

GUIDANCE ON DEPARTMENTAL STRUCTURES FOR DEALING WITH LEARNING AND TEACHING MATTERS

1. Background

- 1.1 As part of the process of ensuring that the University fulfils its statutory responsibilities regarding the quality of its awards, all Faculties will have in place structures which will allow them to effectively manage their delivery of learning and teaching, assure the quality of learning opportunities and maintain the standards of the University's awards for which they are responsible. These structures should also enable Faculties to identify and disseminate good practice to ensure an on-going process of quality enhancement.
- 1.2 Faculties should also ensure that there are clear, effective and well-established routes for reporting and dissemination of learning and teaching issues between central, Faculty and departmental committees.
- 1.3 Since University departments and schools differ dramatically in income, size and balance of activities, there will naturally be some diversity in terms of the departmental structures in place for dealing with matters relating to learning and teaching. Most departments have teaching committees that deal with the majority of learning and teaching matters, however, it is acknowledged that some of the responsibilities outlined in 2.3 below may be dealt with by other departmental bodies or individuals, as deemed appropriate by the Head of Department/School.

2. Departmental Structures

- 2.1 At departmental level, it is University policy that matters concerning learning and teaching at undergraduate and taught postgraduate level are dealt with by the departmental teaching committee, or by an equivalent body within the department or school. The teaching committee is responsible for: the quality and standard of the department's learning and teaching provision; implementation and dissemination of good practice; learning and teaching policy identification and formation. Teaching committees may report to a departmental strategy or management committee. It is normally expected that business received by Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees will have first been considered by the departmental teaching committee or equivalent body.
- 2.2 Membership of departmental teaching committees might be expected to include the Head of Department or their representative, the Director(s) of Teaching, level tutors/co-ordinators and directors of taught postgraduate programmes and student representative(s). However, this membership will vary depending on the size and structure of the department/school concerned and the way in which responsibilities for learning and teaching matters are distributed within the department. Frequency of meetings will be dependent on the amount of business but teaching committees are expected to meet on a regular basis throughout the year.

2.3 Specifically, the teaching committee, or equivalent departmental body, is expected to be responsible for:

1. approval of new module proposals at departmental level and making recommendations to Faculty;
2. approval of amendments to modules and minor amendments to programmes; monitoring of incremental programme and module change and development and review of programme regulations;
3. recommendation to Faculty of new programmes/significant amendments to programmes/suspension or discontinuation of programmes; initial approval/review of programme specifications;
4. annual module reviews, including monitoring of pass/re-sit rates and other follow-up action;
5. forwarding minutes and records from teaching committee meetings to the relevant departmental or Faculty committee when necessary;
6. considering the minutes from Staff-Student Committee meetings and agreeing/monitoring any action taken; agreeing action as a result of student evaluations;
7. monitoring the delivery, quality and resourcing of teaching within the departmental budget allocation and notifying executive/management groups of any resourcing issues;
8. setting assessment arrangements and procedures and monitoring the conduct of examination procedures and recording of results;
9. compilation and consideration of annual statistical information and completion of Annual Reflection on Learning and Teaching report for department;
10. ensuring the department's internal quality assurance practice is regularly reviewed and developed in accordance with University policy;
11. agreeing the departmental Learning and Teaching Strategy, as informed by the University and Faculty Strategies and used in the annual planning process;
12. considering opportunities for portfolio development and dissemination of good teaching practice, informed by evidence of practice elsewhere such as comparable institutions, the Higher Education Academy, and relevant market evidence;
13. considering the progress of individual students when asked to do so by the Head of Department or Director of Teaching.

3. Student Representation on Departmental Committees

- 3.1 Students are represented on various groups and committees at all levels within the University, but the University believes that it is at departmental level, where issues are closest to the students' personal experience, that student participation may be most meaningful.
- 3.2 Specific information relating to departmental Staff-Student Committees is provided in the *Code of Good Practice for Student Course Representatives in Departments and Faculties*

(http://www.lets.dept.shef.ac.uk/flats/student_course_reps.pdf). It is University policy that all departments have a Staff-Student Committee but student representation should not be restricted to this body. Departments are also advised to include student representatives on other committees, such as the teaching committee, and working parties set up by those committees, particularly where the agenda specifically concerns students. The chair of these bodies should ensure that new student members are briefed on the role and procedure of the body in question and that student members are provided with the same information as other committee members to enable effective participation.

- 3.3 Departments should ensure that information relevant to students arising from committee business is disseminated as widely as possible. Some do this by making the minutes of their meetings available on the web.
- 3.4 Where student participation on departmental committees may be problematic owing to discussion of individual student cases, departments should adopt procedures for handling reserved business.

4. **Departmental Examination Boards**

A departmental examiners' meeting/board must be convened when there are substantive decisions to be taken concerning the outcome of assessment. The *Guidance on the Management of Departmental Examination Boards* (<http://www.shef.ac.uk/lets/design/handbook/examboards.html>) provides detailed information concerning this aspect of departmental learning and teaching structures.

5. **Record Keeping**

The keeping of clear and comprehensive records of the conduct of committee business is essential for several reasons:

- It supports the smooth-running of the department's committee structure by facilitating the sharing of information between committees and providing a reference point for tracing the development of policy and practice when reflection and enhancement is required;
- It provides a source of information for wider dissemination to staff and students outside the committee structure to promote transparency and shared ownership which in turn, enhances the departmental ethos;
- It supports the University's quality assurance processes by clearly demonstrating the department's ability to identify and resolve issues raised through its internal monitoring mechanisms.

Departments are encouraged to adopt the following good practice in their approach to keeping records of the proceedings of departmental committees:

- The appointment of a member of staff (academic or administrative) to the role of Committee Secretary. The role should not just be limited to minute-taking but would also include working closely with the Chair to set the agenda and prepare supporting information in advance of the meeting along with prompting and monitoring follow-up activities afterwards.

- Minutes of meetings should be clearly organised in relation to the agenda items and provide sufficient detail to record the key points of discussion, particularly noting agreed action points, the members of staff identified as being responsible for taking matters forward and the agreed timescales within which action should be undertaken.
- Progress in the undertaking of agreed action points should be systematically reported to subsequent meetings, usually through a standing item on the agenda commonly referred to as 'Matters Arising' or 'Matters to Report'.
- Copies of agenda papers should normally be kept along with the minutes of the meetings for a minimum of three academic sessions. This is the period for which records are normally requested to be made available either for the University's internal periodic review process or for external review by the Quality Assurance Agency. Departments should determine the utility of retaining the information for any longer for themselves, in accordance with their own needs and with reference to the University's records management policy (<http://www.shef.ac.uk/records-management/rmpolicy.html>).

Learning and Teaching Committee

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