Guidance Notes on

the Preparation of

Programme Specifications

1.   The General Context

1.1   The Scottish Funding Council requires that programme specifications must be available in all HEIs for the purposes of internal review and as part of the evidence base for QAA institutional review.[1] This follows on from earlier recommendations in the Dearing and Garrick Reports and by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

1.2   At national level, the expectation is that universities' internal quality management systems should focus on whether intended learning outcomes (ILOs), as articulated by the specification:

- are able to be achieved;
- are achieved by students as demonstrated by their performance in formally assessed work;
- are appropriate to the position of that award within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) (i.e. reflect the relevant generic level descriptor within the Framework); and
- reflect any relevant Subject Benchmark Statement.

1.3   Consequently, programme specifications must take into account:

o   *SCQF level descriptors* which set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level.[2] They are intended to provide a general, shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels. The most relevant level descriptors are included in Appendix 1.

o   *QAA subject benchmarks* which "describe the nature and characteristics of programmes in a specified subject. They also represent general expectations about the standards for the award of qualifications at a given level and articulate the attributes and capabilities that those possessing such qualifications should be able to demonstrate." The QAA subject benchmark statements can be found at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements

o   *QAA Code of Practice* which requires institutions to support students in acquiring knowledge and skills and to demonstrate their acquisition. Precept 6 of Section 6 on the Assessment of Students states "Institutions (should) ensure that the amount and timing of assessment enables effective and appropriate measurement of the student's achievement of intended learning outcomes." The QAA Code of Practice can be found at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/code-of-practice/Pages/default.aspx

Programme specifications can also take account of:

- current research or other advanced scholarship carried out by the academic staff;
- the University's and School's mission statements;
- any University, College or School policies on development of skills and employability in fields such as communication, information, technology, team working, etc.;

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[1]   Details available at www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/enhancement-led-institutional-review

[2] QAA Code of Practice on Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review, described "level" as "an indicator of the relative demand, complexity, depth of study and learner autonomy involved in a programme".

- graduate attributes – further information is available in the guidance on programme and course development and design (see: www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/qea/progdesignapproval/programmedesign/ ;
- requirements of professional and statutory regulatory bodies;
- occupational standards;
- national key skill standards.

2. Purpose of Programme Specifications

2.1 Programme specifications are intended to provide the core factual information to a range of stakeholders, including students or potential students, about a programme of study. [For this purpose, the University definitions for programme[3] and course[4] apply.]

2.2 It is University Policy that programme specifications at the University of Glasgow should be primarily aimed at current and potential students, so they should be written in language that students will understand – plain English, no jargon and a good average sentence length.

2.3 When a School designs a new programme, or redesigns an existing programme, it is strongly recommended that development of the programme specification should guide the process *from start to finish*. The programme specification focuses attention on the key questions that should be addressed during programme design.

2.4 Programme specifications will also be required as part of the documentation for the approval of any new programme and for the Periodic Subject Review.

2.5 Programme specifications should be readily available and will have multiple placings. They will be published online (www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/programmesearch/) and should also be incorporated into student handbooks. The University is required to make programme specifications publicly available on its website and to provide a link to the Teaching Quality Information pages of the Higher Education and Research Opportunity[5] (HERO) website.

Programme specifications are also likely to be of interest to employers and to academic and institutional reviewers, although not primarily directed to this audience. They will be referred to on the forthcoming HEAR (Higher Education Achievement Report) which will be issued to Glasgow graduates from June 2012 onwards. The HEAR will include a weblink to the published programme specifications to provide detailed information on the programme structure and content for employers etc.

2.6 Given the Funding Council's requirement for programme specifications as part of the Public Information on Quality data set, these documents must provide an overview of a programme of study. In more specific terms, the QAA states that programme specifications should set out clearly and concisely the:

- aims and intended learning outcomes of a programme;

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[3] Programme = the defining set of courses which lead to an award.

[4] Course = a unit of study on a particular topic with defined aims, intended learning outcomes, mode(s) of delivery, assessment scheme, and credit value.

[5] The HERO website is supported by all the UK funding and research councils, and by Universities UK (UUK) and the Standing Conference of Principles (SCOP). The website will contain a "Teaching Quality Information" (TQI) area. In common with other UK universities, this university will have to post information on the HERO website. Programme specifications will form part of this information.

- teaching and learning methods that enable learners to achieve these outcomes and the assessment methods used to demonstrate their achievement;
- relationship of the programme and its study elements to the qualifications framework.[6]

3. Preparing Programme Specifications

3.1 These guidance notes should be used for the preparation of programme specifications. Cross-references to other guidance or information sources are included. The University's programme specification template is provided in PIP.

3.2 The Learning & Teaching Centre (LTC) will provide support and advice in preparing programme specifications. Named staff from the LTC's Academic Development Unit offer guidance and advice to staff in specific Colleges so please contact your LTC representative directly for further advice/details. The LTC also provides extensive guidance on programme development and design: see www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/qea/progdesignapproval/programmedesign/#tabs=1

3.3 Programme specifications are required for all new programmes. They should also be updated annually. Senate Office will request that Schools update their documents each summer in advance of the new session.

3.4 Programme specifications should be developed for programmes lasting one or more years and leading to a final undergraduate or taught postgraduate award[7]. Programme specifications should not be produced separately for interim awards[8], but possible exit points can be identified in the specification.

Accordingly:

1. Each School should produce a programme specification for its single honours programme(s) [except where the same degree is delivered in more than one College – see 5 below], and for its PGT programmes.

2. Separate programme specifications are not required for early exit awards. Discrete programme specifications are only required for designated degrees, certificates or diplomas where students are explicitly recruited to these.

3. One programme specification may be sufficient to cover a number of closely related degree programmes where there is **substantive commonality** between the programmes, including Programme Aims, ILOs, Assessment Methods, and Teaching & Learning Approaches. It is not appropriate to group programmes in one programme specification if this produces a lengthy document with different sets of aims, ILOs etc. for different named streams. As a rule, no more than two streams should be included in the same programme specification, as they will necessarily have differences in their aims, ILOs and structure.

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[6] For information on the Qualifications Framework in Scotland please consult http://scqf.org.uk/

[7] An award is a degree, certificate or diploma which is conferred following the successful completion of a defined programme of study. This might be a one-year Certificate of Higher Education, a three-year ordinary/general/designated degree, a four-year Honours degree, or a one-year Masters programme.

[8] Such as the Certificate/Diploma of Higher Education, or a Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma where the same programme leads to a Masters award.

4. MSci and MEng degrees should have separate programme specifications from Bachelor awards in the same discipline as there should be different aims and intended learning outcomes between these levels of award.

5. A single programme specification should be produced where the same degree is delivered in more than one College (e.g. Geography, or Psychology). The School in which the programme is primarily located should be responsible for its specification and the College in which that School resides is responsible for approval. Other Colleges offering the degree should be advised of any development or update of the specification.

6. Each School should produce a programme specification covering its half of any joint honours programmes to which it contributes. In most cases one programme specification should suffice for this purpose. Joint designated degree programmes would be included as exit awards in the honours programme specification, or as separate documents if the designated degrees are explicitly recruited to on a separate UCAS code.

7. The Schools concerned should jointly produce a programme specification for any integrated honours programme to which they contribute.

8. Programme specifications are not required for research programmes. [9]

4. Approval of Programme Specifications

All Programme Specifications have to be approved through College Board of Studies and subsequently by the Academic Standards Committee.

Programme specifications are required for any new programmes, or for programmes undergoing a major change and should be submitted for approval to College Board of Studies and Academic Standards Committee as part of the programme approval process. The usual timescales for programme approval are provided in our guidance, see:
www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/qea/progdesignapproval/progapproval/timetable/

5. The University's Programme Specification Template

The programme specification template has been designed to help departments through the process of compiling programme specifications for their programmes of study, and is available on the PIP system. Please note that all sections of the template must be completed.

General guidance has been included in the template in red *italicised* text, which will be deleted in PIP when the programme specification has been approved so will not be published. More detailed guidance follows.

5.1 *General Information (Fields 1–12)*

These fields should be straightforward to complete as they contain factual information. Where the field is not applicable, please leave blank (e.g. accreditation details in Field 11).

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[9] These principles were approved by Education Committee on 15 December 2004 and confirmed by Academic Standards Committee on 3 October 2008.

5.2 *Programme Aims (Field 13)*

(i) This field should state what the University/School aims to provide to students through the programme. Start with a short introductory paragraph describing the subject of study covered by the programme, explaining the nature of the subject (particularly for the benefit of potential students who have not studied it before) and outlining what is involved in the study of the subject at university level. Emphasise any distinctive features of the programme, e.g., the benefits of studying in a research-led environment.

(ii) Following this introductory paragraph, list the principal aims (normally not more than about 6) of the programme. This would normally be done in bullet points, though text could be used if this were considered to be more appropriate. The list of aims should be designed for the programme overall.

5.3 *Intended Learning Outcomes of Programme[10] (Field 14)*

(i) This field should describe the programme's intended learning outcomes (ILOs) and should reflect the core attributes of a graduate of the programme. The ILOs should describe what all students should be able to do, in terms of particular knowledge and understanding, qualities, skills and other attributes. The ILOs should be written at a level that reflects the final award, using active verbs. With the exception of the final grade or classification of awards, all assessment at Glasgow is conducted at course level. It will therefore be necessary to ensure that instruments of assessment which will test the achievement of Programme ILOs are built into course structures (see also 5.4).

(ii) There can be confusion between ILOs at the programme level and ILOs at the individual course level. Programme specifications are directly concerned only with programme ILOs. When developing programme ILOs, it is important to ensure that no permitted selection of option courses would deny students the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of all of the programme ILOs. In practice this means that the programme ILOs must all be achievable through core and option courses. It may prove helpful to map the relationship between programme ILOs and courses clearly to be sure that all students will have the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the ILOs.

(iii) ILOs should be developed in consultation with any relevant QAA subject benchmark statements and other relevant reference points as listed in section 1.3 above should be consulted. Compliance with QAA subject benchmark statements is not compulsory, but the School should be in a position to provide a clear rationale, which has the support of the relevant academic staff in the School, for any deviation from what is set out in the subject benchmark. It is advisable to record this rationale in writing at the time when the programme specification is drafted, so that it can be referred to in the context of internal subject review processes so avoiding any confusion arising from changes in School personnel.

(iv) The set of ILOs should be categorised as follows (in the same manner as many subject benchmark statements). Each category should be addressed.

- *Knowledge and Understanding*

  The knowledge and understanding that a student will be expected to have upon completion (such as "theoretical knowledge of the principles and methods of archaeology" or "knowledge of the major types of chemical reaction and the main characteristics associated with them").

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[10] Further information is available at:
www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/qea/progdesignapproval/progdesign/ilosguidelines/

- *Skills and Other Attributes*

    This category of ILOs can then be further subdivided into subject-specific/practical skills, intellectual skills, and transferable/key skills. The boundary lines between these sub-categories may not always be clear, and the department may have to decide into which sub-category certain skills fit most logically. For example, something deemed to be a transferable skill in one discipline may be more appropriately categorised as a subject-specific/practical skill field in another discipline.

    <u>Subject-Specific/Practical Skills</u>: For example, laboratory skills, scientific report writing, research skills and methods, etc.

    <u>Intellectual Skills</u>: For example, ability to analyse, criticise or synthesis, ability to formulate and test concepts and hypotheses, ability to solve problems and ability to learn independently.

    <u>Transferable/Key Skills</u>: Suggestions for inclusion in the transferable/key skill field are listed below. However this list is not exhaustive and Schools may want to include other skills that are relevant.

• oral communication skills	• numeracy
• written communication skills	• information retrieval and research skills
• graphical communication skills	• interpersonal skills
• oral and visual presentation skills	• forward planning
• teamwork	• time management
• leadership	• self evaluation
• negotiation skills	• IT skills e.g. web, word processing, spreadsheets, etc

5.4   *Assessment methods (Field 15)*

(i)   This field should detail how the assessment for the programme (conducted via course assessments) is structured to ensure that the learning outcomes are tested effectively, i.e. in such a way that enables all students to demonstrate achievement of outcomes to the best of their ability. It is not necessary to list every assessment method used in every course or to cross-refer assessment methods to the ILOs. A list of the methods used is sufficient.

(ii)   Before including an ILO in a programme specification, the School must be satisfied that there are courses within the programme which allow students to demonstrate the actual achievement of the outcome. This will only be possible if the ILO is appropriately assessed. This last point is particularly important in the light of the University's Code of Assessment. [Section 1 of the *Guide to the Code of Assessment*, www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_124292_en.pdf, provides more details.]

(iii)   The categories of ILOs can be associated with certain modes of assessment. Knowledge and understanding of a subject is often assessed through unseen written examinations, but most if not all assessment methods **also** require some demonstration of knowledge and understanding. 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. Assessment of competence in exercising a practical skill must involve practical demonstration of it. Assessment of transferable and key 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 skills linked to specialist knowledge, understanding and practical skills. Other transferable/key skills, that are readily transferable to employment and other contexts, such as communication/teamwork can be developed through structured opportunities in 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.

(iv)   The paragraph below can be used for Field 15, followed by specific information as indicated in the associated example.

(v)   All assessment, except for final award grades and degree classifications, is conducted in the immediate context of the courses comprising the programme. The intended learning outcomes indicated in Field 14 are, however, generic to the programme as a whole and the extent of any individual student's attainment of them will be demonstrated as follows:

Example

The student's theoretical knowledge of the principles and methods of archaeology will be assessed in the examinations, coursework essays and fieldwork assignments set within the core courses in general and theoretical archaeology. They will be further assessed in the examinations and coursework set within the optional courses comprising the programme. The student's detailed knowledge of two or more special areas of archaeology will also be assessed in the examinations and coursework set within these optional courses.

The student's laboratory skills and scientific report writing will be assessed throughout the programme as part of the core course in artefact dating.

5.5   *Learning and teaching approaches (Field 16)*

This field should set out the learning and teaching approaches for the programme.

Consideration should be given as to how the teaching approaches used support learning and hence the achievement of the ILOs. Background on how current research interests and activity of staff underpins teaching should also be provided. Relevant QAA subject benchmark statements and any other relevant reference points should again be consulted. Some approaches will be more appropriate than others for developing particular types of learning. For example:

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.
Subject-specific/practical skills need to be developed through opportunities to practise the activity in an appropriate learning context (e.g. in a laboratory, in the field or on workplace placement). Workbooks or guidance manuals may be used to support learning.

Intellectual skills 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 field based activity.

Transferable/key skills may be developed in a number of ways. Some, 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 field based activity. They may also be developed through extra-curricular activities including work experience, student representative work, and social and cultural activities.

In all of the above, it is important to remember that the more active learning tasks designed to support the development of intellectual, subject specific and key skills will also play a key role in contributing to the development of knowledge and understanding.

It is not necessary to cross-refer the learning and teaching approaches to the ILOs in your programme specification.

5.6 *Relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statements and Other External or Internal Reference Points (Field 17)*

QAA subject benchmark statements exist for honours degrees in most disciplines, and for masters degrees in a small number of disciplines. These benchmark statements can be found at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements

This field should include a web link to any benchmark statement relevant to the programme.

If the programme has been designed to meet the requirements of a professional or statutory body, this field should also contain a web link to that body's own benchmark statement.

5.7 *Programme Structure and Features (Field 18)*

This field should include an easily understood description of the programme structure: the basic curriculum information (the structure and credit value of courses year by year, when particular courses are taught, and exit awards available on the completion of each stage). If any courses are taught in any other language than English this must be specified here, as should information on any courses taught elsewhere. A tabular presentation of the structure is usually most helpful. Where a long list of options may be selected, a supplementary web link can be provided.

A standard paragraph referring to the location of degree regulations has been added to Section 18 and should be retained (although (d) which relates to Honours should be deleted where this is not applicable).

The following information may also be included (as web links if the relevant information already exists):

- opportunities for placement or overseas study;
- reference to the Code of Assessment or an explanation of the Primary Grades especially if these are used to describe progress requirements;
- progression requirements[11] (and whether satisfying these would automatically lead to entry to later stages of the programme);
- modes of study (e.g. full-time, part-time, by distance learning) and any differences that might apply if studying on a particular mode;

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[11] Detailed regulations must <u>not</u> be quoted here as these can easily become out of date. The regulations should be referred to at source (i.e. in the *Calendar*).

- matters specific to professional programmes (e.g. a requirement to undertake clinical or school experience placements) or to programmes accredited by professional or statutory bodies (e.g. holders of accredited degrees are eligible to follow a route to corporate membership).

5.8 *Additional Relevant Information (Field 19)*

This field gives the opportunity to present a more rounded picture of the teaching and learning environment within the School/College to enhance the informative and promotional function of the programme specification. Emphasise areas where the School or Subject Area has distinctive features (more than the norm for the University), such as particularly good IT facilities, using materials from the University's Archives in learning and teaching, "buddy" systems in operation, etc. To keep the field concise, relevant web links should be provided to standard information/services. Examples of items that could be included under this field are:

- School specific Library and IT facilities;
- student support systems or services;
- employability or other School initiatives;
- student feedback and representation opportunities;
- examples of employment or further study undertaken by recent graduates.

There could also be references to more detailed information on the programme, School, and/or University (either publications or web links).

5.9 *Date of Production/Revision*

The date of the initial production or revision should be provided.

To ensure that programme specifications remain current they should be reviewed on an annual basis. The best time to do this is likely to be after the annual monitoring process so that any changes identified via that process can be reflected, if necessary, in programme specifications. Should the annual monitoring process result in a major programme change then a revised programme specification will be required for the programme approval process.

Feedback on the usefulness of the guidance notes would be welcomed. Please send any comments to Helen Butcher (helen.butcher@glasgow.ac.uk) or Helen Clegg (helen.clegg@glasgow.ac.uk).

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