APPENDIX F: Developing Programme Specifications – Design Principles

This appendix indicates key areas that need to be considered whenever a new programme specification is developed. It also suggests a number of questions and associated explanations that are intended to be of use to staff who are involved in developing programme specifications. The list of questions is not definitive, nor comprehensive, but seeks to indicate areas that might normally be regarded as relevant in discussions linked to the development of programme specifications.

1. **What do we want our students to achieve?**

   'What' may include subject knowledge and understanding, a range of intellectual, subject-based and transferable skills, and their application in a range of contexts. It may also include competency to practise, values and other qualities. Programme outcome statements can be created by completing sentences like:

   - This programme is distinctive because it develops...
   - The most important values which inform this programme are...
   - The academic content of this programme concentrates on...
   - The most important intellectual skills developed in the programme are...
   - The most useful practical skills, techniques and capabilities developed are...
   - Competency will be developed in...
   - The most important ways in which a student will learn are...
   - On completing the programme we want students to know and understand...
   - On completing the programme we want students to be able to....

2. **What reference points can we use to show that what we want students to achieve has currency within the academic, professional or employer communities?**

   Possible reference points might include, as appropriate:

   - institutional mission statements and any institutional policies on the development of general skills in fields such as communication, information technology, team working and career management
   - appropriate QAA subject benchmark statement (http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements)
   - QAA Foundation Degree qualification benchmark, where relevant (http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Foundation-degree-qualification-benchmark-2010.pdf) (see note 1 below)
   - QAA qualification characteristics, where relevant (see note 2 below):
     - *Doctoral degree characteristics*  
     - *Master’s degree characteristics*  
current research or other advanced scholarship carried out by academic staff
requirements of PSRBs (refer to Annex S of the Code of Practice for Taught Programmes [https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/codes/taught/annexs.html](https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/codes/taught/annexs.html))
occupational standards in fields or disciplines where these are relevant
qualification descriptors used in the national qualifications frameworks
relevant European or international reference points.

Note 1: The Foundation Degree qualification benchmark identifies the distinctive features of Foundation Degrees that are not necessarily present in other qualifications at that level. It describes the qualification in terms of its particular purpose, general characteristics and generic outcomes.

Note 2: Doctoral degree characteristics and Master’s degree characteristics provide information about the purposes, content, assessment methods and titles of doctoral and master’s degrees. They are additional reference points to provide advice and guidance for those responsible for doctoral and master’s programmes.

3. How should we use subject benchmark statements?

QAA subject benchmark statements provide a helpful starting point when designing a new programme or reviewing an existing programme. However, they are not the sole point of reference, particularly for programmes that do not coincide with the subject definitions used within the subject benchmark statements.

Staff should not simply transpose outcomes from subject benchmark statements into their programme specifications – the statements are not intended to be draft specifications. Rather, they should be used as a point of comparison, a stimulus to reflection and a reference against which individual programme specifications may be justified.

If a Master’s degree programme of study is being developed, but there is a subject benchmark statement for Honours degree-level only, staff are strongly encouraged to use the Honours degree benchmark statement as a starting point, but to make appropriate adjustments for the knowledge and abilities required at masters-level. Where a benchmark statement is so used, this should be referenced as such in the programme specification.

4. How do we expect our students to achieve and demonstrate the intended outcomes?

Consider the teaching, study and assessment methods used to promote learning. Some methods are more appropriate than others for developing particular types of learning outcome. 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. 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 practiced 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. 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.

- Practical skills need to be developed through opportunities to practise the activity in an appropriate learning context (e.g. in the laboratory, field or workplace placement). Workbooks 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/key 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. Skills may be developed also through extra-curricular activities including work experience, student representative work, social and cultural activities.

5. Where might further programme information be found?
Programme specifications generally represent a concise summary of the main features of a programme and of the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve if full advantage is taken of the learning opportunities provided. The specification should contain a statement of where more detailed information regarding the programme can be found. This is likely to include weblinks to online module guides or student handbooks on the School website, where the reader can access an increasing level of detail if required.

6. Is the programme title appropriate?
6.1 The QAA (see the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Framework-Higher-Education-Qualifications-08.pdf states that the title must accurately reflect “the level of achievements, represent appropriately the nature and field(s) of study undertaken and is not misleading”.

6.2 The title should not already be in use by another programme of study offered at the University.

6.3 The title should meet the conventions set out in section 4 of the Credit Framework https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/creditinfo.html#awardtitles regarding single/multiple subject qualifications and programmes of study that include pathways.

6.4 The degree qualification designations that the University of Kent has approved for use are set out at section 24 of the University’s Ordinances (https://www.kent.ac.uk/governance/documents/governance/Ordinance%20August%202017.pdf).

For further information please refer to:
Annex C: Approval and Withdrawal of Taught Programmes
Developing Specifications: Guidance