



Programme Specification: Guidance Notes

01.3A

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Guidance for Cardiff Metropolitan University

Programme Specifications Background

Programme Specifications are an intrinsic part of the programme documentation to be submitted for both validation (see Section 03.1) and review (see Section 06.1). It is vitally important that time is taken to ensure that they are accurate and complete. The template to be used is in Section 01.3B.

A programme specification is a clear and concise statement of:

- The intended learning outcomes of a named programme of study; and,
- The teaching and learning methods that enable learners to achieve those outcomes and the assessment methods used to demonstrate their achievement.

Within the University, the programme specification becomes a key component of the submission document for validation and review. Other components include a rationale (validation), self-evaluation document (periodic/elective review), module descriptors, CVs, etc.

There is some semantic distinction between the terms programme and course. Course usually refers to a single, named award. Programme often refers to a field of study that offers several exit points. The University has used programme specification in the context of single awards as well as multiple awards, such as those found in a modular matrix. The programme specification as adopted here is flexible enough to accommodate both approaches.

Some institutions use the programme specification as a tool for informing numerous audiences, e.g. prospective students, employers and quality assurance auditors. Cardiff Metropolitan University has chosen to use the programme specification in the context of quality assurance and, since April 2016, it is available in a slightly shortened format to prospective and current students. Therefore, the intended audience for Cardiff Metropolitan University programme specifications is no longer just someone with an understanding of programme design and quality assurance procedures within higher education. It should however still be concise.

For prospective students the programme specification will be held in an electronic repository.

It is not meant to be a discursive document. It should provide evidence of a methodical, reflective approach to programme design. However, it is not the reflection itself.

This guidance provides a brief look at the process that leads up to the production of a programme specification. It then gives a brief description of the contents of a programme specification, section by section.

Process Leading Up to Producing a Programme Specification

Thoughtful design and development makes for better programmes. Programme teams approach curriculum design in a variety of ways. It would not be appropriate for the University to prescribe any particular method. Nevertheless, as there are a number of themes and conventions used by the University and QAA that are reflected in the pedagogical terminology of programme specifications, it is considered best practice for programme teams to consult with their Deputy Dean/ Associate Dean: Student Engagement and with the Quality Enhancement Directorate when designing and developing programmes.

In general, staff need to identify the desired learning outcomes of their programme of study and present them as clear and concise outcome statements of what a typical learner will have learnt if s/he has satisfied the requirements for an award.

The learning outcomes should be informed by relevant benchmark statements, professional body requirements or a combination of internal and external reference points. Programme teams should also ensure that the curriculum relates to the Student Engagement Strategy, University Curriculum Principles and relevant School Plans.

Staff should think critically about the way the learning outcomes are achieved by carefully analysing the programme aims, curriculum content, and the teaching and assessment methods.

The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree Awarding Bodies (FHEQ) contains guidelines for preparing 'the definitive record for each programme and qualification'. The University's Programme Specification and Guidance Notes are aligned with the FHEQ which can be found at the below link:

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks>

However, bear in mind that there are different approaches to programme specifications across universities, and the examples provided may not be appropriate for Cardiff Metropolitan University.

Section-by-Section Breakdown

Cardiff Metropolitan University has modified the sections found in a standard programme specification.

This section gives clarification and guidance on the various sub-headings.

1.

Awarding institution/body

For example:

- Cardiff Metropolitan University
- Cardiff Metropolitan University under licence to PEARSON

Teaching institution

For example:

- Cardiff Metropolitan University
- collaborating institution

Dean of School

Insert name and any academic title of Dean

Programme accredited by

For example:

- Institute of Biomedical Sciences
- British Psychological Society

You should append a table mapping the programme to the requirements of any accrediting Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB).

Final award

Please include named exit awards, for example Certificate of Higher Education, Diploma in Higher Education. Please write all exit awards in full. Examples are provided below:

Bachelor Of Arts With Honours In Business And Management Studies With International Business Management

Diploma Of Higher Education In Business And Management Studies With International Business Management

Certificate Of Higher Education In Business And Management Studies With International Business Management

Programme Title

List all pathways and major/minor combinations For example:

- Dental Technology
- Computing

Please note that the normal expectation is that an Undergraduate Degree will have no optional modules at level 4, a maximum of 60 credits of optional modules at level 5 and a maximum of 60 credits of optional modules at level 6. Any proposed deviation from these expectations will need to be approved by the University Programme Standing Panel early in the design process.

Type of Award

Clearly state the type of award – Single Subject, Joint Subject, Major/Minor or Single Subject with named pathway. The rules for which type of award is relevant in Vol1 Section 10.1 and were updated in December 2018.

Programme Director

Insert name and any academic title of Programme Director

Mode of Study

e.g. full-time, part time, sandwich, blended, online

Normal Duration of Programme

e.g. three years for undergraduate full-time degree of one year for full time master's degree

Period of Candidature

e.g. five years for undergraduate full-time degree

Language of Study

English or though the medium of Welsh

UCAS code (or other coding system if relevant)

UCAS codes do change with time, check that the most up to date code is entered – Admissions can assist with this.

Relevant QAA subject benchmarking group(s)

For example:

- Earth Sciences
- Computing

HECoS Subject Code

Codes can be found here:

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos>

and a condensed version produced by MIS can be found in Volume 2, Section 01.10 – Subject HECoS and ASC Look-up.

Date of production/revision

- Cardiff Metropolitan University programme validation/review date
- Modification(s) to programme

2. Criteria for admission to the programme

This should include programme-specific requirements not explicitly covered in the Academic Handbook. (Reference should be made to these general requirements).

This entry might include:

- specialist pre-entry knowledge requirements (e.g. A-level subjects, or for postgraduate programmes, degree subjects);
- any additional skills, qualities or achievement requirements;
- selection procedures;
- advance standing procedures;
- bridging requirements for HND entrants into level 6
- English Language requirements

The contents of this section needs to mirror that which is available on the web pages of the programme on the external Cardiff met website. The currency of the tariffs need to be checked as UCAS etc. have been changed as of September 2016.

3. Aim of the programme

This should be a concise statement, giving a very general overview in **100 words** or less, written as a **narrative** from a teacher's perspective to encapsulate overall philosophy, values and uniqueness of the programme. It should make reference to the skills, attributes and knowledge that are expected of the graduate.

The aim will also be used in the students **Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR)** which will be shown to prospective employers.

For example:

The programme aims to provide a high quality and professionally relevant undergraduate programme, developing in students a critical appreciation of the role managers undertake in the modern business world. Graduates will be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge for a multi-disciplinary approach to diverse business, computing and management problems.

4. Distinctive Features of the programme

What makes this programme different from others within the same subject area to the benefit of the student experience. Key points that you would use when promoting the course to prospective students. E.g. embedded real-world experience through work placements; links with industry; professional accreditation; range of optional modules and/or pathways allowing specialisation; personal tutoring and one to one support; study abroad/Erasmus opportunities. The Cardiff Met, Ethical Digital Global Entrepreneurial (EDGE) characteristics as a distinctive feature of the programme can be referenced as appropriate.

5. Relevant QAA subject benchmark statements and other external and internal reference points used to inform programme outcomes

You should append a table mapping the programme's modules to the subject benchmark.

It would be appropriate to offer a brief explanation if there are no corresponding benchmark statements, or if the curriculum was designed by drawing on numerous benchmarks or external sources.

You should also append a mapping of each level of the programme to the qualification descriptors contained in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, which can be found at:

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks>

Foundation Degrees

Programme specifications for Foundation Degrees must pay due regard to the QAA Qualification Benchmark for Foundation Degrees which defines the characteristics of this award. This benchmark can be located at:

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/supporting-resources>

Masters Degrees and Doctorates

Programme specifications for the above should take cognizance of the QAA's publications on the characteristics of Master's degrees and doctoral degrees available at the following link:

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/supporting-resources>

6. Programme intended learning outcomes

This should be a concise listing of programme learning outcomes of which there should be no more than 12.

Where a programme has optional routes or intermediate exit points, it may be necessary to devise separate learning outcomes, and make it clear which learning outcomes correspond to which award. (For this reason, some programme teams choose to prepare separate programme specifications for each award).

These are broad statements that identify what students should have gained from their programme of learning. They should be set at an appropriate level by reference to the FHEQ. The learning outcomes should reflect the aims set out in Section 3 above. They should be linked directly to the knowledge, understanding, skills, capabilities and values that a student should have gained during a programme of study.

There should be a relationship between the overall programme learning outcomes and the specific learning outcomes in the individual modules (found in module descriptors). This lends itself to mapping exercises, for example, a spreadsheet comparing all modules within a curriculum against learning outcomes as well as any exit points from the programme. Include the mapping in an appendix to the specification.

7. Ethical Digital Global Entrepreneurial (EDGE)

The EDGE Competencies and Descriptors are replacing Graduate Attributes and a revised mapping document appended to the programme specification will include a short module narrative indicating the link of content/learning outcomes to key EDGE competencies covered. This module narrative should also be included within the module handbooks.

Programme teams should be mindful that the programme specification is student facing and quite likely to be an introduction to EDGE competencies for many students.

A short narrative outlining how students will develop EDGE in a context relevant to their programme, (showing the journey into University Level 4-5, Level 5-6 and out of HE), should also be included.

8. Teaching, learning and assessment strategies to enable outcomes to be achieved and demonstrated

A brief description of methods that are used should be included with a corresponding mapping appended. A well-designed curriculum should demonstrate a range of teaching, learning and assessment methods across the modules.

Learning and teaching methods should be classified using the following categories as appropriate:

- Scheduled learning activities:
 - Scheduled synchronous learning: on-campus lectures, on-campus seminars, scheduled lab work with supervision, live demonstrations
 - Scheduled asynchronous learning: flipped or pre-recorded teaching, accessing recorded lectures or videos, learning activities designed online (wikis, interactive tools), contribution to discussion for group work
 - Scheduled academic support: assessment workshops, in-person feedback, subject based tutorial sessions, academic skills sessions, research supervision
 - Scheduled situational learning: field trips, field work, placements, data gathering, work-based learning

- Independent guided learning
 - Independent study: preparation of flipped reading, independent study for assignments, unsupervised group work, studio or lab work on individual projects, reading and research, independent access of specific academic skills support

You should include for each Level, the relative proportions of scheduled synchronous learning, scheduled asynchronous learning, scheduled academic support, scheduled situational learning and independent guided learning.

Assessment methods should be classified using the following categories as appropriate

Examination; class test; exhibition; viva voce; practical; portfolio; placement; presentation; written assessments; other.

9. Programme structures and features, curriculum units (modules), credit and award requirements (making reference to any distinctive features)

This should give a concise overview of the modules to be taken, their sequence, the timescales involved and any intermediate qualifications as appropriate (Approximately 100 words).

For example:

The programme is offered as a three-year full-time programme, with the students attending for 30 weeks per year. The programme is modular in design. In order to obtain an Honours Degree, each student will be required to attain 360 credits: 120 at level 4 in year one, 120 at level 5 in year two and 120 credits at level 6 in year three. The programme is structured around 20-credit modules, each of which represents 200 hours of student effort.

This section must include a table of the programme structure, outlining the modules taken at the various years or levels, and whether they are compulsory or optional modules (and if compensation is not permitted) and during which teaching period the module will be running (we are aware this is subject to change). It must make reference to the Module Descriptors found in an appendix or separate document.

For modular matrices which offer numerous programmes within a discipline, a summary spreadsheet that maps each programme against the modules, indicating whether each module is compulsory or optional must be provided. If any module cannot be compensated, this information must also be provided.

For programmes that are franchised, any proposed differences in modules or programme structure from the home programme must be defined in an appendix to the programme specification.

10. Support for students and their learning

The following standard text is mandatory

A range of support is provided prior to and during the programme, including:

- Student Charter
- Induction Programme
- University Student Handbook
- Student Programme Handbook
- Library and study skills packages
- Library and learning resources
- Tutorials
- Open door policy to staff, especially programme director, year tutor and module leaders
- University-wide IT facilities as well as programme-specific computer rooms
- Access to Student Services including those offered by Disability support, Counselling, Mental Health support, Finance and Welfare advice, I-Zone, Out of Hours assistance, Chaplaincy and Health Service.
- Student Union representation and services including advocacy and support.

You can provide links to further documents if appropriate.

11. Work-based and placement learning or approach to authentic assessment

This section should include information about the location of work-based and placement learning and the learning activities that must be undertaken to enable the outcomes to be achieved and demonstrated. It is an expectation that all programmes will include a situational learning activity, if your programme does not include this opportunity this will need to be flagged to the QED early in the design stage in order for additional scrutiny of your approach to authentic assessment to be undertaken.

12. Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of teaching and learning

The following text is mandatory

University quality assurance and enhancement procedures include:

- Programme Committee meetings with student representation
- Staff-Student Liaison Committee meetings
- Student evaluation and feedback at the end of every module
- Programme Enhancement Planning
- External Examiner Reports
- If collaborative provision, Moderator or Link Tutor Reports
- Periodic internal and external programme review
- Staff Development programmes

13. Assessment regulations

All programmes must indicate compliance with the University's Assessment Regulations. In addition, any programme-specific assessment regulations, including those arising from PSRB requirements, must be listed here. Examples of programme-specific assessment regulations might include: professional body requirements; compensation arrangements; penalties for late hand-in of assignments; mechanisms for providing student feedback; arrangements for work-based/placement learning and assessment.

This section should contain programme-specific assessment regulations that go beyond the requirements of the Academic Handbook.

Although overlap should be avoided, this section could still potentially be the most detailed part of the programme specification.

The programme specification might be used in examination boards; therefore these details must be explicit.

The number of re-assessment attempts for the programme (one or two) should be specified.

The classification for this honours degree shall be determined (you must choose one of the following options)

1. from the average of the aggregated marks achieved in the best 100 credits at Level 6 (weighted at 0.7) and the next best 100 credits at Level 5 or above (weighted at 0.3)
2. from the average of the marks achieved in the best 100 credits at Level 6 only

Examples of programme-specific assessment regulations might include:

- professional body requirements;
- penalties for late hand-in of assignments;
- compensation arrangements;
- mechanisms for providing feedback to students;
- arrangements for work-based/placement learning and assessment.

14. Indicators of quality and standards

Delete and or augment as appropriate the following

- Successful QAA review
- NSS scores
- PSRB accreditation
- Graduate employment statistics
- Awards or successful research grants, etc.

Annex 1

Excerpts from UK Quality Code for Higher Education FHEQ.

Prompts for the Development of Programme Specifications

1 What do we want our students to achieve?

'What' may include subject knowledge and understanding, a range of intellectual, subject-based, and transferable skills and their application in a range of contexts, and perhaps also competency to practise, values and other qualities.

Programme outcome statements can be created by completing sentences like:

- This programme is distinctive because it develops...
- The most important values, which inform this programme, are...
- The academic content of this programme concentrates on...
- The most important intellectual skills developed in the programme are...
- The most useful practical skills, techniques and capabilities developed are ...
- Competency will be developed in...
- The most important ways a student will learn are...
- On completing the programme we want students to know and understand...
- On completing the programme we want students to be able to...

2 What reference points can we use to show that what we want students to achieve has currency within the academic, professional or employer communities?

Possible reference points might include:

- institutional mission statements and any institutional policies on the development of general skills in fields such as communication, information technology, team working and career management;
- subject benchmark statements;
- current research or other advanced scholarship carried out by academic staff;
- requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies;
- occupational standards in fields where these are relevant;
- qualification descriptors used in the national qualifications frameworks;
- Edexcel Programme Guidance
- Foundation Degree frameworks
- relevant European or international reference points.

3 How should we use subject benchmark statements?

Subject benchmark statements provide a helpful starting point when designing a new programme or reviewing an existing programme. However, they are not the sole point of reference, particularly for programmes that do not coincide with the subject definitions used in preparing the benchmark statements.

Institutions should not simply transpose outcomes from benchmark statements into their programme specifications. Subject benchmark statements are not intended to

be draft specifications. Rather, they should be used as a point of comparison, a stimulus to reflection, and a reference against which individual programme specifications may be justified.

4 How do we expect our students to achieve and demonstrate the intended outcomes?

Consider the teaching, study and assessment methods used to promote learning. Some methods are more appropriate than others for developing particular types of learning outcome. For example:

Knowledge and understanding of a subject is often developed through lectures and seminars. Such direct teaching methods are usually supported by directed study of textbooks and journal articles (hard copy or electronic) and by assignment or project work. Knowledge and understanding is often assessed through unseen written examinations, but most if not all assessment

methods will require some demonstration of knowledge and understanding.

Intellectual skills such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and problem solving may be practised and demonstrated through more active learning processes involving assignments or projects, group-learning activity such as a seminar or tutorial, laboratory, workshop, or field-based activity. Assessment of intellectual skills can utilise unseen written examinations or problem-based exercises. Independent project work or research dissertations are typically used to demonstrate capability in a range of intellectual skills linked to specialist knowledge, understanding and practical skills.

Practical skills need to be developed through opportunities to practise the activity in an appropriate learning context (e.g. in laboratory, field, or workplace placement). Work-books or guidance manuals may also be used to support learning. Assessment of competence in exercising a practical skill must involve practical demonstration of it.

Transferable/key skills, that are readily transferable to employment and other contexts, such as communication, teamwork etc. can be developed through naturally arising opportunities within the curriculum. For example, written communication skills can be developed and assessed through essays or dissertations; oral communication skills through presentations in seminars; or team working skills through collaborative projects. Skills may be developed also through extra-curricular activities including work experience, student representative work, and social and cultural activities.

5 Where can further information be found?

Programme specifications should make clear that they represent a concise summary of the main features of a programme, and of the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve if full advantage is taken of the learning opportunities provided. The specification should contain a statement of where more detailed information can be found. Institutions that offer 'layered' programme specifications on their intranet or web site provide links to module guides

or programme handbooks, where the reader can access an increasing level of detail if required.

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