

Principles and Guidance for Design of Undergraduate Courses Updated November 2019

1. Introduction

1.1 The Taught Courses Regulatory Framework (TCRF) defines the regulations and requirements for all awards at the University of Worcester. It is consistent with [The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications \(FHEQ\) of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#) (QAA, 2014) which specifies the level of study required for specific types of awards. It is also consistent with the [Higher education credit framework for England guidance on academic credit arrangements in higher education in England](#) (QAA, 2008) which sets out the minimum credit requirements for HE qualifications.

1.2 This document provides advice and guidance on the design of undergraduate courses leading to Honours degrees.

2. General Principles for Course Design

2.1 The principles for course design set out the standard requirements for courses governed by the TCRF, and more specifically for those Honours degree programmes, including Joint Honours degrees. These requirements are regarded as the norm and courses must comply with the common design principles, structures and other requirements set out here. This ensures comparability of opportunity and experience, and consistency of treatment, for all students on undergraduate courses. In specific circumstances, where course teams consider they have a strong case to deviate from some aspect of these requirements, for example on the grounds of meeting professional body requirements, this must be made clear in the proposal put forward to the Academic Planning and Portfolio Group for approval. Deviations from the standard TCRF regulations are subject to the agreement of the Academic Registrar and the Director of Quality and Educational Development, and must be clearly set out in the Programme Specification for the award or awards.

Principles of modular design

2.2 The achievement of an award within the TCRF is based on the principles of **credit accumulation** where credit is gained through the successful achievement of designated learning outcomes at specified level(s). The amount of credit achieved relates to the amount of learning, with each unit of credit representing 10 hours of student learning. Each course is divided into discrete modules, which are credit rated and have specific learning outcomes. As students successfully take and pass modules they accumulate credit towards specific awards.

2.3 Courses within the TCRF are modular in design to provide flexibility and promote efficiency in course structure and delivery, to enable development of inter- and multi-disciplinary programmes of study, to facilitate student choice and to ensure equity of experience for students in terms of hours of study, assessment, etc. Modular courses also provide opportunities for recognition of prior and/or experiential learning (RPL/RPEL), step on/step off points and intermediate awards for credit achieved.

2.4 All elements of a course which are summatively assessed and contribute to the achievement of the award should be integrated within a module which bears credit. This includes work-based learning which is formally assessed and contributes to the award.

Similarly, placements in professional courses should be incorporated within a module which is credit-rated if they are formally assessed against specified learning outcomes and contribute to the final award.¹

Principles of curriculum design

2.5 The design of all courses must take account of the [UK Quality Code in Higher Education](#) (including qualification frameworks, subject benchmark statements, and qualification characteristic statements as well as the Expectations and Core Practices of the Quality Code). Where relevant, professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements must also be taken into account.

2.6 In addition, curriculum design must be informed by the University [Curriculum Design Policy](#) and the [Assessment Policy](#) and other associated quality standards and policies (see documents under [Policy and Regulatory Framework](#) on the AQU webpages).

i There should be clear aims for all courses in terms of the intended impact on students and on society more generally, perhaps taking account of local, regional, national and global issues. This should include articulation of who the course is for, what the University of Worcester can offer students who take the course, and any unique or distinctive features of the course.

ii The curriculum must be based on a clear set of learning outcomes (see separate [guidance on writing of learning outcomes](#)) which communicate what a student who successfully completes the course will be able to do – based on the knowledge, understanding and skills they have developed as part of the programme of study. The course level learning outcomes must be expressed at the exit level of the course and should structure and shape the design of all modules and the learning, teaching and assessment strategy of the course.

2.7 In designing curricula, teams will need to ensure they have given due consideration to, and made explicit:

- the development of higher level cognitive skills, transferable skills and work-related skills, including those related to critical awareness, problem solving, research and enquiry, together with (from 2020 onwards) University graduate attributes
- student employability and career management guidance and education
- matters of inclusion, equality and diversity, taking account of the commitments and targets in the University's [Access and Participation Plan](#)
- embedding of personal academic tutoring
- the research inspired nature of the curriculum
- developing graduates who are socially, ethically and environmentally responsible.

Principles of assessment design

2.8 Course teams are expected to take a **strategic approach to the design of assessment**, taking account of the University's Assessment Policy and associated guidance. The Programme Specification requires a brief statement on course assessment strategy (advice is provided in the template).

2.9 In designing an assessment strategy, teams will need to ensure they have given due consideration to, and made explicit:

- approach to formative assessment

¹ In exceptional circumstances, approval may be given to the incorporation of placements within 'P modules' which are non-credit rated.

- balance and scheduling of summative assessment across the academic year
- relationship of assessment to learning and teaching and to course and module learning outcomes (constructive alignment)
- range of assessment modes (tasks) and progression
- approach to assessment and grade criteria
- arrangements for standardisation and moderation
- arrangements for providing students with feedback on assessments to ensure course team consistency.

2.10 As well as the statement of assessment strategy within the programme specification, course teams will be required to provide for approval an **assessment map** showing the assessment modes for each module and an **assessment schedule** of summative assessment hand-in dates.

3. Course Design Requirements

Modules in the Taught Courses Regulatory Framework

3.1 A module is a discrete unit of study leading to specified learning outcomes which are summatively assessed. Modules are identified by credit value and by level. The level² of a module is an indicator of the relative demand, complexity and depth of learning and learner autonomy and is demonstrated by the learning outcomes and the assessment.

3.2 Modules must have a specific code and title and be distinctive overall in terms of their aims, specific learning outcomes, content and assessment. This will be defined for each module in an approved definitive '**module specification**'.

3.3 Each module will have defined learning outcomes at either level 4, 5 or 6. Where a module is offered at more than one level (e.g. level 5 and 6) each version must be presented in a separate module specification with clearly differentiated learning outcomes and assessment.

3.4 Each unit of credit represents 10 hours of student learning and the **standard size of a module is normally 30 or 15 credits**. 30 credit modules are normally taken over a whole academic year, with 300 total learning hours; 15 credit modules of 150 learning hours are always taken in one semester.

3.5 The distribution of student learning hours within a module is a matter for the professional judgement of the module leader/team. However, the requirements for **publication of information on learning and teaching activities**, necessitates that information is provided for each module of the amount of time spent in scheduled activity etc. The module specification requires this information.

3.6 Modules of multiples of 15/30 credits are *exceptionally* permitted at level 6, as are 30 credit modules delivered in one semester, at level 5 or 6. Courses must establish the educational justification for inclusion of larger credit modules and these are normally only permitted where the subject matter prohibits meaningful use of modules of smaller size. For example, modules requiring practice placements and time for reflection or work-based learning over longer periods, and performance-related areas of curriculum.

3.7 Each module will have an assessment strategy which is aligned with the intended learning outcomes and learning activities, and all stated learning outcomes for a module will be summatively assessed at their designated level [for further guidance related to assessment see

² Southern England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer - SEEC: <http://www.seec.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/SEEC-descriptors-2016.pdf>.

3.8 Within a course, a module may be specified as **Mandatory** or **Optional**:

- Mandatory modules must be taken and passed
- Optional modules provide choice for students and only have to be passed if they are a pre-requisite for a follow-on module.

3.9 Level 4 of subjects offering Single Honours and Joint Honours pathways must be designed so that core knowledge and skills are located in mandatory modules that must be taken and passed by all students. No more than 60 credits of mandatory modules can be specified for Joint Honours awards. Single honours awards should normally consist of 90 credits of mandatory modules and 30 credits of optional modules. As indicated above, mandatory modules must be passed in order to progress to the next level of study.

3.10 Each course must have an **Award Map** which lists all modules which are mandatory and optional for the course and any specific requirements for each award pathway e.g. Single Honours, Major, Joint, Minor. This forms part of the [Programme Specification](#). Standard templates for award maps should be used; there is one for Single Honours only courses and one for Joint Honours courses.

3.11 Modules may also have **pre-requisites**, i.e. modules that must be taken and passed before another specified module can be taken. The use of pre-requisites must be educationally justified and specific to the module to which they are associated, i.e. the pre-requisite is a requirement for the module and does not differ between awards. No module may be a pre-requisite for another module at the same level and careful consideration should be given to the use of pre-requisites in relation to progression through a course and from one level to the next.

3.12 Pre-requisites can take the following forms:

- a specific named module (or exceptionally two or more modules)
- either module x or module y
- one of module x, y, z, ...
- any XXXX coded module.

Generally, where possible pre-requisites should be kept to a minimum. Where a module does not have a pre-requisite it will indicate that it can be taken by a student who has not completed any modules from the preceding level.

3.13 Pairs of modules at the same level may exceptionally, be specified as **co-requisites**, i.e. a module required to be taken at the same time as another module. Co-requisites must be educationally justified and specific to the module(s) in which they are included, i.e. the co-requisite is a requirement for the module(s) and does not differ between awards. Careful consideration should be given to the use of co-requisites in relation to progression through a course and may have specific implications for part-time students. The use of co-requisites is extremely rare.

3.14 Modules may be shared by more than one course, i.e. although offered by a particular subject/discipline they can be identified as part of a course leading to an award in other subjects/disciplines where they are deemed relevant to the overall aims and learning outcomes of that award. Any shared modules will be listed in the award map for a specific course within the programme specification. Modules that are shared across courses in this way must retain the module code designated by their host subject/course.

3.15 Modules with substantially similar content should be identified by specifying that they are an **excluded combination**, i.e. a student is not permitted to study both modules as part of their programme of study.

3.16 There is no requirement for a mandatory Dissertation (from 2020; formerly Independent Study) module in Honours degree programmes. Where a course/subject does include such a module it is normally 30 credits value at level 6 and can be taken over one or two semesters. A student on an Honours Degree course may take only one Dissertation. Joint Honours students are required to take a Dissertation module from one of their two subjects or take a Dissertation module that covers both subjects.

4. Undergraduate Honours Degree Awards

General Requirements

4.1 Undergraduate Honours Degree awards include both **single subject** and **combined subject** awards, i.e. Joint and Major/Minor Honours awards.

4.2 Each award must be distinct from that of other awards, have a defined course structure, aims and specific learning outcomes related to the knowledge, skills and attributes that an individual is intended to have achieved on completion of the award.

4.3 A particular combination of modules at levels 5 and 6 must be discrete to a particular award title; it must not be possible for students to take the same diet of level 6 modules and be eligible for two or more award titles. The **minimum** differentiation must be 30 credits at level 6.

4.4 The modules specified for a Joint Honours or Minor pathway must justify the award title.

4.5 Each course leading to an award is comprised of an approved set of modules and has a **Programme Specification**, including an award map specifying the mandatory and optional modules for the award(s), which is reviewed and updated annually.

4.6 The design of a course that is intended to lead to a **Single Honours award should normally** provide the opportunity for students to take a Language module from the listing of modules offered by the Language Centre equivalent to 15 or 30 credits at each of level 4 and level 5.

4.7 The number of **mandatory modules** in any course is discretionary within the confines of the credit requirements for each level of the award. However, in the design of Single and Joint Honours pathways in a specific subject, at level 4 there must be **appropriate commonality in the core modules** to enable students to transfer between pathways.

4.8 At levels 4 and 5, programmes must be designed to ensure that **at least half of the student's programme of studies is composed of 30 credit modules** delivered over the academic year. Exceptions to this must be specifically approved. At level 6 in an Honours degree teams are strongly encouraged to include at least one mandatory taught module taken by all students registered for the award. Where this is not the case, there should be a minimum of four cohort-based teaching sessions for level 6 students within the IS/Dissertation or Project module.

Specific Design Requirements for Single Honours Degree Awards

4.9 The defined course leading to a Single Honours award in a particular subject must account for a minimum of 300 credits of the total programme for an Honours degree, i.e. 360 credits. The remaining 60 credits at level 4 and level 5 consist of either optional modules as set out on the award map for the course or Language modules.

4.10 Each course leading to a Single Honours must be designed to include a minimum 120 credits at each of level 4 and level 5, and 120 credits at level 6 (see Table 1, para 4.18). At levels 4 and 5, there should be at least two year-long 30 credit modules.

4.11 At level 6, it is usual to include a Dissertation or Project module, and course teams are encouraged to consider carefully the balance of 30 and 15 credit modules. Larger modules are permitted at level 6, but only if justified on educational grounds related to practical projects, performance, research or work-based learning, and will be subject to approval.

Specific Design Requirements for Combined Subject Honours Degree Awards

4.12 Although students commence their studies registered for a Joint Honours programme, two types of combined subject awards are offered: Joint and Major/Minor awards. These are defined according to the proportion of credit placed in the two subjects which are combined (as set out in the TCRF). There is a minimum requirement for the total credit (modules) required to be available at each level in the design of a course leading to a Joint or Major or Minor Honours Award (see Table 1, para 4.18).

4.13 At level 4 a Joint Honours subject must account for 60 credits which must include at least one 30 credit module and must include core modules shared with the Single Honours programme to enable students to transfer from Joint Honours to Single Honours at the end of level 4.

4.14 **Joint Honours degree awards** have a broadly equal balance between the two component subjects. Thus, a defined group of modules, including a minimum of 60 credits at level 4, 60 credits at level 5, and 60 credits (inclusive of a Dissertation module where appropriate) at level 6 must be available in each subject for courses leading to Joint awards.

4.15 In **Major/Minor Honours degree awards**, the major subject accounts for approximately two thirds and the minor subject one third of the total credits for the award.

4.16 The **Major** component of an award consists of a defined group of modules, including a minimum of 60 credits at level 4, 90 credits at level 5, and 90 credits at level 6 (inclusive of a Dissertation module if appropriate) must be available in the subject.

4.17 The **Minor** subject consists of a defined group of modules, including a minimum of 60 credits at level 4, 30 credits at level 5, and 30 credits at level 6. This will normally be a 30 credit module at levels 5 and 6.

4.18 Minimum Credit required to be provided by a subject or discipline at each Level in the Design of a Course leading to Single, Joint and Major/Minor Honours Awards – Table 1

| Level | Award | Subject 1 | Subject 2 |
|---------|---------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Level 4 | Single Honours | 120* | 0 |
| | Joint Honours | 60* | 60* |
| Level 5 | Single Honours | 120 | 0 |
| | Joint Honours | 60 | 60 |
| | Major/Minor Honours | 90 | 30 |
| Level 6 | Single Honours | 120 | 0 |
| | Joint Honours | 60 | 60 |
| | Major/Minor Honours | 90 | 30 |

Notes: *Must include shared core modules

4.19 At the end of level 4 students may transfer course or pathway, subject to meeting pre-requisites and being able to compose a valid programme of study. Course transfers are subject

to the agreement of the course leader for the new programme. A Single Honours student may transfer to Joint Honours, and exceptionally a Joint Honours student may transfer to one or two new subjects if this is permitted by pre-requisites.

4.20 Most courses/subjects require completion of a 30 credit Dissertation module at level 6. All Joint Honours students are required to complete a Dissertation or equivalent module at level 6. A Joint Honours student may opt to complete a Dissertation in either subject or bridging both subjects. There are a very small number of subjects which for discipline-related reasons currently require a Joint Honours student to take a Dissertation module. Exceptionally, where such a module is mandatory for Joint Honours students, students are permitted to also choose to take a Dissertation in their other subject. Courses that do not require completion of a Dissertation module for Single Honours, Major or Joint Honours, must indicate at approval how they will meet the requirements of the FHEQ for Honours degrees and the specific requirements of subject benchmark statements.

4.21 Joint Honours students may opt to study 60 or 75 credits in one subject at level 5 and 60 or 45 credits in the second subject. Alternatively a student may switch to a Major/Minor award by taking 90 credits in subject one and 30 credits in subject two. These patterns of study can also be taken at level 6. In determining whether the award to be made is Joint Honours or Major/Minor Honours, credits taken in each subject at levels 5 and 6 will count as follows:

| Subject 1 | Subject 2 | Award |
|------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 120 | 120 | Joint Honours |
| 135 | 105 | Joint Honours |
| 150 | 90 | Major/Minor Honours |
| 165 | 75 | Major/Minor Honours |
| 180 | 60 | Major/Minor Honours |

5 Advice and Guidance

5.1 Advice and guidance on the design of undergraduate programmes is available from [AQU](#), who may refer colleagues to consult with specific senior colleagues or members of Registry Services, as appropriate.

6 Associated documents

[Assessment Policy](#)

[Curriculum Design Policy](#)

[Module Specification Template including guidance](#)

[Principles for course design: Guide to writing learning outcomes and developing assessment criteria](#)

[Programme specification template](#)

[Taught Courses Regulatory Framework](#)

Dr Marie Stowell
Director of Quality and Educational Development

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Revision History

| Committee | Date | Change |
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| - | November 2019 | Amendment of wording to Section 3.9 regarding mandatory modules at level 4. |
| - | September 2019 | Document reviewed to ensure currency and references to correct policies, frameworks, documents etc. |
| - | July 2017 | Document reviewed to ensure currency and references to correct policies, frameworks, documents etc. and to reflect discontinuation of electives at levels 4 and 5, (with exception of Language modules) Para 2.8 deleted Para 3.14 deleted Para 4.18 – Table 1 adjusted All weblinks checked and updated where necessary |
| - | 12 th May 2014 | Paras 2.1, 2.4, 2.6, 3.10, 3.17, 4.20, updated Table in heading in 4.18 updated Para 5 inserted Para 6 inserted to include hyperlinks to relevant documents; appendix detailing Award maps removed All weblinks checked and updated where necessary |
| - | 6 th November 2012 | Paras 2.1, 2.4, 2.6 updated |
| - | 25 th September 2012 | Para 3.8 updated, plus new paras inserted as 3.9 and 3.10; and to include information on 'designated' modules |
| ASQEC | 21 st March 2012 | Paras 4.9, 4.10, 4.12, and 4.18 (table), 4.21 updated for clarification |