

Red Guides  
Paper 42

Managing a module: Part one – Developing a  
new module

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Red Guides address educational and staff development issues within Higher Education and are aimed at colleagues within the University and at other institutions. Some describe current good practice in Higher education, others evaluate and/or comment on curriculum development and many provide ideas for teaching. All are meant to stimulate discussion, initiate action and implement change.

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## **Introduction**

Many staff new to university teaching have expressed a desire to be provided with detailed guidance on the development and delivery of a teaching module. This guide contains material of use to all university staff, but of particular relevance to staff new to university teaching or new to teaching at Northumbria University. The guide covers various aspects of the process for developing a new module, including approval procedures. A second red guide, “Delivering a Module”, concentrates on module delivery.

The guide provides an overview of the general principles of module management. Much of the detail, particularly quality assurance procedures can change and staff are advised to access relevant pages on the university website for up to date information and documentation. Furthermore, programme teams may develop their own approaches to certain aspects of module development and delivery. Therefore this guide should not be considered a definitive set of guidelines but used in conjunction with local practices that have been developed in relation to specific student needs.

## **Developing a Module**

Plans to develop a new module generally start from discussions among programme teams or subject groups. If you are considering writing a new module it is important to first consider a number of strategic questions.

- Why is the new module needed?
- Is it to replace another module? Why?
- Is a similar module already offered within the university? If yes, could it be used?

- Is it to be a core module on a programme or an option?
- Is it necessary for the coherence of a programme?
- For optional modules, is there evidence that there will be student demand for such a module?
- Who will be responsible for delivering the module?
- Has the idea of the new module been discussed with subject heads, programme leader(s), programme director(s), the programme team(s) or students?
- What are the resource implications of developing a new module, e.g. staffing, library resources, I.T. support?

## **Module Descriptor**

The first practical step in developing the module is to write a module descriptor. The relevant university template is at: [http://northumbria.ac.uk/static/worddocuments/mod\\_desc.doc](http://northumbria.ac.uk/static/worddocuments/mod_desc.doc). (Northumbria University 2007a) (Alternatively type in the term, *Module Descriptor*, into the search facility on Northumbria's web pages).

The template should be completed and then submitted to an appropriate member of the school's Learning & Teaching committee administrative support team. The proposed module will then be forwarded for consideration by the appropriate school committee. The module descriptor contains various numbered sections, which should all be written in student friendly language as both potential and current students can access these descriptors via the university website. Module descriptors should be written in a way that enables students to make informed judgements about the module.

The module descriptor<sup>1</sup> contains the following sections: (Not all sections of the form are required to be completed by the author some sections will be completed by relevant school administrators. In completing the form authors are requested to use a Sans Serif type font of an appropriate size e.g. ARIAL 10+ with single spacing)

1. The administrator when entering the details onto record systems will complete a **module code** section.
2. **The module title** should be no longer than 55 characters including blanks, though often the use of a short title is more convenient. Remember that the title will appear on listings of modules, which are used for a number of purposes so try and make it as meaningful to students as possible.
3. **Subject Division** contains the name of the school subject division that 'owns' the module and formally approves the module should be entered here.
4. **Module level** normally ranges from Level 4 to Level 6 for undergraduate programmes, and Level 7 for most postgraduate programmes with Level 8 for certain modules on doctoral programmes. See Section 12 of this document for more information about academic levels.
5. **The module tutor** section indicates the name of the person(s) who has authored the module descriptor. This will usually be the person(s) responsible for leading the delivery of the module.
6. **The credit point** section indicates module size. In an attempt to avoid excessive student assessment you should seek to avoid 10 credit modules wherever possible. The university standard for module size is that it will normally be 20 points and deviation from this may have to be defended when the module is approved.
7. **The module type** will normally be semester based indicated by **SB**, but needs articulating if the duration is

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing 2007/8 academic year.

more than one semester, i.e. a year long module, indicated by **YL**.

8. **The type of module** should outline the nature of the module based on the following categories (note that the majority of modules are 'standard'):

RUSAZ Northumbria University

CAM01 Module Type (MOT)

1 of 14 Module Type Records

Code	Short Name	Full name	Reg Type
APL		Accreditation for Prior Learning	
CORE	CORE SKILLS	GNVQ Core Skills Module	
DISS	DISS	DISSERTATION	
FLDW	FLDW	FIELDWORK	
INDS	INDS	INDEPENDENT STUDY	
P/F	PASS/FAIL	PASS/FAIL MODULE	
PLAY	PLAY	PLACEMENT - ACADEMIC YEAR ABROAD FT	
PLCL	PLCL	PLACEMENT - CLINICAL	
PLIN	PLIN	PLACEMENT - INDUSTRIAL	
PRAC	PRACTICAL	PRACTICAL	
PROJ	PROJ	PROJECT	
STAN	STANDARD	STANDARD MODULE	
WKBS	WKBS	WORK BASED STUDY	
WORK	WORK	WORKSHOP	

9. **The location of delivery** should normally be either City Campus, City Campus (East) or Coach Lane Campus. If the module will be delivered on collaborative sites, indicate all sites on which delivery will take place (name of institution, country and start month in each case).

10. **The synopsis** section contains a brief overview of the module.
11. **The indicative reading list** should only include key texts and/or other learning resources. The reference list must be written in Harvard style. See the university's Library and Learning Services page, including link to the document 'Cite Them Right for more guidance. The page is located at: <http://northumbria.ac.uk/sd/central/library/resources/referencing/cite/> (Northumbria University 2007b)

This list can also include e-based learning resources. You should discuss the reading list with the relevant information specialist to ensure appropriate and available choices have been made. It is also recommended that distinction is made between ESSENTIAL and RECOMMENDED resources.

12. **The outline syllabus** section should be a list of the module's content, written succinctly and in plain English.
13. **The aims of the module** should be specified in terms of the general aim of the teaching in relation to the subject. They should be broad or general statements of educational intent & indicate the overall purpose or desired goal of a module. Remember that this information will be released to students and so it should be written in "student friendly" language:

**Examples**

"This module aims to develop confidence in handling numerical information by consideration of a range of basic techniques for acquisition, handling, analysis and interpretation of data"

"To facilitate in the learner the ability, which can be utilised in practice, to interpret and discuss the applicability of life science theories to assessing and planning neonatal special and intensive nursing care."

“To demonstrate and provide pointers for the resolution of conflict between fire safety and other design considerations such as access for disabled people, historic conservation of buildings etc”

“To provide students with an insight and understanding of the methods used in contemporary research”

14. **Learning Outcomes** should state what the student is expected to know and/or be able to do at the end of the module. It is important that these are expressed in a way that reflects the appropriate level for the module. One approach to this is described in sections 6.3.3 and 6.3.4 of the NICATS paper located at: [http://nicats.ac.uk/doc/scr\\_prnc\\_guide.pdf](http://nicats.ac.uk/doc/scr_prnc_guide.pdf) (NICATS 2005). Bloom’s taxonomy (Bloom 1956) is another useful guide.

Modules at the university are described on a scale going from Level 4 to Level 8. Level 4 outcomes are normally associated with Certificate level or first year of an undergraduate programme. Level 5 outcomes are normally associated with Diploma level or second year of an undergraduate programme. Level 6 outcomes are normally associated with Degree level or final year of an undergraduate programme.

Level 7 outcomes are normally associated with taught Postgraduate programmes, whilst Level 8 outcomes are associated with doctoral programmes.

**Level 4 outcomes might include:**

Develop a rigorous approach to the acquisition of a broad knowledge base; employ a range of specialised skills; evaluate information using it to plan and develop investigative strategies and to determine solutions to a variety of unpredictable problems; and operate in a range of varied and specific contexts, taking responsibility for the nature and quality of outputs.



**BOX 1 Bloom's Taxonomy Level 4**

<i>Knowledge:</i>	define, repeat, record, list, recall, relate, state
<i>Comprehension:</i>	translate, discuss, describe, recognise, explain, identify, locate, report, review
<i>Application:</i>	apply, employ use, practice, illustrate, operate, schedule

**Level 5 outcomes might include:**

Generate ideas through the analysis of concepts at an abstract level, with a command of specialised skills and the formulation of responses to well defined and abstract problems; analyse and evaluate information; exercise significant judgement across a broad range of functions; and accept responsibility for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes.

**BOX 2 Bloom's Taxonomy Level 5**

All the previously mentioned Level 4 outcomes, plus

<i>Analysis:</i>	distinguish, analyse, differentiate, appraise, calculate, experiment, test, compare, contrast, criticise, debate, question, relate, solve categorise
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**Level 6 outcomes might include:**

Critically review, consolidate and extend a systematic and coherent body of knowledge, utilising specialised skills across an area of study; critically evaluate new concepts and evidence from a range of sources; transfer and apply diagnostic and creative skills and exercise significant judgement in a range of situations and accept accountability for determining and achieving personal and/or group outcomes.

**BOX 3 Bloom's Taxonomy Level 6**

All the previously mentioned Level 4 and 5 outcomes, plus

*Synthesis:* compose, plan, propose, design, formulate, arrange, assemble, construct, create, organise, manage

*Evaluation:* judge, appraise, evaluate, rate, compare, revise, assess, predict

**Level 7 outcomes might include:**

Display mastery of complex and specialised area of knowledge and skill, employing advanced skills to conduct research or advanced technical or professional activity for related decision making including use of supervision.

*All previous levels, though with an emphasis on analysis, synthesis and evaluation.*

Module learning outcomes should be measurable, and the extent to which they are met should be measured by means of the module assessment.

15. If relevant, **the pre-requisites** section is used to identify any module which must already have been taken at a lower level, or any stipulated level of prior knowledge required before a student can take this module.
16. In a similar way to pre-requisites, the **co-requisites** are any modules at the same level as this one which must be taken with this module, or modules which require this one as a prerequisite. This section only needs to be completed when relevant.
17. The **distance learning delivery** section requires you to enter the resources required if module delivery is by distance delivery, e.g. specific learning materials, hardware and software specifications.

18. **The learning & teaching strategy** should explain how students will learn and how they are supported to achieve the learning outcomes of the module. Module teams should give detailed consideration to the choice of teaching methodology that will be used to enable students to meet the module's learning outcomes. This involves developing a clear understanding of the relationship between the teaching methodology and each learning outcome.
19. **The assessment strategy** should describe the ways in which the module is assessed both summatively and formatively. As well as describing the strategy for generating a module mark as a measure of the student's achievement against the learning outcomes of the module (summative assessment). The module team should ensure that the summative assessment strategy facilitates judgement of student achievement of all the module's learning outcomes. It is also important to describe how you will use feedback to help students understand how they are progressing (formative assessment).
20. **The implications for choice** section should make clear to students if there is anything that they need to be aware of in selecting this module, e.g. modules which require successful completion of this module as a pre-requisite.
21. **The notional student workload** needs to be completed as accurately as possible. The formula to calculate student workload is 100 hours per 10 credit points. Assessment should not take up more than 20% of the Notional Student Workload i.e. 40 hours per 20-credit module. Be realistic about how long you would expect an average student to take to complete the assessment. You should note that if the module is approved in multiple modes e.g. part time or distance delivery then you should complete the Notional Student Workload for

each mode of delivery. It is also important to take account of school norms in relation to student contact hours.

Within this section, the different forms of contact can be defined as:

**Direct student contact activity**, e.g. Lecture, Seminar, Tutorial.

### **Lecture**

A lecture involves a teaching session presented normally by one tutor to the entire student year group(s) unless, in the case of exceptionally large cohorts, accommodation dictates that the group are divided into sub-groups and the lecture repeated.

### **Seminar**

A seminar consists of contact between normally one tutor and a sub-division of the student cohort – typical class size is around 20. Seminar work may involve, for example, investigative or reflective small group work, problem-solving tasks, case studies, student presentations. [Lessons where students work with PCs can be difficult to define as either a seminar or Laboratory work, as it is common for students to refer to “Computer labs”, it is probably more prudent to include as Laboratory work]

### **Tutorial**

A tutorial normally entails one to one contact in any learning environment between a tutor and a student for the purpose of academic discussion and support related to the module content and/or its assessment. However, it is possible to conduct a tutorial with a small group of students (say a maximum of five), particularly if they are involved in a group learning activity.

## **Laboratory work**

Laboratory work is a wholly practical activity, where students work under supervision, often in a simulated environment or using specialist equipment within the University to learn in a practice environment.

## **Directed learning**

Directed learning is activity undertaken by the student outside of class time but where direct guidance is provided by the tutor, for example working through exercises to consolidate learning or a specific task to prepare for a future class such as reading a set article and preparing answers to set questions.

## **Independent learning**

Independent learning consists of the learning identified and initiated by students themselves in order to meet the learning outcomes of the module, which is undertaken out of class time.

## **Placement/work experience learning**

Hours relating to the time students spend on work-based placement during the module should go in this section.

## **Summative assessment**

Covers all work required to prepare for summative assessment of the module. This would include time to plan and write an essay, time to revise for and plan examination answers and sit the examination, time to write up assessed practical sessions etc. It would not include time required for reading up on the topic for an essay or examination (which would count as directed or independent learning) or class time spent undertaking practical work for assessment. Time related to formative assessment activity is not included within this section, instead this is emerged within hours dedicated to contact and directed learning.

Summative assessment(s) should not take up more than 20% of the Notional Student Workload. This has been defined as all work required to prepare for summative assessment of the module, including time to plan and write an essay, time to revise for and plan examination answers and sit the examination, time to write up assessed practical sessions etc. but not including time required for reading up on the topic for an essay or examination or class time spent undertaking practical work – see guidelines at: [http://northumbria.ac.uk/static/worddocuments/md\\_guide.doc](http://northumbria.ac.uk/static/worddocuments/md_guide.doc) (Northumbria University 2007c)

Details of the elements of summative assessment are provided in the **assessment** section. Refer to the Red Guide on Assessment and the University's Guidelines for Good Assessment Practice, located at: <http://northumbria.ac.uk/sd/central/ar/lts/assess/> (Northumbria University 2007d). You should describe the form of assessment and the % total e.g. Examination 50%, Coursework 25%, Presentation 25% and state the scheduled week in which the assessment is to be submitted. You should remember that assessments can be submitted in the early part of a module. Such practice helps spread the overall student assessment burden.

A written assignment will normally require a specific number of words and a number of schools have their own guidelines. It is recommended you check for this with your relevant school administrator. Based on knowledge located centrally, for 20 credits an assignment would usually require between 4,000 and 5,000 words. However, word limits do vary from school to school, so it is worth finding out the school's norm. A written assignment will require a word limit, which should be stated in terms of the upper word limit **not** a range of word lengths, i.e. a 20-credit module should be no more than 5,000 words long and stated as 'no more than

5,000 words long' rather than 'between 4,000 – 5,000 words'.

22. When the module is entered on SITS, a marking scheme is attached to the module overall and to each component of assessment. The particular marking scheme attached has a bearing on the reassessment process and normally depends on either School policy or professional body requirements for the programme on which the module is delivered. Where the same module is delivered on programmes that have different marking schemes, a different module code will be required.

There is a need to differentiate between the reassessment implications for referred students, i.e. does the module require synoptic reassessment whereby the student will be judged against all module learning outcomes or is it a non-synoptic reassessment whereby the student has been referred for the overall module, but will only be reassessed against failed components.

23. **Component Assessment.** Outline the elements of summative assessment in this section – the normal expectation is that there would be one assessment per 10 credits. Under Assessment Description, include each form of assessment on a separate line indicating the % it contributes to the overall module mark in the Weighting column (e.g. examination 50%, coursework 25%, presentation 25%).

An example is completed below for a module which, exceptionally, has three components of assessment:

<b>Sequence</b> 001, 002 etc.	<b>Assessment type</b> <i>indicate <b>ONE</b> of the following types:</i> <b>AO</b> Attendance only <b>CP</b> Clinical Placement <b>CW</b> Coursework <b>EXAM</b> <b>PRE</b> Presentation	<b>Brief description of assessment</b> <i>eg type/length of exam, type/word limit of coursework</i>	<b>Weighting</b> % or Pass/Fail (for grade only components) <i>Note: % weightings should add up to 100% for module overall</i>
001	CW	Assignment (1500 words)	40%
002	PRE	Group presentation	30%
003	EXAM	Multiple choice test (1 hour)	30%

24. **(plus 25, 26 & 27)** These sections concerning approval details will be completed by relevant school Learning and Teaching committee secretary following approval of the module, with details being subsequently entered onto the module information databases.

A new module (or any significant changes to an existing module) needs to go through a formal process to obtain approval for delivery at the university. Approval is given by the relevant School Learning and Teaching committee (SLT) or a sub-committee that is responsible for module approvals. This requires the completion of a second form the module approval MA) form found at:

[http://northumbria.ac.uk/static/worddocuments/form\\_ma.doc](http://northumbria.ac.uk/static/worddocuments/form_ma.doc)  
(Northumbria University 2006a). You may also want to read the Programme Approvals Handbook at:  
[http://northumbria.ac.uk/static/worddocuments/approval\\_pro](http://northumbria.ac.uk/static/worddocuments/approval_pro)



[cess.doc](#) (Northumbria University 2006b), which provides additional information about the module approval process.

## **Module Approval**

Much of the information on the module approval form is either a repeat of information on the module descriptor or the information is supplied by the school administrators.

**Sections 1 to 4** contain the basic information on title, level, subject division etc.

**Section 5:** In this section a brief rationale for the module is required. If the form is being used for modifications this is to also include a summary of what the changes are.

**Section 6** summarises the resources associated with the module. For example, would a computer lab be required for some of the contact sessions? Is there essential text which is not currently available in the library?

**Section 7 (and Section 10)** Assistance may be required from relevant school administrators to complete this section if the module could possibly run across several programmes.

**Section 8** is only relevant where a module is to be replaced. Once again it may be useful to liaise with the relevant school administrator if unsure.

**Section 9** is relevant where modules may be used on programmes that may be linked with professional body approval (e.g. module may be eligible for exemptions). Appropriate liaison may be required with programme leaders in these cases.

The remaining sections deal with approval procedures.

These two forms are then be submitted to the School Learning and Teaching committee:

- Form MA (Module Approval)
- Module Descriptor

However, please note if a module is to be delivered primarily by distance learning, extra information will be required. This involves completion of a third form along with evidence of scrutiny of a significant sample of the learning material. The third form can be found at:

[http://northumbria.ac.uk/static/worddocuments/form\\_dl.doc](http://northumbria.ac.uk/static/worddocuments/form_dl.doc)  
(Northumbria University 2005)

If the module forms part of a programme that is either new or undergoing major revision, then it will be approved as part of the formal procedures for programme approval.

Further information on the approval process and relevant documentation can be found on the Learning and Teaching Support section of the Academic Registry pages of the university website, located at:

<http://northumbria.ac.uk/sd/central/ar/lts/approval/>  
(Northumbria University 2007e)

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