

# CURRICULUM DESIGN

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[Programme Approval, Review and Modification](#)  
[PARM Appendices \(proformas, document templates etc\)](#)  
[University Regulations for Undergraduate Programmes of Study](#)  
[University Regulations for Taught Postgraduate Programmes of Study](#)  
[Academic Policies, Regulations and ICPs](#)  
[Equality at MMU](#)  
[Appendix PARM12 Collaborative Provision Agreement Flowchart](#)  
[MMU Centre for Learning and Teaching website](#)

## **2008/2009**

General updating of information – to include additional information in particular on distinctiveness of taught postgraduate awards

**2009/10**

Updating with reference to new Strategic Approvals process and new Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategic Framework

## CURRICULUM DESIGN

### 1. Programme Development and Academic Planning

#### 1.1 Strategic Planning and Approval in Principle

The development of new taught programmes of study is driven by a range of factors. These must address:

- the University's Vision, mission and strategic objectives;
- external reference points (for example the QAA Academic Infrastructure, PSRB requirements and expectations);
- the aim that programmes should support students in achieving their full potential in their chosen academic field;
- the need to develop an institutional portfolio that is attractive to students, up to date, which promotes employability and encourages skills development;
- the University's aim to be sector-leading in its engagement with equality legislation.

Programmes may be developed in response to external funding initiatives or to provide progression from existing programmes, to reflect the establishment of a new academic discipline, to utilise more effectively developing staff expertise to increase recruitment of under-represented groups, or to address particular initiatives. Above all, curriculum design is, in the words of the QAA code of Practice, a "creative and often innovative activity". The University's processes are intended to foster that creativity and encourage a culture of continuous enhancement of provision.

Programmes are normally developed by small groups of expert staff within the appropriate subject discipline who generate a common understanding of and vision for the programme. Proposals must comply with the objectives established in the University's Strategic Plan and be supported by the relevant Head. **All developments (new programmes and modifications to or review of existing programmes) must then be approved by the Faculty Executive Group for inclusion in the annually updated Faculty Plan approved by the Deputy Vice Chancellor.** Such developments must be affordable; academic planning is inextricably linked to resource planning and programme development teams may need to familiarise themselves with complex staff and student funding issues in order to satisfy the University's managers that a programme proposal is viable. An algorithm for programme planning, a Power Point flowchart presentation providing guidance on the fundability of programmes, is available online at: (On campus access only) <http://www.mid.mmu.ac.uk/midas/default.htm> (under the heading Support).

Academic and financial considerations must both be considered, particularly where a programme is being developed in collaboration with another organisation or institution; in such cases programme development teams must not underestimate the time and energy needed to explore the intricacies of programme funding and the complications of securing inter-institutional support and liaison in order to provide a sound case for proposing the further development of a collaborative proposal. For further details see the Institutional Code of Practice on Collaborative Provision and the Framework for Collaborative Provision. A flow chart to guide collaborative proposals is available as Appendix PARM12. The financial arrangements must be estimated using the model available from Finance Division. For further details, consult the Collaborative Partnerships Office.

The process of approval in principle of new programmes requires development teams to liaise with other departments/faculties of the University which are providing programmes within the same broad subject area. This consultation process, which extends to developments introduced at periodic review and through major faculty modification or ADC modification, is intended to provide a subject-oriented approach to curriculum design, within the context of institutional and faculty planning processes. Procedures also address the QAA's Code of Practice section 7: programme design, approval, monitoring and review (revised 2006).

The overlying principle of programme design is that a programme of study must be able to satisfy the Academic Board's criteria for approval.

### Foundation Degrees

Proposals for programmes leading to an MMU Foundation Degree award must additionally address the defining characteristics of foundation degrees as set out in the QAA's Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark Statement (for example the requirement for active employer engagement with all aspects of programme design and development).

### Programmes leading to Edexcel Awards

Proposals for programmes leading to an Edexcel award must have regard for the scope of the University's agreement with Edexcel which stipulates qualification design principles which should be followed. Further guidance may be obtained from the Centre for Academic Standards & Quality Enhancement.

### Combined Honours

The University has a strong commitment to the provision of a broad Combined Honours programme and programme teams should consider the extent to which the intended developments can be adapted to provide a coherent contribution to the Combined Honours programme.

### Consultations

The consultations which programme development teams must undertake as part of the strategic approval, and approval in principle stage of Programme Approval may necessarily influence the design of a programme as it will need to be placed into both a resource context and an institutional academic context. Where similar subject provision is to be offered in different parts of the University the Directorate may decide on a strategy which directs such provision to develop either its distinctiveness across different campuses or its commonality depending upon the University's strategic approach. Consequently early consultation with all internal and external stakeholders is encouraged to ensure that an institutional perspective can be designed into the programme at the earliest opportunity. If eLearning is to be used in the programme, then the Departmental eLearning Co-ordinator must be consulted.

### Equality

At the earliest planning stage an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) exercise should be conducted that will help staff determine whether the proposal addresses the University's equality policies and other strategic objectives. EIA involves looking at what it is you wish to achieve and how you will achieve it so that all diverse student needs are met. In the Self Evaluation document, programme teams must include a statement confirming that the University's equality policies have been considered during the planning process or, that the University will be looking for evidence of awareness of any potential negative impacts and

solutions for how to address these. Programme teams will find the [guidance notes on inclusive curriculum design helpful](#).

## **2. Programme Design and Structure**

### **2.1 Programme Design**

The design of programmes is governed by:

- the Regulations for the Academic Awards of the University;
- the Regulations for Undergraduate or for Taught Postgraduate Programmes of Study which apply to all programmes leading to an MMU award;
- the University's [Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategic Framework](#) ;
- external reference points such as the QAA's "Academic Infrastructure", incorporating the Framework for HE Qualifications, Subject Benchmark Statements and the Code of practice, which must be addressed in programme documentation prepared for approval in principle (see below regarding Subject Benchmarking, and the ARPH Section on The External Environment for more information about the Academic Infrastructure);
- Requirements of partnership arrangements with Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) (see the ARPH section on the Institutional Code of Practice for Engagement with PSRBs).

The University's strategic plan 2007-2020 states that the University will offer curricula and associated learning experiences that are informed by research, scholarship, enterprise and employability. Specifically, these will:

- incorporate core and transferable skills commensurate with those expected of graduates to operate as world class professionals.
- enhance opportunities for employment.
- enable students to engage in a variety of study modes and have access to an appropriate regime of blended learning.
- be informed by engagement with employers, professional and statutory bodies and pedagogical research.
- provide opportunities for curriculum choice.
- maximise opportunities for progression and transfer to alternative and further study programmes.
- where appropriate, be based on collaboration and partnership with other educational institutions, employers or professional associations.
- be innovative in the delivery of widening participation and provide realistic opportunities for access to higher education.
- promote part-time, open- and distance learning, sandwich placement experiences

and other opportunities for work-based learning and assessment.

- extend its post graduate and continuing professional development framework.
- develop enterprise skills.
- provide access to a University-wide combined honours programme.
- reinforce its position as an important player in local and regional provision.
- strengthen and secure its reputation and brand in the international marketplace.

These undertakings form the context for effective programme design, and ensure that it is aligned with the University's criteria for approval, monitoring and review. To quote from the QAA Code of practice:

*“programme design, approval, monitoring and review are linked, and ... the processes involved need to be seen in a holistic and integrated manner. Good programme design creates programmes that facilitate the delivery of the intended learning outcomes and required standards, and is fundamental when institutions approve new programmes or review the effectiveness of existing provision.*

*Where practices for the initial design and approval of programmes are rigorous and effective, subsequent evaluation is likely to be relatively straightforward. Duplication of effort and documentation can be reduced if the requirements of external bodies, such as PSRBs and QAA, are taken into account when programmes are designed, approved and reviewed.”*

## **2.2 Programme Structure - Credit Framework**

The University incorporates a Credit Framework Scheme within its programme regulations so that every taught programme leading to an award of the University must comply with the credit tariff for that award.

Each programme must be made up of a specified volume of credit at one or more specified levels. Each full-time academic year of study comprises 120 credits equating notionally to 1200 student learning hours; in undergraduate programmes a typical 20 credit unit represents 200 hours incorporating formal class contact time, private study, assessment preparation/revision and such other time spent in achieving the unit learning outcomes.

The University's scheme aligns with:

- the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)
- the Higher Education Credit Framework for England
- the National Qualifications Framework being developed by the European Commission
- the European Commission's European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS) which supports the objectives of the Bologna Process by promoting ease of comparison and transfer between European programmes. In ECTS 60 credits equal 120 MMU credits, representing one full-time year of student study.

## **3. Benchmark Statements**

(see also the ARPH section "[The University's Engagement with the QAA Academic Infrastructure](#) for details of institutional engagement with subject benchmark statements)

### **3.1 Use of Benchmark Statements**

Subject benchmark statements provide a helpful starting point when designing a new programme or reviewing an existing programme. They should be used as a point of comparison, a stimulus for reflection, and a reference against which individual programme specifications may be justified.

Subject benchmark statements provide a means for the academic community to describe the nature and characteristics of programmes in a specific subject. They are designed to make explicit the general academic characteristics and standards of programmes in the UK. Subject benchmark statements set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the techniques and skills needed to develop understanding in the subject.

Subject benchmark statements are used for a variety of purposes. Primarily, they are an important external source of reference for higher education institutions when new programmes are being designed and developed in a subject area. They provide general guidance for articulating the learning outcomes associated with the programme but are not a specification of a detailed curriculum in the subject. Benchmark statements provide for variety and flexibility in the design of programmes and encourage innovation within an agreed overall framework.

Subject benchmark statements also provide support to institutions in pursuit of internal quality assurance. They enable the learning outcomes specified for a particular programme to be reviewed and evaluated against agreed general expectations about standards.

Subject Benchmark Statements are also one of a number of external reference points that are drawn upon for the purposes of external review. Reviewers do not use Subject Benchmark Statements as a crude checklist for these purposes, however. Rather, they are used in conjunction with the relevant Programme Specifications, and the institution's own internal evaluation documentation, in order to enable reviewers to come to a rounded judgement based on a broad range of evidence.

In preparing or updating Programme Specifications, programme teams must relate their programmes to relevant subject benchmark statements. For some programmes a relevant benchmark statement may not be available or applicable, e.g. for NAFE programmes, initial teacher education programmes. Whilst benchmark statements focus on the award of Honours degree in the first instance, postgraduate programmes should demonstrate how they relate to the standard and outcomes of that award.

The process by which new subject benchmark statements are created is set out in QAA's Recognition Scheme for subject benchmark statements.

### **3.2 Honours Degree Benchmark Statements**

Honours degree Benchmark Statements are available on QAA's website at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk> and cover most subjects offered at undergraduate level at MMU. Programme teams should consider the benchmark statements where a set exists relevant to their programme.

### **3.3 Masters Level Benchmark Statements**

A number of subject benchmark statements have been developed at Masters level. Programme teams should check the QAA website for further details.

### **3.4 Benchmark Statements for Academic and Practitioner Standards in Healthcare Subjects**

Benchmark statements for academic and practitioner standards in a range of healthcare subjects are available at

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/health/default.asp>

### **3.5 Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark**

The QAA has also published a Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark, available at <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/foundationDegree/benchmark/FDQB.asp>. This benchmark “sets out a generic framework for Foundation Degrees that serves as a reference point for use in programme design, delivery and review.”

## **4. Programme Specification**

### **4.1 Aims and Learning Outcomes**

All programmes must have clearly stated programme aims and learning outcomes which describe the purpose of the programme and the achievements expected of students by the end of the programme. A brief overview of what is required is given here, and more detailed guidance on writing aims and objectives, together with examples, can be found on the website of the Centre for Learning and Teaching.

### **4.2 Programme Aims**

The programme aims should give a brief overview of what the programme team intends to achieve in the programme. They give the opportunity to encapsulate the team’s vision of what a typical graduate of the programme will achieve in broader terms than the specific programme learning outcomes.

The programme aims should align with the thematic priorities of the University’s Strategic Framework for Learning, Teaching and Assessment:

- Developing world-class professionals
- Providing flexible opportunities to learn
- Rewarding professionalism in learning, teaching and assessment
- Engaging with, and learning from, our learners

### **Embedding Employability**

MMU aims to develop in its students the skills, abilities and personal attributes to enhance their capacity to secure satisfying outcomes in their economic, social and community lives. Programme teams should reflect these aims in their programme aims. The Embedding Employability project will provide case studies, examples and guidance to support the achievement of these aims. During 2009/10 the University will continue to develop its Employability Curriculum Framework which makes a range of expectations of programmes.

This will be optional for programmes undertaking PARM activity in 2009/10 but if you would like more information please contact the Centre for Learning and Teaching.

### **4.3 Programme Learning Outcomes**

Programme Learning Outcomes must include statements which state what a typical student should be able to do when they leave the programme. These outcomes must be assessable and should relate to the knowledge, understanding, skills, capabilities, values and other qualities that a typical student might be expected to gain as a result of successfully completing the Programme or a particular route and award. Consideration must be given to institutional and QAA level or qualification descriptors, including relevant subject benchmark statements and the requirements of relevant PSRBs in the case of an accredited programme.

### **4.4 Mode of Attendance**

The mode of attendance of a programme must reflect the needs and expectations of the target audience for the programme. Market research undertaken by programme developers prior to seeking approval in principle of a new programme should address the issues of mode(s) of attendance.

Programme teams will find it useful to have in mind a 'model of the learner' while they are planning their developments. Such a model would take into account factors such as age range of potential students, previous qualifications and educational experience, diversity of student intake, possible disabilities, distance students may live from the University, commitments to paid employment or caring responsibilities, and so on.

A programme will normally need to be offered in multiple modes of attendance to address the needs of different groups of learners. The student experience of each mode must be comparable, though not necessarily identical, as different modes of attendance may also reflect different learning needs. However, students on a programme delivered in different modes of attendance but leading to the same titled award, will be expected to achieve the same learning outcomes.

Special consideration will need to be given to the arrangements for supporting the learning of students who are not studying on a full-time basis to ensure that they have equality of opportunity, e.g. in terms of access to teaching staff or to learning resources either held in the library or available online.

The programme team should show how they plan to use the University's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) as well as awareness of MMU policies on the support and quality of e-learning. Programmes which do not make use of the VLE should indicate why this decision has been taken.

### **4.5 Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategies**

The programme team should give a general overview of the various ways in which they expect students to learn about, practice and demonstrate achievement of the programme learning outcomes. In writing this section, the team should consider the thematic priorities of the University's Strategic Framework for Learning, Teaching and Assessment. Support for the introduction of innovative learning, teaching and assessment strategies is available from the Centre for Learning and Teaching. Teams should also refer to the Section on [Assessment Practice and Policy](#) within the Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook, and also to the University's [Regulations for Undergraduate and for Taught Postgraduate Programmes of Study](#).

## 4.6 MMU Award Framework

Whilst the QAA's Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) does not in itself represent a national credit framework, the University associates specific credit tariffs to each of its awards which are mostly in keeping with guidelines issued by regional credit consortia.

## 4.7 Credits for Awards

The credits for MMU awards are specified in the Regulations for Undergraduate or for Taught Postgraduate Programmes of Study.

# 5. Award Titles and Curriculum Content

## 5.1 Curriculum Content

Curriculum content must accurately reflect the award title, in order to

- give a clear, transparent indication of the programme's nature to all stakeholders (and particularly to prospective students),
- to ensure alignment with the appropriate subject benchmark statement(s), and
- to permit any potential overlap with similar provision elsewhere in the University to be identified and resolved.

## 5.2 Distinctiveness of Awards

Institutional awards corresponding to routes or pathways through a programme network **must** have a sufficiently distinct curriculum to merit their title and to distinguish between cognate but separate award titles.

For undergraduate programmes, a particular award within a programme network sharing the same curriculum at Levels 4 and 5 **must normally have** a minimum of 60 Level 6 credits distinct to its curriculum. A minimum of half of the Level 6 credits must be within the award's curriculum area.

For taught postgraduate programmes at Level 7, individually titled awards within a programme network sharing some of the same curriculum **must** have a minimum of one third of the credits leading to the award comprising units distinct to each award. In the case of a Master's programme this may be the 60 credit project/dissertation and/or include taught units.

**Under no circumstances should it be possible for students, within a programme network, studying the same diet of units, to receive a different award title.**

For further guidance please contact the Head of Academic Standards & Quality Enhancement.

## **6. Preparation for Programme Approval, Review or Modification**

Inevitably, University procedures and processes are amended to take account of internal and external imperatives. It is essential, therefore, that programme teams preparing for Programme Approval, Review or Modification ensure that they take account of the most up to date information when designing new programmes and modifying existing programmes.

This is particularly important for existing programmes where changes may have been made to policy and procedures since the last review which must be addressed as part the current process. Standard areas which should be reviewed for currency in preparation for a review or modification event include:

- Procedures for Programme Approval, Review and Modification
- Faculty and University strategic objectives
- Definitive document and programme specification templates
- Unit specification template
- University Regulations for Undergraduate or for Taught Postgraduate Programmes of Study
- Regulations for the Academic Awards of the University
- University Learning and Teaching Strategy
- Foundation Degree Policy
- Guidelines for Development and Delivery of On-line Learning
- Scheme for the Admission of Students with Advanced Standing (AP(E)L)
- Policies approved by the University and its Academic Board eg:
  - *the range of equal opportunities policies*
  - *anonymous marking policy*
  - *Moderation of summative assessment*
- Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements
- Relevant Institutional Codes of Practice:
  - *Admissions and Recruitment*
  - *Collaborative Provision*
  - *External Examining*
  - *Engagement with PSRBs*
  - *Placement Learning*
  - *Postgraduate Research Programmes*
- University Student Agreement

Links to relevant websites with the above information are listed on the front page of this document. Teams are strongly advised to contact their Faculty Quality Officer, the Centre for Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement (CASQE) and the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CeLT) at an early state of planning for Programme Approval, Review or Modification. CASQE will be able to advise on quality procedures and timescales and CeLT can work with the team on elements of curriculum design and suggest opportunities for professional development focused on PARM activity.