THE ACADEMIC FRAMEWORK - GUIDANCE FOR PROGRAMME PLANNERS

1. Developing a new programme of study

In developing a new programme for approval, the Programme Development Team should take into account the following:

- the educational aims of the programme, i.e. the rationale prompting the design of the course;
- how the proposed programme fulfils the Departmental/School/LPO and University's strategic aims (see the University's Corporate Plan and Education Strategy);
- the viability of offering the proposed programme based on projected student numbers and the resources available, taking into account the extent to which comparable provision in the subject area already exists and anticipated student demand;
- the level and the title of the final award, with reference to the table in QA3, Annex B and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. In line with guidance set out in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications the expectation is that for programmes with "and" in the title, e.g. BSc Economics and Computing, there will be an approximate 50/50 split between disciplines; for programme titles containing "with", e.g. BSc Economics with Computing, the split will be between 80/20 and 60/40.
- the intended learning outcomes, i.e. the range of knowledge and abilities that a student may be expected to have acquired upon successful completion of the programme. Learning outcomes should be clear and explicit and defined, where possible, in terms of key skills and in terms of external reference points i.e. the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements
- the curriculum structure and the proposed length of the programme, as applicable to both full and part-time students - taking into account progression with an increasing level of demand at each stage of the programme;
- the modes and weighting of assessment for each component of the programme;
- the balance of the programme, incorporating a range of modes of delivery and assessment and a balance of breadth and depth in the curriculum. This should also include consideration of the accessibility of the programme to a diverse range of potential students and in particular, the capacity to meet the anticipatory duty to meet the entitlements of disabled students;
- the overall coherence and integrity of the programme - how the component parts link together to meet the overall purpose and objectives of the programme;
- the entrance requirements, including acceptable qualifications and experience and arrangements for accrediting prior (experiential) learning;
- the likely opportunities available to students upon completion of the programme;
- external reference points:
  - Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)
  - any relevant Subject Benchmark Statement
- internal reference points:
  - University Ordinances on minimum periods of study and aegrotat awards;
  - University Regulations, particularly Regulation 15 on assessment;
  - New Framework for Assessment: Assessment Regulations;
Annex A

- Postgraduate commonality rules (most postgraduate programmes now come under NFA);
- the University's academic framework (see section 2 and Annex B below);
- QA35 Assessment procedures (for programmes not compliant with NFAAR only);
- where relevant, QA20 Collaborative Provision;
- Equalities and diversity policies;
- Statement of Equality Objectives 2013-15;
- requirements of professional or statutory bodies, and advice from relevant employers and the University's Careers Service

2. University Academic Framework

2.1 The University's academic framework is composed of the decisions taken by Senate regarding the credit and modular framework and summarised below.

2.2 Requests for exemption from elements of the University's academic framework will normally be considered at Stage Two Full Approval by the Programmes and Partnerships Approval Committee (although this may be sought earlier where appropriate from the same Committee). The exception to this is exemptions from NFAAR which are approved by the University, Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee. Such requests should be accompanied with a clear rationale for the exemption being sought. Exemption from unitisation is normally only permitted on the grounds that the provision requires collaboration with partner organisations or has constraints on the pattern of delivery dictated by the requirements of professional bodies.

2.3 A programme of study leading to a named award within the University's unitised academic framework comprises a defined number of discrete units which have their own learning outcomes and assessment.

- Compulsory units are those components of a programme of study which must be taken by all students; in the NFA context some or all of these might also be designated essential units (DEUs);
- Optional units are those units that students can select from a prescribed range specified within the programme of study or other, Director of Studies-approved units. Electives are a particular sort of optional unit which can be chosen from across the University’s provision by a student as part of their programme of study. In the NFA context, some or all optional units might also be designated essential units (DEUs). The availability of all optional units may be constrained by timetabling or resource availability;
- Extra-curricular units are taken outside the programme of study, up to a maximum of 6 credits per year. They can be chosen by a student but do not contribute to progression requirements, or to the final degree classification. Credits achieved in these units may count towards an undergraduate award of Certificate of Higher Education or Diploma of Higher Education.

The programme structure should ensure that the programme learning outcomes are met by all who would graduate under the normal assessment and award provisions, e.g. by using Designated Essential Units to underpin requirements without which the named award could not be made.

The University uses the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) as the basis for its unitisation. Proposals for new programmes should reflect the requirements set out in Annex B on award titles and minimum levels of credit, in accordance with the (FHEQ)
2.4 A student engaged in full time undergraduate study for an Honours Degree is normally required to attain 60 credits per academic session. A student engaged in full time taught postgraduate study is normally required to complete 30 credits per semester or 90 credits per calendar year. Students may opt to take additional free/extra-curricular units to a maximum of 6 additional credits in any one academic year (with the prior approval of their Director of Studies).

2.5 Normally, units are based on one tenth of a full-time academic year of study and will have a weighting of 6 credits, half units of 3 credits, double units of 12 credits. Project units based on multiples of 6 will also be permitted and industrial placements may also be assigned a credit tariff based on multiples of 6.

2.6 The University has set a minimum expectation of 100 notional learning hours associated with a 6 credit unit, which equates to a minimum of 1000 learning hours in an academic year (or 1500 learning hours in a calendar year) of full-time study. It is recognised that additional private study time might be required, but it is expected that this should not result in more than 1200 notional learning hours for an academic year (or 1800 notional learning hours for a calendar year) of full-time study.

2.7 Units should be a full semester long and there should be no less than two units totalling at least 12 credits assessed by summative assessment during semester 1 of each academic year. Year-long units made up from the combination of any normal (3-, 6-, 12-credit) semester-based unit-dimensions are permitted to a maximum of 36 credits per year per programme. The impact of year-long units on inter-disciplinary programmes or generally available units should be considered and agreed with the relevant programme teams prior to approval.

3. **Programme Specifications** (see also Guidance on Preparing a Programme Specification and Programme Description)

3.1 Programme Specifications are definitive, formal and concise descriptions of programmes that are comprehensible to a general audience and made publicly available via the University website. Programme Specifications are public documents that support external accountability, intended for students, current and prospective.

3.2 The University also uses programme specifications in programme approval processes to ensure that the aims and intended learning outcomes of programmes are clear, and that the learning outcomes can be achieved and demonstrated.

3.3 In emphasising this formal and concise form of programme specification, it is recognised that programme specifications form only one part of:
- the programme information made available to students, with the University prospectus providing the primary point of contact and detail for prospective students, and programme handbooks being the key point of day-to-day reference for current students;
- the documentation required for programme approval. The concise information including a programme specification with a view to a general audience, should be distinct from introductory or supporting information necessary to make the case for approval of a proposed programme from academic peers; and from programme regulations intended for internal use, which set out in detail the structure and routes through a programme.

3.4 Further guidance on the content of programme specifications, including common content on University indicators of quality and student support structures, is available.
in the Programme Specification Guidance and the templates available on-line under QA3.

3.5 Further information on national expectations regarding programme specifications is available from the Quality Code

4. Programme Regulations

4.1 Regulation 15.2.b states that “Schemes of Study” are those documents which set down the approved curriculum, rules, requirements and scheme of assessment for a programme of study. This regulation is realised in detailed programme regulations; the information from which is set out in concise form in programme specifications.

4.2 Programme regulations should be drawn up to reflect the University's academic framework and regulations and to articulate how these are given effect for the programme and will specify any further stipulations for that programme, such as any professional or statutory body requirements, unit choices, student conduct and any other special responsibilities. Programme regulations describe the structure of, and routes through, a programme. For example, where the University Regulations give the overall admissions requirements for the University, those for specific subjects go into the Scheme of Study or programme regulations.

- for NFA-compliant programmes, see NFAAR UG, PGT, FD, HY, or CPD, "Assessment in the programme context" and Appendix 3 “Scheme of study and scheme of assessment details” of each document;
- for other programmes, a clear and fully detailed set of programme regulations is required as definitive and accurate information on the rules governing entry, progression, assessment and awards, under the provisions of the University Regulations, for reference by students, staff, and Boards of Examiners including External Examiners.

4.3 Credit will be awarded for successful completion of a unit. This will normally be defined as the achievement of the pass mark for the summative assessment(s). The programme regulations should define any additional criteria for the award of credit to be applied at the level of individual components of assessment. In particular, the regulations should specify:

- if a candidate must pass each individual component of the assessment in order to complete the unit successfully;
- if the candidate is required to reach a minimum threshold in any, or all, of the components of the assessment.

4.4 In instances where the teaching of a level 6 (H) level unit and an M level unit is shared, the learning outcomes and assessment must be appropriately differentiated.

4.5 For programmes fully compliant with the New Framework for Assessment: Assessment Regulations, the programme regulations should outline the progression requirements by referring directly to the criteria in the relevant appendices of the relevant NFAAR document (UG, PGT, FD, HY, or CPD) and note any key features identified in "Assessment in the programme context" sections of the relevant NFAAR document. If progression to a placement year is contingent upon having fulfilled all the progression requirements (i.e. if it is not possible to progress to a pre-arrangement before repeating a stage), this must be stated in the programme regulations.

4.6 For other programmes, the programme regulations should outline the criteria for
progression from one year, or part of the programme, to the next, and should in particular, specify:

- the minimum threshold to be achieved in a unit before credit can be awarded by compensation;
- the maximum number of failed units for which credit might be awarded by compensation;
- the criteria for the award of credit by compensation in the light of a satisfactory academic profile during the academic year;
- the criteria for an interim award or transfer to another defined award;
- any differences in the treatment of compulsory, optional and elective units with respect to the award of credit by compensation.

4.7 For programmes fully compliant with the New Framework for Assessment: Assessment Regulations, the programme regulations should define the timing and nature of any re-assessment or supplementary assessment permitted, indicating the mechanisms for retrieval appropriate to different degrees of failure, and referring directly to the criteria in the relevant appendices of the relevant NFAAR document (UG, PGT, FD, HY, or CPD).

4.8 For other programmes, the programme regulations should define the timing and nature of any re-assessment or supplementary assessment permitted, indicating the mechanisms for retrieval appropriate to different degrees of failure and having heed to the following principles:

- candidates may not be permitted an opportunity for reassessment solely to improve upon their marks/degree classifications if they have already been deemed to have satisfied the Examiners;
- candidates will not normally be required to undertake any reassessment for units that they have already passed unless the extent of their original failure was deemed by the Board of Examiners for Programmes to necessitate that they repeat the whole year in order to satisfy the progression requirements of the programme;
- final year candidates on three, four or five year undergraduate degree programmes may not be permitted an opportunity for reassessment unless the Faculty/School Board of Studies determines that exceptional circumstances have affected the candidate's performance.

4.9 For programmes fully compliant with the New Framework for Assessment: Assessment Regulations, the programme regulations should define how a candidate's final degree classification is reached by referring directly to the criteria in the relevant appendices of the relevant NFAAR document (UG, PGT, FD, HY, or CPD).

4.10 For other programmes, the programme regulations should define how a candidate's final degree classification is reached having due regard to the principle that the formulaic calculation is intended as an aid to reaching a decision on an individual candidate and does not override the Board of Examiners for Programmes' discretion to take account of other appropriate evidence, and in particular such regulations should specify:

- the weighting of individual units in the calculation of the final award, including classification where appropriate;
- the criteria for an interim award or transfer to another defined award.

4.11 Where appropriate, the programme regulations should also define any criteria for transfer points between programmes of study (e.g. between BEng and MEng). Where programmes fully compliant with the New Framework for Assessment: Assessment
Regulations are concerned, this should be done by specifying the criteria according to which a student might be admitted or transferred in to an alternative programme (since other criteria are already determined by the relevant NFAAR documents).

4.12 Generic awards, Certificate in Higher Education (CertHE) and Diploma in Higher Education (DiplHE), are available to students on undergraduate programmes, who meet the relevant award requirements and who are obliged or wish to leave their programme prematurely. Programme Regulations should state whether students are eligible for these awards (if it is not considered appropriate to offer one or both awards, an exemption should be sought from Senate). Exemptions from specific aspects of the CertHE and DiplHE may be approved by PAPAC. Credit achieved through a placement or study abroad cannot contribute to either award, unless explicitly stated otherwise in the relevant Programme Regulations and approved by PAPAC.