

# Guidance on the Academic Blueprint

## Undergraduate Courses

### The Academic Blueprint

- 1.1 Undergraduate degree courses must take account of The Academic Blueprint which specifies the design of these awards. The requirements of the Blueprint are noted in the following paragraphs.

### Course Identity

- 1.2 **Every single honours course must have a course structure with a minimum of 40 credits at level 5 and level 6 which are not shared with any other course.** For joint honours or for courses that are effectively joints, it is recognised that the modules are a combination of modules from at least two single awards. It is expected that this will include some of the modules that are identified as only for that course.

### Course options

- 1.3 **At level 4 there will be no choice of modules.** There will be a prescribed curriculum which will be defined at validation.
- 1.4 **At level 5 course teams may introduce 20 credits of choice (usually one 20 credit module) for students.** The number of options must reflect the number of students on the course with at least 20 students on any option module.
- 1.5 **At level 6 course teams may introduce 40 credits of choice.** An academic case will need to be made if more choice is to be introduced and there must be no more than 60 credits of choice at this level. The number of options must reflect the number of students on the course with a minimum of 20 students on any option module.

### Undergraduate Course size

- 1.6 **Courses will work to a principle of having a minimum of 25 students per cohort.**<sup>[1]</sup> It is recognised that it can take time to be recognised in the market and trend data will be used when looking at current courses. However if after a three year period it is clear that the market is too small for a course consideration will be given by the Portfolio Oversight Group to closing a course.

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<sup>[1]</sup> It is acknowledged that in some areas, the course populations will be less than 25 and there will be strategic reasons why the course delivery would continue (e.g. Welsh language provision, some externally funded niche provision etc.). In these cases a rigorous cost/benefit analysis combined with a consideration of the student experience will be undertaken.

## Module credits

- 1.7 **The current University principle that a module is 20 credits or a multiple of 20 remains in force.** The University encourages greater use of the multiples of 40 and 60 credits.
- 1.8 Any variation to this standard credit structure will only be approved where there is a professional body requirement or a compelling academic argument that they are in the best interests of the students.

## Learning outcomes

- 1.9 Learning outcomes shape the content and learning for the module. **There should normally be two and a maximum of three learning outcomes for a 20 credit module.**
- 1.10 It is not the case that if a module is a multiple of a 20 credit module the number of outcomes should be increased in relation to the size of the module. For example, a 40 credit module does not necessarily require 4 learning outcomes. Course teams need to take an academic view on the appropriate number to cover the content of the module.

## Immersive Learning

- 1.11 An immersive experience is required at the beginning of Year 1 and Year 3 (or Year 2 and Year 4 for part-time provision). **Course teams are expected to choose from one of the following in order to achieve an immersive experience for students:**
- a) Setting students a substantial project to work on, in teams, that must be completed within the first six weeks and must require student teams to work together within the University setting;
  - b) Timetabling one module to be delivered over the first six weeks.
- 1.12 Course teams must also build in a summative assessment for all students within the first six weeks of the start of each year. Feedback must be within the 20 day turnaround time. The particular approach to immersive learning will be tested and approved at validation.
- 1.13 Alongside this course teams must work with library staff to design and implement the induction of students to library, referencing and other learning support. In year three it is anticipated that there will be a refresher session regarding library support.

## Module contact teaching hours

- 1.14 A 20 credit module constitutes 200 hours of learning and assessment time, equivalent to 1200 hours for a 120 credit undergraduate course.
- 1.15 The resource to deliver such modules must be considered at the point of approval and it must be clear how all the hours are to be used by the student. This will include contact time which is defined as: lectures, seminars, tutorials, project supervision, demonstration, practical classes and workshops, supervised time in studio/workshop/laboratory, fieldwork, external visits, work-based learning, placement, simulations, structured learning supported by learning resources purposefully designed to support student learning (delivered either online or on paper); time for preparation for contact time (often 2 hours of student learning for each contact hour) and time for assessment and examination which is included in the learning hours for the module.

The following is the indicative breakdown of hours per 20 credits:

- Up to 80 hours guided and self-directed learning;
  - Up to 72 hours preparation and delivery of assessment;
  - Up to 48 hours direct contact.
- 1.16 Laboratory and field work hours will be listed separately and comprise part of the 80 hours of guided and self-directed learning.
- 1.17 Course teams should articulate why they need the volume of laboratory and fieldwork they have specified.
- 1.18 Where module is entirely fieldwork it will look as though contact hours are heavy. Course teams should differentiate from just being with the students and the situation where there is active engagement in learning and teaching and use the volume of the hours associated with the credit.
- 1.19 Course teams are expected to demonstrate their approach to the total hours of student effort and learning at validation. Course teams are to be mindful of the USW Academic Plan and are to demonstrate active and simulation based approaches to learning and assessment as part of their pedagogical approach to curriculum.

## Assessment

- 1.20 **Assessments should be developed in line with the University's Assessment FOR Learning Policy and must demonstrate how they adhere to the University's Assessment Tariff.** These are available on the CELT website. The expectation is that no module is over assessed and this will be challenged at

validation if necessary. The norm is that a 20 credit module should have no more than two elements of summative assessment (including examinations).

- 1.21 Unless a professional statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) indicates otherwise the overall module mark should determine pass or failure of a module. This is known as 'bonded assessment'.
- 1.22 Assessments should be planned across a course to ensure a variety of assessment for the students. The course assessment diary must be used by Course Leaders to avoid assessment bunching and it must be issued to students at the start of each academic year. Once published to students, at the beginning of the year, the nature and hand in date of the assessment must not be changed. The standard submission time for on-line assessments is 23:59 and 16:00 for physical submissions.
- 1.23 As with learning outcomes it is not the case that the number of elements of summative assessment need to increase in line with the size of the module. Academic judgement should be exercised as to how many elements of assessment are needed to achieve the stated learning outcomes.

### **Model for employability**

- 1.24 All students should have real world experience as part of their curriculum. All courses should meet the following aim:

"To enable learners to demonstrate their engagement in a professional work environment and enhance their ability to appraise their performance so as to be prepared for graduate employment opportunities."

- 1.25 **All courses must also satisfy the following learning outcomes** (which are developed for level 5 but may be uplifted to level 6 if required):

Upon successful completion of this module the learner should be able to:

- a) Reflect on the nature of professional practice in their discipline and identify the gaps between their work related capabilities and disciplinary expectations (LO1);
- b) Reflect upon the way their work experiences or role has contributed to their professional practice, using this to develop future personal/professional development. (LO2);
- c) Develop and critically appraise an action plan of their experience and skills developed within the context of a graduate recruitment process and informed by their career plans and aspirations. (LO3).

In order to deliver on the learning outcomes it is anticipated that the majority of courses will use model 1. For a small number of courses model 2 will be utilised.

### **Model 1**

It is recognised that for most courses the real world experience needs to be very visible for all students and an approach that embeds the above learning outcomes in various modules does not enable students to clearly identify this learning across their curriculum. Course teams are therefore to develop a discipline specific 20 credit “Professional Practice and Employability” module included in each course. The module must include at least 70 hours of Relevant Work Experience or equivalent (‘RWE’). Many courses with embedded work experience or sandwich years will greatly exceed this minimum.

### **Model 2**

However there are a number of courses where PSRB requirements include a fully embedded approach to professional practice and employability through placements e.g. Initial teacher training, Chiropractic, social work. For these courses there will not be a requirement to identify the 20 credit module outlined above, rather they will be expected to embed these learning outcomes in their current practice modules. The embedded approach will be agreed and approved at validation.

Course teams will be able to make a case to be included on the list of courses held by QAE which meet the employability criteria. This is done at the development stage for a new course or before a Critical Review of an existing course if they feel that they are similar to those courses already on the register.

The learning outcomes will be delivered through the vehicle of the discipline so that where possible, teaching material will be specific to the professional activities or industries associated with the course.

Flexibility to accommodate longer or shorter work placements is achieved through the **Professional Practice and Employability module** which will include two themes:

- a) Professional practice which includes the attributes needed to be a graduate in a relevant industry. This must be partly or wholly evidenced through ‘Relevant work experience or equivalent (‘RWE’) i.e. RWE is mandatory - Learning Outcomes 1 and 2;
- b) Preparedness for job applications, interview and selection. These might be delivered using some material drawn down from the Careers Service but it must be subject specific where possible - Learning Outcome 3.

Examples of “Relevant Work Experience or equivalent” (RWE) include: a two week industrial observation; an eight week placement in the summer, ‘live projects’ etc.

The “Professional Practice and Employability Module” can be taken by the student at various times during the course, requiring flexible assessment boards. Academic staff are encouraged to be creative in how these modules are managed. They could be run over a short time period, block weeks, through the summer break, or over a year on a day a week basis.

### **Reading weeks**

1.26 The University does not permit the use of reading weeks.

### **Wednesday afternoons**

1.27 It is expected that Wednesday afternoons are kept free for Students’ Union activities.

### **Postgraduate Courses**

1.28 Postgraduate courses are not subject to the Academic Blueprint, however the University has developed a set of principles at the course and module level which should be taken consideration of when designing and implementing postgraduate provision.

#### **At course level:**

- a) Cohort identity needs to be managed through the creation of a community of practice which might be subject/discipline specific or PGT more widely. If PGT more widely this needs to be achieved through alignment of course start dates and alignment of use of space/estate and timetabling.
- b) When designing a new course or revalidating an existing course market research or recruitment trend data needs to demonstrate either a niche or a general market with a minimum expectation of 15 on a course.
- c) For courses linked to our areas of distinctiveness where student recruitment could and should be wider than the region, the curriculum must be managed such that it allows students to manage long distance travel (block and blend approach, weekend, online elements etc.) and a clear marketing strategy for both the UK and internationally must be developed prior to approval.
- d) Employability (career accelerating), work based learning and simulation must be at the heart of the curriculum design; at approval, panels will expect to see how the course design has included time in relevant work experience.

- e) Significant Employer engagement in curriculum design, approval, learning and teaching.
- f) Part time and/or full time with rationale for both and for cohesive offer where they are run together.
- g) A course should build on USW research/innovation/practice links and UG strengths.

**At module level:**

- a) Module options are important at PGT level. There is an expectation that these will be employer relevant where appropriate, build on research/practice/innovation expertise and that no module will run with less than 10 students. Course development therefore needs to consider how viable it is to offer multiple optional modules, raising student expectations when module delivery is unlikely.
- b) Module credits will normally be based on the university norm of 20 credits or multiples of 20. 10 credit modules must be an exception and agreed in advance of course design. Specific PSRB requirements (evidenced) will normally be the only rationale for 10 credit module inclusion.
- c) Module learning outcomes are required for each module and it is an expectation that these will normally be no more than two per 20 credit module.
- d) Module contact teaching hours need to reflect the more independent nature of PGT study. Therefore these will normally not exceed 36 hours out of the 200 available in any 20 credit module.
- e) Module assessment must align to the USW assessment policy. There will not normally be more than two assessments per 20 credit module. Variety and innovation in assessment design is to be encouraged both in modules and across a course.