MANCHESTER 1824

The University of Manchester

Guidance for Producing Postgraduate Research Programme Specifications

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Research Office Graduate Education Team

CONTENTS

1. Purpose of the Programme Specification

2. Criteria for Completing a Programme Specification

3. Detailed Guidance on each Section of the Programme Specification

3.1. General Information

3.2. Aims of the Programme(s)

3.3. Intended Learning Outcomes of the Programme(s)

3.3.a Knowledge and Understanding

3.3.b Intellectual Skills

3.3.c Practical Skills

3.3.d Transferable Skills and Personal Qualities

3.4. Learning and Teaching Processes

3.5. Assessment of Intended Learning Outcomes

4. Structure of the Programme(s)

5. Student Induction, Support, Development and Skills Training

7. Criteria for Admission

8. Progression and Assessment Regulations

9. Date of Original Production and Current Version

1. PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

A Programme Specification is defined by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) as:

> *a concise description of the intended outcomes of learning from a higher education programme, and the means by which these outcomes are achieved and demonstrated.*

(Extract of QAA guidelines for preparing Programme Specifications – pg 3)

Programme Specifications should form part of the Programme Handbook and be accessible to students and staff. Programme Specifications are an integral part of the University's approval and review processes and must be kept up to date and accurate.

Programme Specifications are required for all research degree programmes that include a taught component, for example professional doctorates, MRes programmes.

In preparing the programme specification the requirements of the Code of Practice of Students with Disabilities should be borne in mind. The programme specification should include no unnecessary barriers to access by disabled people and Programme Teams must ensure that intended learning outcomes do not unnecessarily preclude or disadvantage disabled students.

2. CRITERIA FOR COMPLETING A PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

A programme specification should meet the following criteria:

- each section of the form is completed, as appropriate;
- all entry and exit awards from the programme are appropriately identified and the intended learning outcomes associated with each exit award are clearly specified;
- each intended learning outcome applies to all of the students on the programme;
- the level at which the intended learning outcomes are set matches that expected by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications;
- the aims, intended learning outcomes, and processes of teaching, learning and assessment are all aligned with each other;
- for specifications covering more than one programme, a clear description is provided for each programme.

3. DETAILED GUIDANCE ON EACH SECTION OF THE PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

3.1. General Information

Award(s) and Title(s)

This section should include the approved award(s) and title(s) for the programme(s). All exit awards or stopping off points within the awards' structure must be listed and any awards that are only an exit award should be clearly indicated by using the term exit award only in brackets.

Duration of Study

Please provide the standard duration of all awards listed.

Modes of Study

Please provide information on all available modes of study including full-time, part-time, distance learning

School

Please include the full title of the School within which the programme(s) will be offered.

Faculty

Please include the full title of the Faculty within which the programme(s) will be offered.

Awarding Institution

The University of Manchester

Programme Accreditation

Please include details of any Professional or Statutory Body that accredits the programme or parts of it.

3.2. Aims of the Programme(s)

This section is for the overall aims of the programme. The template provides three prompts but this does not mean that each specification should only include three aims. Please amend the template accordingly but as a rough guide programmes will normally have between three and six aims. More complex programmes that involve different routes may have more aims.

The programme *aim* is a general statement about the purpose of the programme. Aims are thus primarily concerned with what the programme hopes to achieve, and they are typically written in terms of teaching intention rather than the learning of the student. All entry awards should have separate aims identified within the programme specification. This is not necessary for awards that are exit awards only.

While the aims of a programme will primarily concern the students themselves, wider aims may also be relevant. It is often only by considering a wide range of aims that the real distinctiveness of a programme is seen to emerge. An appreciation of the distinctiveness of the programme is useful in programme design and in conveying to students and others its unique features.

3.3. Intended Learning Outcomes of the Programme(s)

An *intended learning outcome* is a concise description of what a student will have learnt at the end of some learning process. One of the main advantages to stating the intended learning outcomes from a programme is the way in which this allows one explicitly to consider the ways in which the goals for student learning are constructively aligned with both the methods used for teaching and supporting learning and the assessment on the programme.

A learning outcome typically consists of a sentence that begins with the phrase ‘able to’, which is then followed by three elements:

- an active verb (often with an associated adverb);
- an object of the verb (indicating on what the learner is acting);
- a phrase that indicates the context or provides a condition.

Verb	Object	Context
Critically evaluate	new technical, regulatory and policy developments in law	especially in relation to notions of justice
Recognise	any risks or safety aspects	that may be involved in the operation of computing equipment within a given context

Intended learning outcomes should clearly indicate the level of abilities that students should be learning. When setting the level of an intended learning outcome, you should pay attention not only to the actual subject matter or topic, but also to the way in which the student should be able to demonstrate their understanding of this material, to the interplay between different abilities, to the extent of autonomy on the part of the student, to the complexity of the wider context and to the degree of originality. In order to ensure that the intended learning outcomes for the programme are expressed at the right level, reference should be made to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications which is available at: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/nqf/nqf.htm

This section of the programme specification should include the intended programme learning outcomes for the final award, separated into four key sections: knowledge and understanding; intellectual skills; practical skills and transferable skills and personal qualities. There is some overlap between these categories, but this particular categorisation encourages programmes to include a wide range of outcomes, while still allowing the emphasis placed on different categories to vary between disciplines. When writing learning outcomes Programme Teams will need to make a judgement about which category to place different outcomes. Some programmes will have more emphasis on different skills/outcomes than others e.g. practical skills.

The following are some examples of different types of knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes/values.

3.3a Knowledge and Understanding

- show a systematic understanding of the ways in which accounting and finance inform and are informed by the economic, behavioural, and organisational contexts in which firms operate
- display a critical awareness of the molecular methodology in use and under development at the forefront of microbiological diagnosis, treatment and research, and develop a creative approach to applying such methodology within the discipline
- demonstrate a conceptual grasp of theoretical perspectives that underpin current practice in teaching and learning within higher education, including for instance the nature of reflective practice and active and co-operative approaches to learning
- evaluate the latest research developments and issues within gender, sexuality and culture, taking account of the limits of current knowledge and the effects of this on analyses and interpretation
- apply recent approaches to the relationship between translation and other aspects of language use and communication, including language patterning, textual organisation and the semiotics of verbal and non-verbal communication

- analyse inter-relationships between the cultures, societies, history, institutions, linguistic situation and economies of Italy, in light of given reviews of recent research

This section can also include values and attitudes, including issues relating to ethics. Programme Teams need to be clear that this does involve assessing the attitudes *of students* but ensuring that students understand the values and attitudes *of others*.

- adapt professional practice in light of an awareness of and understanding of the attitudes of others and the underlying values that they reflect
- create ethical protocols for researching certain types of people (eg children or vulnerable individuals) when researching in certain types of environments
- evaluate current approaches to ethical and professional practice, along with a holistic view of engineering practice in society
- ascertain the ethical implications of proposed courses of actions or situations and take the necessary steps to ensure that result from this analysis (Ethical appreciation)

3.3.b Intellectual Skills

An intellectual skill may be regarded as the ability or capacity to carry out a task or activity that is primarily of an intellectual nature. The exercise of such a skill typically requires the student to draw on knowledge and understanding, although this knowledge may be held in a largely tacit form.

- solve non-standard problems in an efficient and effective manner, including the ability to manipulate financial and other numerical data and creatively to apply statistical/econometric concepts
- frame problems at the forefront of knowledge in the discipline in a fashion that is amenable to their solution (Problem posing)
- synthesise and analyse complex issues in a critical and systematic way, showing creativity and the ability to question preconceived assumptions
- plan, conduct and report on a piece of independent empirical research in the form of an academic article
- critically analyse and evaluate the relevant scientific literature
- articulate an extended reasoned argument for a particular point of view, making fully explicit the extent to which the argument is conditioned by the uncertainty of the context (Expression)
- demonstrate originality and lateral thinking in the independent solution of problems and making of decisions (Creativity)

3.3.c Practical Skills

Where tasks or activities are of a primarily practical nature, such as in carrying out an experiment or a clinical procedure then the ability to carry out the task or activity may be termed a practical skill. Such skills are often subject specific, and are particularly relevant in professional or vocational disciplines.

- design and carry out a series of small-scale research projects involving, and critically reflecting on the use of, a variety of research methods
- speak, read and write a foreign language at near-native proficiency within an academic or professional context
- develop formulations based on psychological theories and knowledge and carry out psychological interventions

3.3.d Transferable Skills and Personal Qualities

Transferable skills concern those abilities or capacities to carry out tasks or activities that may be said to transcend subject boundaries. The focus is on skills that are pertinent to employment more widely, such as communication, presentation and ICT skills.

- independently gather, sift, synthesise and organise material from various sources, and critically evaluate the extent to which it might contribute to current developments within the field. (Information retrieval)
- make oral presentations to specialist and non-specialist academic audiences, participating effectively within such contexts
- demonstrate an integrated approach to the use of a variety of both standard (such as database and spreadsheet) and specialist software
- offer leadership in recognising and identifying the views of others and in working constructively with them within multi-disciplinary contexts (Teamwork)
- understand the influence of a wide range of factors on the application of negotiating skills to reach objectives (Negotiation)
- the integration of technical knowledge with commercial, business and management skills in the development of major projects
- autonomously manage a range of dynamically complex tasks
- improve one's own approach to professional development through planning, monitoring, critical reflection and evaluation

In addition to transferable skills, programmes may also address personal qualities. Personal qualities are critical to employability; for instance, an employer is likely to value reliability in an employee or the employee believing that they can make a difference.

- work effectively and productively, recognising the economic value of resources, and paying due regard both to the quality and reliability of outputs and to the importance of customers (Commercial awareness)
- maintain independence of professional action and be self-reliant in face of variable demands (Self-confidence)
- capacity for sustained self-discipline, motivation and diligence (Independence)
- respond positively and with originality to changing circumstances (Adaptability)

3.4. Learning and Teaching Processes

Outcome based models of education are criticised partly because they ignore the experiences by which people learn. Programme specifications should emphasise the opportunities that are offered to students in order for them to achieve the intended learning outcomes. In order to highlight this emphasis this section has been entitled learning and teaching *processes* rather than *methods*. These processes are equally as important as the intended learning outcomes.

The statements provided in this section must include comprehensive information about the learning and teaching processes which are used to ensure that the intended learning outcomes are delivered to students. This should go further than very broad headings such as lectures, tutorials and practicals.

Please indicate the different processes, linking them with specified outcomes (e.g. PBL on health issues (A1, A3, A6)). Types of processes include working through a problem in pairs or mini-debates in lecture sessions, chemical experimentation on minerals in laboratories, observation in the field, analysis of in-depth interviews, analysis of digitised resources; on-line discussion groups)

3.5. Assessment of Intended Learning Outcomes

These boxes indicate the methods used to assess the extent to which students have achieved the intended learning outcomes through the range of learning and teaching processes provided. They should include formative as well as summative assessment. The emphasis is on '*assessment for learning'.*

The information provided on assessment should be more specific than just stating examination, course-work etc. They should be linked to the specific intended learning outcomes by indicating the relevant code in brackets e.g. (A3); for example, a computer-based multiple choice examination (A3, A4); computer-based formative assessment (A5, A7 (these might refer to understanding certain concepts); unseen exam with compulsory questions (A1, A2); open-book exam (A3, A5); team oral presentations, peer-assessed (D3); team report (A3), team report (B2) and team report (D4) (where the same assessment task covers more than one type of outcome).

4. THE STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAMME(S)

This section should provide an overview of the structure of the programme(s) by listing all core and where relevant, optional course units. Information on credits should also be provided where appropriate

5. STUDENT INDUCTION, SUPPORT, DEVELOPMENT AND SKILLS TRAINING

This section should include information about the induction process and different types of student support and development mechanisms in place. It should also outline the overall skills training provision available for students.

The QAA has always linked the purpose and use of programme specifications closely to personal development planning. The QAA guidance states that:

"Personal Development Planning may be supported by Programme Specifications. A good Programme Specification will improve student understanding of how and when learning occurs, and of what is being learned, and thereby inform reflection upon personal learning, performance and achievement, and subsequent planning for educational and career development." (Extract of QAA Guidelines for preparing Programme Specifications – page 3)

The systems will focus upon raising the awareness of students to the development of skills and achievement of learning outcomes. Examples of systems in place might include aspects of skills training and development, personal development plans (PDPs), supervision and the role of the Advisor.

6. CRITERIA FOR ADMISSION

The criteria should be summarised briefly and include the standard entry requirements relating to the entry qualifications presented.

7. PROGRESSION AND ASSESSMENT REGULATIONS

This section should include brief information about progression and assessment requirements for the programme. This information may be available in the Ordinances and regulations for the programme and reference to this may be made where necessary.

8. DATE OF ORIGINAL PRODUCATION AND CURRENT VERSION

Please provide the date when the specification was originally produced and approved and then the date of the current version of the specification if this is different to the original approval date.