

Designing your Programmes and Modules: Guidance notes

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How to use this guide

Course Design¹ should be one of the most creative tasks that you do as an academic. Whether you are designing a whole programme or part of a programme, it is the chance to sort out your priorities and to translate them into an interesting course structure. It allows you and the programme team to share your vision and to take ownership of your programme. It will help you make the learning process effective and stimulating for your students.

Unfortunately all too often course design seems much more like a nightmare! The aim of this guide is to minimise confusion and to clarify what you are required to do. It endeavours to help you though the apparent bureaucratic maze so that you can spend more of your energies focussing on what you want your programme to be about and how you can make it an engaging learning experience.

What does the guide contain?

- The guide is based around **a diagram** (p.6) that shows what you need to take into account and the documents that you will have to produce to design a programme for approval at Plymouth University.
- The design process is divided into **a number of stages** which are numbered and briefly defined in the key (p.7). Each stage is described in more detail in the subsequent sections.
- In the **'How to'** sections you (the team and, in particular, the programme leader) are given practical guidance on implementing the design processes.
- In **the appendices** there are materials that will help you in constructing your documentation e.g. templates, external qualification descriptors. The **Definitive Module Record** template and the **Outcomes Map** must be used as they are; it is up to you to decide if you wish to communicate the other aspects of your programme differently.

The guide is written as though you are starting from scratch, but in fact you are probably working with established practices and many pieces of the jigsaw will be in place already. The processes are described systematically but, in reality, course design is rarely linear; it is messy and creative with lurches of insight. Seeing the overall shape described here will, hopefully, make it easier for you to pull the components together coherently.

How to:

If you are the programme leader it would be worth trying to get your mind around this guide before you and your team get together to start to explore and share your vision and aims for the programme. Check on www.educationaldevelopment.net under ED teaching and learning resources for the latest version of this guide.

¹ In this guide course design is used as a generic term to refer to programme and module design

National and institutional context

Higher Education Institutions are required to be publicly accountable. We need to demonstrate how we assure the quality of our programmes and standards of our graduates. Designing high quality programmes and modules that describe the knowledge, skills and attributes students will have on graduating is one way of providing explicit evidence of quality and standards. It helps students find the right courses, enables graduates to find the right employment and employers to find the right students.

National contexts

The **Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)**, with responsibility for assuring the quality of the work within Higher Education, provides the framework within which we design our programmes. A **Framework for Higher Education Qualifications** defines the generic characteristics of awards at each of five levels. **Subject benchmark statements** capture the knowledge, understanding and skills that graduates from particular subjects will be expected to have gained. Plymouth University has mapped its provision against these and each programme has to ensure that its aims and learning outcomes are congruent with the framework.

All this external intervention has been viewed by some as an intrusion into subject and personal autonomy; however, most tutors now accept that a professional approach to programme design is an important part of their role. In QAA reviews at Plymouth University, external reviewers have usually found programme design practice to be excellent. However, this has not always been the case and this guide supports programme designers in order to help raise the standard of University provision.

Institutional contexts

Our challenge is to develop programmes that we believe in while addressing the external criteria described in this guide, To this end, Plymouth University encourages programme teams to use **design principles** that ensure:

- an effective 'transition' curriculum for new students entering the University;
- clear progression in terms of complexity and autonomy with reference to **level descriptors**;
- a focus on project and/or problem based learning in the final stages of the programme.

How to:

Before you start working on a new programme familiarise yourself with the most recent information about the QAA

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/FHEQ08.pdf>

Subject benchmarks

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/subject-guidance/Pages/Subject-benchmark-statements.aspx>

Course design in theory

Cowan (1998) describes course design as, 'the purposeful creation of situations from which motivated learners will not be able to escape without learning or development.' If we accept this, it might be expected that course developers would draw upon up to date theories about how to create situations in which people learn. However, Gibbs (1999) suggests course design is usually based on institutional culture and disciplinary traditions rather than recent theory.

For example, consider these facts:

- Architecture and civil engineering are not enormously different areas of study. However in architecture assessment is project based and the learning is through studio work while in civil engineering assessment is through exams and learning is through lectures and labs.
- At Oxford Brookes University exams count for 25% of a student's marks whereas down the road at Oxford University they count for nearly 100%.
- Open University teaching is almost exclusively distance learning while most universities are predominantly lecture based.
- In Barcelona the pass rate in engineering courses is 50% compared to 90% in the UK.

At Plymouth University the theory of course design is underpinned by

(1) the concept of '**constructive alignment**' (see Biggs and Tang, 2002, Ch 4)

This means that you need to ensure that the learning outcomes, the learning processes and the assessment mode and criteria relate systematically to each other. If your course is constructively aligned it describes and links together:

- what the course is for (aims)
- what level it is at
- what students will learn (outcomes)
- the content and sequence
- how it will be taught
- the assessment design
- student support and learning resources
- methods of evaluation

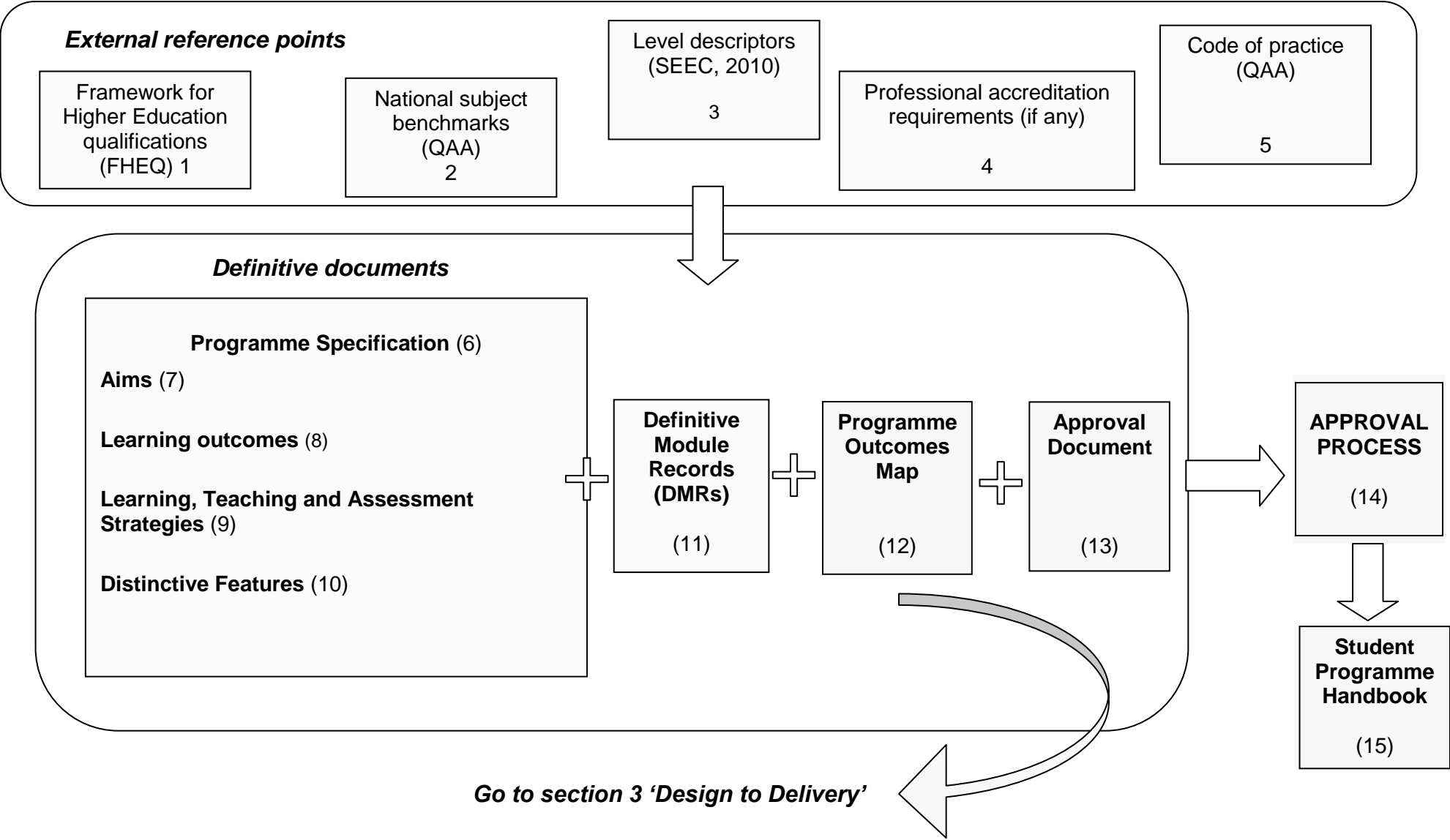
(2) the philosophy of **student centred learning**.

This means that students should become increasingly autonomous and that the learning opportunities should reflect student diversity. Student centred courses reflect an understanding of:

- what students want or need to learn
- what students already know or can do
- what engages students
- how to develop collaborative learning
- how to encourage deep learning
- how to promote student autonomy
- what students do **outside** class time
- support for student differences

There are interesting resources for designing an imaginative curriculum at <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk>

Designing a Programme for Approval



Key to Diagram (explained in more detail later in this guide)

External reference points

1. Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)

This describes the standards expected of the awards /qualifications offered in the programme.

It must be complied with when designing a programme.

2. National Subject Benchmark

Subject benchmarks covering all the disciplines are published by the QAA. These define the attributes and skills expected of Honours graduates (level H). They are written at 'Threshold standard' (ie a minimum standard for a pass). **All undergraduate programmes should refer to one or more benchmark statements.**

3. SEEC Level Descriptors (2010)

These set out broad generic characteristics of knowledge and skills at each of five levels and can be used in designing module outcomes. They are not subject specific. **These are for guidance when writing DMRs.**

4. Professional accreditation requirements

This is normally where there is dual accreditation from a professional body or a requirement for licence to practice. In many areas there is no such requirement but **where they exist they must be used in course design.**

5. Code of Practice

This is the QAA set of 'precepts' which set out expectations regarding quality and standards across all aspects of higher education. **Programmes must reflect these** (but they are mostly incorporated into University policies and guidelines).

Plymouth University requirements

6. Programme Specification

This summarises the features of a programme. These include 7, 8, 9, 10 & 12 below. All of these features are required for internal approval.

7. Programme Aims

These convey the teaching intentions and curriculum coverage of the programme. These are written broadly but avoid aims that are so aspirational that they cannot be represented in the outcomes. They will reflect both the broader purposes of HE (eg employment, widening participation) and the specific subject aims.

8 Learning outcomes

These convey more precisely what the student can expect to learn through the programme. They include the core intended learning outcomes and other learning outcomes achievable through opportunities offered in option modules. They should be defined for each stage of the programme.

9. Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategies

These describe the approaches adopted at each stage of the programme and explain the rationale for their inclusion. It should be clear how the programme relates to the assessment policy and to the University's equality schemes for disability, gender and race.

10. Distinctive Features

These define the unique selling points for the programme ie what makes it special. They usually identify the options/pathways through the programme and may include interesting learning opportunities eg field trips, travel abroad, work placements, lab work.

11. Definitive Module Records (DMRs)

These give a detailed description of each credit bearing element of the programme including module aims, assessed learning outcomes, indicative syllabus, schedule of teaching and learning, assessment mode and criteria and indicative reading. The University requires a DMR template to be completed for each module in the programme.

12. Outcomes Map

This shows how each of the core Intended Learning Outcomes relates to the programme aims and the subject benchmark; it details the core modules in which it will be assessed. Each exit award (ie HE level C, I, H, M, D) requires a separate outcome map for approval.

13. Approval Document

This definitive document explains the background and rationale for the new programme including evidence of market research. It incorporates admissions criteria, a research and scholarship statement and transition and partnership arrangements. It gives a rationale for proposed changes if there is an existing document.

14. Approval Process

This process considers all the definitive documents. Scrutiny will normally be Faculty based. Conditions or recommendations may be applied before a document is approved.

15. Student Handbook

This is a required document that covers what the student needs to know about the structure of the programme; the core and options; the distinctive features (eg work based learning); and where skills and attributes will be developed. It also has information on staffing, student support, resources and generic services. **It is compiled after the approval event and revised annually.**

A Ten Step Guide to Designing a Programme

Use this guide in conjunction with the current Quality Assurance Handbook

	What you need to do	Further guidance
Warning: This process can take two years and is time consuming		
STEP 1	Discuss ideas informally with colleagues and come up with a rough outline for your new/revised programme. Who is it for? Is there is a demand for the programme? What sort of content and structure might be appropriate? Make sure that you discuss the outline with your Head of School at a very early stage.	Use the new programme planning approval template https://exchange.plymouth.ac.uk/intranet/acdevcom/public/plforms/Proforma%20for%20new%20or%20substantial%20change%20to%20an%20existing%20programme.docx
STEP 2	Investigate the resources it might require by going through the checklist at https://exchange.plymouth.ac.uk/intranet/quality/Public/qhandbook/Resource%20Requirements%20Template.doc This may inspire you to go on, or lead you abandon the idea! Then fill in the resources on the new programme planning approval template.	Fill in the costings on https://exchange.plymouth.ac.uk/intranet/acdevcom/public/plforms/Proforma%20for%20new%20or%20substantial%20change%20to%20an%20existing%20programme.docx
STEP 3	Take advice from your Associate Dean (Learning & Teaching/Postgraduate Affairs) and your quality administrator. If your proposal is supported you will now fill in the two University Planning approval forms.	Use the Web links above.
STEP 4	Set up a programme development committee to take the programme forward. The approval event 'aide memoire' makes a good starting point for your committee. Copies are available from your Faculty quality administrator.	Involve external advisors and local employers in your committee where appropriate; ILS and ED can also provide valuable support
STEP 5	Refer to the external reference points before starting to construct the programme documentation. Subject benchmarks may need to be supplemented by other guidance from national bodies with expertise in the subject	Refer to sections 1-5 in this guide.
STEP 6	Draft your programme specification and definitive module records; complete an outcomes map. Use University programme, module and mapping templates (there are different versions for UPC available in the Quality Assurance Handbook).	Refer to sections 6-12 in this guide. See appendices D,F and I.
STEP 7	Write the approval document.	Use the Quality Assurance Handbook https://staff.plymouth.ac.uk/qahbook/qahindex/intranet.htm .
STEP 8	Participate in the approval event (usually a Faculty event with external representatives present). UPC approval events will be in two stages.	Your Associate Dean will provide detailed guidance on this event; general advice is given in section 14 of this guide and at https://staff.plymouth.ac.uk/qahbook/qahindex/intranet.htm .
STEP 9	Approval should be a positive experience for the team and a chance to test out and sell your ideas. However there will inevitably be some recommendations laid down by the panel. These should be addressed as soon as possible.	Work with your Faculty quality administrator to interpret requirements and meet deadlines.
STEP 10	Once you have the go ahead write your programme handbook and start to prepare your module outlines and course materials.	Refer to section 15 in this guide

The Quality Assurance Handbook is available online through Plymouth University Staff Portal at <https://staff.plymouth.ac.uk/qahbook/qahindex/intranet.htm>

Section 1: Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)

The QAA has developed the Framework to assure comparability and consistency in awards offered across the HE sector. It sets out what is expected at five levels:

Level	Award title	Named Awards
8	D (Doctoral)	Doctoral (PhD, DPhil, EdD)
7	M (Masters)	Masters Postgraduate Diplomas Postgraduate Certificate of Education Postgraduate Certificates
6	H (Honours)	Bachelors Degrees with honours Bachelors Degrees Graduate Diplomas Graduate Certificates
5	I (Intermediate)	Foundation Degrees Diplomas of Higher Education Higher National Diplomas
4	C (Certificate)	Higher National Certificates Certificates of Higher Education

For each level the QAA provides **qualification descriptors** to exemplify the outcomes and level of each exit award in order to:

- communicate the level of intellectual and conceptual activity that can be expected of anyone successfully completing the award at a specified level.
- define what the award bearer is capable of in terms of knowledge of the key aspects in their field of study, transferable skills and employability.
- improve understanding both within and outside the HE sector of what a qualification implies or 'is worth'.

Progression through the levels is related to increasing autonomy, breadth and depth of subject knowledge and understanding and proficiency in using the tools of the discipline for investigation and enquiry. The exit awards will become increasingly important as the sector is expected to respond to the government widening participation agenda of 50% of 18 -30 yr olds to have 'some experience of higher education by 2010'. 'Some experience' is deemed to be at least one year of certificated HE whatever the entry/exit points. So the importance of exit awards is increasingly important as more students choose to exit at a level appropriate to their needs and aspirations.

How to:

- Check that you have a copy of the Framework. It is reproduced in Appendix B and can be accessed online at www.qaa.ac.uk. You should become familiar with the details.
- Use the framework as you write your programme outcomes (7) to ensure that they are expressed appropriately for the award.
- When you come to complete the Outcomes Map (12), you will have to complete a separate form for each of the exit points (ie C,I,H,M,D) in your award. Proformas are available for each level (Appendix F) with the appropriate Framework descriptors already incorporated.

Section 2: National Subject Benchmarks

The benchmark statements indicate the knowledge, understanding and skills that can be expected of an Honours graduate in a particular subject. They have been produced by specialists in each subject community and are generally well received by academics as a result. They aim to clarify graduate standards to potential employers both nationally and internationally and to others (including compilers of league tables). Students also need to know that their qualification will meet national expectations.

Benchmarks are not intended as a blueprint for course design. They are intended to provide greater clarity, coherence and consistency across the sector but not to produce conformity. They have **not** been established to tell programme teams what to include in their programmes or create a national curriculum. Your team need not feel totally constrained by them. They are there to help **inform** the process. Indeed the nature of a particular course may be defined by what it decides to select to use from the benchmark statements. It is important that the team is clear about which part of the benchmarks they have agreed to use, so as to be able to articulate and defend their curriculum decisions. It can also be a useful crosscheck for omissions and to point up unique features and strengths of your programme.

The subject benchmark statements are all written at 'threshold level' (ie the minimum standard for a pass). In addition, some set out other standards eg 'typical standard' (ie the 2.1/ 2.2 border) or 'excellence'. It is important to know which standard you are using and to indicate this in the programme specification.

The statements help approval panels, external examiners and quality assurance to review and evaluate programmes against agreed national expectations and standards. They are also useful for constructing assessment criteria and can help students, via their handbooks, to understand what is expected of them in assessment.

How to:

- Get hold of a copy of the most recent relevant benchmark statement(s) for your subject from <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/subject-guidance/Pages/Subject-benchmark-statements.aspx>
- Your programme team will discuss and select from the benchmark statements, adapting them for your aims and outcomes (7&8) to suit the nature and flavour of your own programme
- When you complete your Programme Outcomes map (12) you will need to give a reference to show which of the benchmark statements each outcome relates to
- In practice you could work either way i.e. start with the benchmarks and see which of your outcomes it most closely resembles – or start with your programme outcomes and match them against the appropriate national benchmarks

Section 3: SEEC level descriptors (2010)

Level descriptors describe generic characteristics of learning at each level of an award. They reflect how our expectations of students will increase between levels as they deepen their knowledge and understanding and develop their skills.

The descriptors did not arise from any government or top down directive. They were a SEEC (South East England Consortium) for Credit Accumulation and Transfer initiative led by a group of academic staff who got together to devise, share and define their practice more clearly and consistently. These descriptors are now widely adopted across the UK and were reframed in 2010. Make sure you refer to the updated descriptors.

Although the descriptors are concerned with progression in learning, they are not subject specific; they set out the generic knowledge and skills expected at HE Certificate, Intermediate, Honours, Masters and Doctorate Level. At each level the descriptors address: the setting; knowledge and understanding; cognitive skills; performance and practice; personal and enabling skills. The differences between the levels are to do with

- the degree of autonomy and responsibility that is expected from the learner;
- extending the challenge to learners;
- the learners' ability to work out their own solutions and approaches;
- increasing complexity and range in analysis.

The level descriptors are guides rather than dictates and are particularly helpful as guidance when writing module outcomes and assessment criteria. They articulate for us the kind of judgements we have previously used implicitly and have arrived at through our experience of assessing work but which hitherto was rarely written down or shared. In the past this had posed particular problems for new course designers and assessors.

How to:

- You will need to look at the SEEC (2010) level descriptors in Appendix C.
- The descriptors help in suggesting vocabulary which can provide a starting point for writing your own outcomes at each level.
- The descriptors are relevant in one way or another to most programmes but it is often necessary to 'translate' the descriptors into subject specific language.
- To get the sense of the levels and assure yourself that you are comfortable with them, read the descriptor for the level you are describing and gauge how it differs from those above and below.
- In designing a programme it is not necessary to demonstrate that all of the SEEC descriptors are present at each level. This is a matter for professional judgement by the programme team.
- Once the level descriptors are built into the programme, use them to inform the development of assessment criteria and in setting marking standards

The use of level descriptors is clearly described in Gosling & Moon (2001).

Section 4: Professional accreditation requirements

This is usually a requirement in vocational awards eg education, engineering, health, medicine, social work when Plymouth University has applied for dual accreditation incorporating a licence to practice. Programme staff in these areas will already be aware of what this entails. In most subject areas there is no such requirement.

How to:

- If your programme incorporates professional accreditation requirements, these will be a major influence on your aims, learning outcomes and the content of your syllabus
- Even if they are not a requirement, it is worth doing some research in your field with relevant subject associations, or a range of employment areas that your graduates move on to, as this may enhance your students' employability. It also helps to support and give external reference to your own (implicit) sense of standards.
- It is certainly worth contacting the Higher Education Academy to find out what the current influences are in your field and if there is existing work you can cite or relate to. Find out more at <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk>
- You will refer to this information in your distinctive features (10)

Section 5: Code of Practice

The QAA code of practice describes what HEIs are expected to achieve in relation to quality and standards. While you need to know it exists it should not be necessary to consult it in detail, as the University has addressed the precepts through its own policies. Those relevant to programme design are

- review and approval of programmes and
- assessment
- equal opportunities

There is a duty to ensure that inclusive design informs programme and module construction at every stage.

How to:

- Consult the full range of sections of the code at www.qaa.ac.uk. Many of these are currently being revised so do not rely on an old version!
- Consult Plymouth University Quality Assurance Handbook and the University Assessment Policy at <https://staff.plymouth.ac.uk/qahbook/qahindex/intranet.htm>
- Check the Code of Practice for Placements if you have work experience in your programme
- Consult useful websites such as www.teachability.strath.ac.uk or www.techdis.ac.uk

Approval process documentation

Section 6: Programme Specification

The programme specification is the key document for approval purposes. It pulls together

- what the programme sets out to achieve
- what is distinctive about it
- the teaching and learning methods that enable the outcomes to be achieved
- the assessment methods that enable the achievement to be demonstrated
- the relationship of the programme and its study elements to the qualifications framework and to any subsequent professional qualification or career path.

It also indicates to students and employers what **all graduates** of the programme can demonstrate in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills relating to employment and lifelong learning (from the core modules) **as well as** the range of additional learning opportunities they may choose to pursue (from the optional modules).

Programme Specification

This must include:

- Programme title
- Brief description of programme
- Distinctive features
- Entry requirements
- Progression routes (Foundation degrees only)
- Programme aims
- Intended programme learning outcomes
- Teaching and assessment strategies
- Programme structure and pathways
- Exemptions/special academic regulations
- Final award title/Intermediate Award title(s)
- Awarding Institution
- Teaching Institution
- Accreditation Body
- Link to appropriate subject benchmark(s)
- UCAS code and JACS code
- Date of production/approval
- Appendix to programme specification

NB None of these can be altered after Approval without going through review procedures.

How to:

- Refer to Appendix D and the Quality Assurance Handbook for further guidance.
- Refer to sections 7, 8, 9 and 10 in this guide for detailed support.
- The QAA guidelines for preparing Programme Specifications are available online at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/guidelines06.pdf>
- It is recommended that you start by looking through the examples of programme specifications in the QAA booklet for ideas. However, you should use the University's own template (Appendix D) to create your programme specifications.
- As soon as you have a reasonably accurate draft, ask some colleagues, students and employers to critique it and make suggestions for improvement.

Section 7: Programme Aims

This is a real opportunity for the team members to reflect on, and share, their philosophy, beliefs and values. Programme aims will capture the

- The body of knowledge that graduates will acquire;
- The professional, technical or other employment related skills that graduates will be able to apply;
- The generic skills that all graduates should have regardless of their discipline.

They may be inspirational and aspirational and some aims may be so generic that they will be demonstrated and evaluated throughout the student experience. For example, your programme may aim to develop ethical and professional values or inspire a genuine engagement with the research/scholarship of the discipline.

However aims will, wherever possible, be realistic in the sense that they will later have to be unpacked into demonstrable programme outcomes. In fact, more often than not, the outcomes from various core modules will be grouped to write the programme outcomes (see section 8) and aims will be written to reflect each group of programme outcomes.

How to:

Precede the aims with the words, ' The programme is intended to ...'

Then use a verb:

- prepare students for ...;
- meet the requirements of...;
- develop knowledge/skills in ...

Programme Aims must be deliverable (rather than a wish list) as they have to be able to be capable of interpretation as outcomes and justified in practice.

Write them broadly to leave scope for change and development.

It is better to be concise, preferably no more than three or four aims - perhaps combining aims rather than having too many.

Section 8: Learning Outcomes

Programme learning outcomes are an essential part of the programme specification. They apply to all undergraduate and postgraduate awards, including HND and Foundation Degrees. They are broader and more generic than module outcomes and will represent clusters of outcomes from more than one module.

Their purpose is to ensure that:

- academic and support staff have a shared understanding of the programme they are working on;
- students have accurate information about the opportunities within their programme;
- students have information about the intellectual level of the outcomes;
- students can use the outcomes (through assignments and personal development plans) to demonstrate lifelong learning skills, reflect critically on their academic, personal and professional development, identify/articulate their achievements and

plan for their futures (this is both University policy and national requirement for all students)

- employers will know that a Plymouth graduate can demonstrate and can do 'what it says on the tin'
- accreditors and reviewers can understand and gauge the validity of the programme.

It is extremely important to get outcomes right and this is where much of the work for the programme team will be. They must be seen to derive from the stated programme aims and be informed by all of the external reference points (section 1-5). They are not as specific as module outcomes but it must be possible, for quality assurance processes, to ascertain whether the learning has been achieved, for it to be verified in assessments and tracked through students' work. It is the lack of this evidence and of transparency of these connections that has been the most common reason for loss of points in the external review process.

The focus of this guide is on the **programme core learning outcomes**. However other skills and attributes that are developed in option modules, and are therefore a matter of student choice, may be included and referred to as '**learning opportunities**' rather than learning outcomes. They will form part of the individual student's profile of outcomes which makes up their 'Personal Development Record.'

All learning outcomes will be written at '**threshold standard**' - the minimum standard for a pass. (see Section 2: National Subject Benchmarks)

You will need to use the following headings taken from the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ): knowledge and understanding (subject specific); cognitive/intellectual skills (generic); key transferrable skills; practical skills (subject specific); employment related skills.

You should write programme learning outcomes for each level.

How to:

Try one of these approaches:

First approach

List the key attributes of your programme graduates using the headings above. Use the subject benchmarks as a guide. Once you have got these right you will be able derive your module outcomes from them.

Second approach

Write the learning outcomes for the modules first and put together a list of all core module outcomes. Then group them under the headings above. Next, and this is the really hard part, try to summarise these by expressing each group into one broad outcome in a concise but overarching way that encompasses the underlying intentions and reflects what the threshold award holder will have achieved.

Add any module outcomes from the option modules but refer to them as 'other learning opportunities' rather than core programme outcomes.

You will also need to indicate where in the programme students will critically reflect on their academic, professional and personal development and plan for their future through their own individual Personal Development Record (PDR).

How to:

In writing a set of outcomes

start with the words, 'on completion of the programme the student will be able to...'

Then for each outcome follow this immediately with a verb. The verbs used to introduce programme outcomes are more overarching than those used for modules (see Appendix G) so can, if necessary, be less specific eg show awareness of... demonstrate knowledge of... show comprehensive understanding of...

This needs to be followed by a noun eg. project, concepts, practice, theory

You then need to expand this, explaining the degree of autonomy and an operational context eg with support in an area related to their study; or independently in complex situations; or with the minimum of guidance in unpredictable situations; or in a structure and managed environment.

Examples

Verb (do)	Object (what)	Context / Condition (how)
Analyse	data	with guidance, using a wide range of appropriate techniques
Communicate	information and concepts	to specialist and non-specialist audiences
Demonstrate	initiative	acting autonomously, in unpredictable situations

Section 9: Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategies

A teaching strategy is the support that needs to be given to learners to enable them to achieve learning outcomes. Learning can of course, be achieved without involvement of teaching.
Moon (2002)

In this section you should explain the approaches used in the programme and provide a rationale for why these particular approaches have been selected. For example you might explain:

- how your lectures have been made interactive through the use of buzz tasks or audience response systems in order to increase engagement and employ a conversational approach to teaching and learning (Laurillard, 2002)
- why group work is used and how it develops skills required by most employers
- how problem based learning contributes to motivation and enhances the ability to analyse and research issues
- how small group tutorials are used to discuss and consolidate knowledge or report back on projects and group work
- why peer learning is used and how it develops students confidence and critical self-reflection

This is an opportunity to show what an interesting and varied learning environment you provide and to demonstrate that different learning styles have really been taken into account. It is vital that the **Equality Act (2010)** inform this section.

This learning, teaching and assessment strategies section needs to show how you address the key themes in the university's Teaching and Learning strategy. This includes themes such as: enterprise, student engagement, experiential or work based learning, internationalization, education for sustainable development, widening participation, technology enhanced learning and lifelong learning opportunities. You also need to demonstrate where and how Personal Development Planning (PDP) is supported within your programme. Plymouth University has encouraged programme leads to choose a PDP framework that is most suitable to their programme needs. PDP may be linked to the personal tutoring system, you may have taught elements of PDP spread through your programme, or PDP may be largely the responsibility of each student on an individual basis. Whichever framework or combination of frameworks you chose to use, remember that the university supports an e-portfolio (PebblePad) for each student and every member of staff. This can be found under 'my e-desk' > 'e-portfolio' on the intranet and is widely used to underpin PDP and CPD activities.

How to:

- List the learning, teaching and assessment activities you are planning for your programme. Make sure it is clear if they vary between levels. Consider whether there could be more variety or if they could be more student centred. You may find Appendices E and H help trigger some ideas.
- Many programmes find it convenient to link the programme intended learning outcomes and the teaching, learning and assessment strategies (see the programme specifications in Appendix D).
- Identify the main activities and write a brief justification for their use explaining how they relate to the intended learning outcomes.
- Select some of the more unusual activities and give a rationale for their inclusion.
- Describe how PDP will be supported and make it clear if employment related activities are included.
- Check that activities align with learning outcomes and assessment
- Make sure that there is flexibility in the assessment to allow you to support students with special needs

Section 10: Distinctive features

This is an opportunity to communicate what is special and unique about your programme. It is likely to include what the programme team feels most strongly about and is particularly proud of. It highlights the distinctive nature of your graduates. It may point out how your award differs from those in other HE institutions. This material also has considerable marketing potential and creates a positive, motivating ethos, so it is worth spending some time on it.

It may draw attention to specific outcomes both from the core modules and optional modules. It will also identify particular strengths of the curriculum e.g. field trips, residential, work based learning or work experience, periods abroad, expeditions, special projects, simulations, performances, exhibitions. You can use this section to include access to unusual resources and opportunities e.g. simulator, studios, survey vessel, specific IT software.

Examples of distinctive features

- The year abroad is an essential element of this course and students derive a deeper appreciation of work and study in a different cultural milieu.
- This programme has exceptional resources including a state of the art simulator and a survey vessel for fieldwork and survey trips.
- The placement element is a highly valued element of this programme when students see how their knowledge and skills relate to the 'real world' and gain an insight into how the elements they have been learning fit together.
- Problem Based Learning provides a particular focus in module X. Students find it very motivating and also find that it develops the analytical, research and group skills which are highly valued by employers.
- A wide range of fieldtrips is possible due to the proximity of variety of agricultural; coastal, moorland, marine and industrial sites.
- Video recordings of role play situations add significantly to the practice skills and theory/practice links in module X and have been particularly noted as contributing to excellence by externals and employers.

How to:

If you are already running a similar programme, you will already have a good idea of what is distinctive. In addition, check out:

- What the programme team feels are particular strengths.
- What the students rate - you can 'mine' course reviews, evaluations or even run some focus groups or design a questionnaire for your students and graduates to tell you more on this - and what else they would like to have incorporated.
- What your programme administrators think, they often have a clear and realistic idea about this.
- What employers of your graduates think makes your students special

Section 11: Definitive module records

Definitive Module Records summarise the learning experience and teaching methods that will be used for each 'building block' of the curriculum. All modules need to be approved on the standard University Module Record form using SENDA compliant fonts (Appendix I) and online at <https://staff.plymouth.ac.uk/qahbook/qahindex/intranet.htm>

For most programmes the University encourages the use of 20 credit modules running through the whole Academic Year; this will enhance the assessment experience for students and minimise the assessment load for you. However, modules may be completed in one term and may be worth 10 credits if this is academically justifiable.

Page One

The first page of the DMR is **required** and apart from the name of the module leader, none of this information can be changed without going through a module review process.

The Short Module Descriptor

This section will contain a brief description encapsulating the essence of the module. As it will be included in the Module Catalogue prepared by the University Registry it will, to some extent, be a marketing tool; so make it sound interesting.

Module Aims

The aims will be broad statements which describes the module overall. They will incorporate your teaching intentions for the module.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Module Learning Outcomes will be student centred and describe learning intentions; they clarify what students should be able to do by the end of the module. Learning outcomes start with, '*On completion of the module, students will be able to ...*' and are followed by a verb. The verbs used for module outcomes are not as general as those used for programme outcomes and will be **specific and measurable** (see the list in Appendix G or devise your own list for your subject). It must be clear how learning outcomes help students develop knowledge and understanding, transferable skills and subject specific skills and it must be possible to clearly match students' assessed work with the intended learning outcomes.

Example

Intended Learning Outcomes from a module entitled 'Cultural Differences in Health'

On completion of this module the student will be able to:

1. define concepts of health, sickness and the nature of healing within appropriate theoretical frameworks.
2. examine the role of culture in manifestations of sickness, health and healing.
3. identify sickness as a social and cultural category in the UK.
4. assess the cultural significance of epidemiological findings in relation to race and gender nationally and internationally.

How to:

- Refer to the Quality Community for the module template and further guidance on regulatory requirements.
- Check your programme aims and learning outcomes and reflect these in the module outcomes.
- You will also find that going back to the subject benchmark statement will help you keep the language and the wording appropriate. You may find the vocabulary in the SEEC level descriptors (Appendix C) helpful in describing the outcome appropriately, and in getting the level right.
- Note that not every module has to have outcomes in each of the categories: setting; knowledge and understanding; cognitive skills; performance and practice; personal and enabling skills. It is the programme which ensures the coverage across a range of modules.

Three ways of devising learning outcomes

1. break down the aims into demonstrable elements
2. start with an idea for assessment and establish what it will demonstrate
3. start with the syllabus content and work out appropriate outcomes that enable students to demonstrate their grasp of it and ability to apply it

When you create the Programme Outcomes Map (section 12) ensure that the module learning outcomes are still commensurate with the programme outcomes.

Page Two

Information on the second page is **optional** (see your faculty regulations for whether it is required in your Faculty). Note that although this information can be altered from year to year any change cannot be implemented in the current academic year i.e. the course must run and be assessed as it has been described in the Student Handbook.

Assessment Mode

The Assessment Mode lists summative assignments in broad terms (e.g. essay, exam, dissertation, presentation) – **do not be tempted to be more detailed than this or you will lose the flexibility to change the task** or method within the review period. Appendix J provides ideas for assessment modes/methods which are used for assessing different sorts of learning.

Assessment Criteria

Assessment criteria are descriptions of what the learner has to do in order to demonstrate that the learning outcomes have been achieved. It is important that the criteria are stated at a **threshold standard** – in other words the minimum expectation in order to satisfactorily achieve credit for learning. Some people find this difficult to accept, believing that it may encourage students to work at a low level of achievement. However, there is no evidence that this happens and, if you also use grade descriptors, these will encourage higher levels of achievement.

In the DMR describe the general assessment criteria used in assessing the students' work. It is quite a challenge to write something succinct to reflect how students' achievement of learning outcomes will be judged. Try to write criteria that can be used for different types of assessment so that you are not tied down to the same kind of question, task, content or resources each year.

How to:

- To help you write assessment criteria refer to Appendix K; the guidance and examples in the Quality Community pages; and the ED booklet 'Assessment guidelines' <http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/view.asp?page=32345>
- There may be agreed criteria that are applied across the whole programme or faculty. If these exist (e.g. in the Student Handbook or a subject assessment document), you may simply refer here to these general criteria without having to list them. You will still need to provide any additional specific criteria for this particular module.
- It is important to retain flexibility and leave scope to vary the actual assessment tasks over the period before the next review. Therefore these criteria will be written in broad terms. This can look very minimalist but remember that more detailed and specific criteria will appear in actual assignment briefings.
- DMR criteria should be written at 'threshold standard'. This means the minimum that will be acceptable as a pass. Later the criteria will be expanded to show what is required for other standards of pass ie 1st, 2:1, 2:2, in the general assessment guidance (produced by department or faculty) and in the Student Handbook.

Schedule of teaching and learning

This will simply be a list indicating the types of activities that the student is expected to undertake e.g. lectures, seminars, tutorials, laboratory sessions, fieldwork. These will need to reflect the activities that you described in the programme specification (section 9).

Indicative Reading

This **means** indicative and not comprehensive. It should not be too extensive or overwhelming; simply refer to key texts, a very few relevant journals and/or a small range of web sites. You might also include a **very brief** indication of the role or value of particular texts. Reference your readings in the form that you will be expecting your students to use in their work (Harvard etc.).

Section 12: Programme Outcomes Map

The programme outcomes map is part of the Programme Specification and is used in programme approval and review. Plymouth University templates (Appendix F) have been designed to provide evidence that your programme is based on nationally agreed standards and is relevant to the subject and professional expectations. It will help you ensure (and reassure the approval panel) that all students will achieve the Programme aims (section 7) and outcomes (section 8). It also ensures that the award is both appropriate and valid and it will be checked in review procedures for consistency with learning and assessment activities.

You will need a separate map for each level or exit point you are offering. This is because the QAA National Qualifications Framework states that a lower level award can no longer be given as compensation for a fail at the higher level (e.g. a student can not get Intermediate level award for failing at Honours Level). Therefore, you need to define the specified outcomes that the student will meet to warrant the level at which the award is given.

- Completing the map is probably the last part of the planning process although you will have been compiling it from an early stage to ensure your module and programme outcomes relate to each other.
- Fill in templates (Appendix F) for each level at which you are offering an award.
- Include core programme outcomes only as these are the outcomes achievable by all students on the programme.
- Column 1 The templates already incorporate (in italics), the outcomes required by the FHEQ framework (taken from Appendix B) . You may customise them to suit your programme as long as they comply with the spirit of the FHEQ statements. You should then add any additional core intended learning outcomes from your programme specification.
- Column 2 Refer to the programme aim(s) that the outcome relates to. All outcomes should relate to at least one aim.
- Column 3 Indicate whether each outcome relates to a Subject Benchmark (If your subject benchmark statements have bullet points rather than letters you will have allocate a letter to each statement). Remember that Subject Benchmarks are for Honours level awards. Foundation degrees will need to refer to the foundation degree benchmark statement.
- Multi-disciplinary programmes may need to refer to more than one subject benchmark
- Column 4 List the core modules in which each outcome is achieved.
- Other skills and attributes developed in optional modules will not be listed here. They will appear in the Graduate Attributes and Skills Profile as 'Learning Opportunities' and in Definitive Module Records. You may want to highlight these in the distinctive features (section 11).

Section 13: Approval document

This is also a definitive document. It gives the background to the programme and the foundations on which it is built. It explains and justifies the programme on academic grounds. It includes:

- Rationale
- Market research: potential applicants and employers
- Relationship to external and internal regulations/policies/procedures (including relevant sections of the QAA Code of Practice, University Academic Regulations, Assessment Policy and where appropriate professional body requirements etc)
- Relevant research/scholarship/professional activities
- Resource base
- Programme management structure
- Modes of learning
- Tutorial support
- Careers information and development
- Referencing conventions

Partner Colleges have a template for the approval document that they are required to use. It also includes:

- Links at the University
- CVs of staff on the programme

How to:

- The Quality Handbook <https://staff.plymouth.ac.uk/qahbook/qahindex/intranet.htm> describes the definitive requirements for the approval document.
- Seek help from someone in your School who has written one before as there is quite a lot of work involved. In writing the rationale for example, you may be able to show that your course offers graduates a range of employability skills by researching the careers literature.
- Arrangements for Transition are becoming increasingly important, so discuss the issues with students who have gone through the process.
- Partner College staff will work closely with their academic liaison person to create the approval document.

Section 14: Approval Process

This process is designed to ensure that you have covered all the bases and that your paperwork properly reflects what you intend to do in your new programme or module. After you have put the paperwork together, you will meet with a scrutiny team who will examine the documents and list any updates, amendments or changes that need to be made. Following the meeting those changes must be made before you go forward to the formal approval process.

The formal approval involves a small team of colleagues, including an external peer (and where it is appropriate, representatives from the relevant Professional and Statutory Bodies), in considering the definitive documents. In most cases this is followed by a meeting at which the programme team has the opportunity to answer questions about their programme. The emphasis of these discussions will be on the curriculum; the teaching, learning and assessment strategies adopted; research; scholarly activity and staff development. A standard brief is used by the Approval Panel (**the aide-memoire**). An example is available in the Quality Assurance Handbook. At the end of the approval meeting a brief report is given that may have recommendations or conditions that have to be met prior to final approval. A formal Approval Report is provided using a standard format. Once agreed the definitive documents are held in the Faculty Office.

Most programmes are approved by a **Faculty based process** using the standard University processes and templates. Faculty Boards will be responsible for approving new programmes; Faculty offices will be responsible for holding the definitive copies of the approved documentation including the up to date programme handbook. Partner Colleges have a separate set of procedures and should refer to the UPC Faculty Office for details <http://staff.plymouth.ac.uk/upcfacul/>

The documents required by the panels will always include the Approval Document, the Programme Specification and a programmes outcomes map using the University templates (Appendix F). The Definitive Module Records are also required although some Faculties have decided to discontinue the use of the second page (see section 11).

How to:

- Your Faculty quality administrator will help you prepare for these events.
- Quality office staff are also happy to explain requirements, as helping you get it right before the event saves time at the event itself.
- Contact your Faculty quality administrator if you would like to sit in as an observer on another Approval event to help you understand and anticipate the process.

Section 15: Student Programme Handbook

The handbook will cover everything students need to know about their course. It will be written in clear, student-friendly language using 'you' instead of 'the students'. In order to make it livelier, drawings, photos, pictures etc can be included. This is the opportunity to engage students and communicate the ethos of the department / discipline. The more you can help students anticipate what will happen in the course, the better able they will be to handle it. This could well be reflected in future retention rates.

The Student Programme Handbook can be produced after the programme is approved but it is a required document. It must provide access to the Programme Specification (sections 6, 7, 8, 9, 10), the DMRs (section 11) and the Outcomes Map (section 12)⁵. It will be updated annually and may be required by Review Committees.

You may also have Module Handbooks/outlines for your students. This is NOT a requirement for approval. It will refer to the current delivery of the course e.g. who is teaching it, current assessment tasks, dates of particular events. Providing students with assignment briefs is a requirement of the University's assessment policy.

How to:

- Check with your quality administrator to find out whether there is any Faculty guidance on producing programme and Module handbook
- Choose someone who communicates well with students to put this together. Finding someone with some graphic or desktop publishing skills would be an advantage.
- Have a look at some other handbooks used by programmes in your Faculty. Many of the words you use can be imported from other sources. Foundation degrees have a student handbook template which they are required to use (details are available from the UPC office).
- You will need to ensure that the version of your handbook which is given to students is accessible re size of print, font etc. For example font size will be at least 12 pt using a sans serif font such as Arial. (Waterfield and West 2002).
- Ask a group of students to help write the handbook and ask them to read the final draft. To liven up the handbook include some quotes and tips from a previous cohort eg:

'The project is fun and will really help you understand how it all fits together - but don't leave it till the last moment.'

'Don't miss the early lectures or it will never make sense.'

'The fieldtrips are what made it come alive for me and I got to know the staff well.'

'I know reading intrudes on your social life but you DO need to read X!'

- Students claim that they seldom refer to their handbooks. Despite this it is worth going through the handbook with them as part of their induction. If you get students into the habit of referring to the handbooks before they ask you or email you, your life could become a little easier.

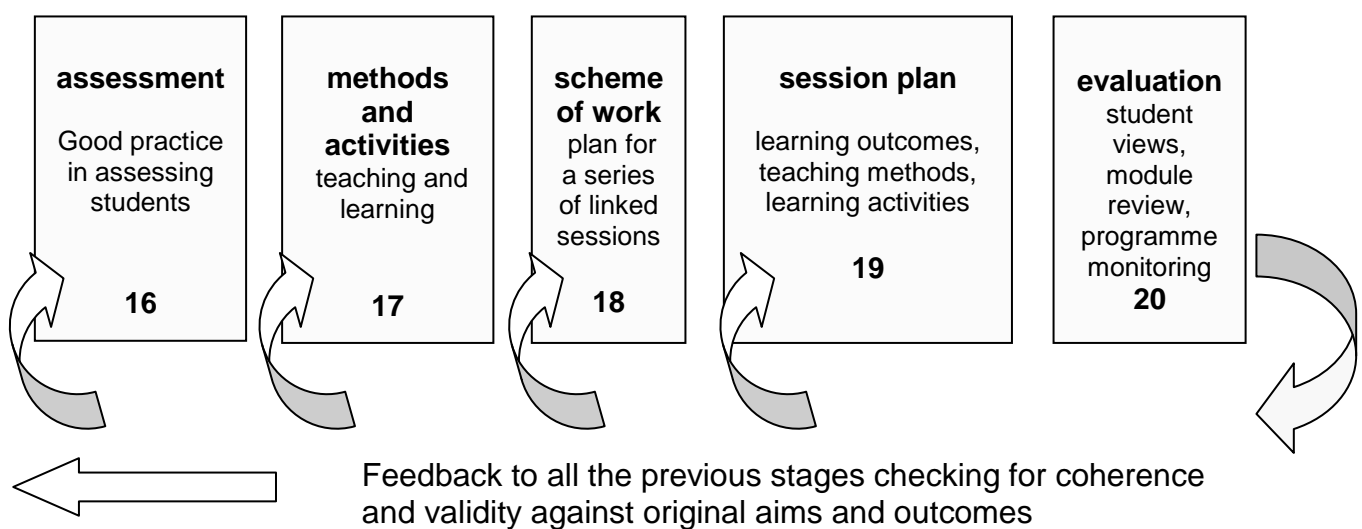
The Programme Specification, DMRs and mapping document need not be in the printed version of the Student Handbook but you need to make them available to students electronically

Design to Delivery

Section 16: Design to delivery

Once the programme documentation is complete and has been approved, the team needs to focus on how it will deliver teaching, learning and assessment. The precise nature of the student learning experience will need to be clear. At this stage you will work out how you will be able to help students achieve the outcomes so that they are able to demonstrate what they can do.

This section of the guide only provides a brief account of the 'design to delivery' process and there are many other sources of information that do this in considerably greater detail. If you would like further guidance on these issues, try batting around a few innovative ideas with other members of your subject team, or contact **Educational Development on Ext. 87608** to arrange an appointment or workshop.



The elements above are not definitive and do not have to be presented for approval. However it is important that they are considered and addressed to ensure there is 'constructive alignment' (*Biggs and Tang, 2007*). From the student's viewpoint these are the elements of the design process that are most likely to contribute to a good experience.

Section 17: Assessment

At first sight it might seem logical to design the learning methods (section 17) before the assessment tasks. However, there is also a rationale for focussing on assessment first to ensure that learning methods align well with assessment. This is referred to as constructive alignment (Biggs and Tang, 2007). It is crucial that assessment tasks are designed so that learners can demonstrate if they have met the learning outcomes. Thus, it will be possible to trace the learning from aims, through outcomes to assessment and grading. This is what Quality Assurance processes will track.

Assignments (see Appendix J) should:

- enable students to show that they have achieved the outcomes;
- make it possible to discriminate how well individuals have succeeded;
- be clear to students;
- be fair to all students;
- be sustainable for all concerned.

How to: You will need to

- introduce the assignment using an **assignment brief**
- design **assessment criteria** for how the students' performance will be judged.
- make sure that assessment is at an appropriate **level**

For example an assessment task at:

- Level one might determine how well a student can *understand and apply* a theory, principle or law
- Level two might determine how well a student can *critically evaluate* that theory
- Level three might determine how well a student can *comprehensively demonstrate the ability to appraise criteria, evaluate, speculate ...*

A major aim of all these processes is to be clear what students do, what they achieved and how well they achieved it. It is also important that the team thinks through assessment practices to ensure a variety of approaches across the programme.

How to:

Try to come at this from the 'blank sheet of paper' approach, (rather than relying on previous practice). Ask:

- what are we really trying to do here?
- what methods will challenge, motivate and engage students?
- what do we need to know our students can do and how do we give them opportunities to demonstrate this?
- what methods suit which elements and which skills?
- do we have a range that allows for different strengths and styles of different students, while still encouraging them to develop their weaker styles?
- how can we help our students show us what they can do?
- when is the best time for a particular part of the curriculum to be assessed?
- is this form of assessment going to help students learn from their mistakes?
- are we giving feedback which will help students learn?
- are we over assessing our students?
- can self, peer and group assessment help students build their judgement?

For a comprehensive exploration of a range of assessment practice, please see **Good Practice in Assessing Students** available from ED online at <http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/view.asp?page=32345>

Section 18: Methods and activities for teaching and learning

This is where the teaching and learning strategies (Section 9) are translated into action. You are not required to give details of teaching and learning methods in the programme specification. This is to avoid tying you down to methods that might become tedious and to allow freedom to adapt to the strengths of different staff.

However, considering methods and activities at the design stage helps create an overall picture of a varied range of learning experiences for students. It is helpful to look at these from the students' perspective by designing activities that will motivate, encourage deep learning and are adaptable to different learning styles. It is also useful to describe how you provide students with formative experiences and feedback to help them develop the knowledge and skills to perform well in summative assessment tasks.

In selecting the teaching, learning and assessment methods best suited to the programme and your students, it is helpful to consider opportunities provided through **work related learning**. These can provide a valuable means of enhancing undergraduate understanding of the subject and its application. Such methods might include work placement, work experience, work based projects, company visits, speakers from industry or other local organisations.

How to . . . In planning learning activities:

- start from your experience of working with students and make a list of some of the activities that have been highly successful
- think about staff expertise and interests
- consider how learning activities need to vary between levels as the work becomes more challenging and rigorous
- design appropriate 'two minute interventions' to re-focus attention during lecture based sessions, as well as longer project or group work activities
- use activities to enable the students to develop and 'own' their subject knowledge, this switches the focus from your delivery to a more significant emphasis on their learning
- ensure that there is continuity between activities to provide opportunities to reinforce skill development

You may find Appendix E useful in identifying a range of learning and teaching methods.

Section 19: Scheme of work

The scheme of work is usually prepared for a module or part of a module. It lists the sessions, their dates, the main outcomes or aims being addressed in each session; the activities and crucially how they relate to formative and summative assessment. Although this is not a required document it will help students (and staff) to understand the structure of the module, anticipate where the workloads will fall and to organise their time and their work. A template of how you might tackle the Scheme of Work is available (Appendix N). There are a variety of other ways you could do this eg a flow chart and you could also show other elements such as student support. Use whatever approach you feel suits your module.

The logical process is to establish the major activities and assessments within a module so that they can be entered into the scheme and then add the sessions planned to lead up to and reinforce them. However, there may be a variety of reasons why other priorities may dictate the structure of the module to some extent.

In organising the sequence of events, where possible incorporate a particularly interesting activity early on to help engage students. Try also to incorporate a short formative assessment (peer or computer marked?) early on so students can gauge how they are doing. A larger formative assessment some time later can help the students identify which areas they have to focus on or simply make them realise that they've got to get on with it.

Out of class time can also be included in the scheme of work. It is important to remember that 1 unit of credit is roughly meant to equate to ten hours of work (in line with the Higher education credit framework for England available at

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/creditframework.pdf>). The scheme of work allows you to map the activity in and beyond the classroom.

Students are sometimes unsure what to do or how to use their own time effectively. At the stage of structuring your schedule, consider what tasks you could or would expect them to do between sessions. Projects are an effective means of getting that engagement. This is not always appropriate but even simple instructions about which chapter(s) to read or a problem(s) to work on will get more involvement. The chances are further improved if the next or subsequent sessions incorporate some feedback (to the whole group - perhaps with self or peer assessment) and/or builds on it in some way or if there is computer aided assessment which students can access to check on their own learning.

How to . . . complete Appendix N:

- Enter the dates of all scheduled sessions (column 1).
- If you are working from an existing pattern of delivery it's probably easiest to list the titles and a short description of the contents of sessions (column 3).
- For each session:
 - Identify the course aim(s) that it addresses (column 2).
 - Note the method ie lecture & tutorial, workshop, independent research for that session (column 4).
- In column 5/6 there would not normally be an entry for each week. However it may be appropriate to do so if you regularly set work for the students to complete before the next session and if it is checked in some way (by you, or peers or themselves).
- Try to show how the formative assessment in column 5 relates to and help build skills required for the summative assessment(s) (column 6).

Section 20: Session Plan

There is no required method of planning sessions. However, the template (Appendix O) offers an approach to help you to plan and link together the elements or episodes of a session i.e.

- how session aim(s) are unpacked into intended learning outcomes
- how these are realised through inputs and learning activities
- how the timings might work out
- what you need to remind yourself to have produced or collected or other things that you have to organise.

The plan also helps you see if you are providing variety of activity within the session to appeal to different learning styles and enable learners to learn actively.

The University is committed to student centred learning. This means coming at the planning of session from the perspective of the student's experience. This differs from teacher centred learning where the lecturer plans what he or she will do - which tends to lead to a 'knowledge transmission' model. If you feel that your session needs to incorporate information delivery, it may be worth considering if some of that role could be done in a range of ways eg through student independent reading, online materials, recordings. The point about student centred learning is that it involves more active approaches. There is a significant body of research which demonstrates that students learn better through what they do. The approach used in the template is designed to incorporate more student activity.

Once you are involved in delivering the session, if something occurs that is exciting the students and is a better way of doing it - do it. Or, if students are struggling with something fundamental, deal with it - although it may mean requiring them to work independently on some of what was missed.

How to . . . complete Appendix O

- The aim of the session - this is teacher focussed, it's what you, the lecturer, intends to do and hope the session will lead to eg 'to explain and explore aspects of X to develop students' understanding of the interconnections and causal factors and make informed judgements.'
- The intended learning outcomes make the aim more concrete. They say exactly what the student will be able to do as the result of the session or a number of linked learning experiences eg lecture and tutorial; lecture and laboratory; set reading and workshop. (Refer to the verbs in Appendix G to help write outcomes)
- For each outcome, think of an activity that would help the student achieve that outcome by the end of the session(s). Start your plan by writing in these activities and what students will do. Such activities need not be time consuming and can be very short. The variety will help the students come freshly to each bit of learning.
- Now put your input around these ie what you will do to set the scene / provide the theory/explain the terms or concepts/facilitate the skill development.
- Now look at the timings and adjust - but don't lose the activities. Check there is variety and that students have to do some work and thinking.
- Note all the things you need to remember eg overhead transparencies/ handouts/PowerPoint/model.
- Afterwards, reflect on the session and note changes for next time. File it.

Section 21: Evaluation

It is essential to evaluate your courses and teaching even though this is sometimes seen as a bureaucratic penance. One of the primary sources of evaluation is student feedback. It is important at the end of a module to check whether students are satisfied with their experiences and are meeting the learning outcomes. Module evaluation complements the University's student perception questionnaire <http://staff.plymouth.ac.uk/quality/spq/> and the National Student Survey <https://exchange.plymouth.ac.uk/intranet/quality/Public/nss/start.htm> as sources of student feedback. The University has introduced a template for module evaluation which can be adapted for your use (Appendix Q).

Not all evaluation need to be done at the end of the module, students will be much more likely to take it seriously if you do some evaluation early in the course and take action - where you can - on the points they make. It is sometimes seen as an end in itself and is not taken seriously. However, students will be more convinced of the value of module evaluation, if they see how past feedback has been taken into account.

There is no point getting the data if you are not going to do something with them, ie analyse them, and decide what changes are feasible. It is not 'failure' to find things that need changing; courses take time to mature. Remember that you cannot change the aims or outcomes in your DMR; however, you can get a sense of the balance and priorities amongst them and react accordingly. Evaluation can prompt useful changes in assessment, teaching schedules, resources, use of accommodation, teaching and learning methods. However avoid changing too many things at once; quite apart from the stress you won't be sure which changes are having what effect. You need time too, to get a perspective on the whole thing, to build more effective resources / case studies / assessment. Through reflection on your data, you and colleagues, can improve the learning experience for the students by developing more appropriate approaches. The University's peer review guidance encourages teaching teams to evaluate aspects of their programmes and modules and can be used as a driver for change.

How to:

- Establish what it is you want to know about e.g. what students feel they have achieved in terms of the outcomes and skills or aspects of them, what they have found difficult/easy/enjoyable/discouraging.
- Check out how much of this will be covered in the end of module questionnaire.
- Decide if you want to investigate some of these at an earlier stage in the course so that you have a chance to resolve issues en route.
- Beware of questionnaire fatigue. Consider if you can you find these things out by means other than a traditional questionnaire e.g. an 'Instant questionnaire' or 'stop/start/continue' post-its, (Gibbs et al 1989).
- At the end of the course you might set up a focus group (ask a third party unconnected with the course to run it), or some other form of evaluation. Or you might consider an alternative approach e.g. where students recount a significant aspect of their learning experience in the form of a story or a learning log.

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