



University of
Chester

Quality and Standards Manual

Handbook A: The Design of Academic Provision and Structures

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| Version: | 2.0 |
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| Effective from: | 14 September 2022 |
| Next review: | September 2026 |

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Handbook accompanies Section D of the *Principles and Regulations*, dealing with the design of approved academic provision leading to awards. It contains requirements governing the design of academic provision falling under the *Principles*

and Regulations of the University of Chester, derives its force from those *Principles and Regulations* and shall be read in association with them.

The requirements shall also apply to the design of franchised provision, external programme provision and provision to be delivered by a collaborating institution.

- 1.2 The procedures and requirements for information shall be reviewed periodically, in the light of the University's own experience, sector-wide developments and the advice and requirements of external bodies.
- 1.3 The information in this Handbook relates to provision based normally on 20- and 40-credit modules.

2. OVERVIEW

- 2.1 The design and structure of a framework, programme, or course of study shall provide for the progression of students from the level of knowledge and skills required at admission to the level required for the award in an appropriate form of study.
- 2.2 A module at undergraduate level is normally defined as one-sixth of the notional academic session's work for a full-time student. The learning activity for a student within a 20-credit module is contained within 200 hours.
- 2.3 All curricula shall be designed to articulate and reflect coherent aims, objectives, content and learning, teaching and approaches to assessment.
- 2.4 Similar principles shall apply to the differentiation of award titles. For example, a Bachelor of Divinity (BD) must comprise at least 60 credits of biblical languages, 40 of which are above introductory level, as a feature which distinguishes the provision from other awards in theology/religious studies, and any provision which fulfils these criteria shall be deemed to lead to a BD.
- 2.5 In fulfilment of its duties to safeguard the University's academic portfolio, the Portfolio Development and Management Committee shall determine the principles to be applied to all cases where questions arise over differentiation between the titles of awards, programmes or course of study. Programme Approval Panels and Review Groups shall act on this authority in enforcing these principles.
- 2.6 Academic provision shall be informed by both the relevant policies of the University of Chester and the elements of the national academic infrastructure for higher education. The following sections of this handbook set out the key determinants of which account must be taken when devising frameworks, programmes, or courses of study.

3. MODULE DESCRIPTORS

- 3.1 Curricula shall be designed to ensure that it is not possible for a student to register for an identical suite of modules in more than one named programme or course. To merit a separate or variant title for a programme or course, there must be a minimum of 40 credits unique to that title and where there is a dissertation the focus of the dissertation should also be on the distinctive area indicated by the title. All provision carrying its own title for which students may register as a qualification aim shall be expressed in a programme specification specific to that title.
- 3.2 The principle of embedding skills does not require wholesale lectures on study skills. The emphasis should be on making academic skills explicit in what is already done. This will help students and staff to see the transferable skills they are learning or teaching. Therefore, mapping will facilitate the visibility of academic skills embedded across all teaching activities, and identify any gaps.
- 3.3 The module level academic skills template is available to module leaders to map the skills embedded in a module and is not designed to be prescriptive. It is recognized that not all the skills identified on the template will be relevant to each and every module. However, there will be fundamental skills for each level of study across a programme. A list of fundamentals, of relevance to the identified skills, is provided to assist academic staff. There will also be space for module leaders to specify core academic skills that are discipline-specific, and the template accommodates the inclusion of such skills. Using the template will also promote the concept of minimum curriculum entitlement. It also ensures coverage of all identified academic skills and effectively maps progression and continuity of learning during the course of the student's programme.
- 3.4 Frameworks, programmes, and courses of study shall be designed as modular, credit-based structures. A module descriptor shall be completed for each approved module. At the University of Chester, a standard module is a unit of 20 credit points, which represents a notional 200 hours of study. Undergraduate frameworks and programmes normally comprise 120 credits of study at each appropriate level. Written assessable work per 20-credit module will normally be to a maximum of 3000 words at Levels 3 and 4 and 4000 words at Levels 5 and 6, unless specific exception is granted by Senate. 40-credit dissertation modules at Level 6 shall normally have a limit of 8000 to 10000 words. Written assessable work per 20-credit at Level 7 will normally be to a maximum of 5000 words, but a Level 7 dissertation may run to 12000 to 16500 words (if 60 credits) or 16000 to 22000 words (if 80 credits). An examination taken under controlled circumstances is deemed equivalent to coursework according to the formula: one hour = 1000 words. (**Appendix Di**: Assessment volume and equivalences).

4. QAA REFERENCE POINTS

Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications

- 4.1 The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree Awarding Bodies publication combines The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and the separate Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS).
- 4.2 The FHEQ is central to the design and structure of all higher education provision in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is designed to ensure consistent use of qualifications titles, by describing the achievement represented by higher education qualifications. The framework has five levels, three undergraduate (4, 5 and 6) and two postgraduate (7 and 8). (See the QAA website at www.qaa.ac.uk).
- 4.3 The FHEQ qualifications descriptors shall be used as the key generic point of reference for level of study, which programme teams should be guided by in designing and reviewing learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The FQ-EHEA (Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area) 'Dublin descriptors' are available as additional points of reference (see QAA website, www.qaa.ac.uk).

Qualification Characteristics Statements

- 4.4 QAA Qualifications Characteristics Statements describe the distinctive features of qualifications at a particular level within the Qualifications Frameworks. They describe the qualification in terms of its particular purpose, general characteristics and generic outcomes, but do not include subject level detail. They are intended to support and contextualise the Qualifications Frameworks and, where relevant, they complement the qualification descriptors provided in the frameworks. The Characteristics Statements for Doctoral Degrees, Master's Degrees, Foundation Degrees and Qualifications involving more than one Degree-Awarding Body are available on the QAA website at www.qaa.ac.uk

Subject Benchmark Statements

- 4.5 Benchmark statements are designed to make explicit the general academic characteristics and standards of honours degrees in the UK. All available subject benchmark statements are published on the QAA website (www.qaa.ac.uk).
- 4.6 Where relevant subject benchmark statements (which are written for achievement at Level 6) exist, they shall be used as the primary point of reference for mapping subject content, learning outcomes and assessment criteria across all levels of a programme of study.

5. PROGRAMME SPECIFICATIONS

- 5.1 Programme specifications set out explicit information on content, learning outcomes, teaching, learning and assessment methods, and the relationship of the programme and its study to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. A programme specification shall clearly and concisely inform University colleagues, intending students and their advisors, students who are already studying and employers. (**Appendix J**: Guidance for writing programme specifications). Further information and guidelines for preparing programme specifications are published on the QAA website (www.qaa.ac.uk).
- 5.2 The aims and learning outcomes of a programme of study, together with other required information, shall be stated in the programme specification using the appropriate template as approved both for Levels 4/5/6 and for Level 7. Programme outcomes shall be listed by level/ exit award and be mapped to modules where possible. Guidance may be sought from Academic Services.

Programme learning outcomes shall be grouped into the following categories:

- i) knowledge and understanding
 - ii) cognitive skills
 - iii) practical and professional skills
 - iv) communication skills
- 5.3 Learning, teaching and assessment strategies, especially at Level 4, shall be designed to take into account the range and diversity of students' previous learning and assessment experiences. Programme teams shall design opportunities for the development of an appropriate level and range of subject-related study skills needed by students in order to undertake and progress successfully in their studies.
- 5.4 Programme teams shall ensure that the arrangements for teaching and supporting students in their learning, whether through direct contact or through flexible, distance or e-learning, are varied, appropriate and clearly described.

6. PROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS / EMPLOYER COLLABORATION

- 6.1 Professional or statutory body requirements shall be integrated within the content and assessment design of programmes, where relevant. Any specific requirements regarding attendance or the number of recorded hours to be spent in professional practice shall be explicitly stated in the relevant programme, course or module documentation. Any requirement, including any relating to assessment, that may necessitate a derogation

from the regulations of the University must be submitted for approval by Quality and Standards sub-Committee, on behalf of Senate.

- 6.2 Employers shall be consulted about the appropriate skills and knowledge required to prepare graduates for employment in the sector, field or industry to which a programme relates.
- 6.3 Consideration shall be given, where appropriate, to the opportunities to be provided for students to undertake work-related or vocational learning within the programme of study.

7. ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 Assessment strategies and tasks shall be designed to enable students to demonstrate their achievement of specified learning outcomes across the whole programme or module. They shall be appropriate to the level in question.
- 7.2 Assessment methods shall be mapped across levels and modules within programmes to ensure that the range of activities is varied, balanced, and well-timed, whilst adhering to the regulatory requirements for weighting and avoiding unnecessary or repetitive over-assessment of students.
- 7.3 Assessment methods shall be designed effectively to test students' achievement of intended learning outcomes and/ or identify aspects for further development of learning. Programme and module learning and assessment activities shall therefore be aligned with intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria.
- 7.4 Module assessment shall normally comprise one, two or three distinct and separately weighted components, each of which shall be identified on the approved module descriptor. A component is a discrete assessment activity, for example an examination, presentation or coursework assignment, whose weighting shall be indicated as a whole number percentage on the module descriptor.

Elements should not feature in any assessment component, and it should be clear to students where a piece of work constitutes a component of the module's assessment and is subject to late work penalties, and requires an extension. It should be noted that this does not remove the occasional potential for portfolio assessments, where there may be stages to completion of the assessment but with a final completion date and deadline for the whole component.

Modules shall be devised so as to enable reassessment of each component.

- 7.5 A module descriptor or other programme documentation shall **only** deem a component or module to be non-compensatable in instances where this is necessary to satisfy the requirements of a professional or other external body that recognises the University award. Such instances must be approved by Quality and Standards sub-Committee, on behalf of Senate.

- 7.6 In the interest of transparency, Faculty, departmental or programme-specific marking criteria consistent with the generic marking criteria in **Appendices L to O** of this Handbook shall be published in handbooks and made available to students. In addition, module handbooks and assignment guidelines should indicate particular assessment criteria relating to that module or assignment.
- 7.7 All module assessment should be explicitly designed to enable students to demonstrate achievement linked to identified learning outcomes.
- 7.8 Formative assessment, particularly at Level 4, shall be designed to enable both the assessment activity and developmental feedback to students on their performance to be integrated into learning and teaching activity.
- 7.9 Developmental feedback to students on all coursework assessments should be linked wherever possible to the stated assessment criteria, using feedback forms which reflect University guidelines (see Handbook F: Assessment).

8. ASSESSMENT CRITERIA AND MARKING CRITERIA – DEFINITION

- 8.1 The following definitions are those agreed for general use by the University:

Assessment Criteria describe what a learner is expected to do in order to demonstrate that learning outcomes have been achieved. They provide a transparent indication of the characteristics required in a piece of work and may represent a threshold standard of achievement.

Marking Criteria are guidelines that describe characteristics of performance for which marks will be awarded at a higher or lower point than the threshold pass; they therefore differentiate between grades of students' performance

9. GENERIC GUIDELINES FOR MARKING CRITERIA UNDERGRADUATE AND LEVEL 3

- 9.1 The detail provided in the generic marking criteria shall be used to provide guidance to Faculties, departments and programme teams in the design of subject- or programme-specific marking criteria which encourage the use of the full range of marks, from the highest to the lowest level of achievement. (See **Appendices L and M**).

- 9.2 The main aim of the generic marking criteria is to promote consistency and equity in awards to students across the University, notwithstanding clear differences in character between subject disciplines. The generic criteria shall be used as the basis for selection and interpretation into more specific marking criteria at programme and module level.
- 9.3 Subject or programme teams should consider whether it is appropriate to design separate specific marking criteria at Levels 3, 4, 5, 6, derived from their discipline-based selection and interpretation of the generic statements.
- 9.4 The generic marking criteria are indicative rather than prescriptive. They are organised into the four categories promulgated by the QAA for programme specifications and other outcomes-related documentation. The allocation of particular criteria within categories may depend upon emphasis and perspective within the context of a particular subject or programme.

10 GENERIC GUIDELINES FOR MARKING CRITERIA – LEVELS 7, 8

- 10.1 The Level 7 marking criteria (**Appendix N**) shall be used as generic guidelines to promote marking consistency across the University. They are not intended to indicate a mechanistic marking process, but rather to enable refined judgements to be made. Level 7 programmes shall design assessment criteria linked to the stated learning outcomes.
- 10.2 Level 8 feedback criteria (**Appendix O**) are intended for modules at this level within Professional Doctorate programmes, other than the major project.

11 PROGRAMME AND MODULE HANDBOOKS

- 11.1 It is the responsibility of each programme leader to ensure that programme handbooks are updated and published on Portal by 1st August of each year. The content to be included in programme handbooks shall follow guidelines issued annually by Academic Services. For all University-wide policies and procedures, handbooks shall refer or link to the relevant Portal pages. Further information about programme handbooks is available in Quality and Standards Manual Handbook I (Information about the University and its Provision), Appendix C.
- 11.2 Moodle sites for taught modules at levels 3-8 are the definitive source of module information for students. Module information may include module handbooks which, if produced, must be accessible online via the relevant Moodle site. Module 'Handbooks' may be presented in the form of a specific module handbook document, or through relevant information being placed onto the module's Moodle site. Heads of Department, programme leaders and module leaders are responsible for ensuring that this

information is made available to students ideally before the start of the academic year, or at least before the module commences.

12 INFORMATION RELATING TO FRAMEWORKS

12.1 In the case of the Work-Based and Integrative Studies Framework (**Appendix P**), it will be the responsibility of the programme leader to ensure that all relevant information is made available to students on the Portal.

12.2 The framework for Undergraduate Modular Programmes appears as **Appendix Q**, that for Foundation Degrees as **Appendix R**, that for Work-Based and Integrative Studies as **Appendix P**, that for Postgraduate Taught Programmes as **Appendix S**, that for Master by Research as **Appendix T**, and that for Professional Doctorates as **Appendix U**. Other awards lying outside of a formal framework are described in **Appendix V**, and Integrated Master Degrees in **Appendix W**.