biological, radical cultural, psychoanalytic). The module builds upon theories introduced in the 'Key Concepts' module at Level 1. It applies concepts of 'reading' media and cultural images developed in the media and cultural theory modules at Level 2. It will link with topics examined in the 'Consent/Dissent' modules, and will provide a basis for the development of the 'racial' dimensions of issues examined in Level 3." (From 'Inventing Black and White', Leeds Met Module MPC205, Cultural Studies. Tutor: Dr Max Farrar)

Which of the questions above does this rationale answer, and help students to answer?

Seven principles for course design and operation: good practice

Chickering and Ehrmann (1996) identified a number of principles of good practice in relation to course design and operation. The following guidelines by the author summarise, with comments and questions, the key features from their work (in italics).

A good course:

1. Encourages contacts between students and staff

"Frequent student-staff contact in and out of class is a most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Staff concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few staff members well enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and plans."

Comments: What is contact?

- Being one of 200 students in a lecture may count as contact on the timetable. But it may not feel like contact to a student – unless the lecturer is brilliant at engaging students, and the design of the lecture encourages student engagement.
- Being 1 of 20 students in a group may or may not feel like contact to the student.

What will make any part of the course feel like contact?

- I suggest being known by name, acknowledged; feeling safe to contribute to discussion; being taken seriously by tutor and students. The course has to be to designed and run to generate such engagement.
- Prompt, appropriate feedback is also a positive form of contact.

2. Develops co-operation among students

"Learning is enhanced when it is a team rather than a solo effort. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's ideas and responding to others' improves thinking and deepens understanding."

Comments: We should:

- make it rational for students to co-operate = design the course assessment so that students are assessed according to how well each of them does, and not how well they do in comparison to other students. Then:
- design the course so that students need to collaborate from week one, first on small tasks and then on assessed collaborative group work projects with tasks of growing size
- discuss and reward co-operation, beyond the intrinsic rewards that co-operation brings
- make sure that students see staff co-operating.

3. Uses active learning techniques

"Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to lecturers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write reflectively about it, relate it to experiences, apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves."

Comments: The idea of learning as an activity, rather than as a result of being taught – "learning as doing" (Race, 2010, in press) – permeates this booklet. It should permeate courses.

Students should be appropriately active from the start of their course; for example, at Leeds Met a number of programmes feature immersive learning at the start. They should experience the course as a sequence of learning activities, steadily growing in scale and complexity, both within each module and from year to year.

4. Gives prompt feedback

"Knowing what you know and don't know focuses your learning. In getting started, students need help in assessing their existing knowledge and competence – to know and value what they know. Then, in classes and between classes, students need frequent opportunities to do work and to receive feedback on their work. At various points in their studies, and at the end, students need chances to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how they might assess themselves."

Comments: Students can learn to review their own work and the work of peers, and use the results to improve their work. This process needs to be built into the course.

Feedback can take lots of staff time and can be long delayed. It need not be. At Leeds Met we are committed to returning 80% of coursework with feedback to continuing students within three weeks and 100% within four weeks. Approaches such as feedback to groups, feedback with checklists, or a day allocated to giving feedback can speed and ease giving swift, useful feedback, as described later.

Using student portfolios can help students to reflect on their work and learning.

5. Emphasises time on task

"Learning to use time well is critical for students and professionals. Allocating realistic amounts of time means effective learning for students, effective teaching for staff."

Comments: Some course timetables say little about what the students will actually do. Again, courses can usefully be designed as a sequence of learning activities, growing in scale and complexity, and growing in the degree of autonomy which students exercise in the task as they work through each module and each year of the programme.

6. Communicates high expectations

"Expect more and you will get it. High expectations are important for everyone: for the poorly prepared student, for those unwilling to exert themselves, and for the more able and better motivated. Expecting students to perform well can become a self-fulfilling prophecy."

Comments: The learning outcomes of the course should give a clear description of high quality work on the course. Examples of good work should accompany the outcomes. What makes good work, on the course and in the subject, should be topics for conversation throughout the course. Royce Sadler's work (Sadler, 2009) proposes sharing high quality work with students as the basis for a learning dialogue.

Developmental feedback can communicate high and realistic expectations.

7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning

"Different students bring different talents and learning styles to University. Brilliant students in a seminar might be all thumbs in a lab or studio; students rich in hands-on experience may not do so well with theory. Students need opportunities to show their talents, to learn to value these talents, and to learn in ways that work for them. Then they can be helped to learn in new ways that do not come so easily."

Comments: Through personal development planning, students should become familiar with their capabilities, learning needs and preferred learning styles. The design and operation of the course should enable students to use this information to collaborate productively and study effectively.

The shape and structure of the course

A true story about a logical but inappropriate course structure

John (not his real name) had been fascinated, from a very early age, by the sea. So he decided to study oceanography. He was accepted onto an oceanography degree.

He left the course midway through the second year. Why? John said:

"They told us that oceanography uses a lot of physics, chemistry, biology. So, before we could do oceanography, we had to study physics, chemistry and biology.

"But, they told us, physics especially needs a lot of maths. So, before the physics, we needed to study maths.

"We weren't going to get to do any oceanography until the third year. So I left."

There may have been some subject-based logic to this course design. But it ignored something vital: John's motivation for taking the oceanography degree – his fascination with the sea.

What (if any) implications does John's story have for the current course that you are reviewing and modifying, or the new course that you are designing?

What is the place of the class in the course?

We shall consider later some possible shapes and structures for courses.

But first, let us consider a generic issue for any course that has regular classes. What is the relation between the class and the work that students do between classes?

A conventional, if implicit, weekly model looks like this:

Class	Student work outside class	Class	Student work outside class
Week 1		Week 2	

In this model, if you like, the class is the locomotive pulling behind it the work that students do between classes.

I suggested earlier that it is useful to consider the course as what the students do, and to consider course design as designing what students do. This gives us a different model of the role of the class:

	The class			
Student work between classes	Reviewing student work from previous week	Teaching new content	Setting up next week's student work	Student work between classes
Week 1				Week 2

Continuing with the train metaphor, here, the class is the coupling between the carriages. Each carriage (risking metaphor overload) is propelled mainly by the work of the student rather than by the lecturer.

This model evens out student workload – proposing a few hours of student work every week, rather than gaps interrupted by assignment panics. Also, it uses the work that students do each week, and students have the assurance of seeing progress each week.

A crude module structure (not recommended)

- Take the syllabus
- Divide it into 10 or 12 sections, however many weeks are available to teach it
- Plan to start the course with an introductory overview, and to end with a conclusion that brings everything together
- Then, teach a section of the syllabus each week.

Possible drawbacks of the approach include:

- The subject may not fall into the necessary number of discrete sections
- The subject may not have this linear shape
- This structure may not match the enthusiasms of the students (as in the oceanography example above)
- You may want to address some topics several times during the module.

Do any of these drawbacks apply to the way you currently deliver your module?

At this stage, what ways do you see to address them?

The spiral

Section 4 of the section 'Summary of the approach to course design' draws a cycle of learning, and stresses that this cycle should be a spiral.

Each successive piece of student work comprises a part, or a simplified version, of the learning outcome of the course. Each successive piece of student work builds on previous elements, is larger, more complex. It brings in fresh ideas, new content, new methods, more sophisticated analysis and synthesis and judgements, and where appropriate greater creativity.

The increase in scale of task should be logarithmic rather than linear, starting with tiny tasks – maybe just a few minutes – and increasing rapidly to hours, days, a week, or several weeks.

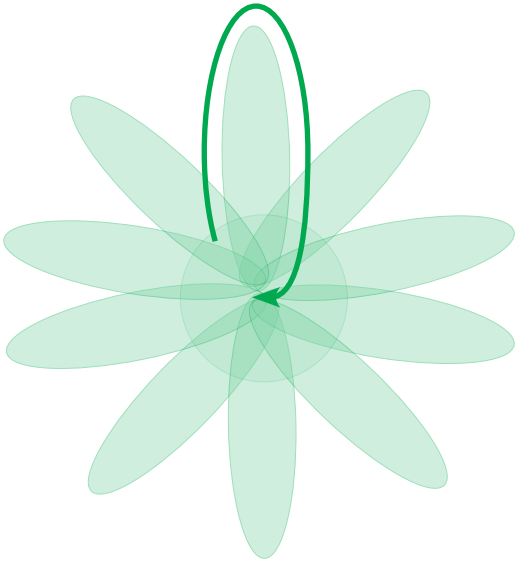
Building on some of the ideas you developed in the section above on learning activities:

- *Draft a succession of learning activities for your course that increase in this way*
- *Fit them into a course timetable.*

The flower

Here, the course starts with a core question, concern or topic. Each week – or two or three – a new approach is considered, explored, used, tested, always returning to the core, reviewing what has been learned and achieved and what remains to be learned and achieved, and then off round another loop.

Experiment with different possible shapes for your course. Different subjects have, or at any rate seem to work better with, different shapes.



Student satisfaction and student success

Introduction

'Course design' isn't a National Student Survey heading for a good reason. Students don't experience 'course design'. They experience teaching, assessment and feedback; academic support, organisation and management; and learning resources. They have views on how the course helps them to develop personally, and on their overall satisfaction with the course.

Course design brings these elements together.

We can assume that student satisfaction correlates positively with student success to a greater or lesser extent.

Satisfaction and timescale

Beginning university study can be scary. Many aspects of student life may be different from what has been experienced before. Students might find comfort in, and hence satisfaction with, a continuation of the teaching and learning methods from school or college, whether the experience of school or college was recent or more distant. (This assumes that school or college experience has been broadly successful and satisfactory, which will not always be the case. Incoming students are an increasingly heterogeneous group.)

Some of the approaches to teaching and learning suggested in this booklet will be familiar and comfortable to some students; others perhaps less so. The less familiar teaching and learning methods may initially reduce student satisfaction; early feedback on the course may be discouraging. What can course designers do about this?

Explain how the course will be run, and why

The one thing we rarely talk with students about at university is learning.

- How does the module run?
- Why?
- What can students expect from the lecturer?
- What will lecturers expect from students?

The course guide should answer these questions. In the Leslie Silver International Faculty at Leeds Met, staff are trialling a 'Student Compact': a document stating clearly what students can expect and what is expected of them. But these are also fit topics for explanation and conversation, at the start of the course and on the way through.

Start small

The first required in-class or online student learning activity should be small – maybe only two or three minutes. But it should happen during the first class, failing which as early as possible. It should feel safe. Similarly, the first student assignment should be small, perhaps requiring only an hour or so. It should be very tightly specified – not trivial, but safe.

The second class assumes that the first assignment was completed. It builds on the work the students have done. Working between classes thereby becomes a natural part of the course process.

Build slowly

Each week, each class, each assignment, should slowly build on the previous one. Safe, steady growth rather than abrupt jumps works best. Learning needs repeated success, stretching students without threat. Student success and student satisfaction are the likely outcomes.

Sketch a few weeks of your course using this model.

Learning outcomes and syllabus content

What are the relationships between learning outcomes and syllabus content?

Learning outcomes describe what students need to be able to do in order to pass the course.

A syllabus is usually a list of content; of topics, ideas, principles, authors, theories, depending on the subject.

Learning outcomes describe what the students need to be able to do with this content.

The idea of syllabus as content is not new. Nor is the idea of teaching as the delivery of that content. A 1741 list of 32 lectures on Materia Medica at Cambridge starts with an introduction and overview. The lectures are then grouped under four headings: fossils, vegetables, animals and chemicals. They offer a partly recognisable list of content – for example waters, aromatic herbs, general rules for prescribing, and – reassuringly given that the materials taught include mercury – "Antidotes to all the known poisons". We are promised that a specimen of each material will be shown, and that we shall be told everything that is useful or curious about it. Fee: 3 guineas for the course (Wordsworth, 1877/1968).

There is some good course design and teaching here: a clear and explicit overall structure; the chance to see each material; and an implicit outcome: the abilities to prescribe, and to counter poisons. But it also illustrates a nowadays too-common pedagogic model: "Be taught it, and hence be able to do it."

What do students need to be able to do with the content of your course?

You may find it useful to start with an existing syllabus. What do you want students to be able to *do* with the content?

You might, for example, want your students to be able to:

- Use the content to solve problems, make plans, create artefacts, design systems – or other things appropriate to the subject.

How do you want your students to be able to use what's in your syllabus?

- Critique the content – for example, review it, analyse it, take different stances to it.

How do you want your students to be able to critique what's in your syllabus?

- Go beyond the taught content, find new content, synthesise new ideas or artefacts.

Do you want your students to go beyond the taught content?

You may find it useful to analyse your syllabus, line by line, using this question:

What would you like your students to be able to do with this piece of syllabus content?

As you do this, you will see similar kinds of activities – that is, similar kinds of learning outcomes – emerging. Capture them, review them, and, if they work, use them.

Assessment tasks

Why consider assessment tasks at this very early stage of the course design process?

The main reason is to ensure that the learning outcome you have written for the course is, in practice, capable of being assessed.

What makes a learning outcome assessable?

Consider this extract from a set of module learning outcomes. Hopefully they are hypothetical, although very similar ones have been seen in practice:

"Students will appreciate the distinctive contribution of [a list of named authors] to [the topic of the course]."

How could you assess students' achievement of this learning outcome? Note down a few possibilities.

You might set the following tasks or essay titles:

- Describe the distinctive contribution of [one or more of the authors] to [the topic of the course]
- Critique the distinctive contribution of [one or more of the authors] to [the topic of the course]
- Compare and contrast the distinctive contributions of [some of the authors] to [the topic of the course].

All are possibly legitimate assessment tasks, although the first is not even at undergraduate first-year level – the relevant QAA level descriptor says that students should demonstrate "knowledge of the underlying concepts and principles associated with their area(s) of study, and *an ability to evaluate and interpret these within the context of that area of study*" (emphasis added). Knowledge alone is not enough, even at first-year level.

The students, faced with a learning outcome like this, have a vague view of what may be expected of them in assessment. They will pick up clues from what you teach, the work you set, the feedback you give, last year's exam paper.

But surely we do not want students to experience higher education as a guessing game, a game of "guess what the lecturer wants"? Better, surely, to be explicit from the start about what we want our students to be able to do, about the qualities of good work – a few examples always help – and therefore about how they will be assessed.

Along with 'appreciate', the words 'know' and 'understand' also feature heavily in learning outcomes, as in, generically:

"Students will know [or, possibly, understand] the principal current theories of [the topic of the course]."

You may find that such words, or such outcomes, crop up regularly in the learning outcomes for the course you are currently modifying.

If you find such outcomes, how could you make them less ambiguous?

'Know' can often appropriately be replaced with 'describe', and 'understand' with 'explain'. You may well find other replacement terms that work better in your subject. Then ask:

What would a good assessment task for this outcome be?

Constraints and opportunities on assessment tasks

How much freedom do you have in designing and selecting assessment tasks? Perhaps more than you think.

Two good principles for designing assessments – indeed, for designing courses or for many kinds of planning – are:

- If it is not required, then it is optional
- If it is not prohibited, then it is allowed.

Assessment is, properly, a formal business. It must be done rigorously and fairly, as major consequences follow, for the student and for the university's reputation. Also, assessment can engender strong emotions, for students and for staff. For these reasons, it can be difficult to improve assessment, and some strange old assessment practices persist.

Good learning outcomes provide a strong lever for improving assessment. A good learning outcome is not just capable of being assessed. It is usually very clear how a good learning outcome should be assessed. A learning outcome describes what students should be to do. The obvious way to assess it is usually to ask them to do it.

Is this the only assessment task you will ever need?

- *Say to students: "Show that, and show how, you have achieved the learning outcome(s) of the course."*

Course design is not a linear process. It is iterative.

Once the aims and rationale, and then the learning outcomes, are written, ask: do the learning outcomes deliver what the aims promise? That is, if, as a student, I had achieved the learning outcomes, would I feel that the course had achieved its aim? Would it have lived up to its rationale?

We are working here at the rather artificial borderline between course design and course operation. Course design should be informed by experience of course operation. For example:

Look at a piece of student work to which you have just awarded a good mark. Did that piece of work show that the student, through producing that piece of work, had attained the learning outcomes of the course? Or:

- Was something that you value missing from the work? If so, do you need to extend the learning outcomes to embrace that additional feature or quality?

- Did the work contain features or qualities that you wanted to reward, or indeed did reward, but are not specified in the learning outcomes or assessment criteria? If so, are you content to allow some leeway for rewarding additional unspecified good features of a student's work? (If you were a student, how would you feel about your assessors having this leeway, this ability to apply criteria that they hadn't previously told you about and given you the chance to discuss and apply to your work?)

After marking 10 or 20 or 100 pieces of student work, you may find you can list additional features or qualities; review these with colleagues; and, with agreement, make them into future learning outcomes or assessment criteria. You should be careful to avoid an upwards drift in standards as you do this.

Student learning activities

How do people learn?

People learn through doing things, and then reflecting on what they have done and achieved. This reflection can usefully be supported through conversations with, and feedback from, others. Action is often more effective and productive when it is permeated by reflection.

Even more fundamentally – reflection is a learning activity.

Three of the seven principles discussed earlier are concerned with action – Principle 2 describes the importance of co-operation, Principle 3 promotes active learning and Principle 5 emphasises time on task.

What kinds of learning activities, and what kinds of reflection, should we design into courses? Learning activities should be appropriate, and they should be appropriately challenging and varied.

Appropriate tasks – appropriate to what?

1. Appropriate to the learning outcome of the course

One overall learning outcome of a degree in engineering for renewable energy might be that, on completion of the course, students should be able to specify and design a safe and efficient wind farm.

In the 'Student satisfaction and student success' section we suggest starting with small tasks. A small task, for week one, or even for hour one, of a renewable energy degree might be for the students to produce an outline design for a wind farm.

Throughout the degree, students could research, extend and critique this outline design, and no doubt from time to time abandon it in favour of something better.

What task clearly appropriate to an overall learning outcome of your course could you use in the very first class?

2. Appropriate to the motivations of the students

We hope that students bring to their study of our course a passion to learn about and become knowledgeable, proficient, perhaps even expert, in the subject.

It is useful to ask students – individually or en masse – why they are studying this course.

What would you ask them? How? When? What answers do you predict? And how would you use the answers?

3. Appropriate to students' confidence and capabilities

Apart from any resits, all students are likely to be new to your module. However clear the course guide, the students may not be entirely certain what to expect.

It is good to start with activities that students can use to identify the knowledge and capabilities they bring to the module. Students can then be helped to compare their knowledge and capabilities with those expected or required for successful study

of the module. Suitable support materials or processes can help students to address any gaps.

If you discover large gaps between what you are expecting students to bring and what they actually bring, you may have to provide substantial additional support, or modify the module.

What knowledge and capabilities do students need in order to begin to study successfully on your module?

How will you help them to identify whether or not, and to what extent, they already have this knowledge and these capabilities?

You may also have to accept that, in some areas, the students may know more than you do, and be prepared to use their knowledge!

4. Appropriate to the learning resources available

Ideally, learning resources (considered later in this booklet) should be available to meet course and student needs.

But, even in an information-rich age, the resources we really want are not always available. We must design learning activities that make realistic demands on resources. This may mean, for example, using online resources rather than shelved books; simulated experiments rather than laboratory experiments; virtual or local field courses rather than more distant visits; modified existing reusable learning objects rather than specifically designed materials. For example, at Leeds Met Simon Thomson's project on using Open Educational Resources may be helpful.

Are there any desirable learning resources for your course that you know students will find it difficult to access? If so, what substitutions are possible?

How difficult?

Students learn best when their current task is challenging and stretching, but not too much. The problem of course is that different students find the same task differently challenging. Varied tasks, additional guidance materials available on request (most efficiently provided through a Virtual Learning Environment), and support for student co-operative learning, are all likely to be helpful.

Variety in student activities

Students prefer, and learn better with, a judicious mix of similarity and variety of learning activities. ('Judicious' masks the inconvenient fact that the optimal extent and nature of variety is different for each student. But we must do what we can.)

Beyond similarity to the course learning outcome – indeed, beyond direct, obvious and immediate relevance to it, and beyond steadily increasing scale – what kinds of variety in student activities are appropriate? Perhaps:

- solo, small group and large group tasks
- different task formats – essays, reports, presentations using varied media ...

- different intended audiences – other students, tutors, conferences, employers, specific media, the public …
- different primary emphases – analysis, innovation …

Sketch the most varied set of appropriate student learning activities you can think of for your course.

From these activities, what kinds of things are different?

Will these activities help students achieve the outcomes?

As well as being good learning activities, would they also make good assessment tasks?

Ensuring that students get and use feedback

Introduction

Feedback here means reactions to, commentary on, and possibly suggestions for the improvement of, work.

This section suggests some ways to design feedback systems into the course. The systems will benefit student learning without increasing staff workload, although some time may need to be invested in setting up systems that will soon save staff time through greater efficiency.

Good and useful feedback is:

- clear – students can understand it
- swift (normally within three weeks at Leeds Met) – since the value of feedback falls rapidly with time
- specific – the students know exactly what they have done well, exactly what they need to improve
- constructive – beyond knowing what to improve in their work, they also need to know how to improve it
- personal – the student must see how the feedback relates to this particular piece of work
- honest – distinguish between facts and opinions in the feedback. Tell the truth – truth builds mutual trust
- kind – don't miss out the bad news, but treat the recipient as you would wish to be treated – with respect
- usable – the design of the course should let students use feedback to improve their next piece of work.

Feedback from whom (apart, of course, from you)?

Students can give themselves feedback on their own work. If you can persuade them to do this once, they will rapidly discover the value of it. Giving themselves feedback, revising the work, and handing in the revised work with their self-assessment of the work will lead to an increase in the quality of their work.

Students can give each other feedback on their work. This needs a degree of trust. The students will rapidly discover the value of giving feedback, receiving feedback and using feedback.

On placements, employers can give valuable feedback. They may need to be inducted into good feedback practice.

Examples of anonymous student submissions from previous cohorts, with feedback, can give timely feedback; for example, using a Virtual Learning Environment, examples and feedback from previous cohorts can be put on a timed release to appear immediately after the submission deadline.

Rewarding self and peer feedback

The currency of higher education is marks and grades. We can show that we value self and peer assessment by rewarding it – either with a fixed small mark for doing it, irrespective of how well, or with marks awarded for the quality of the feedback against explicit criteria.

Planning the course to ensure that students can use the feedback they get

Lecturers sometimes complain that students are not interested in feedback, only in the mark. Of course, a mark is a simple form of feedback. Leaving that aside, we wonder: why aren't some students interested in feedback on their work?

If you know students who have not picked up your feedback on their work, you could ask them why. What answers do you think they would give?

They might say:

- I don't understand your feedback
- I only want the mark, to check if I'm doing enough work
- No-one else picks up their feedback either
- I don't like the negative comments.

Another reason, spoken or not, might be:

- We don't see how we can use the feedback.

This could be a pedagogic problem, a matter of technique. The problem may lie with the kind of feedback you give; or with the student's ability to interpret and use it; or, most likely, some of each.

Or there could be a structural and operational problem in the course. If the students do very few assignments in a module, and if they don't receive feedback for several weeks, and if the next assignment is very different, then it may indeed be difficult or impossible for them to use the feedback you have invested time and care in producing. Here are three possible solutions:

1. **Increase the number, reduce the size of assignments**

How many assignments would be feasible on this module – without increasing student workload or your marking load?

2. **Speed feedback by automating feedback**

To their work, add a printed list of comments you've most often made on this assignment, or this type of assignment. Tick the ones that apply. Add a few individual comments on each. Richer feedback, using less of your time.

What are the 20 or so most common comments that you make on student work?

In this list you have the basis of a feedback sheet or web page for use with your students.

3. **Provide a worked example/examples on a web page with FAQs**
4. **Build feedback into your timetable**

For example, you set an assignment for your class of 60 students. You have planned the assignment such that you can mark one in around 7-8 minutes. That means around eight hours' marking. The assignments are due in on Monday. You've allocated Tuesday for marking – no classes, no meetings, no research. Students get their assessed assignments back on Wednesday morning. Student satisfaction will increase.

Perhaps on Tuesday morning there's one class you have to give and one meeting that you must attend. Or perhaps you can't face a solid day of reading student work. So you mark on Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday afternoon. Students receive their assignments with your feedback on Thursday. That's still much faster than the three-week turnaround expected at Leeds Met.

If the Faculty decides that giving swift, helpful and usable feedback is important, it can be provided.

What would you have to do to make this work on your course?

Teaching and supporting student learning

Introduction – roles for the lecturer

This booklet offers a strongly learner-centred and learning-centred view of course design. There is sustained emphasis on student learning as an active business. What are the roles for the lecturer – beyond, obviously, designing the course?

The lecturer's roles in ensuring that students receive feedback and have access to learning resources are considered elsewhere in this booklet. Here, we concentrate on planning how the course will be run.

Managing student transitions

We said earlier that the learning approaches at university may be unfamiliar to some students, and perhaps uncomfortable. A vital role for a lecturer is persuading students of the value of these new approaches.

This means:

- hearing students' concerns
- explaining why these methods are important for their academic and professional future
- giving students the opportunity for repeated small successes in using these methods. Start on day one of the course with a small outcome explained to students, worked towards by the students, and demonstrably achieved.

How might your students react to the kind of course suggested here?

How will you respond?

Managing student expectations

This builds on the previous point. Students may expect to be taught. For some, 'taught' may mean 'told', pointed to the right sources of information, and shown how to use the information.

Good teaching starts where students are, with their current beliefs about teaching and learning. Students may or may not be able to articulate a clear educational philosophy. But a lecturer can help them analyse how they have been taught, how they are learning and want to learn, and what views about learning and teaching underlie these practices. (This is best done in small chunks, rather than in a single class on learning.)

Sketch a few short class activities in which students can explore how they have been taught and how they learn. These activities should help students to adopt and embrace the learning methods that will be used on the course.

Teaching for connections

The focus advocated in this booklet on learning outcomes and learning activities may sound a rather linear process. And so it can be. But a major part of the pleasure and richness of learning lies in the making of connections between ideas and information. Good teaching helps students to make these connections.

List some connections among concepts in the course that you would like your students to make. How can you help them to make these?

Teaching for serendipity and newness

This focus on learning outcomes and learning activities may also sound a rather fixed process. Where is the scope for unexpected discoveries, for following fresh enthusiasms, for dealing with issues from today's headlines that engage students and illuminate the subject from fresh angles?

The learning outcome for a course in politics may be that students will be able to analyse political movements and developments. The syllabus may give an indicative list. But surely the course should also enable students to address contemporary political movements and developments, making and testing their own analyses before there is a received wisdom to learn? It could involve them in doing political analysis as well as studying others' analyses.

Similarly, for any subject, it will usually be possible to refresh the course each time it runs, whether the new content comes from lecturer or students, and from whatever source – newspaper, television, journal, web pages ...

Could a syllabus not end with: "... and new content arising during the year"?

When something new and exciting happens in the subject area of a course you are teaching, can you bring it into the course?

How can students bring their discoveries into the course?

Are there constraints?

If so, how do you overcome these constraints?

Prompting learning

Good lecturers ask their students good questions.

For the course you are developing or revising: what would be some particularly effective questions?

What makes these questions particularly effective?

Achieving more than one outcome at a time

A student researching and writing an essay is learning about the topic, developing research skills, developing skills of academic writing, and probably much more.

The section above on student learning activities suggests the use of varied kinds of assignments. It is good to help students see how, as they undertake these different kinds of assignments, they are learning a variety of relevant abilities.

You have devised assessment tasks that will check that the learning outcomes of the course have been attained. You have devised learning activities through which students will, with appropriate learning resources and feedback, come to achieve these learning outcomes. You have devised teaching methods that will among other things support and prompt students to use new learning methods, know themselves as learners, make connections, update courses and, above all, do productive work.

A good course design keeps all these elements in alignment, supporting and reinforcing each other.

Resources to support student learning

Uses for learning resources

Before we consider the production and selection of resources to support student learning, we should explore the purpose of these resources. How can resources support student learning?

Everything we have said so far about outcomes-focused learning activities and about active learning suggests that learning resources should be produced and selected to support students to undertake appropriate learning activities.

If you are reviewing a course, in order to revise it:

- What learning resources have been produced or selected, and brought to students' attention?

In what ways does each of these resources:

- support student learning?
- support student learning activities?

Locate resources

Where can you find potentially appropriate learning resources? Examples:

- from colleagues
- from the appropriate Higher Education Academy Subject Centre
- from your disciplinary or professional association
- from the University library
- from the internet – for example, iTunesU
- Open Educational Resources, for example from Leeds Met **(http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/oer/unicycle.aspx)**, MIT or the Open University (**http://labspace.open.ac.uk/course/category.php?id=19**).

Beyond this list, what sources of learning resources have you used? What sources have colleagues used? Do you pool and share sources and resources? Could you do so?

The problem is not a scarcity of resources, but rather a scarcity of time to find them, filter them, and decide how best to use them.

Evaluate resources

The usual academic criteria apply for judging potential learning resources:

External criteria – principally the credibility and reputation of author, publisher and institution

Internal criteria – currency, academic level, and relevance and utility of the resource, to your course and students.

Produce resources

Resources can be very expensive to produce. Ten years ago, the average 60-credit Open University course cost around £1m to produce. Most of that cost was staff time. Most of that staff time went into researching and writing content.

Academics love to research and write content. But we can rarely afford to do so at the level we would wish. Better, surely, to locate good resources, and then to guide students' use of these good resources through activities and questions.

Invite students to locate and generate resources

A requirement for an assignment could be that students locate and use a good source or resource not on the reading list. This brings obvious scope for plagiarism. Requiring each member of the group to identify and use a different source or resource, and say how they located it, judged its suitability, and then used it, would require sophisticated student co-operation. It would also mostly eliminate plagiarism on this task.

These newly found resources could be judged for quality, then fed into the reading list for next year, perhaps replacing earlier or less valuable items.

How might you do something like this on your course?

Learning to select and use sources from the reading list

A page a minute is a brisk reading speed for native speakers reading unfamiliar textual material. A page may need a few minutes for thoughtful study, still more minutes if notes are to be taken and ideas and arguments analysed. A reading list of 10 books, with an average of 200 pages each, means at a minimum over 30 hours of reading, possibly several times that. The study time on a 15-credit module is around 150 hours (see the next section on 'The economy of a course').

Particularly in the early years, students need help on how to use the reading list, what to study deeply, what to skim, what to study for additional guidance on particular topics. Students may find long and un-annotated reading lists intimidating.

If, as part of each assignment, students will note just which sources they used from the reading list, but additionally how they selected sources from the list and how exactly they used each source, they will steadily learn good ways, which work for them, to select and use sources from a list. They will identify which texts are core, which are desirable and which are for those who wish to delve really deep into a subject.

For the early stages of a course, you plan, in fair detail, appropriate student learning activities. These learning activities will help students to achieve the module's learning outcomes.

For the later stages of each module, and for later years of the programme, you describe these learning activities in less detail. But the course timetable for a 15-credit module should still suggest student uses for all of the 150 study hours.

You use a variety of classroom and online methods, of large group, small group and one-to-one methods, to support students as they undertake these activities; to give themselves and each other feedback on their work; and to use the feedback from themselves, from each other and from you to learn and to use this learning in subsequent pieces of work.

And when you are selecting, perhaps occasionally producing, resources to help students to undertake the learning activities, ask:

Are these resources of high quality?

Are they varied, meeting different learning styles and needs?

Do students get practice in judging the quality of different kinds of learning resources?

Above all – are they effective? Do students use them to produce good work?

The economy of a course

As well as producing more and better student learning, an activity-based approach to education has an unexpected benefit for staff. It can reduce the amount of staff time needed to teach the course well. How does this work?

A 15-credit module involves each student, notionally, in around 150 hours of work. Those 150 hours of student learning time include both time in the presence of a lecturer and time in private study, group work, and doing assignments.

The course timetable should cover all of these 150 student learning hours. It should not specify when in the week students should do private study. But it should explain what to do each week, and roughly how long it should take. If the timetable doesn't do this, then students may feel that there are two kinds of time – contact time and 'free time'.

What does your module timetable say about contact time and the rest of the 150 student learning hours? Do you make it really clear what the expectations for non-timetabled time on the course are?

We normally measure our own work in contact hours, with notional adjustments for class size and for other duties. Another way to look at staff workload is to ask: "How many student learning hours should each hour of my time support – through teaching and giving feedback and planning assignments and doing everything else to do with teaching?"

You can calculate this for a course, School or Department. The figure may be around 20–30. Let's assume 25.

A good course design question then becomes: "What is the best use of each hour of my time to generate, support, assess, etc 25 hours of student learning?" Examples:

- Large classes look economical. They are only economical when they generate learning outside class. (See section on 'The shape and structure of the course' above.) A class taking two hours to prepare and one hour to run with 75 students supports around 75 student learning hours – just earning its keep if it leads to no further student work.
- Feedback to students can be powerful – but expensive. Automating assessment (see 'Ensuring that students get and use feedback') helps. So does the use of student work groups. Each student does each assignment; one member of the group in turn gets feedback on each successive assignment; they share your feedback and use it to give feedback to each other. Doing each assignment and giving feedback are requirements.
- Recording audio feedback can be quick and effective. See, for example, National Teaching Fellow Bob Rotheram's JISC-funded 'Sounds Good' project at Leeds Met (**http://sites.google.com/site/soundsgooduk/**).

- The most productive use of staff time is often to plan student tasks. The three hours spent planning and running a class could instead have been spent designing an assignment that would take each student 10 or 20 or more hours of relevant work to do, thus generating 750 or 1,500 or more good student learning hours. 1,500 student learning hours means – earns – 60 staff hours. Even with say 12 minutes' feedback on each assignment – a total of around 15 hours – 45 staff hours remain to, for example, invest in planning new activities.

Planning from student learning hours frees staff to plan innovative courses and teach appropriately and efficiently. Students are doing highly relevant work. Everyone benefits.

Course description and course handbook

Whose course?

You may be reviewing and revising a course that someone else wrote. It may or may not be possible to talk to them about why they designed the course in the way they did.

Or you may be writing a course that others will teach, alongside you or independent of you.

What follows?

- As well as describing the facts about the course, it is also helpful to say why the course takes the form that it does. (Students will also find it helpful to know.)
- The closer the course follows the design process here, and hence the more closely integrated aims, learning activities etc are, the less explanation will be needed. But it is still good practice to look at your course description through the eyes of someone who may teach it in the future, and document the course to meet their needs. The negotiation involved when a group of staff develops a course can generate this documentation.

The course handbook

Ultimately, the course belongs to the students, although the course handbook is an important public document available to external scrutineers and other stakeholders. The most important account of the course is the course handbook. Regulations permitting, the course description should be as similar as possible to the course handbook. This also makes best use of your time – writing similar but slightly different documents for different audiences is not a good use of your time.

If you are revising a course that has been running for some time, you and colleagues will know the kinds of questions students ask about the course. You can answer these in the revised course handbook, perhaps as FAQs.

If you are writing a new course, you and your colleagues will still know the kinds of questions students ask about courses in your subject. Again you can answer these in the course handbook.

If you were a student joining your course, what would you want to know about it?

You have identified how students will be supported to learn, and the resources to support their learning. How will students find out about all this?

We sometimes use the class to tell students the information they need in order to study the course. A regular (usually for a full-time course, weekly) gathering can help students to feel part of the course.

A thorough course handbook may mean that the weekly class loses its dissemination function. The earlier account of the shape and structure of the course suggests other functions for the class. But the decision on what information to put into a printed course handbook, what to put on the intranet and what to provide in class is much more than an administrative or technical decision. It affects how the students experience and learn through the course.

Factors in and myths about courses and learning

Introduction

Factors affecting the design of courses include:

- professional body requirements for the amounts of class contact, or for a particular balance of theory and practice
- whether topics follow each other in a necessary way
- the economics of running a course
- the amount of staff time available
- the shape and layout of rooms
- the capabilities of the Virtual Learning Environment
- student access to printed and online materials
- teaching and learning methods with which staff and, separately, students, feel comfortable and capable.

Different disciplines have different ways of teaching and learning that arise (partly) from the nature of the subject – fine art (partly) in the studio, sport (partly) on the field, humanities (partly) in the library, and so on.

How much of the shape and the teaching of your course is determined by which of these factors?

Then there is custom and practice. And there are myths ...

"Students have to be taught it before they can learn it"

If students do not graduate as capable, enthusiastic, autonomous learners then, whatever else they may have learned, we have failed them. Students need to learn how to learn without being taught, starting on day one.

"Students have to learn it before they can do it"

Learning outcomes for courses often start with knowledge, and then say how students will be able to use the knowledge. This implies: teach students the knowledge, and then teach them to use it.

Many learners learn knowledge best in the act of using it (which includes analysing and critiquing it). Maybe courses could better integrate 'knowledge as content' with 'knowledge as action'. Why separate them?

Maybe the overall learning outcome for any course in any subject is that the student should be able to do (which includes know, practise, analyse and critique) the subject?

"Being able to describe how to do it is the same as being able to do it"

This myth is enshrined in a million exam questions, most of them starting with "Describe how you would...". If a learning outcome of the course is that the student should be able to do something, then the course should help them to become able to do it. And the assessment should test whether or not, and how well, they can do it. Students should also be able to give a reasoned account of how and why they did it, and an evaluation of how well they did it, as befits a graduate.

Which beliefs and myths, about courses and learning, do you see in your own courses?

Conclusion – making the course work

- **In brief:** Course design is the design of student learning.
- **To put it another way:** Course design involves determining the aims, the learning outcomes, the learning activities, the feedback processes and the learning resources that lead students to learn.

Focus on the outcomes

What should your students be able to do in order to complete the course successfully? The answers to this question provide the learning outcomes for your course. The answers to this question also inform course design.

Focus on the learning

A course timetable often focuses on teaching. The timetable, learning outcomes, learning activities, teaching, learning resources, feedback and assessment should all focus on the learning.

Focus on the activities

It is mainly the work that students do that generates their learning. This work will be supported by teaching, by resources and by feedback.

Some students may experience this as a surprise, even as a shock. "Teach me," they may say. We need to have continued conversations with students about learning. We need to help students to discover that learning comes from the work they do, not primarily through being taught.

Steps, not cliffs

Coming to university may be an alarming experience. Some things, or most things, or everything, may be very different from students' previous experiences of study. And these previous experiences of study may be a long time in the past.

We need to help students to make the transitions. There are three main ways to do this:

- As well as telling them how the course will be run, explain why it will be run in this way
- Make all of the transitions small, gradual, a step at a time. Keep many things similar to the previous week, and make just a few things explicitly different – slightly bigger, slightly more complex, requiring one or two additional skills
- As part of this process of gradual transition, allow students opportunities for frequent activity, frequent success, frequent feedback on their work – from themselves, from peers, and, insofar as time allows and always in the most efficient possible way, from you.

Take them with you

As suggested above in 'Student satisfaction and student success', unfamiliar learning methods are not always immediately welcomed by students. In the short term, student satisfaction may drop.

Persistence and courage are needed, on your part and on your students'. These will be rewarded with better learning and increased student satisfaction.

Appendix: Requirements at Leeds Met

This section summarises Leeds Metropolitan University requirements for course design, documentation and approval. It is not definitive. Formal University documentation should be consulted.

Course design and University policies

The aim of academic approval is to secure the quality and standards of the University's awards and maintain a high quality of educational and academic experience for students. The process for academic approval is designed to foster creativity and to encourage a culture of continuous enhancement of provision. A series of templates has been designed to assist colleagues in their preparation of documentation.

Course documentation

The course document addresses the context, philosophy and rationale for the programme, including its aims and objectives, structure, management, organisation and regulations that apply to the course. Additional or specific professional, statutory or regulatory body requirements are also included within this document.

The University Course Document Template (at **http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/prs/index_section_b.htm**) requires the course document to describe the background and philosophy of the course, the University and Faculty context, the external context and the market and demand for the course.

Course documentation needs to describe the aims and learning outcomes of the course, and the skills and other attributes that students will develop; the cross-cultural capabilities that they will develop; the assessment, learning and teaching strategy and methods and the assessment regulations; the course structure and its rationale; how the course maps to a range of specified external reference points; how students and their learning will be supported, through for example learning resources, the learning environment, personal tutors, student liaison officers and tutorial support; admission regulations and entry requirements; how the course will be organised and managed, and the various roles and responsibilities for the course; methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of teaching and learning; and regulations and procedures for managing assessment.

The documentation also needs to show the mapping of the course to relevant subject benchmarks, to assessment and to programme learning outcomes. An assessment schedule is also required.

A similarly detailed account is given of the requirements for a Course Handbook, a template for which is available at: **http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/prs/Course_handbook_template_2009-10.doc**

A module template specification is provided, together with guidance on its completion.

Procedures for periodic review are specified.

Essential requirements

In order for a scheme or course to be approved, it must be ensured that:

- strategic Planning Approval has been gained prior to course development
- the scheme or course is designed and operated in accordance with the University's regulations
- the standards of the University's awards are maintained
- the human and physical resources are available and the environment within which the scheme or course is offered is satisfactory
- the standards and quality of teaching are maintained and, where possible, enhanced.

Employability

From 2009 all courses applying for approval or reapproval must explicitly reference their employability content, showing how employability skills are developed on the course. The key employability skills referenced by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) – i.e. teamwork, communication, analysis and decision-making, and problem-solving – should be addressed. A tool for undertaking a course audit of content is available at: **www.leedsmet.ac.uk/alt/index_developing_your_curriculum.htm**

References and further reading

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Chickering, A. W. and Ehrmann, S. C. (1996) Implementing the seven principles: Technology as Lever. *AAHE Bulletin*, 3-6.

Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) (2008) *Curriculum design call: Funded projects*. Available at: **http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning/curriculumdesign/fundedprojects.aspx**

Projects within this large programme are developing new, often rapid and flexible, approaches to course design – including Personalised Curriculum Creation through Coaching (PC3) at Leeds Met: **http://pc3project.wordpress.com/**

JISC also publish three valuable resources for course designers:

A pack on *Responding to Learners*: available at: **www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/documents/respondingtolearners**

Managing Curriculum Change: available at: **www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/documents/managingcurriculumchange**

A briefing paper, 'Learning Literacies in a Digital Age', available at: **www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/documents/learningliteraciesbp**

Moon, J. A. (2002) *The Module and Programme Development Handbook*. London: Kogan Page.

A useful and detailed guide. Particular emphasis on the importance of programme coherence. Opens with a valuable personal account of a student's eye view of a course.

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (n.d.) *Subject benchmark statements*. Gloucester: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. Available at: **www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/default.asp**

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Race, P. (2010, in press) *Making Learning Happen: a guide for post-compulsory education* (2nd edn). London: Sage Publications.

Sadler, D. R. (2009) Transforming holistic assessment and grading into a vehicle for complex learning. In: Joughin, G. (ed) *Assessment, learning and judgement in higher education*. Dordrecht: Springer, Ch 4, 45-63.

This chapter is an account of how it is possible to engage students in regular evaluative sharing of their work with a view to developing their understanding of what quality work looks like, the variety that is possible (and desirable), and a better idea of high standards. Without sharing, students have to rely on descriptions of high quality, and this is always a poor substitute for actually seeing and engaging with it.

Schwartz, P., Mennin, S. et al (2001) *Problem-based learning*. London: Kogan Page.

A valuable set of accessible case studies across a wide range of disciplines.

Wordsworth, C. (1877/1968) *Scholae Academicae*. London: Frank Cass.

A detailed account of academic life, mainly at Cambridge, mainly in the 18th century. Fascinating, for what has changed a lot in university education (scale) and what seems to have changed little (assessment).

Other publications in this series

Other publications available from Leeds Met Press include:

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