



GUIDELINES ON PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

Some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ):

- A How do programme design and curriculum mapping link to programme specification?**
- B Who are programme specifications for?**
- C Which programmes need a specification?**
- D Which pro forma should I use?**
- E Where can I get more advice?**
- F How should I use these guidelines?** Please see this FAQ (below) for a section by section guide to completing the subject and programme specification pro forma.

A How do programme design and curriculum mapping link to programme specification?

The programme specification is considered to reflect the principles of programme design to which the programme team are committed. Some of the current issues/concerns are: level of difficulty for the learner, ensuring there is progression in level of difficulty throughout the programme, appropriate balance between different elements in the curriculum, appropriateness of the programme to typical students needs, programme coherence and appropriate use of reference points (for detailed information on reference points please see below).

The programme specification is one element of the documentation the University uses to communicate the key feature of programmes to students. The module specifications also should be written to show how they support the students' achievement of the intended learning outcomes at the programme level. For example, if the students are to be able to demonstrate the ability to work with others as a programme level learning outcome, a programme which includes no group work and whose modules are assessed purely by written examination probably cannot be said to have been designed to achieve this objective.

In order to help with this aspect of programme specification the University has produced a pro forma for a **curriculum map**. The curriculum map should be completed as part of developing a programme specification. It is a part of the documentation needed for all internal quality processes but will not be made available externally.

B Who are programme specifications for?

Programme specifications may be seen by a wide range of people including prospective students and applicants, their parents, careers guidance officers in schools, students currently studying on the programme, employers, internal and external academic colleagues involved in University processes, representatives of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and employers. In accordance with the requirements of the Higher Education Funding Council programme specifications will be made available outside the University (probably as electronic documents via the web) in due course. As with all public information, specifications should be reliable, accurate and complete.

C Which programmes need a specification?

Programme specifications should be available for all *ab initio* qualifications up to Masters Level (Level 4) which (i) have a substantial taught component and (ii) are within the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). *Ab initio* qualifications are free-standing qualifications which students can register/enrol on from the beginning. The Ordinary Degree, for example, is not an *ab initio* award because, although they might register/enrol for it eventually, students may not register/enrol for an Ordinary Degree from the beginning of their programme. Qualifications which are only offered as interim awards (like the Pass Degree) are not *ab initio* awards. Most degrees and some certificate and diploma awards are *ab initio* awards.

Some programmes, commonly Masters programmes, may include an *ab initio* Postgraduate Certificate, *ab initio* Postgraduate Diploma and a Masters award. In these cases the information required in the programme specification pro forma is needed for each *ab initio* award e.g. learning outcomes should be identified for the PgC and PgD as well as the Masters. It is anticipated that the learning outcomes for the PgC and PgD in such cases will normally be a subset of those for the Masters. It should be possible to include the information for programmes which include *ab initio* intermediate awards in a single pro forma. You may also choose to write a separate specification for each award if preferred.

Programme specifications are not requested for programmes offered entirely by individual research, or which are at Doctoral Level, e.g. the MPhil, PhD or DSc.

Specifications should be available for the following: BA, BSc, BEng, MEng, MPharm, MChem, MA, MBA, MSc, MRes, Foundation Degree, *ab initio* Certificate of Higher Education/Diploma of Higher Education (undergraduate) and Postgraduate Certificate/Postgraduate Diploma (postgraduate). For advice about any other awards not listed above please contact Sarah Davies, Lesley Price or Gillian Simpson in Registry (contact details are given in the response to FAQ E below).

D Which pro forma should I use?

Please use EITHER

1. 'subject specification' pro forma, curriculum map and module specification pro forma OR
2. 'programme specification' pro forma, curriculum map and module specification pro forma

The University has adopted two methods for programme specification: (i) 'subject specification' for subjects that are part of the Combined Honours Scheme or for Major and Minor subjects that are part of multidisciplinary Major/Minor Programmes and (ii) 'programme specification' for all other programmes including interdisciplinary Joint and interdisciplinary Major/Minor Programmes.

The different pro forma reflect the fact that programmes in the Combined Honours Scheme are multi-disciplinary. Major/Minor Programmes (normally titled 'X with Y') may be interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary. Please choose the appropriate proforma depending on the level of integration within the programme. All other University programmes are fully integrated (interdisciplinary or Single Honours).

A curriculum map should be developed for all programmes.

E Where can I get more advice?

These notes contain the answers to the FAQs about programme specification (see **F How should I use these guidelines?** for more detail about what the notes include). For further information please contact the members of staff listed below:

Development of programme specifications (new and existing programmes):

Sarah Davies (Registry) Extension 4657

Lesley Price (Registry) Extension 4656

Gillian Simpson (Registry) Extension 4682

Procedures for programme approval:

Sarah Davies, Lesley Price or Gillian Simpson in Registry

(s.j.davies@aston.ac.uk, l.a.price@aston.ac.uk, g.simpson@aston.ac.uk)

UCAS or JACS Codes ONLY:

All Programmes:

The full list of JACS codes is available at the HESA website:

http://www.hesa.ac.uk/dox/jacs/JACS_complete.pdf.

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See also: <http://www1.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/planning/statutory-returns/modules-jacs-costcentres/>

Jo Hughes (Registry) Extension 4686

F How should I use these guidelines?

These notes on programme and subject specification include advice for all of the types of programme that need a specification. They can be read as a whole or you can choose to read the guidance for a particular section by clicking on the section title you are interested in the web-based version of the guidance.

1. Programme Title	9 Programme Accredited By
2 UCAS Code	10 Date Programme Specification Written and Revised
3 School/Subject Area	11 Educational Aims of the Programme
4 Final Award	12 Relevant Subject Benchmark Statement(s) and other External and Internal Reference Points used to inform programme outcomes
5 Interim Award(s)	13 Programme Structures and Requirements: Levels, Modules and Credits
6 Mode(s) of study	14 Programme Learning Outcomes: knowledge and understanding, intellectual skills, professional/subject specific skills and transferable skills
7 Normal Length of Programme	15 Learning and Teaching and Assessment Strategies to enable outcomes to be achieved
8 Total Credits	

Section 1: Programme title.

The programme title is the 'name' of the award e.g 'Chemical Engineering'. The award e.g. BSc, BEng, MSc etc should be listed separately in Section 4 of the specification.

The use of different programme titles is justified by the distinctive content of

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programmes which lead to different award titles. As programme titles reflect the intended programme learning outcomes, programmes with different titles are expected to have different learning outcomes. Please read the section on learning outcomes before finalising your programme title.

The extent of variation in learning outcomes will generally reflect the extent of the variation in the title, for example, degree programmes may be offered which indicate a specialism by adding the specialism in brackets after the single subject pathway, such as BEng Chemical Engineering (Management Studies). This type of title denotes a strong flavour of the bracketed subject in Level 3 and this may be demonstrated by the range of final year options, a requirement for a specialist project and/or the availability of specialist work-placements.

Section 2: UCAS or JACS Code

Please fill in the UCAS Code for undergraduate programmes or the JACS Code for postgraduate programmes. The University has procedures for assigning the codes to new programmes.

For new undergraduate programmes only (UCAS Code) please contact the appropriate School Admissions Tutor in the first instance. The UCAS code for existing programmes is available in the UCAS Directory and in the prospectus.

For queries please contact:

Jo Hughes (Registry) ext 4686

HESA website: http://www.hesa.ac.uk/dox/jacs/JACS_complete.pdf.

See also: <http://www1.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/planning/statutory-returns/modules-jacs-costcentres/>

Section 3: School/Subject Area

Please indicate the School and subject area responsible for the programme. If there is input from more than one subject area/School please indicate clearly in which subject the programme is based (E.g. Mechanical Engineering with input from XXX). For collaborative programmes please include the full name of the collaborating body. If you are not sure whether the programme is collaborative you should seek advice from Sarah Davies, Lesley Price or Gillian Simpson in Registry (s.j.davies@aston.ac.uk, l.a.price@aston.ac.uk, g.simpson@aston.ac.uk).

Section 4: Final Award

This may be a Degree of the University, or a Certificate or Diploma if these are offered as *ab initio* awards.

The degrees (awards) of the University which should have a programme specification are as follows:

Certificate of Higher Education CertHE,
Diploma of Higher Education DipHE,
Foundation Degree FdSc/FdA/FdEng,
Bachelor's Degree BSc/BA/BEng/LLB,
Graduate Diploma, Grad Dip
Postgraduate Certificate, PgC
Postgraduate Diploma PgD,
Integrated Master's Degree MEng/MPharm/MChem,
Taught Master's Degree MSc/MA/MBA/MRes/LLM,
Professional Doctorate EngD/OD/DBA

The Ordinary Degree and the Pass Degree are not *ab initio* awards and do not require a programme specification. For any degrees not included in this list please contact Sarah Davies, Lesley Price or Gillian Simpson in Registry (s.j.davies@aston.ac.uk, l.a.price@aston.ac.uk, g.simpson@aston.ac.uk).

Ab initio Certificates and Diplomas are free-standing qualifications which students enrol on from the beginning of the programme (i.e. not interim awards) normally the Certificate of Higher Education/Diploma of Higher Education (undergraduate) and Postgraduate Certificate/Postgraduate Diploma (postgraduate).

For any other Certificate or Diploma awards please contact Sarah Davies, Lesley Price or Gillian Simpson in Registry (s.j.davies@aston.ac.uk, l.a.price@aston.ac.uk, g.simpson@aston.ac.uk).

Section 5: Interim awards

By definition an interim award is one which a student receives if he or she leaves their programme before completing it, having amassed the appropriate credits. It is not possible to register or enrol for an interim award as a freestanding programme from the beginning (for free-standing or *ab initio* Certificates and Diplomas please see Section 4 above).

The programme specification should include the interim awards available. Normally these are: Certificate of Higher Education/Diploma of Higher Education or Postgraduate Certificate/Postgraduate Diploma (for interim awards of any other name please seek advice from Sarah Davies, Lesley Price or Gillian Simpson in Registry (s.j.davies@aston.ac.uk, l.a.price@aston.ac.uk, g.simpson@aston.ac.uk). Please use the full name of the award (i.e. Certificate of Higher Education or Postgraduate Certificate not 'Certificate') in order to ensure that the information given to readers (who may be applicants or other lay people) is complete and accurate.

It will be assumed that the titles of any interim undergraduate and postgraduate awards are the same as the title of the final award given in the

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programme specification (unless otherwise indicated).

The learning outcomes for interim awards should not be included in the programme specification, however, different interim award titles should represent distinctive content i.e. different interim award titles should not be available if the academic content/modules are the same. Different interim and final award titles might be necessary for programmes that specialise mainly at Level 3. If a different title is required for the interim award(s) the required title(s) should be included in this section.

Section 6: Modes of study

Please specify whether the programme is full-time, part-time, full-time by distance learning and/or part-time by distance learning. Please also indicate if the programme has (i) an optional or (ii) a compulsory placement year.

Programmes must be approved in distance learning mode of study (as well as 'standard' mode) by Senate before they can be offered. There are national guidelines on distance learning programmes which may be helpful. Please see the **reference points section** (Section 12) for more information.

Section 7: Normal length of programme

The normal length of the programme is how long a typical student would normally be expected to take to complete the programme e.g. 4 academic years for a full-time programme with placement year or 1 calendar year for a full time Master's. You can find guidance on University regulations about fulltime and part-time modes of study in the 'General Regulations on Undergraduate Programmes' or the 'General Regulations for Postgraduate Taught Programmes' as appropriate. Distance Learning programmes are expected to be of the same normal length as the equivalent 'standard' mode of study.

Section 8: Total Credits

Please list the total number of credits required for all final awards. You can find guidance on University regulations in the 'General Regulations on Undergraduate Programmes' or the 'General Regulations for Postgraduate Taught Programmes' as appropriate.

Section 9: Programme accreditation

If the programme, or part of the programme, is accredited by a professional, statutory or regulatory body (e.g. IMechE, BPS, AMBA) please give details of the accreditation, including any exemptions or non-University awards offered for successful completion of the programme, and the full name of the awarding body. The programme specification is intended for lay people, such as applicants, students and employers, who may not know the acronyms used in the discipline so please use full names/titles in this section.

Section 10: Dates written and revised

The date at which the programme specification was written, and the dates of major revisions should be included for reference e.g. written January 2007, major revision July 2008. For this purpose a major revision is one which involves significant changes to the aims, learning outcomes, and/or learning and teaching or assessment strategies. The date of minor changes to learning outcomes, or changes in option modules which do not impact on the overall aims and learning outcomes need not be noted in this section.

Section 11: Educational aims of the programme

Educational aims are normally broader and more general than learning outcomes. They address what the programme aims to achieve from the perspective of the student. Educational aims are different from strategic aims. Strategic aims address what the programme aims to achieve from the perspective of the University and School e.g. to attract a greater number of overseas/postgraduate students, to enhance the University's provision in the area of XXX subject. This type of strategic aim should not be included in the programme specification. Staff are reminded of the strong emphasis placed by the University on the relevance of programmes to graduates' future careers. Educational aims should reflect the importance of this.

Section 12: Relevant subject benchmark statements and other external and internal reference points used to inform programme outcomes

Please list here the reference points you have used in designing the programme. The use of reference points is now a common feature in programme design for both new and existing programmes within the University and more widely within the UK HE sector, and has the support of the Higher Education Funding Council and other sector-wide bodies. The aim of using reference points is to ensure that the outcomes planned for students have currency within the academic, professional and employer communities. Some key reference points programme design should take account of are given below. Please take the relevant reference points into account in the design of your programme.

- University Mission and Strategic Plan
- School Strategic Plan
- University Learning and Teaching Strategy
- Current research or other advanced scholarship in the field or carried out by members of staff
- Employers' views
- Relevant subject benchmark statement(s) (all undergraduate programmes and MBA and MEng)
- Foundation Degree benchmark statement
- Requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies or occupational standards in fields where these are relevant
- Framework for Higher Education Qualifications/Qualification Descriptors
- HEFCE/QAA Code of Practice on Collaborative Provision (programmes offered in collaboration with other institutions only)

- University Guidance on Collaborative Provision
- HEFCE/QAA Guidelines on Distance Learning (Distance learning programmes only)

How to use the reference points

Programme specifications should reflect or articulate with these general points

of reference e.g. it is anticipated that programmes will support the University and School Strategic Plans, and will contribute to the Learning and Teaching Strategy. Programme specifications are not expected to reproduce or copy passages which exist in reference material, e.g. in the Subject Benchmarks, but should interpret them in light of the individual programme. In particular the key reference points should be given careful consideration when defining the educational aims and the learning outcomes of the programme.

Section 13: Programme Structures and Requirements; Levels; Modules, and Credits

You can find guidance on University regulations in the 'General Regulations on Undergraduate Programmes' or the 'General Regulations for Postgraduate Taught Programmes' as appropriate.

For national guidance on credit volumes and on Levels see the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. The Qualification Descriptors are a useful reference when determining how to express learning outcomes at the appropriate Level.

Staff developing Foundation Degree programmes should note that programme outcomes should be at the Intermediate Level by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications i.e. at the University's Level 2.

Section 14: Programme learning outcomes: knowledge and understanding; skills and other attributes

14.1 Learning outcomes should reflect the award title of the programme.

14.2 The learning outcomes describe what such students will be able to do when they have successfully completed the programme. Learning outcomes should be 'threshold' outcomes i.e. those that a student who successfully completes the programme and gains the award offered regardless of degree classification. They may not represent all of the outcomes that will be achieved by a first class or 2.1 student.

14.3 The University has decided not to include learning outcomes for interim awards in the programme specification (except where students may register/enrol for these awards *ab initio* i.e. from the beginning).

14.4 Level

Learning outcomes should be written to reflect the Level of a

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programme. Generally speaking the learning outcomes of an undergraduate degree programme (excluding Foundation Degrees which are Level 2) should be at Level 3, and those of a Master's programme at Level 4. If you are unsure about the Level of your programme please contact Sarah Davies, Lesley Price or Gillian Simpson in Registry (s.j.davies@aston.ac.uk, l.a.price@aston.ac.uk, g.simpson@aston.ac.uk).

The Qualification Descriptors of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) are a useful guide to the general features of qualifications at different Levels. The Levels described are:

<u>FHEQ</u>	<u>University</u>
Certificate (C)	Level 1
Intermediate (I)	Level 2
Honours (H)	Level 3
Masters (M)	Level 4

Please note the University's Level P (describing the placement year)

- 14.5 Staff are reminded of the strong emphasis placed by the University on the relevance of programmes to graduates' future careers. Learning outcomes should reflect the importance of this.
- 14.6 It is recommended that you include at least one learning outcome which is specific to successful completion of the placement (where a placement is offered) and indicate this in the specification e.g. by including (placement only) after the relevant outcome. The outcome(s) should be at the same Level as the other programme outcomes i.e. Level 3 for Degree programmes and Level 4 for Masters programmes.
- 14.7 The University has decided that programme specifications should record the intended learning outcomes in terms of the following categories:
- Knowledge and Understanding (all programmes)
 - Intellectual Skills (all programmes)
 - Professional Skills (accredited/professional programmes only)
 - Transferable Skills (all programmes)

Knowledge and Understanding

It is expected that the majority of outcomes here will relate to specific subject knowledge.

Intellectual Skills

Examples include: Problem formulation, assessing information, searching literature, data analysis, developing arguments.

Professional Skills

This section is for programmes that have a strong link to a profession, particularly those which confer a 'licence to practice' on successful completion by the student or which are accredited by a Professional or Statutory Body (PSB) such as the IEE or the BPS. Where a well-known set of skills or 'competancies' exists for a professional programme (possibly required by the professional body) it may be helpful to both staff and students to identify these as a separate category although professional skills may cut across the other categories.

Programmes which do not involve a direct link to a profession should omit this section as learning outcomes specified here will normally overlap with those specified in the other three learning outcomes sections.

Transferable skills

Examples include: presentation skills (data presentation, oral communication, report writing, word processing, desktop publishing), management skills (setting objectives, project planning and management, progress review, time management, working with others, person management), personal skills (independent thought, self reliance, self-discipline, self-criticism). Please note personal skills can be difficult to assess.

Sections 15 and 16: Learning and Teaching and Assessment Strategies to enable outcomes to be achieved

- 15.1 Programme specifications should help students to understand the teaching and learning and assessment methods that enable the learning outcomes to be achieved.
- 15.2 All learning outcomes written in a programme specification should be supported by an appropriate learning and teaching method.
- 15.3 All learning outcomes must be formally assessed. Schools are encouraged to adopt as varied an approach to assessment methods, as is appropriate to the subject matter. Care should also be taken to ensure that students are not over-assessed
- 15.4 Some learning and teaching and assessment methods may be considered more appropriate than others for developing particular types of learning outcome. The methods used may also reflect other factors such as the profile of the students on admission (e.g. a diverse profile may necessitate specialist teaching in mathematics or writing skills for particular sub-sets of students).
- 15.5 There are few straightforward rules about which learning and teaching and assessment strategies to use. The key points are to ensure these are appropriate to the subject, the type of students that typically undertake the programme and to the intended programme learning

outcomes. The following are very general points which may be of assistance but which should not be interpreted rigidly:

Knowledge and understanding of a subject is often developed through lectures and seminars. Such direct teaching methods are usually supported by directed study of textbooks and journal articles (hard copy or electronic) and by assignment or project work. Knowledge and understanding is often assessed through unseen written examinations, but most if not all assessment methods will require some demonstration of knowledge and understanding.

Intellectual skills such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and problem solving may be practised and demonstrated through more active learning processes involving assignments or projects, group-learning activity such as a seminar or tutorial, laboratory, workshop, or fieldbased activity. Assessment of intellectual skills can utilise unseen written examinations or problem-based exercises. Independent project work or research dissertations are typically used to demonstrate capability in a range of intellectual skills linked to specialist knowledge, understanding and practical skills.

Professional skills can include skills from any of the other categories and are usually defined in conjunction with a professional body. Often professional skills need to be developed through opportunities to practise the activity in an appropriate learning context (e.g. in laboratory, field, or workplace placement). Work-books or guidance manuals may also be used to support learning. Assessment of competence in exercising a practical skill must involve practical demonstration of it.

Transferable skills, that are readily transferable to employment and other contexts, such as communication, teamwork etc can be developed through naturally arising opportunities within the curriculum. For example, written communication skills can be developed and assessed through essays or dissertations; oral communication skills through presentations in seminars; or team working skills through collaborative projects. Assessment of competence in exercising a practical skill must involve practical demonstration of it e.g. oral presentation skills should be assessed by an oral presentation.

Section 16: Entry Requirements

Please include any requirements which are in addition to the General Regulations.

Section 17: Programme Regulations

Please include any requirements which are in addition to the General Regulations. Please do not repeat or copy the General Regulations. Key matters which need to be included are given below.

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Undergraduate programmes: Attendance requirements, industrial/professional training, Ordinary Degree.

Postgraduate programmes: Requirements for the award of distinction and merit.

Section 18: Further information

This section of the pro forma is intended for any further information you wish to include which might be helpful to current students, applicants or other readers. Possibilities include information on admissions criteria and procedures: placement opportunities, how the curriculum helps graduates to develop employability skills and support provided for students' academic development e.g. personal tutoring.

Distance learning programmes may wish to include specific information about the academic guidance and support provided for students.

It may be helpful to include a section on where to find further information about the programme e.g. web-site address, contact information for admissions tutor etc.

Please do not include any extracts of General Regulations in the specification.

Examples of completed programme specifications

Programme specifications are stored in a shared folder that all staff can access. To get to the folder paste the following link into a browser:

\\nas\shared\progspec.

You will not be able to make any changes within the folder as this is the responsibility of the Schools/Interdisciplinary Studies.

If you have any questions or experience technical problems please contact Gillian Simpson in Registry (g.simpson@aston.ac.uk).