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DAQ **Guide 1** – June 2008

An Introduction to Quality Management at DMU

Third Edition

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Section 1: DMU's approach to academic quality and standards

This guide sets out De Montfort University's (DMU) approach to academic quality management and makes explicit for staff and students alike its shared values, principles and procedures. The University has an academic quality management system to ensure that students benefit from a consistently high standard of education.

The main features of the DMU approach to academic quality management are set out in the University's Academic Quality Policy approved by Academic Board in October 2004. The approach is based upon the dual concepts of **trust and accountability**. Trust means taking as a given that all staff are competent and professional; accountability means being transparently responsible for quality and standards, and staff and systems being open to scrutiny.

In brief, the Academic Quality Policy is about:

- Being supportive in bringing about enhancements, but also challenging where there are deficiencies in quality or standards
- Offering flexibility within a common framework of validation and review
- Being inclusive and consulting the opinions of staff and students, but not burdening staff unnecessarily with reporting duties
- Trusting staff and devolving responsibility for quality to faculties, but with centrally managed checks and balances to ensure accountability.

Section 4: Putting the policy into practice explains how planning, validation, monitoring and review all support the Policy.

To expand upon the Policy further, it is an underlying precept of the quality management system that 'one size' may not fit all, and that differing faculty structures and practices must be taken into account. DMU quality processes are predicated on the University employing professional, competent and trusted staff; therefore the primary purpose of the quality system is to provide assurance and to continuously enhance, rather than provide systems to prevent failure. At a more detailed level, to promote efficiency, individuals should be

enabled to exercise executive responsibility for certain processes or protocols where this is a part of their substantive role (eg faculty Head of Quality). In operational terms, timeliness is a prominent factor in all policies and processes; sensitivity must be shown by central staff and departments in recognising peak times of activity and avoiding burdening faculty staff with additional tasks at these times.

The University's approach to quality management is about finding ways of enhancing students' education as well as about assuring quality and standards. It is important that this approach is not seen solely as a 'top down' process and to this end ownership can perhaps be seen as the key. Continuous improvement is, therefore, predicated on a 'bottom up' approach where ownership starts with programme teams and individual lecturers. Changing practice in, and views of, learning and teaching is promoted through discussion and exposure to examples of good practice that work in the local context.

The systematic promotion of enhancement in the University is achieved through embedding it within quality procedures, rather than by implementation of a separate strategy for enhancement. Embedding quality improvement actions within the work that is already undertaken at all levels across the University avoids unnecessary creation of systems or duplication of activity. Processes for validation, monitoring and review all culminate in identifying shared themes, areas for development and enhancement and activities to be commended. These outputs normally take the form of enhancement and development plans.

The continuous enhancement of quality also depends upon the individual efforts of University staff. The University seeks to recruit, retain and develop talented individuals and it has in place a high profile scheme of recognition and reward. The development of staff is actively promoted and faculties are strongly supported by a dedicated Academic Professional Development Unit (APDU).

Section 2: The academic quality policy

The De Montfort University Academic Quality Policy is to promote enhancement, promulgate good practice, assure the quality of learning opportunities and the standards of DMU programmes and awards, and provide evidence of quality to stakeholders. This Policy relates to all DMU students, undergraduate, postgraduate and research, wherever they are located.

The Policy is based on the following principles:

Standards

University awards are set at the appropriate level. Standards compare with those of similar awards in United Kingdom higher education. Activities which support the maintenance of academic standards include external representation on validation and review panels, external examiner arrangements and programme monitoring, including analysis of data on student achievement.

Ownership

Responsibility for quality lies with all staff at all levels and is exercised in day-to-day practice. The authority to make decisions should be exercised at the appropriate level. Responsibility for quality management is devolved to faculties, with central monitoring. Students have a responsibility to contribute their views through their programme and faculty representatives, and to participate in periodic review.

Trust

The University recruits high quality staff, who are trusted to work to first-class standards. It provides an environment and support for staff to remain at the cutting edge of research, scholarship and professionalism.

Accountability

The University is accountable to its stakeholders for the quality and standards of its academic provision and awards. The provision of reliable information about DMU programmes is an essential component of accountability. Academic Board has overall accountability for the quality of academic provision.

Continuous improvement

Staff are expected to engage in reflective practice and critical self-evaluation. Systematic sharing of good practice, and responsiveness to the ideas of others, are central features of enhancement.

Responsiveness and resolution

The University is committed to responding in a timely manner to the views of all stakeholders, including students, staff, external examiners, employers and Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), and to the prompt resolution of issues.

Appropriate regulation

The University's quality procedures shall be transparent and fair and based on common sense. The degree of regulation is commensurate with the task and sensitive to the dangers of overly bureaucratic processes. Procedures are regularly reviewed by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) to ensure that they continue to be effective.

New University quality management procedures are devised to align with these principles.

Section 3: Quality improvement and learning and teaching

The Academic Quality Policy is a key reference point in developing the process for quality improvement in learning and teaching. A further reference point comes from developments nationally, in particular the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) statement that:

“Quality enhancement is defined as the process of taking **deliberate steps at institutional level** to improve the quality of learning opportunities...” with an emphasis upon “the way that such good practice is brought about, supported and maintained by an ethos which expects and encourages the enhancement of learning opportunities.”¹

The QAA also states that:

“Quality enhancement is therefore seen as an aspect of institutional quality management that is designed to secure...steady, reliable and demonstrable improvements in the quality of learning opportunities.”²

These statements are ones which the University fully endorses.

As indicated above, promotion of enhancement is integral rather than discrete. The University believes this is the best approach as it builds on existing arrangements rather than introduces new systems, responsibilities or structures. Our aspirations for embedding enhancement further are that each faculty will systematically:

- Consider teaching and learning issues at every appropriate level, for example from faculty to programme management board to programme team, and take action as appropriate
- Draw all appropriate central departments of the University into this discussion and the subsequent actions

- Identify examples of good practice in learning and teaching and take proactive steps to disseminate these using the most effective avenues of communication such that they are received by the widest and most appropriate audience possible
- Undertake an annual assessment of activity, using means appropriate to the local context, of the use made of identified examples of good practice by staff within the faculty and the impact these have had upon the student learning experience
- Produce an action plan to improve the use and impact of good practice
- Use the QAA statement above to help incorporate this assessment and action plan into the annual report from the Faculty Learning & Teaching Committee (FLTC) to the University Learning and Teaching Committee (ULTC)
- Embed intended future actions into the faculty Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy.

¹Annex B, *QAA Handbook for Institutional Audit* (revised 2006)

²Paragraph 47, *QAA Handbook for Institutional Audit* (revised 2006)

Section 4: Putting the policy into practice

This guide provides an overview of DMU quality systems. The following elements are each described in full in separate Department of Academic Quality (DAQ) guides which are available on the DAQ intranet or by contacting the Department for hard copy.



Section 4: Putting the policy into practice

Academic planning

The main purpose of academic planning is to ensure that the overall portfolio of taught programmes offered by the University is relevant to market needs, reflects DMU's strategic direction and offers a high quality 'value-added' student experience. Academic planning promotes robust and appropriate procedures to help ensure that every new programme starts with the best chance possible to recruit and retain viable student cohorts.

The University's academic planning process is based upon the activities of faculty-based committees, Faculty Academic Planning Committees (FAPCs) and a University-level committee, the Academic Planning Committee (APC), supported by the Curriculum Planning Office. New programme proposals are received on a structured proforma with supplementary market intelligence at two points in the academic year, October/November and March/April. They are initially debated at the FAPCs where representatives from key central departments join faculty colleagues to ensure full scrutiny of the proposals. If a proposal is for delivery at a partner institution additional scrutiny is provided by a sub-committee of APC, the Academic Planning Sub-Committee for Collaborative Provision. If a proposal has cross-faculty dimensions additional scrutiny is provided by the APC Inter-Faculty and Creative Industries Sub-Committee. All proposals are then formally endorsed to go forward to validation by APC which takes a strategic overview. APC membership includes all Deans and all Pro Vice-Chancellors, plus the Heads and Directors of the relevant central departments.

In addition to approving new programme proposals APC monitors the withdrawal of taught provision, significant academic policy developments, and operates the University's undergraduate programme viability procedure.

The University has a streamlined modification process to support staff in ensuring that the curriculum remains up to date. The guiding principle behind this process is that all relevant stakeholders are communicated and consulted with.

Validation

The main purpose of validation is to assure the University that a new programme is academically viable, that

academic standards have been appropriately defined and that it will offer DMU students the best opportunity to learn. It is about assuring quality but must also be about promoting best practice and adding value by enhancing the quality of the proposal.

The DMU approach to validation centres on a validation event during which a panel of academic peers and representatives of central departments scrutinise the new proposal. To do this they read documentation in advance and meet with the programme team and senior faculty staff, and industrial and commercial representatives and students if appropriate, to discuss the proposal. Where the programme is delivered in a non-DMU location, or by non-DMU staff, this will normally involve a quality check that the location is suitable and resources are in place to support learning.

Holding a face-to-face validation puts the programme team to the test and ensures they can justify their proposal and explain in their own words how things will work in practice. The event also provides a focus and incentive for the programme team to share experiences and learn from the wider perspectives and fresh insight provided by University colleagues and external peers. Equal weight is given to capturing innovative developments which can be disseminated more widely across the institution.

Within this general approach further flexibility is available to ensure the focus of scrutiny is appropriate and proportional to the type of new programme being proposed. Increasingly the University is seeking to validate new programmes that fall outside of the traditional full-time three year, on campus model. A 'one-size-fits-all' approach to validation will not enable the University to respond to this diversity of new provision. Therefore programme developers must discuss with their faculty Head of Quality and DAQ the best approach to validation, for example if the proposal involves work-based learning.

Monitoring, evaluation and enhancement plans

Across the institution there are a range of systems and approaches in place that enable the University to assure the quality of its provision, and equally to promote quality improvement. These are described overleaf.

The Programme Enhancement Plan (PEP)

- The PEP records the areas of focus for the forthcoming academic session on which programme teams have agreed to work. These areas not only concentrate on issues that need addressing but also embed examples of good practice that have been identified and are worth pursuing.

External examiner/other external agencies reports

- Programme teams, programme management boards, faculty Heads of Quality and the Dean all consider the comments made by external examiners and external agencies. Teams are not only expected to address issues raised but are also encouraged to consider the adoption of identified examples of good practice that will benefit and develop the programme.

Systematic consideration of performance data at programme, faculty and University levels

- In order for programme teams to make a meaningful evaluation of the provision for which they are responsible, they need easy access to performance monitoring information such as module pass rates, student entry profiles and progression and achievement reports. These are produced and are available through WebFocus reports on the Staff Portal. The Programme Data Set Report helps programme teams use monitoring information to support programme evaluation. The report highlights areas of strong performance, and also where support or improvements might be required.

Discussion of good practice at faculty and University level committees

- Examples of good practice emerging from validations, external examiner feedback, student views and periodic review are systematically captured through summary reports and commentaries and are reported to University committees. Additionally the University employs a range of more informal opportunities for disseminating new ideas including departmental meetings, lunchtime seminars, away days and staff development events, newsletters and the utilisation of 'Good Practice' Blackboard shells.

- Faculties and central departments work collaboratively on inter- and intra-faculty projects encouraging dissemination and embedding, including involvement in the Teacher Fellow Awards and the Teaching Excellence Awards.

CPD and staff development

- The University's commitment to continuing professional development is seen through, for example, the peer observation scheme and Teaching Excellence Awards to academic staff. There are well established programmes of staff development in each faculty run by faculty colleagues, the Academic Professional Development Unit (APDU) and DAQ amongst others. A regular feature of these programmes is the dissemination of examples of good practice identified from a range of sources. Members of both administrative and academic staff are encouraged to attend sessions appropriate to their interests and needs and to seek to embed the identified good practice into their own practice. The introduction of the Staff Development Policy in 2008 is a reflection of commitment at institutional level to providing a learning environment for all staff.

Personal reflection

Normal professional practice includes reflection at an individual level leading to continuous improvement in response to feedback from students and external examiners. This involves work at three levels:

- Examining what one is doing and as a consequence, making explicit aims, objectives and outcomes
- Making incremental changes so that teaching is more efficient or research more productive, while maintaining the current direction of each
- Doing things in new ways.

Review

- Periodic review provides a means for evaluating programmes and subjects holistically, at least every six years. The self-evaluation process is led by the subject team. The review event is based on a Self-Evaluation Document and a forward-looking development statement produced by the subject team. A panel of reviewers is drawn from a mixture of University staff and external peers.

Section 4: Putting the policy into practice

The primary purposes of the review exercise are to assure quality and celebrate good practice. To ensure this dual objective does not create tensions between defensiveness and open self-evaluation, the University is committed to ensuring that the process is supportive, developmental and not adversarial in character. In order to achieve its purpose, subject teams need to be explicit about their strengths as well as areas for improvement. In addition to making an evaluation of current provision, periodic review is an opportunity for subject teams to think strategically about their programmes and review longer term plans and objectives. To do this, the cumulative effect of change needs to be evaluated and account has to be taken of external developments such as changes in entry profiles and employer expectations.

The student voice

For the University to exercise its commitment to quality enhancement, it is essential that the views of students are considered. Students themselves have a responsibility to provide feedback through their programme and faculty representatives, through questionnaires and through other opportunities such as staff student consultative committees. Feedback from research students is sought through the Annual Monitoring Reports and Annual Review Panel Meeting paperwork. Responses by the Research Office to issues raised by these are given directly to the individual(s), usually by email, and problems solved or solutions towards resolution put forward. Resolutions to problems raised are actioned by the Research Office in liaison with faculties. For taught provision, programme management boards are required to ensure their student representatives can make a full contribution to proceedings and that account is taken of student views from all locations where the subject/programme is delivered. Students also make an input into quality systems through their membership on periodic review panels.

The DMU Policy on Student Feedback requires that student views are collected at a module and programme level.

The Faculty Academic Committee (FAC) oversees the arrangements for collecting and responding to student views at programme level.

It is vital that undergraduate, postgraduate and research students are informed promptly about the results of their feedback and the actions taken in response to it through the following mechanisms:

- For example, giving student representatives the opportunity during scheduled teaching time to report back issues to the students they represent
- Module tutor presenting the main findings of 'in-module' feedback to the student group for discussion
- By printing and publicising results and actions of previous feedback for example in module handbooks, electronically, on noticeboards, and through Blackboard
- Reviewing issues at the staff student consultative committee.

Feedback is made available to subsequent cohorts of students where appropriate by recording in module handbooks any improvements made as a result of feedback from previous groups of students, and also informing students of any issues where it has not been thought appropriate to introduce change.

External review

University programmes are subject to considerable scrutiny by Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). In excess of 30 different PSRBs accredit or approve our programmes. This activity is valued by staff and students, and it is important to the University that relationships with PSRBs, and other external agencies such as commissioning bodies, are effectively managed. A short set of protocols have been approved by Academic Board to govern this.

Partner institutions

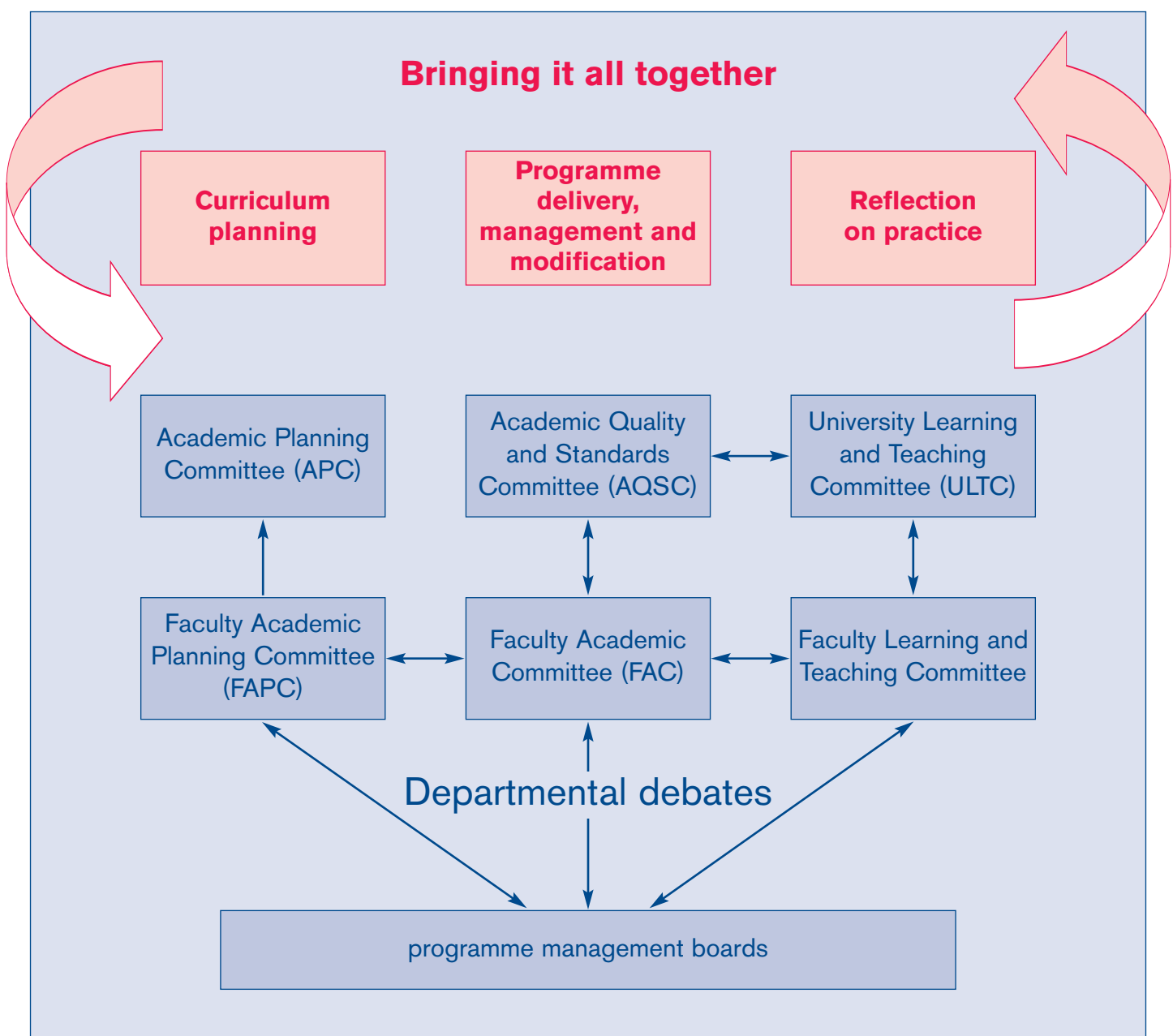
The standard of collaborative provision with partner institutions is maintained at the same level as on-campus delivery, and this is ensured through a system of rigorous initial approval, moderation of student work and the consistent application of University regulations. New initiatives require support at institutional level and must be taken through the standard University procedures for programme development, planning and approval. Once approval to proceed to validation has been secured, a

Section 4: Putting the policy into practice

University panel will normally visit the partner institution to consider the proposal on behalf of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC). This panel will consider the appropriateness of the learning environment for the delivery of curriculum validated by the programme management board(s). Partners of DMU are subject to a major review of collaborative arrangements on a periodic basis.

Monitoring of provision at partner institutions at programme level is the same as for DMU based

provision, except that an annual report is also required. Responsibility for the programme curriculum, irrespective of location, is vested in the programme management board and an overview of quality is maintained by each FAC. Educational Partnerships have a responsibility to maintain an overview of the operation and management of collaborative partnerships and they provide an important line of communication between DMU and its partners at a University level. A clear statement of monitoring requirements and communication lines is set out in the new framework for collaborative partnerships.



Section 5: Individual responsibilities

Dean of faculty

The Dean is responsible to the University for the academic and executive operation of the faculty. The Dean chairs the Faculty Academic Committee (FAC), the Faculty Academic Planning Committee (FAPC) and the Faculty Executive. Although most functions of academic management will be devolved to the Head of Studies, the Dean has ultimate responsibility for the programmes the faculty develops and operates, as well as all systems and functions which maintain and enhance quality and standards.

Faculty Head of Quality

The faculty Head of Quality has key responsibility within the faculty for the operation of quality management policies and processes. The faculty Head of Quality has specific responsibility for managing, under devolved authority, the processes for validation and monitoring of academic provision. They also manage the nomination of external examiners and have an overview of all external examiner reports for the faculty. The faculty Head of Quality has a corporate role via the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) for the management and development of the University's quality assurance and enhancement policies.

Faculty Head of Studies

The Head of Studies has key responsibility within the faculty for the operation of academic planning and management processes. The Head of Studies is responsible for the operation of the regulatory system within the faculty and has a corporate role via the Modular Management Group in the management and development of the University's regulatory framework. The Head of Studies has ultimate responsibility within the faculty for advising and supporting students on all regulatory matters including disciplinary panels and arrangements for extenuating circumstances for coursework submissions.

Chairs of Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee (FLTC)

The chair of each FLTC has responsibility for producing the faculty's annual planned set of priorities which link to the University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Strategy. This set of priorities is presented to the FAC and then University Learning and Teaching Committee (ULTC) along with a report of actions in the previous year. Throughout the academic session the chair is responsible for managing debates regarding learning and teaching across the faculty and for promulgating appropriate examples of good practice. Each faculty chair is also a member of a working group organised through the Department of Academic Quality (DAQ) which meets regularly to enact and influence decisions made by the ULTC.

Head of Department/School

The Head of Department/School is responsible to the Dean for the academic and resource management of the subject(s) within the department/school. The Head of Department/School has a key role working with the Head of Studies and faculty Head of Quality in the academic management of the faculty as a whole, and is expected to play a corporate role across the University, for example via committee membership and chairing validation events. It is normal practice that the Head of Department/School will chair the undergraduate programme management and assessment boards and may also chair the corresponding postgraduate boards.

Programme leader

The programme leader is responsible for the development, management and enhancement of their programme(s) and is responsible to the Head of Department/School for ensuring that agreed policies and procedures of the faculty and University are fully implemented. The programme leader also checks that human and physical resources are appropriate to the effective delivery of the programme(s) and where there are perceived shortfalls the programme leader will raise this with the appropriate reporting line. The programme leader is the key point of contact for students on the programme(s) and is responsible for liaising with external examiners associated with the programme(s).

Module leader

The module leader is responsible for the management, delivery and assessment of the module(s) and checking that appropriate human and physical resources are

available for the module(s) and where there are perceived shortfalls the module leader will raise this with the appropriate reporting line. The module leader is responsible for the management of the assessment and moderation process for the module(s) and for ensuring that faculty and University processes for evaluation and review are appropriately undertaken and responded to effectively. It is expected that the module leader will be a member of all programme management and assessment boards which have ownership for programmes which utilise their module(s).

Contacts

Up to date information on who's who in DAQ is available on the DAQ intranet. For a quick reference here is where to find advice on:

- Approvals – Leopold Green
- Collaborative partnerships – Tasha King
- Collaborative validations – Heather Willcocks
- E-learning – Richard Hall and Suki Kaur
- External examiner appointments and reports – Louise Gale
- Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategies – Sophia Goddard
- Performance data – Suzanne Toms
- Periodic review – Rachel Barford
- Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies – Kathryn Brennan
- Programme developments – Nick Allsopp
- Programme Enhancement Plans (PEPs) – Kathryn Brennan
- Programme modifications – Sally Lloyd
- Student feedback – Alison Cork
- Validations (devolved) – Gervase French.



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