



**This guidance document is primarily intended for:**

Directors of Studies, and members of programme development teams who are involved in preparing and updating programme specifications

Members of:  
Faculty/School/Dept Learning Teaching and Quality Committees; Courses & Partnerships Approval Committee, or other Committees involved in the scrutiny of quality of programme documentation.

## Guidance on Preparing a Programme Specification

### 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, can inform 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

- a. the main programme specification template
- b. programme definition and structure - includes unit titles, credits and options.
- 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 3.

4.2 For Stage 1 Strategic Approval the programme specification template ([QA3 form 2](#)) is available to download as a Microsoft Word document. For Stage 2 academic approval additional detail will

be required in the version of the programme specification, definition and structure developed and stored in the Curriculum Management Information System ([CMIS](#)). Faculty/School Assistant Registrars can be consulted with regard to programme documentation and CMIS.

**4.3 The processes have been adapted for programmes which are being developed as part of the University’s curriculum transformation initiative. Further information is available from Academic Registry.**

**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;
- Write programme specifications in the present tense as they are self-standing documents available on the web to students, potential students, employers and other stakeholders after programme approval;
- 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:*

Section	
<b>GENERAL INFORMATION</b>	<p><b><a href="#">Subject Benchmark Statements</a></b> 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.</p> <p><b>Intended level of completed programme</b> The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (<a href="#">FHEQ</a>) 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.</p>
<b>Educational aims of the programme:</b>	<p>Should answer the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the purpose of this programme of study?</li> <li>• What is the programme intended to achieve?</li> </ul>
<b>Intended learning outcomes:</b>	<p>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?</p>

	<p>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.</p> <p>A clear learning outcome does three things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It says what students should be able to do;</li> <li>• It says something about how well they should be able to do it.</li> <li>• It says something about the context or conditions in which they should be able to do it;</li> </ul> <p>e.g. <i>“By the end of the programme, students will be able to apply pedagogical and other forms of knowledge to complex situations concerning human learning and development through childhood and adolescence”</i></p> <p>Further guidance is available from the Academic Staff Development team, Centre for Learning &amp; Teaching (CLT) <a href="mailto:acdev@bath.ac.uk">acdev@bath.ac.uk</a>,</p>
<p><b>Details of support available to students:</b></p>	<p>Standard text is included for annotation as appropriate on the stage 1 programme specification template (<a href="#">QA3 form 2</a>) and as a hyperlink from within the <a href="#">CMIS</a> system).</p>
<p><b>Admissions Criteria:</b></p>	<p>The Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions has provided the following advice to support colleagues in drafting this section:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a summary of entry criteria should 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</li> <li>• 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)</li> <li>• 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</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• If Departments/School or partner organisations anticipate that they will need to make regular use of procedures for <a href="#">APL</a>, <a href="#">APEL</a> or direct entry with advanced standing (e.g. to Year 2 of an undergraduate degree) as part of the admissions process, further advice is available from the Head of Admissions.</li> <li>• Departments/Schools/partner organisations should ensure that their admissions procedures and policies are consistent with the institutional guidance provided in <a href="#">QA22</a> on the Recruitment, Selection and Admission of Students</li> </ul>
<p><b>Structure and Content of the Programme</b></p>	<p>This will be fine-tuned for second-stage academic approval in the Programme Definition and Structure sections in the <a href="#">CMIS</a> system. Include diet of core units and key optional units. Programme developers will need</p>

	to ensure that students will have met the pre-requisites for core units, options and pathways.
<b>Summary of assessment and progression regulations:</b>	For programmes fully compliant with the New Framework for Assessment: Assessment Regulations (NFAAR), the programme regulations should outline the progression requirements by referring directly to the criteria in the relevant appendices of the relevant <a href="#">NFAAR</a> document (UG, PGT, FD, HY, CPD or PGOLC) and note any significant features relevant to the “Assessment in the programme context” sections of the relevant NFAAR document. Academic Registry are able to provide further advice on this aspect of the programme specification.  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.
<b>Indicators of quality and standards</b>	Academic Registry has drawn up a summary which is included in the stage 1 programme specification template ( <a href="#">QA3 form 2</a> ) and as a hyperlink from the <a href="#">CMIS</a> system.

## 7 Further information:

Sector expectations on programme specifications are set down in the Quality Assurance Agency [UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: Course Design and Development](#).

The University’s QA [Code of Practice](#) 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 development of programme specifications and the Code of Practice statements can also be sought from the Academic Registry.

Academic Registry  
August 2019