Guidance on Preparing a Programme Specification including the Programme Description

1. **Scope** The purpose of this guidance document is to provide practical advice to support staff in preparing and updating programme specifications.

2. **Definition** Programme specifications are definitive, formal and concise descriptions of programmes that are comprehensible to a general audience, for the information of potential and current students and their sponsors, and support external accountability.

   The primary reference point for prospective students is the University prospectus, whilst programme handbooks serve as the key point of reference for current students. For further information, see QA44 Programme Handbooks and Programme Specifications.

3. **Responsibilities**

   3.1 Directors of Studies are responsible for ensuring that:
   - programme specifications are reviewed annually to ensure that they are accurate and up to date and consistent with the more detailed programme information provided in the prospectus and programme handbooks
   - current programme specifications are published on the University website.

   3.2 Assistant Registrars in the Faculties/School and the Head of Learning Partnerships are responsible for ensuring that Programme Specifications are made publicly available via the designated area on the Faculty/School/Learning Partnerships Office website.

4. **Content**

   4.1 The full set of programme specification documentation consists of two or three parts:
   a. the main textual programme specification (template: QA3 form 2)
   b. a programme description – appended or inserted: a tabular description of programme structure, unit titles, credits and options giving the details required under the “Structure and Content of the Programme” section of the programme specification (programme description templates: [http://www.bath.ac.uk/quality/cop/statements.html](http://www.bath.ac.uk/quality/cop/statements.html))
   c. for programmes not covered by NFAAR, notably in relation to taught elements of postgraduate research programmes, a set of separately written programme assessment and progression regulations that are fully explicit, for operation by Boards of Examiners including External Examiners. A brief summary of these rules should be included in the main specification document under “Summary of progression and assessment regulations”. For more detail see QA3 Annex A Section 4.
4.2 The programme specification template is available to download from the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office (LTEO) website: QA3 form 2. The programme description templates are located from the index to the QA Code of Practice.

5 General tips

- Keep the programme specification succinct and use links to more detailed documents or policies published elsewhere rather than duplicate content. This will help to minimise potential discrepancies between documents, such as programme specifications and programme handbooks, and reduce the need for updates in the future;
- Programme specifications are definitive, self-standing documents available on the web to students, potential students, employers and other stakeholders after programme approval, so they are written in the present tense;
- When drawing up a programme specification as part of the programme approval process, don’t put the case for programme development into the programme specification. This can be explained separately in a coversheet to the programme approval documentation;
- The aim is to create a programme specification that can be understood by a general audience, including prospective and current students, so avoid jargon and abbreviations.

6 The Programme Specification template (QA3 form 2)

The following guidance relates to specific sections of the programme specification template:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GENERAL INFORMATION</td>
<td><strong>Subject Benchmark Statements</strong> are published by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and set out expectations about standards and content of degrees in a range of subject areas. Programme developers should check whether there is a subject benchmark statement which applies wholly or in part to the discipline area and level of the new programme. It will be necessary to demonstrate as part of the programme approval process that the new programme is appropriately engaged with any relevant subject benchmark statements.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Intended level of completed programme</strong> The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) describes the achievement represented by higher education qualifications. It will be necessary to demonstrate as part of the programme approval process that the new programme is aligned to the appropriate level in the FHEQ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational aims of the programme:</td>
<td>Should answer the following questions:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What is the purpose of this programme of study?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What is the programme intended to achieve?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intended learning outcomes:</td>
<td>Should specify the knowledge, skills and attributes that someone will be required to demonstrate in order to have completed the programme successfully: what has a graduate of this programme or unit demonstrated that they know or understand?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A well-formed learning outcome does not specify curriculum but the level to which the skills and/or knowledge should be demonstrated, and says something about the context in which they should be demonstrated.</td>
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A clear learning outcome does three things:
- It says what students should be able to do;
- It says something about the conditions under which they should be able to do it;
- It says something about how well they should be able to do it.

e.g. ‘By the end of the programme, students will be able to demonstrate detailed understanding of the influences of the historical and social context within which the chosen text is set, both from the text itself and others within the period’.

Further guidance is available from:

the Academic Staff Development team, acdev@bath.ac.uk, LTEO

Gosling D. and Moon J., “How to Use Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria”, Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC, 2001 - copy held by LTEO.

| Details of support available to students: | The Head of Student Services and the Director of Academic Registry have drawn up an overview of information relating to supporting students on the Claverton Campus that can be used as the basis for preparing and updating this section of the programme specification, adjusting the wording as appropriate for the programme. The text is included for annotation as appropriate on the programme specification template: QA3 form 2) |
| Admissions Criteria: | The Head of Admissions has provided the following advice to support colleagues in drafting this section: |
| • Departments/Schools/partner organisations should ensure that their admissions procedures and policies are consistent with the institutional guidance provided in QA22 on the Recruitment, Selection and Admission of Students |
| • this section of the programme specification should refer to any key elements of the admissions process which are distinctive for this programme in this Department/School/partner organisation (e.g. the approach to interviews or to deferred entry) |
| • a summary of entry criteria should also be provided, noting that precise requirements may vary from year to year. It is not necessary to list every equivalent qualification or combination of subjects acceptable for admissions purposes. It is acceptable to refer to a departmental/School/partner organisation’s URL for detailed entry criteria |
| • English language requirements should be specified either by a statement confirming that these are the same as the institution's minimum requirement or by a summary of higher programme-specific requirements in IELTS. |
| • any other specific pre-requisites (such as a particular level or grade in a Mathematics qualification or particular subjects required as part of first-degree study) should also be mentioned |
| • If Departments/Schools or partner organisations anticipate that they will need to make regular use of procedures for APL, APEL or direct entry with advanced standing (e.g. to Year 2 of an undergraduate |
As part of the admissions process, further advice is available from the Head of Admissions.

**Structure and Content of the Programme**

The Programme Description which is appended to the Programme Specification can be referenced from or included in the “Structure and content of the programme” section. Consequently, when a programme specification requires updating, often only the appendix will need changing. (see [http://www.bath.ac.uk/quality/cop/statements.html](http://www.bath.ac.uk/quality/cop/statements.html) for templates).

**Summary of assessment and progression regulations:**

See QA3 Annex A, section 4: Programme Regulations

Assessment must be consistent with the learning outcomes. The inter-relationship between aims, learning outcomes and assessment criteria needs to be at the heart of curriculum design.

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.

The Head of Student Records and Examinations, Student Records and Examinations Office is able to provide further advice on this aspect of the programme specification.

**Indicators of quality and standards**

The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office has drawn up the summary which is included in the programme specification template: QA3 form 2

7. **Further information:**

Sector guidance on programme specifications is available from the Quality Assurance Agency website: [Quality Code - Part A](http://www.qaa.ac.uk) Chapter A3: the programme level.

The University’s QA [Code of Practice](http://www.qaa.ac.uk) statements on programme approval (QA3), amendment (QA4) and review (QA13) are available on-line.

Assistant Registrars in the Faculty/School and the Head of the Learning Partnerships Office are the primary source of advice on preparing documentation for programme approval, amendment and review.

Advice on the purpose and development of programme specifications and on the QA statements can also be sought from the Quality Enhancement Officer, LTEO (ext: 3118).

Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office, August 2014