

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 14 February 2014

Multiple Programme Specifications for Similar Awards

Ms H Butcher, Clerk to the Committee

The question of the need for multiple programme specifications for groups of awards such as the proposed MSc Infection Biology with various specialisms was raised at the Semester 1 PAG and it was agreed that this issue should be discussed further by ASC.

In October 2008 ASC confirmed guidance as recommended by the Programme and Course Approval Working Group following their consideration of issues relating to the production of programme specifications. At that time ASC noted that the Working Group had sought to maintain the principle agreed previously by both EdPSC and ASC that the duplication of documents containing the same, or very similar, content should be avoided. Since then, some further points of clarification have been added to the guidance.

Extract from Guidance on Programme Specifications
(www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_106193_en.pdf)

3.3 Programme specifications are required for all new programmes. They must also be updated annually. Colleges will request Schools to update their documents each summer in advance of the new session. The Senate Office co-ordinates the annual web publication of the University's programme specifications.

3.4 Programme specifications should be developed for programmes lasting one or more years and leading to a final undergraduate or taught postgraduate award. Programme specifications should not be produced separately for interim awards, 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 faculty – 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 where students are explicitly recruited to the three year degree on a separate UCAS code.
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.

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.

Point 3 under 3.4 was not articulated during the discussion in 2008 but has since been added and relates to the key issue of multiple specifications for similar programmes. While this permits one specification to be used to cover closely related degree programmes, it also warns against the production of cumbersome single documents that set out different sets of Aims, ILOs etc for each programme/stream. This points to the question of the extent to which programmes can be similar in terms of structure and content, and at the same time be assigned distinct titles or streams.

In cases where a single specification is used for multiple awards various manual activities are required in MyCampus to ensure that discrete programme records are set up for each award to enable students to be registered on them and to receive correct award titles on their transcripts and parchments. Concerns have been raised separately about this process as there is no quality assurance mechanism associated with the input of additional titles onto the system. If each final award was required to have its own programme specification this manual activity could be removed from the system.

ASC is invited to consider whether the current guidance on producing multiple programme specifications requires revision to confirm that multiple documents should normally be expected in order to ensure that sufficient detail on the distinct features of the different programmes is clearly presented or, alternatively, whether there is a need to clarify the circumstances in which a single specification will be appropriate and when multiple specifications are required.