PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION GUIDELINES FOR PROGRAMME APPROVAL

Introduction

A programme specification is a concise description of the intended learning outcomes from a tertiary institution programme and of the means by which these outcomes are achieved and demonstrated. A programme, in this context, is a defined curriculum path that leads to a named award.

The information required in a programme specification encourages the teaching staff to identify and express clearly and concisely:

- The intended learning outcomes of the programme
- The teaching and learning methods that enable learners to achieve these outcomes and the assessment methods used to demonstrate their achievement
- The relationship of the programme and its study elements to the Qualifications Framework.

The minimum expectation is that the information contained in programme specifications will be used to inform intending students and their advisors, students who are already studying and potential employers, about the learning outcomes from a programme and the means by which these outcomes will be achieved.

There is no single template for programme specifications but every programme specification should include certain elements as indicated below. These elements provide a starting point for deciding how best to present a programme specification.

Programme Specification Elements

A. Programme Description

Institution

This section requires the name, the respective department and address of the teaching institution, together with the name and address of the body or institution that bestows the award.

The award

The title of the award, the programme title, related courses, and accreditation details are included in this section. In addition, the requirements for entry into the programme, the major learning

pathways within the programme such as majors and other areas of emphasis, and the targeted professional occupations for graduates are stated in this section.

B. Aims, Outcomes, Teaching/Learning Strategies, and Assessment

Programme Philosophy

The programme philosophy is a statement of the institution's perspective of student learning, assessment, the structure of learning spaces and student support.

Programme Aims

Aims are brief and clear overall impression of the educational purposes of the programme. The aims can be stated as follows:

The main aims of a programme in ... are to...

Learning Outcomes

Outcomes are more detailed statements of what the student would have gained as a result of learning. These are the knowledge, understanding, skills, capabilities and values that a student would have gained after completing the programme as a whole. Note that the programme outcomes do not reflect an aggregation of the outcomes of the courses or modules of the programme. Programme outcomes can be categorised as knowledge and understanding, intellectual/cognitive skills, and other key skills.

Here are a few stems that could be used to formulate programme outcomes:

The programme develops....
The most important values which inform this programme are....
The most important intellectual skills developed in this programme are....
The most useful practical skills, techniques and capabilities developed are....
On completing this programme we want students to know and understand....
On completing this programme we want students to be able to....

Teaching and Learning Strategies and Modalities

These are the opportunities provided by the institution for each individual student to achieve the range of learning outcomes. It is expected that the different strategies, modalities and combinations thereof, align with the learning outcomes described above.

Assessment Methods

These are the ways by which students can demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes. Assessment strategies should align with the learning outcomes.

Programme Alignment

The programme should be aligned with other programmes within the same field of study within the institution.

C. Programme Structures

Programme Structures and Requirements

In this section the programme structures and features, curriculum units (modules), credit and award requirements are listed. This could include but is not limited to the following components:

- Unique features of the curriculum and a rationale for the curriculum design.
- A summary of the curriculum structure for the programme by semester to indicate format, such as practicals, lectures, and project work.
- Course outlines
- Credit calculation
- Grade Point Average (GPA) calculation
- Professional development units/points equivalence
- Programme delivery, e.g. whether fulltime or part time, distance.
- Overview of assessment, e.g. percentage allotted to course work.
- Progression requirements for successful completion of the programme.
- Possibilities for transfer to other programmes.
- Distinctive features of the programme such as work attachments, advanced entry, accelerated tracks and alternative routes.
- Year by year information on the curriculum units (modules) with sequence, levels and credits.

Criteria for Admission to the Programme

Essential pre-requisites and registration requirements

Information about Assessment Regulations

Details of rules governing marking, i.e. second marking, examinations, pass marks, supplemental examinations, appeals, late work, disciplinary matters, and grading criteria.

D. Quality Elements

Indicators of Quality

Results of programme and institutional reviews
Accreditation status
Ratings

Peer review reports

Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of learning

Student surveys, evaluation of student feedback, periodic programme and curriculum reviews, staff appraisals, mentoring schemes, peer teaching observations, external examiners' reports, programme and subject committees' meetings, alumni surveys.

Support for Learning

List the infrastructure and facilities that support students' learning, such as, library, computing services, career centre, disabilities services, induction programmes, course handbook, Web sites, study skills sessions, individual guidance arrangements, tutorials, access to academic staff and counsellors, access to tutors, students' representation on programme committees, feedback policy, professional development unit.

Date at which the programme specification was written or revised

Indicate the date