



ARDEN UNIVERSITY QUALITY ASSURANCE DOCUMENT QA 4 - PROCEDURE FOR THE PRODUCTION, APPROVAL AND MAINTENANCE OF ONLINE MODULE LEARNING MATERIAL

Introduction

The development of online material that is fit for purpose is a core requirement. This paper sets out policies and processes for the guidance of those involved in this activity.

It is recognised that different academics will approach the same content in different ways. For example the emphasis; examples; and context will differ. What should not differ is coverage of core principles of the subject; the level; and the focus on the assessment. There are also issues in respect of the fitness of the material regards student engagement and for Arden University compliance with house style. It is also important that those who will be delivering the material are engaged in the process and have some ownership of it. This paper provides some pointers for those developing material and a process for approval and engagement by the module team. It also considers the issue of updating of content.

There are four issues that are seen as key to the development of online lessons for Arden University:

Content
Level
Feedback
Style

Content

A module specification will have been agreed at validation and provides the basis for the content. Content might be specially written but should also draw on appropriate sources from elsewhere. Each module should identify a core text which is available to students electronically, this will need to be checked prior to authoring. Additional reading should be identified both within the lesson content and also as part of an additional resource on the module page which identifies key resources for the module, to provide easy access for students. All students should be encouraged to engage with relevant texts and journal articles appropriate for their subject and level of study. We would also expect writers to embed richer content such as audio and video. This will normally use a mix of specially produced and open source content. The use of richer



content should be used to enhance the learner experience, for each stage of the AU learning model and will form a key part of the lesson review process.

The following specific points are provided for guidance:

1. inclusion of all key concepts as set out in the module specification is required
2. relevant examples should be provided that are meaningful and suitable for overseas learners
3. appropriate language should be used; colloquialisms/slang avoided; and consideration given to cultural sensitivities (e.g. political leadership styles)
4. at level 4/5 we still need to provide opportunity to develop higher level skills so the content needs to reflect this through the incorporation of appropriate academic resources
5. up to date reference lists should be used and appropriately referenced, specifically resources students can access through our online libraries i.e. EBSCO, mylibrary
6. references in the content need to be up to date
7. relevant activities which enhance the learning and provide the opportunity to work through each of the four stages of the learning model - rather than reinforce the 'content'- to be provided

It is important that review teams have input into the development of material and the following process will be used:

- The writers should work with the Module Leader or nominated subject expert (Subject Reviewer) for that programme and an expert in learning and teaching (Learning and Teaching Reviewer) to agree a framework for the module and a storyboard should be drawn up and agreed by both the Subject Reviewer and Learning and Teaching Reviewer setting out how the material will be provided (i.e. by section/lesson etc) and the examples (case studies, articles etc) to be used.
- One exemplar section of the material should be produced and agreed by the Subject Reviewer.
- The final material should be approved by the Subject Reviewer and Learning and Teaching Reviewer



In the event that module material is authored by the Module Leader, the storyboard, exemplar section and final material will normally be subject to review by a subject expert and teaching and learning reviewer.

One of the peculiarities of Higher Education is that the same 'content' can be studied at a range of levels. For example, on an MBA a student can be studying a subject at Level 7 that they have never encountered previously but we will also have students at Level 4 looking at similar content. What distinguishes the two students? The module specification will provide some guidance but the key resource to consider for this is the QAA The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland August 2008.¹ The following extracts identifying the level of knowledge required illustrates this point:

Level 4	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
Level 5	knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of their area(s) of study, and of the way in which those principles have developed
Level 6	a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline
Level 7	a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice

It is essential that the issue of level is considered. For example at Level 4 we are considering only basic principles and it might be justified to use a key text as the main reference source. By Level 7 the key text is there as background reading but there is an expectation that there will be clear references to journals. The types of activities used must allow students to respond at the appropriate level. For example tests of understanding are more appropriate at Level 4 than level 7 and at the latter we ought to be presenting activities that test those higher skills.

Feedback

¹ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/EWNI08/FHEQ08.pdf>



An important element in the production of ODL is to ensure that materials provided are not simply ‘paper behind glass’. They need to be engaging and motivating to students and contain opportunities for feedback. In addition they need to be well written and have working links. The types of activities to be used are contained in the Arden University style guide. The point made above about levelness should be noted in this context. In order to maximise the feedback that we give and reduce the burden on tutors activities should provide for generic feedback as much as possible. It is though expected that in some cases module leaders will have to give specific and highly different feedback to students. For example, a Level 7 module might make reference to a specific article and then ask questions about it.

Style

A corporate style is to be adopted. Details of which are included in the templates for writing AU lessons and the guides to writing richer content. ‘Guidelines for Authors for the Presentation of Online Interactive Learning Materials ’



PRODUCTION PROCESS SUMMARY

Module content is authored in accordance with the most up to date Author Guidelines (which includes the Style Guide and Arden Learning Model) and from the training given by the Content Development Lead.

Content is reviewed and signed off by the Module Leader (or a nominated independent subject specialist) and the Learning and Teaching Reviewer by the following process:

1. Storyboard is submitted to the reviewers to comment on the extent which the storyboard accurately represents the module descriptor, in terms of content, learning outcomes and graduate attributes; the use of subject appropriate resources; and the extent to which the learning and teaching activities support the Arden Learning Model and the assessment strategy of the module.
2. Draft lesson is submitted to the reviewers for comment on depth, levelness, accuracy, reliability and currency of the material, etc., as well as coverage of learning outcomes/indicative content from the module descriptor/specification. In addition, the Learning and Teaching Reviewer will specifically comment on application of the Arden Learning Model and level of interactivity.
3. Comments from reviewers are used by the author to make amendments to the first lesson and to inform the authoring of subsequent lessons.
4. Draft module is submitted to the reviewer for comment as above.
5. If the reviewer requires changes to the material, feedback is provided to the author and a number of iterations will ensue until the reviewer is prepared to sign-off the material.
6. When the reviewer is prepared to sign-off the material, they will do so by completing and signing the Module Sign-off Sheet.
7. The module material is subject to a full editorial proofread.



8. Proofread material is web authored using Arden University's well established semi-automated module builder software. As a result of the web authoring process the content is produced in the following formats:
 - a. A set of html files with embedded rich content such as videos, podcasts and animations; accessible for all mobile devices.
 - b. A set of printable pdf files;
 - c. A set of downloadable files formatted for Kindle devices.
 - d. Other formats, as required

REVISION PROCESS

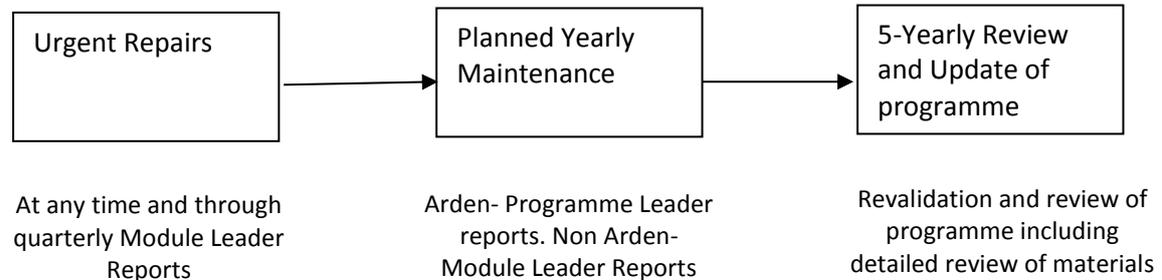
Maintenance

Inevitably over time the materials become out of date. For example, hyperlinks become broken and new data such as statistics or financial accounts become available. Repairs to links can be made when reported by either students or module staff and regular checks to ensure currency will be undertaken. The issue of old data is though more difficult. For example if a set of accounts is included and students are expected to comment to their tutor then this is easy to amend. Where there is a detailed commentary on the accounts then this would necessitate an update to this and would be more difficult.

There is value in students being exposed to the latest data however and as far as possible material should be organised such that this can be inserted simply and easily. This may mean therefore that detailed accompanying commentary is omitted and left to module tutors and what is provided is a series of pointers to focus student reading. The module report should identify deficiencies in the learning materials that the module tutor feels needs addressing.

In a conventional academic setting, as new tutors take responsibility for a module, there is a frequently a change of emphasis to reflect the interests of the new teacher. Module leaders must recognise that in the short term it is not possible to accommodate this and we cannot re-write material to meet the wishes of new staff. Instead Programme Leaders will have the ultimate say as to what should be updated. However, it is possible for tutors to supplement the materials and become involved in updating.

Module content is reviewed on an ongoing basis as described below.



- **Broken links** identified via automated broken link checker or via students/tutors on a continual basis
- **Quarterly Module leader reports.** Module content is formally reviewed during quarterly Course Committee meetings on the basis of feedback elicited from tutors and student and as triggered by the monitoring of student progression on the module. In addition, informal feedback from student (channelled to the Module Leader directly or via the Student Support teams or other tutors) is used to drive module revisions as appropriate.
- **Yearly Programme/Module Leader reports** reviewing all modules through engagement with tutors, identifying content which can be 'plugged out and replaced' so section updates/repairs rather than a full rewrite.
- **5-yearly re-validation/review** of the programme where module descriptors may change and materials updated. This would be a more detailed 'root and branch' look at the module material.

Any changes are authored according to the production process as described in 1-8 above. The sources files are changed and the modules are rebuilt. Any substantial change is reported to the tutors, and where possible are built at the next quarter so to take effect for the next cohort of students.

Any new update or significant repair are updated immediately and an email notification highlighting the significant changes (if applicable) is sent to all students and tutors.