UCL Academic Policy and Quality Assurance

Guide to Academic Regulations and Policy Development

Help

The Academic Manual is edited by the Regulations and Casework team in Academic Services. If you have any questions, please contact academicregulations@ucl.ac.uk.

1   Types of policy

The Academic Manual is divided into Chapters and Annexes:

- Chapters include the main regulations which departments and students have to follow.
- Annexes include additional guidance notes and forms.

1.1   Regulations, policy or guidance?

While there is often some overlap, the following offers a broad guide to the differences:

Chapters

Regulation	A binding statement or principle central to the contract between the university and students e.g. minimum requirements for an award, number of credits to be completed, calculation of classification.
Requirement	A binding statement of minimum standards or expectations e.g. attendance, registration, meeting deadlines, codes of conduct.
Procedure	A binding set of tasks that must be completed for a specific purpose e.g. complaints procedure, irregularities procedure.

Annexes

Process	A non-binding set of tasks that are to be completed for a specific purpose e.g. How to register for a module.
Guidance	Non-binding, supplementary advice to help staff and students interpret a regulation, policy or process e.g. extenuating circumstances guidance notes.
Form/ Proforma	An accessible, template document for students or staff to complete under a particular process or procedure e.g. Extenuating Circumstances Form.

2   Approval process

2.1   Minor corrections

Minor corrections such as typos do not need committee approval but please check with the Academic Manual team before making any changes so that we can update all the different formats (web version, combined PDF etc.).

2.2 Annexes

Annexes can be updated as and when there is an operational need. However if there are substantive changes which impact a large number of students and/ or staff, annexes may need committee approval so please check with the Academic Manual team.

2.3 Chapters

Changes to Academic Manual Chapters must be approved by the following committees:

Academic Committee (AC)	Regulations relating to complaints or disciplinary proceedings.
Research Degrees Committee (RDC)	Postgraduate Research regulations, including those for the MRes, or anything else on the Chapter 5 webpage.
Student Recruitment, Admissions and Funding Committee (StRAFC)	Admissions, Student Recruitment and Funding regulations or anything else in Chapter 1.
Education Committee (EdCom)	EdCom formally approves all other policies, but they need to go to the relevant sub-committee first for scrutiny and approval.
Quality Review Sub Committee (QRSC)	Regulations relating to Quality Review, Student Representation, External Examiners, Student membership of committees or anything else in Chapter 9.
Programme and Module Approval Panel (PMAP)	Regulations relating to programme and module approval or amendment, or anything else in Chapter 7.
Academic Partnerships Review Group (APRG)	Regulations relating to academic partnerships, or anything else in Chapter 8.
Academic Regulations and Quality Assurance Sub Committee (ARQASC)	Regulations relating to qualifications, credit, programme structures, assessment, registration or any other regulation not listed above.

2.4 Who to contact

Names and contact details of committee chairs and secretaries can be found on [UCL's committee webpages](#).

For the EdCom sub-committee secretaries please contact the Academic Manual team.

2.5 What to submit to the committee

All papers need to be submitted with the UCL Committee Paper Cover Sheet in Annex A. Annex B includes some advice from the secretariat on what your paper should include.

Where changes are substantial or complex, you will need to ensure that the committee knows what is changing: how does the new policy differ from the previous policy? This might just need to be a general description of all the key points but if it is very complex you might need to provide line-by-line descriptions of the changes. The Academic Manual team can advise on this.

3   Deadlines

The Academic Manual Chapters are published once a year. In-year changes are avoided because they create significant disruption for the departments that have to implement the regulations.

All developments must meet the following deadlines in order to be included in that year's manual:

Publication Date	Content	Content Deadline
1 August	Publication of Academic Manual website	All pages to be finished by 31 July
1 July	Publication of 'Recent Changes' page	Submit content to Academic Manual team by 14 June
1 July	Publication of the 'Core Programme Information'	Submit content to Academic Manual team by 31 May
June or earlier	Approval at most senior committee	Submit papers to committee 2 weeks beforehand
May or earlier	Approval at sub-committee	Submit papers to committee 2 weeks beforehand

Committee deadlines

Most committees require papers to be submitted two weeks before the meeting so make sure you factor this into your planning timelines.

Annexes

Annexes should be proof-read and updated each year in time for the 1 August publication. Annexes can also be updated in-year when there is an operational need. However if there are substantive changes, please check with the Academic Manual team first.

4 Communicating your policy

4.1 Communication plan

If you are making substantive changes, you will need to put together a communications plan. Departments need plenty of time to prepare for changes and should be notified at the earliest opportunity via consultation and/ or briefing sessions. Policy changes will go through the committee structure but please do not assume that this will suffice as a dissemination method. The Deadlines section of this document can act as a useful starting point for working out what you need to communicate and when.

4.2 Recent Changes page

The [Academic Manual Recent Changes page](#) is published at the start of July each year to brief staff on forthcoming changes. If you are making substantive changes which impact a large number of students and/ or staff you will need to submit a brief summary to the Academic Manual team.

4.3 Core Programme Information

The [Core Programme Information](#) is the basis for all student handbooks and Moodle sites. It includes standardised text on various topics which departments copy and paste into their handbooks or Moodle sites (they can also add their own information). If your policy has an impact on the CPI, you will need to ensure that this is updated (or you might need to add a new section). The CPI is published at the beginning of July to give departments enough time to make the changes. You will need to submit content in April/ May so that the CPI can be put together.

5 Formatting and layout

5.1 Formats

Chapters within the Academic Manual are published in the following formats:

- Full chapter in PDF format
- Web or 'HTML' version
- Combined PDF of all the Academic Manual Chapters

The full chapter is also stored in Word format on the Academic Manual S Drive.

Any changes to a Chapter must be made to every format, and published at the same time.

5.2   Version control

It is very important that you keep a full and accurate audit trail of changes.

If you are amending a Chapter you will need to submit a 'Tracked Changes' Word version showing all the amendments to the Academic Manual team so that they can update the website and combined PDF.

It is also helpful to provide an executive summary of any new policy or substantive changes, both for committee approval and for the Recent Changes page.

If changes to annexes are significant or complex, you should also ensure that there is an audit trail.

In-session changes

In-year changes should be avoided if at all possible as they can cause a lot of confusion for students and staff. If you do need to make a correction or in-session amendment, it must be approved by the appropriate committee (Chair's Action may be possible).

A version suffix should be added to any updated documents – i.e. v2, v3, etc.

5.3   Unique numbering

To make it easy for staff and students to accurately quote a regulation, ensure that every paragraph has a completely unique reference number using the following convention:

- Chapter, Section, Paragraph, Sub-Paragraph, Sub-sub-paragraph, Bullet
- Example: Chapter 4, Section 3.4, Paragraph 3a) ii., ●

5.4   Styles

To ensure a professional and uniform appearance across the Academic Manual, text should be formatted within Word using the 'Styles' menu:

Pre-formatted templates for Chapters and Annexes are available from the Academic Manual team.

If you create your own document, the following conventions should be used:

1 Section Title [Heading 1: Arial 22]

1.1 Subsection Title [Heading 2: Arial 18]

1.1.1 Sub-subsection Title [Heading 3: Arial 14]

Un-numbered heading [Heading 4: Arial 12, Bold]

1. Normal paragraph [Paragraph: Arial 12]
   a) Sub-paragraph [Sub-paragraph: Arial 12]
      i. Sub-sub paragraph [Sub-sub-paragraph: Arial 12]
         - Bullet [Bullet: Arial 12]

Please also refer to the Academic Manual Chapter template for paragraph- and line-spacing conventions.

5.5 Table of contents

The use of Styles also has the benefit of creating an automatic, responsive table of contents.

You can update the table of contents by right-clicking on the table in Word, selecting the 'Update Field' option, then selecting the 'Update entire table' option before pressing 'Ok'.

It is also useful to make sure there are page numbers throughout – the Academic Manual templates include them in the centre of the footer.

5.6 Accessibility

UCL webpages are designed to be accessible but you will need to make sure that all PDFs, forms and annexes are accessible to disabled users. It is also very helpful for our many international students.

Accessibility includes making content suitable for a 'Screen Reader' i.e. computer software which 'reads out' text. Certain conventions need to be used for the software to work - including the use of Styles (see above).

ISD have a handy page which outlines how to make content accessible.

Some key points to consider for Academic Manual content:
- Always use Arial font, with at least 11 point sizing, preferably 12.

- All text should be in black, with the exception of hyperlinks in blue.
- Try to use 1.5 line spacing if this doesn't make the document too long.
- If you can't use 1.5 line spacing, use 1.15 line spacing and/ or paragraph spacing to spread the text out. You can also set the page margins to 'Moderate' to reduce the number of pages.
- Screen Readers read **bold**, *italics*, <u>underlining</u> and BLOCK CAPITALS as emphasis which can come across as 'shouting', so try to avoid them. Use the Style menu to make text stand out.
- Screen Readers read tables from left-to-right, row-by-row; make sure any tables make sense in this format. Do not merge cells as this will not work with the Screen Reader.
- Use consecutive headings:
    - Use: Heading 1, Heading 2, Heading 3
    - Not: Heading 1, Heading 4
- Make sure diagrams are screen-readable, or make sure there is an alternative 'plain' version available. Bear in mind that diagrams often can't be used in the web/ HTML version.
- Make sure forms are easy to use, well-spaced out and utilise the Styles function.
- Avoid restricted formatting (where only certain fields can be edited).

Word also includes an 'Accessibility Checker' which identifies any issues that you might need to resolve. You can find it under the 'File' menu and then 'Check for Issues':
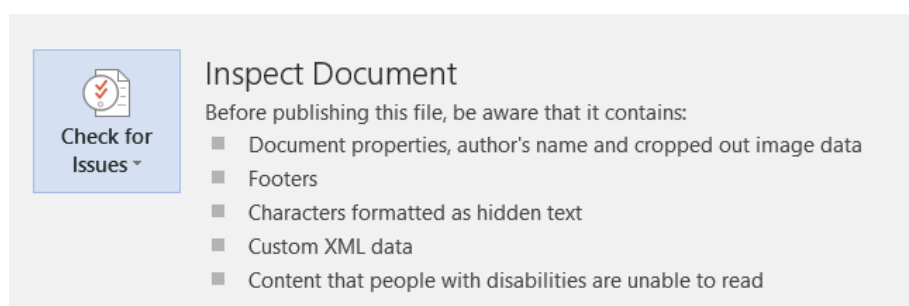
5.7   Cross-references

To make a cross-reference to another chapter or section of the UCL Academic Manual, use the following conventions:

Referencing a section within the same chapter:

- ...for further details see Section 1: Extenuating Circumstances

Referencing a section within another chapter:

- …for further details see Chapter 1, Section 4.6: Interruption of Study

Referencing another chapter from within another chapter:

- …for further details see Chapter 4: Assessment Framework for Taught Programmes

5.8   Hyperlinks

Hyperlinks (clickable web links) break very easily and need a significant amount of annual maintenance, so try to avoid using them in Word documents and PDFs if you can. If you do need to use hyperlinks:

Academic Manual content

If you are linking to another part of the Academic Manual, use the cross-referencing conventions above rather than hyperlinks.

Other UCL content and external content

Make sure that you use the full URL (entire web address) in the text. E.g.:

- Please visit www.ucl.ac.uk for more information.

Make sure that you are linking to a stable web address. In particular, do not link directly to a file, document or PDF attached to a webpage; link to the webpage that it sits on – otherwise the link may break as soon as the document owner makes any changes.

HTML version

The Academic Manual team can add working hyperlinks to the web/ HTML version of the Chapter if you provide us with a hyperlinked version of your document.

5.9   Adding contact details

Students should contact UCL services via askUCL rather than individual email addresses. The following example shows how this can be incorporated into the text:

- 'Students wishing to change Mode of Attendance must contact UCL Student Records via askUCL for information on how to apply'.

Where a policy is aimed at staff, mailbox email addresses can be used e.g. academicregulations@ucl.ac.uk.

6   Policy style guide

6.1   Use Must, Should and May

To ensure that the Academic Manual is as clear and unambiguous as possible, the following conventions should be used for all regulations:

Must	Indicates a regulation that will be adhered to in all circumstances. Deviations from such regulations would only be granted by the Director of UCL Academic Services on behalf of the Vice-Provost (Education & Student Affairs) in exceptional circumstances. For example "All programmes *must* include

	rigorous second-marking and internal moderation processes which promote consistency and fairness".
Should	Indicates a regulation that will be adhered to unless sound pedagogical, professional or practical reasons prevent this. For example "A variety of assessment methods *should* be used across a programme of study to test different knowledge and skills".
May	Indicates where an action or regulation is permitted but not mandatory, and where there might therefore be variations across programmes and modules. For example "Information *may* be provided in a number of formats including Student Handbooks, Moodle sites and the UCL intranet". Where 'may' regulations are used, the specific arrangements in place on the programme must be explained clearly in the Student Handbook or equivalent.

6.2   Use UCL terminology

The [Academic Manual Glossary](#) includes common terminology, definitions, and abbreviations used at UCL.

Bear in mind that UCL does not always use sector-standard terminology (e.g. UCL uses 'programme' rather than 'course').

Jargon is sometimes unavoidable. If you need to use technical language, try to make sure the term is either in the Academic Manual Glossary, or defined at the start of your document.

6.3   Use Plain English

While regulations can be complex the following will make them easier to use:

- Write in the active rather than passive tense
- Use short sentences (can you say something in fewer words?)
- Avoid multiple clauses within one sentence
- Avoid multiple regulations in one paragraph
- Use headings, bullets and lists to break up dense text
- Minimise duplication – only regulate for something in one place
- Try to read through your document as if you were a lay person who is not familiar with the subject

6.4   Write in the third person

Use 'the student' rather than 'you'.

6.5 Use inclusive gender pronouns

Use 'they', 'them', or 'their' and not 'he', 'she', 'him', 'his' or 'her'.

6.6 Write out abbreviations

If you need to use an abbreviation, write it out in full at the first mention e.g.

- 1st mention: Annual Student Experience Review (ASER)
- 2nd and subsequent mentions: ASER

6.7 Capitalise consistently

Any entity or concept which has a formal regulatory status should be capitalised e.g. Undergraduate, Faculty Tutor.

Make sure that you capitalise consistently throughout the document.

6.8 Avoid footnotes

Footnotes have an ambiguous regulatory status and are often in an inaccessible font. If the point is important, add a sub-paragraph to the main text.

6.9 Put 'further guidance' in annexes

The former regulations included 'further guidance' throughout the text which resulted in non-unique reference numbers – you can still see this in a handful of regulations which are still to be revised. Try to reserve the Chapters for essential 'must, should and may' content and put any further information in annexes.

6.10 Make sure all programmes are covered

UCL has a very wide range of programme types and structures. Make sure your policy provides for all the different types of Undergraduate, Taught Postgraduate and Postgraduate Research students. If you are writing a procedure or process, make sure you consider the different organisational structures in Faculties and Departments. Disciplinary differences also have a significant impact on policy design.

6.11 Make sure roles are clearly defined

Try to be as precise as possible when assigning responsibility for an action. For example, 'the department must approve' might be better phrased as 'the Departmental Tutor must approve' or 'the Head of Department must approve'.

Make actions clear and direct; avoid vague or passive statements e.g. 'Students will be notified' doesn't define who is responsible for notifying the students.

6.12 Make sure all students are treated equitably

When writing student regulations it is important to ensure that all students are treated fairly. Particular vigilance should be used if there might be any opportunity for bias (unconscious or otherwise) in decision-making.

6.13 Proof-read all documents

The UCL Academic Manual is publicly available and should meet the highest standards when it comes to grammar, spelling and punctuation. Please make sure that you proof-read all documents thoroughly before publication.

The following final checks can help to ensure that your document has a professional appearance:

- Check for 'hanging headings' i.e. where the header is on one page and the body text is on the next page
- Update your table of contents whenever you make in-text changes.

7   Compliance

7.1   UK Quality Code compliance

Committee proposals should provide an assurance that the change has been checked against, and is in alignment with, the UK Quality Code. Further guidance is available from Academic Policy and Quality Assurance.

7.2   GDPR compliance

All policies must comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). UCL's GDPR website includes more details.

7.3   Consumer Protection Legislation

Where proposed changes might have a significant impact on current or future students, proposals must meet the requirements of Consumer Protection Legislation. Advice is available in Chapter 7, Annex 7.1.3 of the UCL Academic Manual.

8   Archiving

Chapters

All of the Chapter PDFs will be added to the [UCL Academic Manual Archive](#) each year.

Annexes

Further Guidance in PDF format will be added to the archive.

We do not keep forms in the online archive to prevent people from finding and using the wrong version. We do however keep these in a networked archive which can be accessed on request.

9   Drupal website guide

The following guidance is for members of Academic Services who have access to the web version of the Academic Manual.

9.1   Drupal access

To gain access to authoring in Drupal, visit the following website and login using your UCL ID and password (i.e. – uczrabc – without @ucl.ac.uk): www.ucl.ac.uk/drupal/site_academic-manual/user/

Please let the Academic Manual team know once you have done this so that we can manually approve access.

9.2   Chapter layout

Each Chapter of the Academic Manual has its own "splash page", consisting of the following, which should be kept in the same order:

- Title of Chapter (automatically formatted in Drupal)
- Content intro/summary (grey box below title)
- Thumbnail of Chapter with 'Download Chapter X' heading
- Chapter contents
- Forms and Further Guidance

If you wish to make any additions or amendments to the above ordering, please contact the Academic Manual team.

9.3 Summary box

Each splash page contains a grey box at the top of the page with prepopulated text which feeds into search engines, including the one on the UCL website. It should include key search terms so that your content can be found easily.

The text within this box is limited to 200 characters.

9.4 Fonts and headings

To ensure a professional and uniform appearance across the Academic Manual, the following conventions should be followed when formatting the splash page:

Download Chapter X (h2)

Chapter X contents: (h3)

- ABC (no style)

Forms and Further Guidance: (h3)

Subheading (h4)

Sub-subheading (if required) (no style, bolded)

- x.x.x Document Two (PDF)
- x.x.x Document One (Doc)

The styles can be applied automatically within Drupal by highlighting text and selecting the appropriate style from the top bar (style codes are in brackets in the above image).

9.5 Forms and further guidance

Annexes should be numbered with the convention 1.1.1, where:

- First number = chapter
- Second number = section
- Third number = annex number

Example:

- First annex in Chapter 2, Section 1: 'Annex 2.1.1: [Document Name]'
- First annex in Chapter 2, Section 2: 'Annex 2.2.1: [Document Name]'

9.6   File labelling

The type of document should be added in brackets after the document title (i.e. PDF, Docx, etc.).

Forms should be in Document format, so people can fill them in digitally.

Guidance documents should be in PDF format, unless they contain information that colleagues need to copy into their own materials, or forms people can fill in (PDFs make this difficult).

If uploading a new version of a document, make sure to tick the 'keep original filename' box to prevent links breaking.

Annex A: Committee Cover Sheet

Title of the paper

Summary of Paper

1-2 line summary.

Prior Consideration

Insert the name of the body who considered the matter, the action taken, date[s] of consideration and onward consideration required.

Action Required of [Committee Name]

To note / for formal approval.

Author/Paper Sponsor

Name and title. '
Paper Sponsor' here means the (usually senior) person or body proposing any formal recommendations to the committee. A paper may have an author or a paper sponsor, or both.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE ONLY: Confirmation of alignment with UK Quality Code (state section)

Papers to Education Committee proposing changes to regulations should provide an assurance that the proposed change has been checked against, and is in alignment with, the UK Quality Code.

Annex B: Advice on Committee Papers

If the paper is longer than five A4 sides, authors are asked to provide an executive summary highlighting the key issues/points of interest and any recommended action. Authors are encouraged to consider supplying any detailed or lengthy supporting data in appendices to the paper, rather than the paper itself.
Where the paper is part of a major discussion item at the committee, it should be designed to prompt that discussion.

All papers should include at least the following sections:

Introduction and background

This should explain the purpose and context for the paper, including any relevant prior consideration that may have taken place.

Discussion items/issues for the committee to consider

This section(s) should be succinct and highlight the key points of discussion. Where the paper is a report from a School or Vice-Provost, it should address the challenges, not just report on 'good news'.

Where applicable, authors are encouraged to highlight the relevance of the material to the UCL2034 Strategy and/or key risks on the Risk Register.

Recommended action
This should be a clear statement of what the committee is being asked to do. It should be consistent with the summary information provided above.

Header information (i.e. the paper number, date) will be added by the Secretary when the paper is submitted.