The University of Manchester

Programme Specification Guidance

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All new programmes should work to these new guidelines for producing programme specifications.

1. What is a Programme Specification?

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)[1] expects that a definitive record of each programme and qualification is maintained by the University. This record acts as a reference point for the delivery, assessment, monitoring and review of the programme and is designed to be shared with academic and support staff, students, internal and external examiners, professional and statutory bodies, and academic reviewers. The record should be updated as and when amendments to the programme or learning outcomes are approved.

Programme specifications are used for this purpose and they should make explicit the intended outcomes in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills and other attributes.

They should help students to understand the teaching and learning methods that enable the outcomes to be achieved; the assessment methods that enable the outcomes to be demonstrated; and the relationship of the programme and its study elements to the qualifications framework and to any subsequent professional qualification and career path.

Programme specifications should be written with current students as the target audience. They should help the student to understand:

- the aims and structure of the programme;
- how different units contribute to the overall aims;
- and what makes the programme as offered at the University of Manchester distinctive.

They should also provide information on:

- how a student will progress through the programme;
- how they can expect to develop from year to year;
- and what knowledge, understanding and skills they can expect to have acquired by the time they graduate.

The expectation is that programme specifications are drafted by groups of staff including a number of colleagues involved in the delivery of the programme. The process should also involve student input.

A programme specification is required for all programmes and programme teams are required to check them annually and to keep them up to date.

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[1] QAA: UK Quality Code for Higher Education - Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards *(Reference Expectation A2.2)*

2. What format should a Programme Specification take?

Programme specifications should take the form of a dialogue between staff involved in the delivery of the programme and their students. The decision on which format is most suitable for this purpose is then best decided by these groups. The language used should be that naturally used in a conversation about the programme between staff and students. It is, however, important that the programme specification does indeed explicitly *specify* the programme and its components and does not just discuss in general terms. Claims about learning outcomes must be supported by evidence of how they are developed and, where appropriate, assessed. The information in the programme specification should then help graduates to talk about what they have learned and how.

It should be recognised that programme specifications form one part of a set of different types of documents about a programme and its components, which involves prospectus, programme handbook, unit specifications and information on websites. Information for students is presented through different media; printed documents, websites and virtual learning environments. The relationship between the documents must be considered carefully and consistency must be ensured. It is suggested that if programme specifications are written according to these guidelines, they would form a natural part of a handbook, rather than be viewed as a separate document.

Even if the programme specification is made available to students through a printed document, it is recommended that it is also made available in electronic format. Whenever the information is communicated in different ways, it is essential that the documents are consistent and date marked to ensure version control.

3. How do I write a Programme Specification?

The purpose of this guidance is to provide advice on the writing of programme specifications, not to be prescriptive. The guidance centres around the minimum core content required in all the University's programme specifications: working through the list of contents and producing text for each section will lead to the completion of a programme specification. The programme specification should address each section in the list of contents but the University does not prescribe any particular format for the presentation of the resulting information; there is no specific template to be completed.

This guidance should be used for all new undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes and for research degrees that involve a significant taught component which is formally assessed, e.g. professional doctorates. Existing programme specifications should be reviewed by programme teams during periodic review and consideration must be given to re-presenting them according to this guidance. However Schools may decide to continue with their current programme specification format if they prefer, as long as it can be shown that this is the best way of communicating the content to their students. Programme specifications can also be reviewed when programme handbooks are updated or as part of annual monitoring.

Please note that any substantial changes to learning outcomes, teaching, learning or assessment methods or programme delivery during such reviews will require School and/or Faculty approval. Faculty Quality Administrators will be able to provide advice on what types of change require formal approval. Schools are requested to inform their Faculties when they replace existing programme specifications with a new format.

It should be noted that this University review of and guidance on programme specifications is part of a larger exercise including also a review of the guidance the institution provides on programme handbooks and unit descriptors.

## 4.	List of contents

A programme specification document MUST contain information on the following topics:

a.	<u>Summary</u>

- Awarding body/institution
    - *This is the University of Manchester or, in the case of collaborative programmes where the degree is awarded jointly, the University of Manchester and XXX institution or organisation*

- Teaching institution (if different)
    - *For programmes that are taught wholly (e.g. validated programmes) or partly (e.g. joint programmes) at a site other than the University of Manchester, please give the name of the institution/s or organisation/s where this teaching will take place.*

- Details of accreditation by a professional/statutory body (if any)
    - *Where applicable, please give the name of the professional/statutory body and a summary of the accreditation provided.*

- Name of the final award
    - *e.g. BA or BSc*
    - *(include details of any exit awards, if relevant)*

- Programme title
    - *e.g. Mechanical Engineering or, French and German*

- UCAS code
    - *For undergraduate programmes only*

- Subject benchmark (not applicable for research degrees)
    - *The name of the QAA subject benchmark statement(s) to which the programme is linked should be given here. Benchmark statements mainly apply to undergraduate programmes but there are also a small number of statements for Masters programmes.   It may also be helpful to provide the following link to the QAA website where further information on subject benchmark statements can be found:* http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements

        Staff will find the benchmark statements of use as a reference document when developing aims, learning outcomes and content.

- Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
    - *The level of the programme within the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) should be given here. It may also be helpful to provide the following link to the QAA website where further information on the FHEQ can be found:* http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/qualifications

        Staff will find the FHEQ of use as a reference document when developing aims, learning outcomes and content.

- The role of the programme specification

- Generic statement aimed at the students on the role and purpose of a programme specification: http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=10052

- Date at which the programme specification was written or revised
  - *This aids version control*

- Further links to other relevant information such as programme handbooks, School homepage,
  - University central support services
    - Student support microsite: http://www.studentsupport.manchester.ac.uk/

b. <u>Aims and intended learning outcomes</u>

It may be helpful in terms of both aims and intended learning outcomes to refer to the development of discipline-specific skills, knowledge and understanding, intellectual and practical skills, and personal qualities, though this need not be done under separate headings.

Aims of the programme
  - *This section should act as a "mission statement" for the programme and should be written to enthuse students about studying this particular programme. What is the programme's overall purpose? What makes it distinctive? Why have these aims been settled on?*
  - *The aims are for the programme as a whole. It may be helpful to refer to links with current research and scholarship, and the employability of graduates.*
  - *Items mentioned in the 'Aims of the programme' should be able to be demonstrated through a combination of learning outcomes in the next section.*
  - *It is accepted that aims may be quite general and may not cover all aspects of the programme. It is not advisable to state too many aims.*
  - *A useful guide to writing aims and intended learning outcomes can be found at: http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=4713*

- Intended learning outcomes
  The learning outcomes should set out what students <u>should</u> be able to do on successful completion of the programme. They should be determined by considering what the typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve if full advantage is taken of the learning opportunities.
  - *Programme learning outcomes will often be different from unit learning outcomes; they will be more than the sum of the unit learning outcomes. It should however be possible to evidence the programme learning outcomes through a combination of unit learning outcomes.*
  - *It is not expected that the programme specification will list every learning outcome associated with the programme. <u>The specification is a concise summary rather than an exhaustive description</u>. However, students may find it helpful if this section of the programme specification includes a cross-reference (a web link if possible) to unit specifications. It may also be helpful to specify some learning outcomes relating to the choice of optional units, e.g. "You will have the opportunity to acquire skills in XXX based on the selection of appropriate optional units".*
  - *A useful guide to writing aims and intended learning outcomes can be found at: http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=4713*
  - *A list of useful phrases for use in writing intended learning outcomes can be found at: http://www.tlso.manchester.ac.uk/quality-framework/programme-specs/programmespecifications-listofcontents/contents-aimsandintendedlearningoutcomes/usefulphrases*

- o *For undergraduate programmes, intended learning outcomes should be listed for each year of the programme as markers for student progression. Outcomes for the programme as a whole should also be provided.*
- o *For postgraduate taught and research programmes, aims and intended learning outcomes should be provided for the complete programme. Separate outcomes for exit awards at postgraduate level are not required.*
- o *Staff setting up a new programme or revising an existing programme may wish to discuss with potential employers, the Careers Service or accreditation bodies the intended learning outcomes that employers are particularly looking for. Where the Manchester Leadership Programme may be taken as credits contributing to the general programme, learning outcomes associated with the MLP can be referred to. [Career Service may be able to provide specific wording or phrases which could be added to lexicon]*
- o *For undergraduate programmes it may be useful to provide a link to relevant benchmark documents and for UG and PGT/R alike, there may be other similar statements which are of relevance.*

c.   <u>Teaching, learning and assessment methods</u>

- A summary of teaching, learning and assessment methods for the programme
  - o *The particular <u>approaches</u> to teaching, learning and assessment for the programme as a whole should be noted, including any distinctive or innovative features such as major independent work or unique project work. Students should also be made aware of the breadth of types of assessment involved in the programme. Statements could be added such as "You will have the opportunity, based on your selection of units, to be able to….." followed by a list of any particular areas of teaching, learning and assessment methods distinctive to the programme.*
  - o *Programme specifications are not required to contain lists of every teaching, learning and assessment method for every unit; the exact assessment will depend on the students' selection of units. Students may therefore find it helpful if this section of the programme specification includes a cross-reference (a web link if possible) to unit specifications.*
  - o *A cross-reference to the University's degree regulations should be included (<u>http://www.tlso.manchester.ac.uk/degree-regulations/</u>)*

- Support for student learning and development
  - o Provide an overview of sources of support for students on the programme.
  - o Detail any School specific support including support for part-time, disabled, overseas students, skills support, PDP, English Language, supervision for research degrees and generic and subject skills training.
  - o Link to the Student Handbook regarding disability, etc. for University-wide support.

d.   <u>Programme structure</u>

- A summary of the programme structure and requirements
  - o *For each year or component of study, a list of the mandatory units and the credit rating for each of these units should be noted. Also the total amount of credit that can be taken as optional units should be listed and cross-referenced (by a web link if possible) to the appropriate unit specifications.*
  - o *Requirements for exit awards and any specified pathways should also be made clear.*
  - o *A curriculum (or skills) map of units and learning outcomes is not required but it may be included if the Programme staff believe that students will find it useful. If a skills map is not included then particular care should be taken to ensure that a narrative is provided that explains how the programme fits together. The QAA website provides examples of how partial skills maps can be used.*

e. Mechanisms for programme revision

- A summary of what the procedures are for revising the programme and in particular how feedback from students feeds into this process. This might involve reference to annual monitoring, the procedures for dealing with the outcome of unit questionnaires and what use is made of other methods for gaining student feedback.

5. Useful Resources

- HEA information on employability (https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/enhancement/frameworks/framework-embedding-employability-higher-education)
- HEA embedding employability toolkit (https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/enhancement/toolkits/embedding-employability-toolkit)
- QAA: UK Quality Code for Higher Education - Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards *(Reference Expectation A2.2)*
- QAA Guidance on programme specifications (http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Guidelines-for-preparing-programme-specifications.pdf) – please note, this has now been overtaken by Expectation A2.2, above
- QAA Subject Benchmark Statements (http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements)
- QAA Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/qualifications)

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