Programme Documentation Guidance – 2016-2017

1) Summary

- In the wake of the University Process Review of programme approval a revised format for Programme Documentation (PD) was devised to facilitate both the preparation and use of PD ensuring better value from staff time spent on core QA processes.
- The new format maintains compliance with national QA developments embodied in the revised QAA Quality Code.
- The former tripartite Approval Document, Programme Specification, and Definitive Module Records has been replaced by: Approval Documentation, Programme Specification, Operational Specification and Module Records together with Guidelines and Aide Memoire for approval panels.
- The new format is consistent with current policies and processes, thereby obviating any need for substantial change elsewhere in the University QA system.
- A key facet of the rationale for the design of the new format is the notion that, together, Programme Specification, Operational Specification and Module Records constitute an ‘Operational Manual’ for all stakeholders involved in the specification, approval, administration, management, delivery and assessment of academic programmes.
- Market Research is more appropriately presented as part of the business case for programme approval/re-approval via current ADPC processes.
- Improved ownership and routine usage of PD by staff is consistent with both University and QAA aspirations for academic quality enhancement.
- Student handbooks need to be more effectively integrated with PD and approval. Student input will be essential to the review process so this will be addressed as a separate stage of the PD revision process.

2) Rationale for Change

Prior to 2013-14 the format of documentation used in the specification and approval of University programmes remained, with minor modifications, essentially the same for over a decade. It generally served its purpose well, as evidenced by the outcomes of successive QAA audits and by positive feedback from External Advisors on Approval and Periodic Review Panels.
One of the key benefits of the long period of stability in format had been a degree of consistency across the University which facilitated the preparation, approval and use of PD. On the other hand, the demanding and time-consuming process of document preparation had been increasingly hampered by versions of templates and guidelines on the Intranet which were out-of date and inconsistent. This, together with the University Process Review, KIS requirements and general evolution of national academic QA precepts were prompts during the 2012-13 academic session to refresh PD to ensure currency, consistency and fitness for purpose.

Programme Specifications and Module Records not only serve to demonstrate compliance with University Regulations and QAA Expectations and Indicators of sound practice, but are working documents that circumscribe the operation and delivery of programmes and are routinely used by non-academic staff directly involved in the management, administration and delivery of programmes.

Accrediting bodies and external members of approval panels routinely ask programme teams to provide greater clarity about operational aspects of PU programmes. It is entirely appropriate to address this especially as the greater clarity and detail sought is in the interests of the student experience, and in practice serves to protect staff in the face of an increasingly litigious culture in HE.

It is germane to remember that PD needs to demonstrate:

- compliance with QAA Expectations and Indicators of sound practice;
- compliance with University and accrediting body regulations, policies and processes;
- evidence of the rigour of the programme planning process;
- concise and transparent specification for the approval, management, delivery, and assessment of academic programmes for all staff and students;
- security as a reference in dealing with appeals and complaints.

3) Revised format of Programme Documentation (Consult also ‘Designing Programmes and Modules document’)

University Programme Documentation now comprises:

- Approval Documentation;
- Programme Specification;
- Operational Specification;
Programme Specification, Operational Specification and Module Records will constitute an operational manual for all staff connected with programme(s). The expectation that these will be used as working documents and referred to beyond the approval is not new, but does need more consistent adherence.

The focus here is the main organisational structure of PD. Many of the headings below will be divided into subsections to ensure that specific issues, like PDP, CPD, distance and e-learning etc receive appropriate attention.

3.1) Approval Documentation
The principal function of Approval Documentation is to provide concise, relevant context about the University, the Faculty, the School, the programme and its evolution. This is particularly important for Approval Panel members, especially external advisors. The intended functions of Approval Documentation are to inform and facilitate the process of approval. In order to conserve time and paper a single document may be used to provide context for a scheme or suite of related programmes. Whilst the information is not definitive it may be of later use in the preparation for Accreditation and for Periodic Review.

Approval Documentation is not definitive and is not subject to programme change regulation.

Normal requirements for a programme or scheme include:

- History and context of past/current programme(s);
- Rationale for new programme/revised programme(s)
- Key drivers for programme design (incl stakeholder input);
- Relevant external and internal regulations/policies/procedures;
- Programme Delivery (T&L strategies, Assessment Strategies, Feedback processes);
- Preparation for employment and personal development;
- Relevant research/scholarship/professional activities;
- Resource base (append summary of ADC process and follow-up issues);
- Summary of consultation/liaison with other programmes/subject areas affected by new or revised programme(s);
- Outline staff CVs.
3.2) **Programme Specification**

Programme Specification constrains the specification and local regulation of programmes. It comprises core information/templates that are used to inform students, colleagues and External Examiners. In the case of appeals and complaints Programme Specification will be used by University boards and, potentially by lawyers and by the OIA.

**Programme Specification is definitive and is subject to programme change regulations.**

Admission criteria will be exempt from this but any changes must be approved, before implementation, by HoS and ADTL and key administration staff notified in a clear and timely manner.

Requirements for each award include:

- Programme Title: Award Titles, Intermediate Awards
- Awarding institution/body; teaching institution(s);
- Accrediting body(ies): specific conditions, regulatory requirements and expected date and process of re-accreditation;
- UCAS and JACS codes;
- Distinctive features of the programme and the student experience;
- Relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Group(s);
- Programme structure: incl pathways, options and progression routes, fieldwork, placements etc;
- Programme aims;
- Programme intended learning outcomes;
- Admissions criteria, including APCL, APEL and DAS arrangements;
- Titles and criteria for final and intermediate awards;
- Exceptions to Regulations.
- Transitional arrangements;
- Mapping and Appendices: ILOs against Modules mapping; Assessment against Module mapping; Skills against Modules mapping; Appendices.
3.3) **Operational Specification**
Operational Specification elucidates the framework and processes to be used in the management, delivery and assessment of programmes/schemes.

**Operational Specification is not definitive and is not subject to programme change regulation.** Changes to Operational Specification should, however, be presented to, and approved by the relevant Programme Committee to ensure appropriate contribution from the students together with technical and administrative staff.

Normal requirements for a programme/scheme include:

- Programme management (including committees, membership, roles and responsibilities, timetable);
- Modes of delivery and assessment (incl alternative and inclusive assessment strategies);
- Feedback processes/policies;
- Specific issues: fieldwork, placements, WBL, partnership progression/articulation arrangements and liaison;
- Management of student choice (options, projects, fieldwork);
- Student support (academic, pastoral, equality and diversity);
- Student liaison, representation and the Student Voice;
- Student Transfer and progression opportunities and arrangements;

3.4) **Module Records**
The MR for each module, as per current practice.

**Specified elements of MRs are definitive and are subject to programme change regulation**

3.5) **Student Handbooks**
At present programme student handbooks (SH) must be submitted after the approval event and updated (and approved) annually (see page 24 of [Designing Programmes and Modules handbook](#)).

4) **Written style**
In order to facilitate the ease of use of operational documents it is recommended that the written style is concise and focused with judicious use of short paragraphs, bulleted lists, tables and, where essential, appendices. A comprehensive Contents list should be provided for each document.
The text and page should be formatted as follows:

- 12pt Arial;
- Left justified;
- Double sided;
- 3rd person idiom;
- Margins: 2.5 cm;
- Footer page numbers programme title(s) and date of approval;

It is helpful for readers with dyslexia or other perception issues to employ 1.2 or 1.3 line spacing and to minimise the use of text framed in boxes.

Updated July 2015