

# Degree Programme Specification Guidance



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## Purpose of Guidance

This document provides guidance on the preparation of Degree Programme Specifications.

## Scope: Guidance is not Mandatory

This guidance is relevant for all staff preparing Degree Programme Specifications, which must be completed using the mandatory templates.

**Contact Officer** Kathryn Nicol Head of Academic Policy and Regulation [Kathryn.Nicol@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Kathryn.Nicol@ed.ac.uk)

## Document control

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**Approving authority** Academic Policy and Regulations Committee

**Consultation undertaken** Original consultation via CSPC, amendment September 2014 updated the contact officer details and relevant external links, amendment March 2015 added a footnote to paragraph 27

**Section responsible for guidance maintenance & review** Academic Services

**Related policies, procedures, guidelines & regulations** Degree Programme Specification Template and External Summary examples and curriculum information:  
[www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/staff/curriculum/degree-prog-specific](http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/staff/curriculum/degree-prog-specific)  
[www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/staff/curriculum](http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/staff/curriculum)

**UK Quality Code** Advice and Guidance: Course Design and Development

**Guidance superseded by this guidance** This amended version replaces the 19.3.15 version.

**Alternative format** If you require this document in an alternative format please email [Academic.Services@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Academic.Services@ed.ac.uk) or telephone 0131 650 2138.

**Keywords** Degree programme specification, curriculum, programme content

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1. A programme specification is a concise description of the learning outcomes of a degree programme and the means by which the outcomes are achieved and demonstrated. Programme specifications provide core factual information, which is essential for a variety of purposes:
  - As part of the information considered by the Board of Studies when approving a new programme or agreeing modifications to an existing programme
  - As part of the information for current and prospective students
  - As part of the information for Key Information Sets
  - To enhance information given in the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), for each undergraduate, taught postgraduate and Master of Science by research student at the time of graduation or afterwards. It explains the content and context of the graduate's qualifications
  - As part of the evidence base for internal subject review and external institutional review.
2. Programme specifications are public documents.
3. A programme specification is required for all undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes offered at the University of Edinburgh.
4. The golden copy is held on the Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study and a version is also displayed on the University prospectus webpages.
5. Template sections and their order are standard for all programme specifications in the University.

## Completing the University programme specification template

6. This guidance should be read in conjunction with the QAA Quality Code Advice and Guidance on Course Design and Development: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/course-design-and-development>
7. All new degree programmes within the University must include a programme specification when submitted for approval to the Board of Studies and the relevant College committee.

## Drafting Guidance: Sections 1-8

8. These sections provide factual information. Enter 'Not applicable' where appropriate (e.g. for the UCAS code of a postgraduate programme).
9. Consult the QAA website for Subject Benchmark Statements: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements>

## Drafting Guidance: Section 9: External Summary

10. These guidance notes are not prescriptive and aim to support Schools in producing summaries with a consistent style and structure that are suitable for inclusion with official University HEAR transcripts and for use elsewhere (e.g. prospectus).

## *Audience and purpose*

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11. Degree programme summaries need to be understood by a broad audience, including potential employers, intending students and school careers advisors. It is essential that the summary provides some background on the degree programme subject; highlights key aspects of the learning experience at Edinburgh; and describes the main learning outcomes in a way that highlights their application to a range of career destinations. It should describe the main and distinctive characteristics of Edinburgh graduates in this discipline.

## ***What should be included in the summary?***

12. Three main sections:
  - Background to the discipline and subject, what it is and its place in human endeavour.
  - What is special about the Edinburgh experience in this degree? This might be specific to the way in which we teach the subject, the quality of our educators, or aspects of the student experience. This can draw upon aspects of the learning experience that are distinctive to the discipline in general and/or to Edinburgh specifically.
  - What are the main programme aims (learning outcomes)? What will students learn from their degree and degree programme experience? Focus on high level skills or experience that can be applied beyond their degree studies into a wide range of employment settings. Our aim is to highlight the main characteristics of an Edinburgh graduate in this area.

## ***What shouldn't be included in the summary?***

13. Avoid too much detail, particularly on internal University, School or degree programme structures, or detailed module descriptions.

## ***What about style?***

14. When considering style, tone and content:
  - Keep it aimed at a general audience rather than directly to students (i.e. "Students in Edinburgh will work with ...." rather than "You will work with....").
  - Focus on high level attributes (application of skills) and not bulleted lists of skills (e.g. "ability to communicate geological information effectively in a wide range of contexts and for different audiences" rather than "presentation skills; writing skills; influencing skills).
  - 200-250 words.
  - Avoid jargon.
  - Avoid references to internal University structures or systems.

## ***External summary examples***

15. Examples of the external summary are provided online:  
[www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/staff/curriculum/degree-prog-specific](http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/staff/curriculum/degree-prog-specific)

## **Drafting Guidance: Section 10: Educational aims**

16. This section describes what the provider (the University/School) aims to achieve through the programme. Programme specifications may be read by potential applicants, and so it is useful to describe briefly what is involved in the study of a particular discipline at university level.

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17. The section should begin with a short description of the general area of study/discipline and how the programme is placed within it. Any distinctive features of the programme at the University of Edinburgh should be mentioned, but there is no need to duplicate information from section 9.
18. List the principal aims of the programme (around 6).

## **Drafting Guidance: Section 11: Programme outcomes**

19. The section is divided into six subsections. In addition to describing the programme outcomes, this section needs to identify the various teaching and learning methods used to achieve or foster them. Information on the various modes of assessment employed also needs to be included. Programme specifications need to clarify precisely where stated learning outcomes are assessed.
20. The Programme Outcomes subsections are:
  - a. Knowledge and understanding
  - b. Graduate attributes: Research and enquiry
  - c. Graduate attributes: Personal and intellectual autonomy
  - d. Graduate attributes: Communication
  - e. Graduate attributes: Personal effectiveness
  - f. Technical/practical skills
21. The first five categories (knowledge and understanding, research and enquiry, personal and intellectual autonomy, communication, and personal effectiveness) will be discipline based, but the sixth category (technical/practical skills) may also include non-discipline specific skills. Collectively these subsections describe the outcome of the degree. For some disciplines, particularly those with professional accreditation requirements relating to outcomes, the Programme Outcomes section will focus on high level outcomes and professional competences.
22. The four graduate attribute subsections (b-e) reflect the clusters of skills and abilities at the core of the University's graduate attributes framework – this framework was designed to allow interpretations that differ between academic domains, ensuring relevance across the institution while retaining an overall cohesion. The boundary lines between each of these subsections will not always be clear and Schools will need to decide into which category certain attributes fit most logically. For example, something deemed to relate to research and enquiry in one discipline may be more appropriately included in the personal and intellectual autonomy section in another – this will depend largely on the focus of the attribute described. It is also worth noting that the distribution of statements across the four graduate attribute subsections may not be even. For example, the distinctive nature of a degree programme may mean there is rightly a heavy emphasis on 'Research and enquiry' and 'Communication'; whereas other programmes may focus on 'Personal and intellectual autonomy' and 'Personal effectiveness'.
23. Indicative interpretations of the four graduate attribute subsections are available – these are generic; versions for individual programmes should make clear the relevance of each attribute to the academic discipline. Guidance and examples for including Graduate Attributes in programme descriptors is available on the University website:  
<https://www.ed.ac.uk/graduate-attributes/how/staff/programme-course-information/programme-descriptors>

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24. Schools should ensure that they can clearly demonstrate where in the programme of study students develop any of the skills or attributes that they claim are a feature of the degree programme (though it is not necessary to state this explicitly in the programme specification for every individual attribute).
25. When completing Section 11, it may be useful to consider the following statements and questions.

**a. Knowledge and understanding**

Entries should describe the acquisition of knowledge as opposed to the ability to do something.

**b.-e. Graduate attributes**

Entries should describe an attribute that is distinctive to higher education. Does the entry legitimately describe an attribute that is the outcome of completing a degree at Edinburgh?

- If not, can it be rephrased to show its role within higher education? For example, 'Use IT effectively' versus 'Use IT effectively in order to search for current thinking on a subject and to solve complex problems'
- If it cannot be appropriately rephrased it may belong in 'Technical/practical skills'.

Does the entry make clear what role this attribute plays in the degree discipline?

- If not, can it be rephrased to show its relevance? Again, phrases such as 'in order to' can help tie an entry to the degree in question rather than simply being a description applicable to any degree. For example, 'Research the available evidence' does not make clear the link to the discipline, as opposed to 'Collect, evaluate and use the best available evidence in order to diagnose, prevent, cure or manage animal health problems'
- Some attributes will inevitably be common across multiple degree programmes but these should not dominate a degree programme specification – students need to be able to understand the distinctiveness of the programme in question.

Is the entry a description of an ability/skill or a description of a disposition/attitude/value/habit of mind?

- If it is a disposition/attitude/value/habit of mind, it likely belongs in the 'Educational aims of programme' section and relates to the three overarching statements of the University's graduate attributes framework – giving a sense of what it means to study at the University of Edinburgh as opposed to elsewhere. For example, 'Having a strong sense of intellectual integrity and the ethics of scholarship'

In which graduate attribute subsection does the attribute belong?

- For some entries this will be straight-forward. For others it will initially be more ambiguous and indeed the subsections are not mutually exclusive. Indicative interpretations of each graduate attribute subsection can be found in the expanded version of the University's graduate attributes framework:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/graduate-attributes/framework>

These indicative interpretations can be helpful in clarifying the border between subsections. It can also be helpful to identify the pivotal skill/attribute within the entry – this often dictates which subsection the entry belongs in, as it is currently phrased. For example, 'Be able to critically assess research options' [Research and enquiry] has a very different focus than 'Be

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able to question networks effectively in order to critically assess research options’  
[Communication].

## **f. Technical/practical skills**

Entries here are neither the high-level knowledge and understanding developed during the degree, nor the associated graduate attributes.

Entries are likely to be high-level technical or practical skills developed during the degree programme, e.g. for subjects that have a practical medical basis or significant time spent within the laboratory. They may not be relevant for some programmes, in which case state “not applicable”.

Some Schools may choose to also include basic level skills that are required to undertake the degree – care should be taken, however, that these are indeed outcomes of the degree rather than necessary precursors to it.

## **Drafting Guidance: Section 12: Programme Structure and Features**

26. The section presents the structure of the programme in relation to the University’s Curriculum Framework. It is the norm within the University for our awards and degree programmes to be consistent with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk)
27. Section 12 must include
  - SQCF credit points and levels for each constituent course and each year of the programme
  - Entry requirements<sup>1</sup>, including requirements for second-year entry where applicable
  - Progression requirements
  - An explanation of the articulation of learning outcomes and assessment practices
  - Modes of study
  - Exit awards available at the completion of specific stages of the programme
28. It is important to ensure that the curriculum design and programme approval assesses the extent to which the programme is inclusive of the needs of all students, e.g. disabled, part-time, distance learning.
29. If not provided earlier in the programme specification, information needs to be included on relevant factors from the University’s Strategy 2030, e.g. embedding in the curriculum factors of:
  - Social and civic responsibility <https://www.ed.ac.uk/about/strategy-2030/our-focus/social-and-civic-responsibility>
  - sustainability [www.ed.ac.uk/sustainability](http://www.ed.ac.uk/sustainability)
  - equality and diversity [www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/equality-diversity](http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/equality-diversity)

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<sup>1</sup> Entry requirements are provided in the original DPS which is considered for Board of Studies and College approval. Once the programme is agreed, the entry requirement is removed from the published DPS. The golden copy of entry requirements is provided in the Degree Finder.  
[www.ed.ac.uk/studying/undergraduate/degrees](http://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/undergraduate/degrees)  
[www.ed.ac.uk/studying/postgraduate/degrees](http://www.ed.ac.uk/studying/postgraduate/degrees)

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## **Drafting Guidance: Section 13: Teaching and Learning Methods and Strategies**

30. This section should include the following
- The range of teaching and learning methods used on the programme, by year of programme (including opportunities for feedback)
  - Facilities (e.g. library; IT or any other distinctive facilities provided within the School)

## **Drafting Guidance: Section 14: Assessment Methods and Strategies**

31. This section should include the following
- Programme assessment methods, preferably by year of programme (including opportunities for feedback)

## **Drafting Guidance: Section 15: Career Opportunities**

32. This section should provide further information on the career opportunities available to graduates on completion of the degree. Contact your College Careers Advisor who can assist in preparing statements for this section.

## **Drafting Guidance: Section 16: Other items**

33. This section can include other distinctive features of the programme, e.g.
- Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of teaching and learning
  - Opportunities for placement or overseas study.

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