

Programme Specification for MSc Physician Associate

This document applies to academic year 2023-24 onwards

Table 1 Programme Specification for MSc Physician Associate

1.	Awarding institution/body	University of Worcester
2.	Teaching institution	University of Worcester
3.	Programme accredited by	N/A
4.	Final award or awards	MSc
5.	Programme title	MSc Physician Associate
6.	Pathways available	N/A
7.	Mode and/or site of delivery	Taught programme - University of Worcester Practice placement – Local NHS
8.	Mode of attendance and duration	Full time programme lasting 2 years. Practice element may include working some unsocial hours (evenings, nights, weekends, and public holidays).
9.	UCAS Code	N/A
10.	Subject Benchmark statement and/or professional body statement	QAA (2020) Master's Degree Characteristics Department of Health (2006, revised 2012) Competence and Curriculum Framework for Physician Assistants (2012)
11.	Date of Programme Specification preparation/ revision	June 2014 (approval of full time course); May 2015 (amendment to duration of course and assessments); April 2016 (approval of part time route); September 2016 (amendment to module titles MSPA4001 and 4004), August 2017 (removal of national exam from module MSPA4007), August 2019 AQU amendments to Section 19; August 2020 QAA Benchmark statement links updated; August 2020 – AQU amendments to Section 19; August 2021 – AQU amendments; August 2022 – AQU amendments, July 2023 – Annual updates.

12. Educational aims of the programme

The [Department of Health \(2006, revised 2012\) Competence and Curriculum Framework for Physician Assistants \(2012\)](#) defines a Physician Associate (formally Physician Assistant) as:

“a new healthcare professional who, while not a doctor, works to the medical model, with the attitudes, skills and knowledge base to deliver holistic care and treatment within the general medical and/or general practice team under defined levels of supervision. The role is therefore designed to supplement the medical workforce, thereby improving patient access”.

The MSc Physician Associate course is aimed at graduates in life/biological/biomedical sciences, healthcare professions and science, engineering and social sciences whom have studied appropriate biological sciences at degree level, whom aspire to become Physician Associates.

The MSc Physician Associate programme is a pre-registration healthcare course, delivered at post-graduate level (Level 7). The programme aims to equip individuals to be able to function in a multi-disciplinary team, under the supervision of a registered medical practitioner (doctor). On

completion of the programme, graduates should be patient-centred Physician Associates, who are safe, competent and reflective practitioners. They will be prepared for the National Certification Examination with the tools for a career that will involve professional enquiry and health research. Graduates will be well placed to become leaders in the Physician Associate profession.

The programme is constructed around the guidance of the [Competence and Curriculum Framework \(2012\)](#) for Physician Assistants, which cover the breadth of clinical topics in primary and secondary care and reflect an evolving workforce agenda in the NHS. Students will participate in an intensive and demanding programme of study over 2 extended academic years, amounting to 90 weeks of study over two years. Both the duration of the programme and the requisite high levels of knowledge and skill required to ensure patient safety means that this is a highly assessed academic and clinical programme. The RCP FPAs specifies a minimum of 1,500 hours of theory teaching and 1,600 hours of clinical placements must be completed to be eligible to take the National Certification Examination upon graduating. The approach to assessment is comprehensive and demanding, but not unrealistic, given that it is driven by patient safety requirements.

The programme aims to meet the educational requirements set out by the Royal College of Physicians Faculty of Physician Associates (RCP FPA) in the [Competence and Curriculum Framework \(2012\)](#)

1. Enable graduates to provide patients with safe, high quality, compassionate clinical care within their scope of practice and field of delegated autonomy.
2. Provide graduates with sound scientific knowledge to inform their clinical skills and decision-making.
3. Equip graduates to safely assess patients, demonstrate clinical reasoning and diagnostic skills, formulate a management plan, and execute the management plan.
4. Enable graduates to work effectively within an integrated multidisciplinary team and with delegated autonomy.
5. Equip graduates with transferrable skills and an understanding of first principles to provide them with the ability to adapt practice in order to function safely and effectively in a range of situations, many of which will be new or novel.
6. Prepare graduates to become leaders of their profession through self-management, role modelling, and education, and by contributing to the evolution of the Physician Associate profession in the UK.
7. Enable graduates to demonstrate the qualities and skills for employment.

13. Intended learning outcomes and learning, teaching and assessment methods

The intended learning outcomes of the course reflect that this is a two-year, full time course that is designed to meet both the standards set out in the RCP FPA [Competency and Curriculum Framework \(2012\)](#) and which also take account of the University's [Curriculum Design Policy](#), [Assessment Policy](#) and [Guidance on writing learning outcomes](#) and developing assessment criteria, as well as the UK Quality Code (for FHEQ and subject/qualification benchmarks) and any professional body requirements.

Table 2 knowledge and understanding outcomes and which module/code they relate to

Knowledge and Understanding

LO no.	On successful completion of the named award, students will be able to:	Module Code/s	Award
1.	Demonstrate comprehensive and critical knowledge and understanding to practice in a legal, ethical and	MSPA4022 MSPA4026	PGDip MSc

	compassionate manner within their scope of professional practice.		
2.	Demonstrate comprehensive and critical knowledge and understanding to develop professional relationships across the scope of professional practice.	MSPA4022 MSPA4026	PGDip MSc
3.	Utilise a broad knowledge base, demonstrating conceptual understanding of clinical and medical sciences, including pharmacology, therapeutics, public health and epidemiology, to underpin patient assessment, clinical decision-making and clinical management of patients across the age spectrum.	MSPA4021 MSPA4025	PGCert PGDip MSc
4.	Critically appraise and utilise the evidence base and exemplars of best practice to underpin clinical practice, for advanced scholarship.	MSPA4024 MSPA4030	PGDip MSc

Table 3 cognitive and intellectual skills outcomes for module code/s

Cognitive and Intellectual skills
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5.	Exercise a systematic approach and critical awareness in problem solving using skills to interpret information, informing differential diagnoses and clinical management.	MSPA4022 MSPA4026	PGCert PGDip MSc
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Table 4 learning skills and capabilities related to employability outcomes for module code/s

Skills and capabilities related to employability

6.	Conduct safe, appropriate and effective history taking, clinical examination, and consultation with patients across the age spectrum and in a range of clinical settings.	MSPA4022 MSPA4026	PGDip MSc
7.	Identify, request and, where appropriate, conduct clinical investigations, in a range of clinical presentations across the age spectrum and in a range of clinical settings.	MSPA4021 MSPA4023	PGCert PGDip MSc
8.	Produce coherent and accurate clinical and professional records.	MSPA4022 MSPA4026	PGDip MSc
9.	Create safe, rational and coherent plans, including referral and review, for the care and management of patients across the age spectrum and in a range of clinical settings.	MSPA4022 MSPA4026	PGDip MSc
10	Critically assess and manage risk in all aspects of professional practice.	MSPA4026 MSPA4025	PGDip MSc

Table 5 transferable/key skills outcomes for module code/s

Transferable/key skills

11.	Work effectively in a team, with both direct and indirect supervision, where appropriate teaching and supervising others.	MSPA4026	PGDip MSc
12.	Demonstrate leadership skills and advanced scholarship for innovative practice development to adopt and disseminate NHS service improvement.	MSPA4024 MSPA4030	MSc
13.	Demonstrate effective and appropriate verbal, non-verbal and written communication skills, where appropriate receiving, eliciting and transmitting information, in all professional situations.	MSPA4022 MSPA4026	PGCert PGDip MSc

Learning, Teaching and Assessment

The programme aims and learning outcomes have been developed in accordance with the [University's Curriculum Design Policy](#).

The University places emphasis on enabling students to develop the independent learning capabilities that will equip them for lifelong learning and future employment, as well as academic achievement. A mixture of independent study, teaching and academic support through the personal academic tutoring system enables students to reflect on progress and build up a profile of skills, achievements and experiences enabling success. This is especially important at level 7 – Master's level. As a graduate of this course, students will be working in complex situations that require reasoned approaches to be taken, often when dealing with uncertainty in the clinical environment.

Teaching

Students are taught through a combination of structured lecturers, seminars, clinical simulation and clinical skills practical sessions, blended learning, case-based learning, directed and independent study, group and individual tutorials, with the additional support of e-learning strategies using the virtual learning environment. There will be input from other agencies, service users and professionals as appropriate. This will meet the [RCP FPA](#) requirement for 1,500 hours of theory.

A feature of the programme is the opportunities for clinical skill and simulated learning including role play, 'hands on' practical skills sessions using a range of simulation manikins. Formative feedback on performance is provided to facilitate safe and effective support for essential skills development, in simulation suites, replicating hospital and community practice learning environments.

Practice learning experiences are in primary and secondary care environments, including GP practices, hospitals, hospices, community hospitals and other out-patient and community settings. These are based predominantly in the Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. In the year one of the course, students will undertake one day a week placement, for example in primary care, A&E and out-patient departments. Year two is predominantly based in clinical placements in a variety of clinical settings which when combined with those placement hours in year one, meet the requirement for 1,600 hours of clinical placement as set out by the [RCP FPA](#). During year two, students will also return to the University for a combination of clinical skills and simulation teaching, formative assessment of progress, Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) meetings and dissertation tutorials.

When in practice, students are supported, coached, supervised and assessed by a named clinical supervisor. The named supervisor will co-ordinate clinical experience supervised by a range of appropriately qualified clinical staff within the healthcare team and clinical firm. Experience is verified in the final sign off by the Clinical Supervisor.

The Work Based Learning requirements are aligned to the specialities and associated duration of placements in these, set by the RCP FPA as follows:

Speciality	Duration
General Hospital Medicine	350 hours
Community Medicine	510 hours
Front Door Medicine	180 hours
General Surgery	90 hours
Mental Health	90 hours
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	90 hours
Paediatrics	90 hours
<i>Other</i>	<i>200 hours</i>

Contact time

In a typical week in year one, teaching will be across five days, Monday to Friday and typically consist of 21 hours teaching time. In year two, students will be on placement for a minimum of 37.5 hours per week with four academic in-weeks of approximately 20 hours per week.

Independent self-study

In addition to the contact time, students are expected to undertake around 17-20 hours of personal self-study per week. Typically, this will involve completing online activities, reading journal articles and books, undertaking research in the library and online, preparing coursework assignments and presentations, and preparing for examinations.

Independent learning is supported by a range of excellent learning facilities, including the Hive and library resources, the virtual learning environment, and extensive electronic learning resources.

Teaching staff

Students are taught by a teaching team whose expertise and knowledge are closely matched to the content of the modules on the course. The core academic teaching team consists of three Physician Associates, a Doctor of Medicine, a Physicians' Assistant (Anaesthesia) and an academic with research experience in whole systems physiology and health workforce development. All but one holds a post-graduate teaching qualification and are Fellows of the Higher Education Academy. The teaching team are supported by Associate Lecturers, mostly General Practitioners, hospital doctors or Physician Associates from the local area. There is also input from a wider range of professionals including practicing healthcare professionals, practitioners and service users/carers.

Assessment

The course provides opportunities to test understanding and learning informally through the completion of practice or 'formative' assignments. Each module has one or more formal or 'summative' assessments which are graded and count towards the overall module grade.

Assessment methods include regular examinations, Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCE), Objective Structured Practical Examinations, written project work and group presentations. Formative and summative assessment runs throughout each module and where possible, formative assessments are integrated into study days at the university. Clinical practice is assessed using a variety of appropriate methods, by supervising clinicians in placement, and by OSCEs at University. Final assessment in preparation for the national exam is integrated into the end of the final year.

14. Assessment Strategy

The assessment strategy is designed to enable students to demonstrate competence in individual, discrete skills, and the integration of those skills in the safe assessment and management of patients. It offers a robust approach to assure student competence. To that end, students will hold a skills passport for the duration of the programme, enabling them to demonstrate their ability in a range of competencies, initially through simulation and then in clinical practice.

Feedback

Students will receive feedback on practice, "formative" assessments and on formal, "summative" assessments undertaken by coursework. Feedback on examination performance will be via tutorial with the module leader. Feedback is intended to support learning and students are encouraged to discuss their progress with personal academic tutors (PAT) and module tutors as appropriate. Feedback on summative assessments is within 20 working days of hand-in.

Assessment of clinical practice learning involves formative initial and intermediate interviews, where students' learning needs are identified and where necessary, action plans are put in place. Summative assessment is completed at the end of placement. Feedback is provided to students on a final interview form.

15. Programme structures and requirements

Course Route

Year 1 is delivered 5 days per week, over 45 weeks per year, providing 1,500 hours of theory through completion of the taught modules. The equates to 105 credits and 150 hours of clinical placement.

Year 2 consists of clinical placements to complete 1,450 hours. Students also complete the Dissertation during this year and 100 hours of theory during the academic in-weeks. The placement hours over the two years achieves the [RCP FPA requirement](#).

In order to progress into the clinical placement module (MSPA4026), students must have successfully completed modules: MSPA4021, MSPA4022, MSPA4023, MSPA4024 and MSPA4025. These modules ensure that students have the required theoretical underpinning and simulated clinical skills required to provide the foundation knowledge, understanding and competence required for clinical placements, including aspects of patient safety.

Table 6 award map

Module Code	Module Title	Status Mandatory (M) or Optional (O)			
		Credits (Number)	PG Cert	PG Dip	MSc
MSPA4021	Foundations of Clinical Medicine and Surgery	30	O	M	M
MSPA4022	Foundations of Clinical Practice	30	O	M	M
MSPA4023	Clinical Medicine and Public Health	15	O	M	M
MSPA4024	Research Methods in Health	15	O	M	M
MSPA4025	Clinical Specialities	15	O	M	M
MSPA4026	Clinical Placements	30	n/a	M	M
MSPA4030	Dissertation	45	n/a	n/a	M
Total Credits		180			
PG Certificate					
To be awarded the PG Cert in Clinical Studies students must successfully complete 60 credits at Level 7 from any of the above Optional modules.					
PG Diploma					
To be awarded the PG Dip in Clinical Studies students must successfully complete the PG Certificate plus any other Mandatory modules to a total minimum of 120 credits at Level 7.					
To be awarded the PG Dip Physician Associate students must pass modules MSPA4021, MSPA4022, MSPA4023, MSPA4024, MSPA4025 and MSPA4026 inclusive, but be unsuccessful in the Dissertation (MSPA4030).					
MSc Physician Associate					
To be awarded the MSc Physician Associate, requires students to successfully complete all Mandatory modules as indicated in the table above. The awards of PG Cert and PG Dip are only available as exit awards.					

16. QAA and professional academic standards and quality

This award is located at Level 6 of the [OfS sector recognised standards](#) and reflects the QAA guidance on master's degree characteristics. The design of the curriculum has been informed by:

[QAA \(2020\) The characteristics statement for masters' degrees, Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.](#)

[QAA \(2002\) Benchmark Statement – Medicine](#)

[Department of Health \(2006, revised 2012\) Competence & Curriculum Framework for the Physician Assistant](#)

[Department of Health National Practitioner Programme \(2006\) Matrix Specification of Core Clinical Conditions for the Physician Assistant by Category of Level of Competence](#)

The MSc Physician Associate curriculum reflects the broad principles of Professional Statutory Regulatory Bodies in anticipation of future regulation, such as:

The NHS Long Term Plan (Jan 2019) and

[HM Government Consultation on the Regulation of Medical Associate Professionals \(MAPs\)](#)

17. Support for students

The university offers a full range of pastoral and academic support services are available for students that can be accessed via the [Student Homepage](#). Support for a wide range of student issues from accommodation to welfare through a single point of access, FirstPoint, located in the Peirson Centre. Students with disabilities will be supported by the specialist services such as [Student Services](#) and the [Disability and dyslexia service](#), in conjunction with the programme team.

Prior to commencing the course, students are invited to attend a day that will familiarise them with the University, the School of Allied Health and Community and the course. They can meet representatives from Student Services, Registry and ILS and hear more about their services as well as meeting the programme team.

Induction

An induction programme is offered to all students in their first week of the course which provides students with the opportunity to meet the course leader, the course team, subject librarian and their personal academic tutor. Induction introduces students to the concept of learning and teaching at level 7 including study skills and academic writing, introduction to information and learning systems including library resources, use of computer facilities, timetabling and access to teaching staff, an introduction to student services and the international office. There are also a range of study skills workshops, open to all students on a self-referral basis. Academic support is also offered by the [Disability and dyslexia service](#).

Personal Academic Tutors

Personal tutoring is at the heart of student support. All students are allocated a Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) within the Physician Associate team for the duration of the course. In addition, the course and module leaders are another source of support for students, especially in respect of overall guidance.

Whilst the Personal Academic Tutor will be the student's first point of contact for support with developing academic skills, it may also be useful for them to access some of the additional support the University provides for all its students. This includes a diverse range of study skill support including maths support, a writer in residence and referencing.

The Course Handbook contains information that is provided to all students. The handbook is reviewed, updated and reissued annually. Subject guides, and 'Libguides' are widely available both in hardcopy and on the university website. The programme has a course presence on the virtual learning environment (Blackboard) in addition to individual web pages for each module.

Clinical Placements

During clinical placements in year one, students are in University for four days per week, and as such have normal scheduled PAT meeting at which placements are discussed, as well as regular group discussions with the clinical placement lead. Matters arising can be discussed ad hoc with either the students' PAT or the placement lead when necessary. Student feedback both about the placement and from the placement are also monitored regularly and used to help support the students.

In year two, clinical placements are supported in a number of ways, which meet the University's Work Based Learning policy. These include, three site visits to each student, roughly once per term. There are four one-week University-based blocks, during which students will have a PAT meeting, discuss placements as a group, have clinical simulation and seminars that support placement skills and clinical reasoning as well as dissertation seminars and meetings with supervisors.

18. Admissions

Admissions Policy

The programme seeks to recruit graduates with a strong science or healthcare background as well as experienced clinicians in other healthcare disciplines. The University of Worcester is committed to widening participation, equality and diversity, and inclusion. Candidates will be selected on ability, potential, commitment to become a Physician Associate and demonstrating values and attitudes compatible with professional healthcare practice.

Entry requirements

Applicants should normally have: GCSE (or equivalent) grade A-C/4 in Maths and English, a minimum of 250 hours of healthcare experience and:

EITHER

A minimum of a lower second-class honours degree (2:2) or above in a relevant subject, such as medical, biological or life sciences or other health related subject from a UK university **or** an overseas equivalent.

OR

A minimum of a lower second-class honours degree (2:2) or above in a physical science or engineering subject or social work and appropriate modules in biology passed at a minimum of 55% at QAA levels 5 or 6. E.g. from the Open University.

Alternative professional qualifications (e.g. DipHE in Nursing, Paramedic Science, ODP) with appropriate professional registration and a minimum of two years post-registration experience may be considered. Applicants may be required to submit supplementary details, such as course transcripts and asked to complete a short essay.

When assessing a non-standard entrant's suitability for entry onto the programme, candidates will need to demonstrate their potential to achieve the aims and outcomes of the programme. The candidate will also need to demonstrate that their experiences are equivalent to having achieved a minimum 2.2 in a science or healthcare at undergraduate level. The following criteria may be taken into consideration:

- Level of current qualifications
- Evidence of adoption of the principles of lifelong learning
- Ability to be an effective learner in a fast-paced Masters programme
- Ability to recognise and adopt professional standards and values
- Ability to work with others in a team
- Ability to write in a clear, coherent and critical manner
- Motivation for undertaking the programme
- Experience of working in a public-facing environment

For applicants whose first language is not English, they will be expected to demonstrate their proficiency in English and would normally be expected to have an IELTS score of 7.5 with a minimum of 7.0 in each element, or equivalent (This is inline with [GMC guidance on English language standards](#)). Students can check their qualification with the International Recruitment Team at: international@worc.ac.uk

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) requirements

All applicants must undertake an enhanced DBS check and occupational health clearance, this will be at the applicants' own expense.

Recognition of Prior Learning

Students with relevant previous study at postgraduate level or with extensive experience may be considered eligible for recognition of prior learning. Please contact the Registry Admissions Office for further information or guidance on 01905 855111.

Further information on Recognition of Prior Learning can be found at <http://www.worcester.ac.uk/registryservices/941.htm>

Admissions procedures

All applications will be processed by the Admissions office and following initial screening, reviewed by the programme team.

Candidates who meet the entry criteria will be invited to participate in a selection day to include;

- Values based interview (via a number of interview/assessment stations)
- A team exercise
- A literacy assessment
- A presentation

Admissions/selection criteria

Students are offered a place based upon their performance in the selection elements, provided they meet the entry criteria. Any offer of a place is conditional upon the applicant providing a satisfactory enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check and receiving Occupational Health clearance.

19. Regulation of assessment

The course operates under the University's [Taught Courses Regulatory Framework](#)

Requirements to pass modules

- Modules are assessed using a variety of assessment activities which are detailed in the module specifications.
- All assessments and the dissertation are assessed on a pass/fail basis.
- Students are required to submit all items of assessment in order to pass a module, and in some modules, a pass mark in each item of assessment may be required.
- Some modules have attendance requirements for Work Based Learning requirements.
- Full details of the assessment requirements for a module, including the assessment criteria, are published in the module outline.

Submission of assessment items

- Students who submit an assessment item after the due date that is marked on a Pass/Fail basis or submitted for reassessment and subject to being capped at the minimum pass mark will not have the work marked. A grade of "L2" will be used to indicate that work had been submitted. Students who have a claim of mitigating circumstances upheld and have submitted the assessment item within fourteen days of the deadline, the original assessment item will be marked.
- For full details of submission regulations please see the [Taught Courses Regulatory Framework](#).

Retrieval of failure

- If a student is unsuccessful in the reassessment, they have the right to retake the module; the module grade for a re-taken module is capped at pass.
- A student who fails a placement in relation to MSPA4026 will have one reassessment opportunity only for that placement.
- A student who fails 60 credits or more after exhausting all reassessment opportunities may be required to withdraw from the University.

- A student will be notified of the reassessment opportunities in the results notification issued via the secure student portal (SOLE). It is the student's responsibility to be aware of and comply with any reassessments

This course is subject to the University's fitness to practice procedures.

Requirements for Awards

Table 7 requirements for awards

Award	Requirement
PG Cert Clinical Studies	Passed a minimum of 60 credits at level 7, as specified on the award map
PG Dip Clinical Studies	Passed a minimum of 120 credits at level 7, as specified on the award map
PG Dip Physician Associate	Passed a minimum of 120 credits at level 7, MSPA4021, MSPA4022, MSPA4023, MSPA4024, MSPA4025 and MSPA4026 inclusive, but be unsuccessful in the Dissertation (MSPA4030).
MSc Physician Associate	Passed a minimum of 180 credits at level 7, as specified on the award map

The awards of PG Cert, PG Dip and MSc are unclassified.

20. Graduate destinations, employability and links with employers

Graduate Destinations

Graduates of the course are working as Physician Associates in a diverse range of clinical settings, including A&E, general medical specialities, transplant and general surgery, primary care and psychiatry.

Student Employability

100% of graduates from the first two cohorts who were successful in the national certification examination have found employment as Physician Associates.

Links with Employers

Practice partners are engaged in the writing, development and delivery of the programme. They provide clinical placements and are closely involved in the on-going monitoring of the programme.

Please note: This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if s/he takes full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detailed information on the learning outcomes, content and teaching, and learning and assessment methods of each module can be found in the module outlines and the course handbook provided to all students at the start of the course.