

Quality & Standards Handbook

Programme design and approval

Guidance note 2.2

Preparing programme specifications using the Brookes template

The programme specification is a concise description of a programme of study, including the entry requirements, learning outcomes, curriculum structure, and details of how the programme will be taught and assessed. A programme specification is required for all credit-bearing programmes of study (including separate ones for the same programme delivered by a number of partners, or by the University and a partner), and is formally approved by the University, through the appropriate QA processes as set out in the Quality and Standards Handbook Chapter 2 (or Chapter 5 for collaborative provision). Any changes to the PS must also be formally approved through the appropriate process set out in that chapter.

The programme specification has a number of purposes:

- to provide a concise description of an approved programme of study, for a range of stakeholders, including students, potential students, University approval and review panels, external examiners, professional bodies, employers, etc;
- to form the 'contract' between the awarding body (Academic Board) and the Department/School or partner organisation (along with the operations manual etc governing the delivery arrangements) responsible for delivering the programme;
- to be a reference point for QAA/other external audit teams who will wish to explore the accuracy and usefulness of PSs (and other programme information) to staff and students;
- together with the student handbook, to form the basis for the programme to be set up on the student records system.

One of the guiding principles set out in the advice and guidance published by the QAA on course design and development is that "definitive course documentation is produced, accurately and fairly describing the learning opportunities, intended student outcomes and support offered". There is a similar expectation in Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European HE Area, that HE providers should publish information about programmes that is "clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible". These expectations have assumed greater significance in the context of the Competition & Market Authority's guidance (issued in March 2015 – see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/higher-education-consumer-law-advice-for-providers-and-students>) on the application of consumer legislation to the HE sector.

The Brookes template for programme specifications, as approved by the Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee, is available on the APQO website (T2.7 under Chapter 2 of the Quality & Standards Handbook). This paper provides guidance on completing each section of the template.

COVERSHEET

The cover page should clearly state the title of the programme described in the PS and the award to which the programme of study leads. The name of the managing faculty should be stated in full, and, for collaborative provision, the full name of the organisation delivering the programme. The front cover was updated in May 2016 – in response to the CMA guidance referenced above – in order to be more specific about the cohorts to which the PS applies, and to clearly log any changes made to the PS since approval, so that the published document remains accurate and up to date.

SECTION 1: GENERAL INFORMATION

This section is largely self-explanatory, but a few guidance notes are given in each section below:

Awarding body	This will almost always be Oxford Brookes University, unless the programme also leads to an award of another awarding body, e.g. in the case of dual and joint awards.
Teaching institution and location	The full name, and location, of the organisation (which will be Oxford Brookes in many cases – if so, indicate which campus it is mainly delivered on) responsible for the delivery of the programmes.
Final award	This should be the qualification gained by students successfully completing the whole programme of study, e.g. BA (Hons), MSc, FdA, etc. You should check the list of approved awards in the University regulations. If a new award is required, this must be approved by Academic Board, via AESC.
Programme title	The title of the programme of study, e.g. Sociology, Education Studies, Mechanical Engineering, etc.
Interim exit awards and award titles	The awards which may be gained where students exit the programme at an earlier stage, e.g. CertHE, PGCert, etc. If the exit awards have different titles from the final award title, please list them with the award available.
Brookes course code	Please contact the Course & Student Administration Team (Student Central) for advice.
UCAS code	Please contact the Admissions Office for advice.
JACS code	Please contact the Head of Management Information and Data Returns: Rachel Shapton for advice. The HESA website also gives details about the Joint Academic Coding System www.hesa.ac.uk
HECoS code	as above.
Mode of delivery	Choose from: FULL-TIME [face to face/on-campus/blended] PART-TIME [face to face/on-campus/blended] DISTANCE LEARNING (FULL-TIME) DISTANCE LEARNING (PART-TIME) *SANDWICH MODE (FULL-TIME) *SANDWICH MODE (PART-TIME) * for sandwich mode on the UMP, the year of study in which the placement occurs must be specified, as each variation has a separate mode of delivery code.
Mode/s and duration of study	Give an indication of the normal/expected completion time, and the maximum permitted duration of study for each of the modes of delivery stated in the box above.
Language of study	Language of delivery and assessment – usually English.

Relevant QAA subject benchmark statement/s	The title of the subject benchmark statements to which the programme relates.
Professional accreditation <i>(applicable to programmes with formal professional body approval)</i>	Name of professional body/ies accrediting the programme, if applicable, and URL of PSRB website/s.
University Regulations	The standard entry should include: The programme conforms to the University Regulations for the year of entry as published/archived at http://www.brookes.ac.uk/regulations/ If applicable , you should refer to (and give the link to) any specific regulations (section B of the University Regulations) or programme-level variations from the regulations that apply. All variations from the regulations must be approved by QLIC (in advance of programme validation events).

SECTION 2: OVERVIEW AND PROGRAMME AIMS

Rationale for/distinctiveness of the programme

This section is an opportunity for the programme team to highlight any distinctive features of the programme or (where the programme is unique or uncommon in the sector) the reasons for designing a programme leading to the award described in the PS – e.g. to respond to the needs of a particular industry or profession.

This can be useful for potential students when trying to decide between programmes of study leading to similar awards taught at different universities. Programme teams may wish to highlight, for example:

- a particular area of expertise within the teaching department which has led to the development of specialist modules within the curriculum;
- members of teaching staff (or visiting lecturers) on the programme who are nationally or internationally recognised (if they don't teach on the programme, don't claim this though);
- opportunities for undertaking work experience/professional placements, perhaps overseas, in a renowned company, or within a specialist field;
- a particular (or innovative) approach to the teaching and learning strategy;
- cutting edge teaching facilities;
- accreditation by a particularly distinguished professional body or bodies;

The provision of information about the teaching qualifications and academic standing of staff who will be directly responsible for teaching on a programme is a key concern in the CMA guidance – a link to where staff profiles of members of the core teaching team can be found on Department/School websites should therefore be provided here.

SECTION 3: PROGRAMME LEARNING OUTCOMES

Intended learning outcomes describe the knowledge, skills and attributes the students will have acquired on successful completion of the programme of study. They should be presented under the headings of the Brookes Attributes, as appropriate (remembering that there are three levels: for Foundation, Bachelor's, and Master's degree programmes) - learning outcomes should be listed under the 'best fit' attribute, and, where necessary, annotated to indicate their relevance to other attributes. Further detail about the Brookes Attributes can be provided in the programme handbook.

Learning outcomes should be specified for all target awards, i.e. awards which are marketed as qualifications in their own right, even if they may also be offered as exit awards. For other exit awards, it is not necessary to specify learning outcomes; however, any modules that are required in order to qualify for the award should be clearly identified.

Learning outcomes should succinctly and accurately describe the key attributes of holders of the academic qualification described in the PS, and should be informed by - but not simply lifted verbatim from - the subject benchmark statement/s or professional competences; and by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

Some professional bodies are more prescriptive than others about the terminology of intended learning outcomes, but you should remember that the qualification towards which students on the programme are studying is also an academic award made by the University, and the learning outcomes should reflect this. Your OCSLD link developer can provide advice and workshops on programme design and writing learning outcomes and on developing the Brookes Attributes.

SECTION 4: PROGRAMME STRUCTURE AND CURRICULUM

Programme structure and requirements

This section should set out the structure of the programme as delivered over the different levels of the programme (or stages where a programme is at one level but with progression points), with module codes and titles, and their credit values. Compulsory and optional modules should be clearly marked, including any that are required in order to qualify for interim/exit awards.

You should use the table in the template to present the modules at each stage of the programme, which requires only the following information:

- Module Code
- Module Title
- Credits
- Level
- Status - e.g. optional, compulsory, etc – including an indication of whether they are compulsory for any interim/exit awards
- Coursework : exam ratio

Keep this section simple - more module information and more detailed structure diagrams can always be provided in in programme/module handbooks.

Progression and award requirements

Progression points should be clearly indicated, along with the requirements (e.g. credit accumulated, compulsory modules passed, pass marks, etc) for progression from one stage of the programme to the next – please ensure they are consistent with the University Regulations which apply to the programme.

The requirements for the final award (and any interim/exit awards), including required modules and how the award classification will be calculated, should also be given.

In relation to postgraduate programmes, in particular, you may wish to give an indication of the range of dissertation topics that can be supported by staff with relevant research interests.

Professional requirements

Section 4.3 refers to programmes with professional accreditation. As part of the Unistats return, the University is required to provide public information about the requirements for gaining professional recognition, and this section should state whether accreditation is dependent on having studied particular modules (please identify them), gaining a particular class of award (e.g 1st or upper second, etc) or whether accreditation is simply linked to successful completion of the award according to the relevant University Regulations. Please indicate the category of professional body membership the programme leads to, and indicate any further action which needs to be taken by graduates to register for this membership (or if it is automatic on graduation).

SECTION 5: PROGRAMME DELIVERY

Teaching, learning and assessment

Detailed information about the teaching and learning experience across the programme, including information about field trips, placements, etc, will be provided in the course entry, and you should work

with your Faculty Marketing Team to ensure it is accurate and sufficiently detailed to give potential applicants a good flavour of the student experience and an indication of any potential additional costs.

As part of the University's obligations in respect of the Key Information Set, you should include in this section:

- an indication of the typical contact/independent study mix – how student time is divided between different teaching and learning methods;
- an indication of the typical mix of coursework/exams students will experience across the programme.

More detailed information about contact hours and assessment tasks will be given in individual module descriptions and handbooks, but the PS needs to give an approximate overview of the typical learning experience. A number of useful QAA guides to explain contact hours etc can be found online at:

https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/contact-hours-guidance.pdf?sfvrsn=cc45f981_8

https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/explaining-class-size.pdf?sfvrsn=c446f981_10

SECTION 6: ADMISSIONS

Entry criteria

This section should generally refer only to any necessary prior qualifications (incl. English language requirements), and not to grades or tariffs, which are subject to change – up to date information on grades is given in the course entry. Many PSs refer to 'typical offers' which become out of date and could be considered misleading if they are different to the offers advertised via the course entry in a given year – however, if it is felt necessary to give this information, please explain the circumstances when a typical offer is made and how it might be varied.

DBS checks

If the programme requires all students to be checked by the Disclosure and Barring Service [DBS, previously CRB, checks], for example, professional programmes which involve working with children or vulnerable adults, you should state this and briefly outline the process to be followed (e.g. at what stage this is done, who is responsible, etc).

SECTION 7: PREPARATION FOR EMPLOYMENT

The template gives examples of the information you might wish to include in this section to indicate how the programme has been designed to prepare students for employment. Information about graduate earnings and destinations will be provided via the course entry. For Degree and Higher Apprenticeships please outline expected job roles and progression on completion of the apprenticeship.