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Forward

This second edition of the Rough Guide to Curriculum Design has some major tweaks, changes and additions from the first edition, but anyone familiar with that version should not find themselves unduly disorientated by the differences. The main principles and processes described within are essentially the same. Several of the changes that have been made are organisational and typographical, all the URLs for support materials have been reviewed and updated and the order of some sections have been changed to aid clarity. Some sections, most notably the sections on panel approval, documentation and learning outcomes, have been extensively revised and the ‘stages’ of the design process have been slightly compacted. A major change to the original ‘sector generic’ version is that this second edition is aimed directly at Birmingham City University staff, although obviously much of what is written here will apply in most institutions.

Many of the content updates and additions relate to the experience gained and lessons learned by programme teams and members of the Education Development Service (formerly Centre for Excellence in Learning & Teaching) that supported them through the major institutional curriculum change programme at BCU known as Transforming the Curriculum (TtC). Over an 18 month period in 2016/17 every undergraduate and postgraduate programme in the university was transformed, rewritten and validated in light of the new institutional Academic Plan.

The Academic Plan and TtC required a greater change than simply changing the format and documentation of existing programmes. It was designed to create a fundamental review and clarification of the University’s academic offer and its underlying philosophy.

The first edition of the Rough Guide was used by programme teams to guide the process from first conception through to validation and the lessons learned during that experience have been incorporated into this second edition.

The guide is hopefully useful to all members of programme teams and stakeholders involved in the curriculum design process, but for consistency’s sake, the general approach is to speak directly to the course/programme leader. A statement from the introduction to the first edition bears re-stating here. The name of this guide was carefully chosen - it is designed to be ‘rough’ - it is deliberately
descriptive and enabling rather than prescriptive and directive. There is, of course, some content in the guide relating to regulatory requirements and expectations that are a non-negotiable aspect of the programme approval process and you may also have subject specific (and possibly professional body) requirements specifically relevant to you which need to be taken into account. However, the emphasis remains on offering guidance on design approaches to facilitate effective curriculum design. The decision to follow the order suggested or to use any of the resources or starting points is yours. There is no fixed path, the Guide is designed to map a possible route to take you where you need to be.

The original version of The Rough Guide to Curriculum Design was produced by members of the Centre for Enhancement of Learning & Teaching at Birmingham City University, the majority of the writing work being undertaken by Paul Bartholomew and Sonia Hendy-Isaac. Since then, the department has gone through several re-structures and two name changes and is now known as the Education Development Service. Paul and Sonia have since moved on and the task of editing and revising the guide for the second edition was undertaken by Graham Lowe, Deputy Head of EDS.
Introduction & Background

New courses are generally created in response to a market opportunity or institutional directive. The design process often focuses on producing the relevant paperwork necessary to obtain approval. This process relies on the assigned course leader and course team designing a set of modules and working towards a fixed date for a panel approval sometimes leading to a rush to produce documentation as the approval event date approaches.

This mode of working can lead to tried and tested pedagogies winning out over more innovative approaches. The approval event itself can be an underexploited opportunity. Although discussion at such events can often lead to good ideas and suggestions, this is usually met with the realisation that it is too late to incorporate these into the first running of the programme because, in reality, the implications of those ideas needs to be carefully worked through.

Similarly, re-approval of an existing course is often centred on adjustments and moderations of existing provision sometimes incorporating student evaluation, regulatory requirements as appropriate and new market approaches or considerations. This approach tends to focus on the redevelopment of existing modules, often in isolation from one another, followed by the creation of an updated version of the paperwork. Many academics ‘inherit’ the programme or modules that they teach, and more often than not, simply maintain ‘content’ because ‘it’s always been there’. There can be a reluctance to attempt a ‘blank page’ approach to courses or programmes that have a reasonable track record in terms of academic quality assurance and student satisfaction and programmes can often end up with new modules and pathways ‘tacked on’ as a result.

Academic staff can sometimes be reluctant to ask for support because they feel they are expected to know how to create curriculum. There may also be a fear that by asking for support we might relinquish some aspects of control over the programme itself and this can create political tensions which can ultimately impact on the design experience and the effectiveness of the stakeholder approach. Curriculum design is a complex and difficult process requiring a wide range of knowledge and skills and by default, you cannot expect to be expert in every aspect of it. It is important, therefore, to remember that the Education Development Service can support you and your team through the design and validation whenever and wherever you feel you need it.
A Brief History of the Rough Guide

A comprehensive review of programme design and approval was made by Birmingham City University as part of the JISC-funded T-SPARC project between 2009 and 2013, which ultimately led to the development and pilot of a new approach to curriculum design.

The project delivered two main outputs:

- A new approach to curriculum design
- The Design and Approval of Programmes System (DAPS)

DAPS was a customised MS SharePoint-based system developed to offer an online environment for programme design and approval. The functions of the system were designed to mirror the curriculum design and approval process, developed as part of the project, through key stages and were intended to encourage parts of the programme to be ‘signed off’ by those conferring approval as the work was completed without having to wait for an approval event. Input from other stakeholders, such as student representatives and external advisors, during the design process allowed for suggestions to be built into the design rather than emerging as ‘recommendations’ or ‘conditions’ from a traditional approval event.

Although the DAPS system offered solutions to facilitate interactions with stakeholders and to allow progressive sign off, the interface and system itself created different problems for those using it and eventually the DAPS system was abandoned for more individual methods of managing the process at a local level. The final validation event continues to be the focus for the approval and reapproval of programmes but it was found to be possible to replicate some of what the system did through other means (Moodle, Wikis, Mahara, WordPress, etc.) and ultimately, the most critical finding of the DAPS experience was that the conversations that take place about curriculum design are more important than the systems that support it.

Therefore, although the project initially started as a technology project, the lessons learned about the processes of curriculum design meant that the most significant outcome of the project was the new approach to curriculum design described in the first edition of the document you are now reading.
A New Approach to Curriculum Design

Historically, most programme review processes might best be described as following a ‘distributed model’ (Figure 1). Here the programme is broken into modules at the beginning of the design process, immediately allocating these to relevant programme team members. Module design often takes place in isolation of the wider programme until the modules are brought back together (often just) prior to approval. Although this may offer a swift distribution of the design workload, it does not provide the best environment for constructive alignment of course/programme aims, the learning, teaching and assessment strategy, and the strengths of the programme team, which can create a diffuse and disjointed programme identity and offer.

One of the approaches identified during the BCU project was the need to adopt a more ‘holistic’ perspective in relation to curriculum design with all stakeholders being involved as early as possible in the process and across every aspect of programme development (Figure 2). This was found to deliver higher levels of programme ownership across the whole programme development team (including those stakeholders who are not part of the teaching team).

Whilst the historical ‘distributed’ processes can lead to a ‘race’ to complete the paperwork (together with an increase in workload leading up to that date) and introduction of stakeholders beyond the
programme team often happening too late in the process to be influential or effective, in the more iterative ‘holistic’ approach shown below, all stakeholders are engaged and the workload is more balanced as the documentation emerges from the process.

![Diagram of Rough Guide Approach to Curriculum Design and Approval]

The key challenge with this approach is that decisions require a consensus of opinion and therefore this is a more time consuming exercise. However, we have found that the benefits in terms of the quality of the finished product far outweigh any disadvantages in terms of the need for careful time management.

It should be clear by now that there is a fundamental principle underlying the approach being suggested here. That is, a programme should be designed ‘as a programme’ and then divided into components (modules) for delivery, rather than be seen a series of distinct components (modules) created separately and then collected together to create a programme.

The guide that follows, then, attempts to provide a model of a holistic approach to curriculum design to get the maximum engagement from all stakeholders and ensure that the validated programme can live up to the high ideals that all dedicated academics start with.
General Principles

One of the key differences in this new approach to curriculum design is the drive to ‘evidence’ how design decisions have been made, and to demonstrate how these decisions have been informed through robust stakeholder engagement. The Rough Guide approach recommends that you ‘scrapbook’ the artefacts that emerge from your discussions and activities and have the whole team involved in the whole process. That might mean voice recording/filming meetings, taking photos of the flipcharts/whiteboards used to document your discussions, or simply the notes taken at meetings. These can be held on a virtual space so that everyone within the team (and potentially your validation panel) can access them to explain the process of designing the curriculum as well as the product that emerges. If you can also incorporate these into a forum type setting, you can explain and encourage evolution of the product through an open and transparent discussion method. If you also give access to these forums to your external and internal stakeholders then everyone involved in the design process can engage with the discussion and help to inform the design decisions. This ensures that all inputs contribute to the iterative process and it is possible to exploit the type of feedback/suggestions which would normally have come from the panel event at the design stage and not after the paperwork has been completed.

The Rough Guide works on the principle that there are a number of stakeholders involved in course design but that the degree to which each party is integrated into the process varies greatly. The integration of a broader number of stakeholders at an early stage enables co-creation of the programme and attempts to avoid the confirmation approach whereby the course paperwork is presented as almost complete and then certain stakeholders are asked to comment on its fitness for purpose. The confirmation approach tends to bring limited innovation and ownership from those outside the course team, primarily because the product already seems fully formed and unless there are regulatory and/or professional body issues, the question posed is often based on whether or not this ‘looks ok?’

Below is a model of stakeholder engagement (Figure 3), initially produced to get real engagement of stakeholders in project work. Indeed, the whole programme design process can be conceived as a project. It has a deadline, there is work to be done (broadly in a sequence) and there is a product at the end of the activity. As such, the model is useful in showing how more effective stakeholder engagement can be achieved just by changing the sorts of activities you choose to do with your
stakeholders. Clearly, higher levels of engagement, which we have found to result in the best conceived programmes, are obtained when activity is focussed to the right hand side of the grid.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder roles</th>
<th>Engagement tools</th>
<th>Anticipated effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders are passive recipients of non-contextualised information</td>
<td>Occasional newsletters, briefings, regular blogs, targeted letters</td>
<td>Potential for peripheral awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders as respondents</td>
<td>Focus groups, project staffing, focus consultation workshops, interviews</td>
<td>Potential for contextualised awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders as project team members</td>
<td>Workshops, voting, active focus groups, joint led consultations, interviews, internal and external</td>
<td>Confirmed widespread contextualised awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders as project leaders</td>
<td>Stakeholder-led consultations, interviews open/closed, focus group discussions</td>
<td>Emergent reaction data is not framed exclusively by project staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder leaders</td>
<td>Stakeholder management teams, stakeholder management activities, consultation workshops, final decision meetings</td>
<td>Stakeholder agenda are clearly defined and recognised</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The intention behind involving a wider group of people to support good design is to benefit from the broadest possible expertise. For ease of reference here are the generic key stakeholders (in alphabetical order) and a description of their possible roles and responsibilities in the process (Figure 4). There may be additional stakeholders for your individual programme, but they are likely to fall into one of these categories.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Roles &amp; Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Services Quality Lead</strong></td>
<td>Academic Services will have a number of experts able to support curriculum design in terms of QA processes and regulatory matters. Academic Services is also responsible for setting up and running the validation event and overseeing all Quality Assurance matters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dean/ Associate Dean/ Head of School</strong></td>
<td>The Dean, Associate Dean or Head of School can be a key champion in terms of supporting innovation and evolution of programme offers. S/he may also be responsible for completing and/or approving some of the pre-design checks and for maintaining coordinating oversight of the programme development in line with Faculty aims and ambitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Academic Advisors</strong></td>
<td>External Academic Advisers should be asked to contribute throughout the design process. The principal role of an external adviser is to assure the University that the academic standards of the proposed programme(s) of study are set at the appropriate levels and are equivalent to those adopted across the UK Higher Education sector for similar awards. EAs are expected to liaise with the Programme Lead throughout the design phase and may form part of the validation panel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Practitioner Advisors</strong></td>
<td>External Practitioner Advisers help ensure programmes produce graduates who meet the needs of industry or the profession. They should be able to comment on the appropriateness of the programme structure and content to a professional or industrial area and/or should be in a position that involves the recruitment of graduates from the discipline area being considered. EPAs are expected to liaise with the Programme Lead throughout the design process and may form part of the validation panel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning &amp; Teaching Support Staff</strong></td>
<td>University Learning &amp; Teaching Support Units can offer support and encouragement to the programme team, providing advice about the design process, resources, and issues relating to learning and teaching. They might also be able to act as a neutral facilitator for the programme lead as this can sometimes help to alleviate tensions and negotiate areas of potential conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body Representatives</strong></td>
<td>Where a programme offers additional accreditation, PSRB representatives will need to be identified by the Programme Lead. Their views on the suitability of the programme in relation to students gaining professional registration/approval are often instrumental in the validation process, but having interactions at an earlier stage can avoid the need to make adjustments at the last stage or have conditions pending on approval.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programme Director/ Course Leader</strong></td>
<td>Programme or Course Leader/Director is responsible for engagement with all stakeholders and co-ordination of programme development. S/he will specifically oversee and facilitate Programme Team activity, appoint EPAs, EAs, PRSB Representatives and student representatives as appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programme/ Teaching Team Members</strong></td>
<td>It is essential that all members of the programme team have input, access and ownership of the design process. The programme team are responsible for key contributions in developing course philosophy and aims, module development and learning and teaching strategy / implementation. Members of Library and Learning Resources and/or members of faculty administration may also be co-opted onto the programme team as appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student/ Alumni Representatives</strong></td>
<td>Student representation is crucial throughout the design process. A combination of current students and recent graduates will ensure that a focus on the student experience is explicit. You may also wish to consider asking the Students Union to offer support and input.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Validation Panel</strong></td>
<td>Validation panel membership ranges across institutions but will normally include a senior academic to chair (usually not from the same faculty), a member of Academic Services, an external examiner, an employer, a PSRB representative (if relevant to course), and a student/alumni representative. Academic Services will advise you on the membership of this and will make all the arrangements.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# The Design and Approval Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Initial Action by the Programme Leader</strong></td>
<td>Identify Programme Team and other stakeholders&lt;br&gt;Confirm expected approval date and begin to consider and plan the timescales for design&lt;br&gt;Regulatory/PSRB/Institutional pre-design checks to be completed&lt;br&gt;Prepare for Design Initiation Event&lt;br&gt;Prepare virtual space with key documents which may inform design, such as reports (NSS, External Examiners Reports, etc), course/module evaluation and/or feedback, PSRB guidelines or Regulatory requirements, QAA Subject Benchmarks, market indicators and/or other market research. Seek out support from Education Development Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Design Initiation Event</strong></td>
<td>Structure activity around key outputs: Briefing on the philosophy and approach to programme design, Stakeholder Induction, Introduction to the Design Space, Programme Philosophy and Aims, Programme Structure, Approaches to Learning, Teaching &amp; Assessment, Initial discussion around the design challenges&lt;br&gt;Gather evidence from the discussions and activities at the event which will help to inform design decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>After Design Initiation Event</strong></td>
<td>Upload evidence from the day to the Virtual Design Space&lt;br&gt;Use the forum discussions online to progress the key outputs and begin to refine them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Stage One Sign Off &amp; Design Progression to Module Writing</strong></td>
<td>Final working draft of the Programme Philosophy and Aims&lt;br&gt;Final working draft of Programme Structure Diagram.&lt;br&gt;Statements of Intent around the Design Challenges&lt;br&gt;Responsibility for module development distributed to members of the Programme Team&lt;br&gt;Iterative module writing process begins&lt;br&gt;Consideration and adjustment of Philosophy and Aims and Structure as modules take shape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>Stage Two Sign Off</strong></td>
<td>Completed modules aligned with both the Programme Philosophy and Aims&lt;br&gt;Completed module information should normally include Learning Outcomes, Feedback and Assessment methods, Indicative Content, Resources and KIS information&lt;br&gt;Stakeholder input and evidence of discussions demonstrates the rationale for the design decisions taken. Modules can then be 'signed off' (either one by one or as a collective).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>Creation of Programme Specification and Other Definitive Documentation</strong></td>
<td>The Programme Specification is completed and will usually incorporate items such as: Programme Philosophy and Aims, Module Descriptors, Programme Structure Diagram, Statements of Intent and the Student Handbook. Other documents such as mapping documents (for course pathways, or course themes), resources documents, assessment schedules and professional body requirements also be included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>Programme Approval</strong></td>
<td>The completion of the design process will have generated the relevant ‘paperwork’ for the approval event, but the emphasis with the Rough Guide approach is that the ‘evidence’ generated through the process acts as the rationale for the design decisions made and should therefore reduce focus on a ‘form-filling ’ approach to design. The online forums and the wiki/Moodle/SharePoint space should act as your ‘evidence scrapbook’ for both external and internal validators to review your design and decision making processes and lead to a shorter, more focused approval panel process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5 Design and Approval Process - Overview*
Stages of Design and Approval

For an overview of the entire process, please see Figure 5.

1 Initial Action by the Programme Leader

Documentation

A good starting point is to gather together key documents which may inform your design. This will include, amongst other local documents, reports (NSS, External Examiners Reports, etc), course/module evaluation and/or feedback, PSRB guidelines or Regulatory requirements, QAA guidance including Subject Benchmarks, market indicators and/or other market research. You should also upload the university templates for the programme specification, module guides and the context document. Prior to any design activity, certain permissions may need to be sought by the Programme Director. The level of permissions will depend largely on whether this is a revalidation or a new programme and whether PSRB accreditation is being sought. The Dean/Associate Dean/Head of School responsible for portfolio development and/or academic practice will be a key contact at this early stage in terms of university and faculty procedures.

Stakeholder Identification

In the initial stages, someone within the programme team (normally the Programme Director) should spend time identifying key stakeholders and representatives. The Programme leader will need to confirm the date of the Design Initiation Event (DIE – team away day) and ensure that everyone is invited and available to attend.
Planning the Design Initiation Event

We have found that the initiation of course design is best facilitated by an all-day event (The Design Initiation Event) involving all Programme Team members and associated stakeholders such as students, employers and professional body representatives. This type of event offers an essential opportunity to begin the design work with a holistic approach, enabling a contribution from the entire course team and relevant stakeholders. Although it is ideal, they do not all need to be physically present on the day. Their input might rather include reports such as External Examiners Reports, course/module evaluation and/or feedback, PSRB guidelines or Regulatory requirements along with QAA Subject Benchmarks, the results of focus group discussions etc. may inform discussion and design decisions throughout the day. Arranging for this event to be hosted away from the usual working environment and possibly by someone from outside of the normal programme team can provide a level of objectivity that can sometimes be helpful. The Education Development Service at BCU are available to support if requested.

Design Challenges

One of the principles of the Rough Guide approach is to consider what we call, ‘Design Challenges’. We have listed a series of generic design challenges appropriate to most situations that can be used to trigger discussion and act as anchors for design structure. Some may be much more important than others in your context, some may not be appropriate at all and you may well have your own design challenges specific to your situation. Each of the design challenges we have identified has a brief explanation, some suggestions for starting points and links to resources available in the Appendix.

Before the event itself, it is strongly recommended that programme directors develop a definitive list of design challenges to be considered on the day. In each case it is also worth considering how you might approach each design challenge ahead of the design initiation event and whether there are any ‘non-negotiables’. You should ensure that the programme team will have had access to any relevant documentation/information that may help to inform discussion on the day.
- Designing and evaluating effective induction
- Designing for a widening participation agenda
- Designing for inclusivity
- Designing for Personal Development Planning (PDP)
- Designing for retention and progression
- Designing for stronger student engagement
- Designing for sustainability
- Designing for the needs of international students
- Embedding employability in the curriculum
- Engaging employers in curriculum design and delivery
- Engaging representatives of professional bodies in curriculum design
- Engaging students in curriculum design
- Engaging technology to support learning
- Engaging with information literacy
- Seeking out good practice
- Writing good learning outcomes

Initial Structure Design

It is worth considering early on how the programme might be structured and begin to map possible alternatives. A diagrammatic representation of the programme structure is often more helpful in demonstrating the overall structure than a list of potential modules. Any diagram should cover the structure of the course, the modules, levels and credit values, and the awards that can be gained at each stage (if relevant). There are certain university regulations to consider when constructing this, such as the CAT point levels for each module, rules on the use of optional modules and requirements for joint honours provision. Advice and guidance on the rules at BCU can be sought from the Education Development Service and Academic Services.
Preparing the Programme Team

It is essential to ensure that the programme team are aware of the deadlines involved and that they have sufficient time to engage in the process. A good way to start this is to require the teaching team to complete a Learning & Teaching Review Grid to bring to the DIE (Figure 6). An up to date CV from each member of the team may also prove useful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Already teaching in the following areas:</th>
<th>Would like to/be willing to teach in the following areas:</th>
<th>Pedagogic expertise (e.g. forum moderation, problem based learning, assessment design)</th>
</tr>
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Virtual Design Space

The creation of some kind of virtual space (perhaps a wiki, VLE page or MS Sharepoint site) will provide a focus for both discussion and emerging documentation throughout the process and should be made available to all stakeholders, so this should be done as early as possible and populated with the key documents already collected for ease of access to all parties. Support from the TELT team within the Education Development Service is available to help set this up.
Setting the Agenda

The Programme leader needs to set the agenda for the day. There are a number of required outputs for the Design Initiation Event, so it is worth working backwards from there when deciding on the structure of the day. The agenda might look something like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09.00 - 09.30</td>
<td>Arrival &amp; refreshments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.30 – 09.50</td>
<td>Briefing on the philosophy and approach to programme design being used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.50 – 10.10</td>
<td>Welcome to all stakeholders and explanation of roles and responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.10 – 10.30</td>
<td>Introduction to the Design Space to evidence the journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.30 – 11.00</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00 – 12.30</td>
<td>Programme Philosophy and Aims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.30 – 13.15</td>
<td>Lunch Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.15 – 14.00</td>
<td>Generation of Programme Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.00 – 15.00</td>
<td>Programme Approaches to Learning, Teaching &amp; Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.00 – 15.30</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.30 – 16.30</td>
<td>Discussion around the design challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.30 – 17.00</td>
<td>Review of progress so far and reminder of Design Space and where next activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You will also need to ensure there are sufficient resources to ‘capture’ activity for the virtual space. This might include large paper and pens, post-its, still cameras, note-takers, etc.
2 The Design Initiation Event

There are a number of required outputs for the Design Initiation Event. The expected outcomes are:

- Briefing on the philosophy and approach to programme design being used
- Stakeholder Induction
- Introduction to the Design Space
- Generation of Programme Philosophy and Aims
- Generation of Programme Structure
- Programme Approaches to Learning, Teaching & Assessment
- Generation of initial discussion around the design challenges

Here we suggest ways in which each of these outcomes might be achieved. You will also have your own ideas as to how best to work towards these outcomes, whichever way is best for you and your team is the way to go. Also remember that the Education Development Service can be available to help facilitate these activities – that facilitation role can ease the path of the initial discussions.

Briefing on the Philosophy and Approach to Programme Design

From the BCU experience, it was discovered that when introducing a new approach to curriculum, it isn’t a good idea to offer a solution where people aren’t aware there is a problem. Consequently, if a programme team is more used to a distributed approach, it is worth exploring the full rationale for this more holistic approach. Essentially, the team need to have an understanding of ‘why’, ‘what’ and ‘how’. This approach is richer in experience than the paperwork completion route that they may have previously encountered and as such, it requires a slightly different mindset for it to be effective. Therefore explaining to your colleagues why you think this approach will enrich the design experience and, perhaps more importantly, the quality of the student experience your programme delivers is a great opportunity to engage with any objections or confusion as to why this approach is being taken.
Stakeholder Induction

There has been significant discussion already around why we feel that a broad range of stakeholders is crucial to good curriculum design. As the programme leader you will need to particularly ensure that external stakeholders are given sufficient time to understand the nature of this design process. It is suggested that early introduction to the processes suggested and the principles that underpin them will help everyone to clarify their expected roles, responsibilities and commitment to the design experience. As many of the external stakeholders (PSRB reps, students, alumni, industry reps. etc.) will be unfamiliar with the team and the surroundings, explicitly making them feel welcome and valued is essential.

Introduction to the Design Space

Whatever virtual environment you choose to support your evidence scrapbook, it is sensible to try to pick one that your team are already familiar with. Using a new technology on top of implementing new design principles can throw people out of the process and the technology can quickly became both a barrier for engagement and a scapegoat for returning to the ‘way we’ve done it before’. If you decide not to use a virtual space – try isolating a large wall to act as a literal pinboard – just having a visual representation of the discussions and key areas for development can offer some clarity to the process. Whatever your choice, show the team exactly how it will work. Having most of the pre-existing documents already available via the space will help and you can point out particularly useful or important documents such as analyses of NSS results and QAA guidance. You will need to return to this at the end of the day to reinforce the next steps and how everyone is expected to interact with the space.

Programme Philosophy and Aims

The development of your philosophy and aims is a crucial aspect of the design process and at the very least, you should aim to have a working draft of these by the end of the Design Initiation Event.
Agreeing a Programme Philosophy and Aims will allow for subsequent development of modules to be undertaken in a way that reflects and supports the overall programme. The Philosophy and Aims should act as a vehicle to communicate the key characteristics and distinguishing principles of the proposed programme. A Programme Philosophy might include statements that relate to:

- Distinctiveness within the sector
- Intended characteristics of graduates
- Defining principles and values
- Pedagogical approaches that are adopted throughout the programme, such as problem based learning, student negotiated curriculum, e-learning support, flexible delivery modes etc.
- How the programme articulates with professional registration (where appropriate)

The programme philosophy should then be reflected in aims for the programme. The aims should define for students what will be provided within the course, in relation to both their learning experience and their personal and professional growth.

You may require explicit programme level learning outcomes in addition to programme aims, especially if there is PSRB accreditation attached to the course. If that is the case for you, try to align the aims and learning outcomes as much as possible and try not to make this too complex. It can be difficult in the later stages of design to align every programme level learning outcome to the modular level if there are huge swathes of them and this not only disrupts the constructive alignment, but it also makes it difficult for students to map their own learning.

One way to facilitate the discussion is to prepare several sheets of flipchart paper/whiteboards with the following headings placed around the room and ask the programme team members to add their thoughts to each section.
We value…

What is important to us? Examples of the things we may want to consider include approaches to learning and teaching, PSRB requirements and expectations, broader ‘real world’ contexts etc.

Our programme USPs are…

What should the unique aspects/distinguishable features of our proposed programme be? What do we want to be known for?

Our graduates will know…

List the key areas of knowledge, experience and expertise (indicative content) students will need to be exposed to be successful both on the programme and as a graduate. How will they demonstrate this knowledge, experience and expertise?

Our graduates will be able to…

List the skills, attributes and attitudes you expect our students to be able to demonstrate as a result of completing the course. How will they demonstrate these skills, attributes and attitudes?

Use these concept boards to act as triggers for further group discussion (this can be done in smaller sub groups and fed back into the broader team if necessary) to begin constructing a ‘narrative’ version of the Philosophy and Aims. Remember that anything you create on the day can be tweaked later. The iterative approach invariably means that, as a programme team, you will continue to develop your thinking as the design process continues.

Programme Structure Diagram

One of the things to consider as a programme team is how the key characteristics of your programme will actually thread through your course. A good way to structure and visualise this is through the

development of a Programme Structure Diagram. A Programme Structure Diagram is a regulatory requirement for (re)approval as part of the Programme Specification, but we also see it as a tool that can help to support good design.

When used in conjunction with the Philosophy and Aims, and your decisions relating to the approaches to learning and teaching, the Programme Structure Diagram can really help to plan and develop the programme in a holistic way. It can enable members of the programme team to jump more easily between the macro and micro levels of course design without losing sight of either. As a programme leader, you may already have some firm ideas about the structure, possibly due to known constraints, but try to be open minded about other suggestions. Sometimes presenting two or three possible alternatives can generate a valuable discussion and often a new version arises out of that.

Discuss the time structures and other constraints you have to play with and how they fit into the calendar year. Think about whether you are structuring the course using 'long and thin' modules or 'short and fat' ones, or more likely, a combination. You may have sandwich years or placements to incorporate and you should have a sense of where these will fit into the overall structure. You may have a particular desire to include optional modules, or to avoid them. You will then need to think about broad topic domains and how they might best be sequenced. You can then overlay these broad topic domains onto the overall structure. The details of each module will come later.

Once you have refined your Programme Structure Diagram from being a development aid into a clear structure with module working titles and their relevant credits, this should be uploaded into your virtual Design Space for inclusion within the Programme Specification at a later stage in the process.

Programme Approaches to Learning, Teaching and Assessment

One of the reasons for taking this holistic approach to curriculum design is that modules are often designed and delivered in isolation of each other. That can lead to low levels of transparency within module teams and frequently academics are not aware of how their peers teach, what their specific areas of expertise are, or what pedagogic innovations they have deployed in their teaching. Sharing
of expertise can begin with the programme team discussing the ‘learning and teaching review’, allowing the team members to ascertain the experience they have within their team and to put it to best use within the programme.

The L&T review (Fig 6) should not be seen as an audit tool. It is designed to enable discussion and facilitate course design based on experience and expertise. It is intended to create further synergy between course design and delivery. This is important for both a new course and a re-approval but sometimes for slightly different reasons. A new course would use the review in order to consider and align the potential offer with the market research. There is little point responding to market demands, exploiting a new area of provision and creating a course without the expertise to deliver it. Similarly, for a re-approval, there is sometimes an expectation that a ‘revision’ of existing modules will be sufficient, the design of those modules is often inherited and may not always be delivered in full alignment with a course team member’s experience or research interests. This misalignment can impact negatively on the student experience. The Rough Guide recommends a holistic, distributed approach, and as such module ‘ownership’ at the inception stages can create disruption to this model so should be avoided.

It is suggested that each team member complete the L&T Review prior to the Design Initiation Event allowing for some discussion during the day as the programme structure is being drafted. It may also serve as a way to consider resource distribution within teams and identify areas of strength and possible gaps in course team expertise. For example, a member of staff with a keen interest and expertise in blended learning could become a key player if a decision is made to dramatically increase the use of learning technology but knowing that a large proportion of the team have little awareness of blended approaches may have implications for both design and staff development. An up-to-date CV from all members of the PT may also be useful and help generate discussion around areas of expertise. In our experience, the most commonly heard phrase during these discussions is, ‘I never knew that!’.

During these discussions you will begin to discuss your approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. Some choices, like choosing a problem-based learning curriculum, or removing all exams, will have ramifications for many of the design decisions you will make. Take note of the expertise and experience of your team there as there will be elements of pre-existing effective practice at a modular level that could be implemented more widely to good effect.
Thoughts and ideas relating to delivery and assessment will also come out of other discussions during the Design Initiation Event, but you may feel that you need to ‘capture’ some of this discussion separately. One approach is to maintain a Learning, Teaching and Assessment ‘open board’ throughout the day with one member of the programme team (or a number on rotation) that will take responsibility for writing up any of the key contributions/issues that get raised throughout the day.

**Statements of Intent**

To help capture the programme philosophy around the design challenges, as part of the design initiation event the programme team should develop ‘Statements of Intent’. These statements will help you to articulate your understanding of the challenges for your own programme and should facilitate discussions around how you will implement these principles within the delivery of the programme.

Use the list of design challenges you have developed to trigger discussion and act as anchors for design structure. Remember that some may be much more important than others in your context, some may not be appropriate at all and you may well have your own design challenges specific to your situation. As programme leader, you will probably have completed a definitive list for discussion before the day but you may wish to have discussion of what should (and should not) be in your programme list as part of the DIE discussion. Discussion can take part in small groups assigned specific challenges and then reported back to the whole group for further discussion. More information, including starting points and further resources, can be found in the [appendix](#).

- Designing and evaluating effective induction
- Designing for a widening participation agenda
- Designing for inclusivity
- Designing for Personal Development Planning (PDP)
- Designing for retention and progression
- Designing for stronger student engagement
- Designing for sustainability
- Designing for the needs of international students
- Embedding employability in the curriculum
At the DIE, you may find that some of these (e.g. writing good learning outcomes) are better held over to later stages of the process. You may even have entirely different needs depending on the type of curriculum you are designing (e.g. online or virtual provision will require additional consideration of appropriate technology). Whatever YOUR design challenges are, you should aim to spend some time on the day formulating Statements of Intent for each area to aid articulation, and alignment of them across the programme.

During the DIE you will capture a range of evidence. You may have a series of photographs captured from the whiteboards. If you had a number of breakout sessions perhaps they were voice recorded or have generated numerous notes. You may even capture conversations via a smartphone video camera. Whatever you have, upload it all into forums for discussion in your Design Space with a suitable title of your choice. Structure the space logically to mirror the processes within the Rough Guide or choose appropriate headings of your own.

When uploading the evidence from the DIE activities, try to remember that forum discussion should be led by a summary of the discussions that took place and show how the evidence supported the discussion, not the other way round. Remember that the confirmation approach described earlier can sometimes apply to forums too so try to ensure that the forums are a fluid space and not a place to simply ask ‘I’ve done this now - does this look ok’? It’s fair to say that there will probably be a considerable amount of uploading needed after the DIE so make sure you put time in your diary for this and try to distribute responsibility across the programme team if possible.

The beauty of a Design Space is that everyone has access. It’s a transparent process, so bombarding your team with constant updates isn’t always necessary (or welcome!). Over the next few weeks, try only to update or ‘nudge’ others to contribute when there is something substantial to discuss otherwise people can feel overwhelmed or irritated by the volume of information and their
expected input. If the DIE was successful in its aims, the team should already feel that much of the content already reflects the collective opinions and as such the online input is about honing and iterating the design rather than asking for feedback on everything. However, if you have external/internal stakeholders that weren’t physically present at the DIE, try to summarise the activity to date and then invite discussion on the forums. The transparency of this type of discussion is crucial to effective stakeholder ownership and engagement.

Encourage everyone to comment, support and evidence within the forums on your virtual design space but do bear in mind that there may be some areas that only the Programme Director and/or allocated Project Manager should be able to edit, especially if you are trying to maintain ‘version control’. And at some point, shortly after the Design Initiation Event, programme team members will be allocated modules to lead on, so it is important to find a balance on who can edit which areas without causing confusion.

3 Stage One Sign Off & Design Progression to Module Writing

Key Documentation

Following the DIE and the subsequent online discussions, the programme leader will draw together the comments and suggestions from the team. Out of this work will come three important documents that will underpin all the work to follow. They are:

- Final working draft of the Programme Philosophy and Aims
- Final working draft of Programme Structure Diagram
- Statements of Intent around the Design Challenges

These should be uploaded to the design space and agreed by all members of the writing team.
The documents are described as ‘Final working Drafts’ as there will naturally be some consideration and adjustment of Philosophy and Aims and structure as the modules begin to take shape.

Assigning Modules

Now the responsibility for module development can be distributed to members of the Programme Team using the discussions around experience and expertise as a guide. Module spaces should be created in the Design Space and allocated to the appropriate programme team members by the Programme Director. Module writers should upload drafts of modules to the Design Space for comment and review. Comments can be invited from across the team, including external stakeholders or specific modules could have assigned reviewers. Either way, the design of modules should take place in an open, transparent and iterative way always underpinned by the three key documents.

You may wish to consider employing Word documents for this stage to ensure that the module template is being adhered to, but do be conscious of the fact that ‘tracked changes’ can be difficult to manage and that multiple versions of a document can create confusion. If you have the option to create a ‘web form’ of sorts (e.g. essay questions in the Quiz facility of Moodle), this may help version control.

Module Design Challenges

Just as at programme level, there are several design challenges for module development which may include, amongst others:

Writing good learning outcomes
Designing module assessments
Designing feedback mechanisms
Developing assessment literacy
Embedding employability in the curriculum
Engaging employers in curriculum design and delivery
Engaging students in curriculum design
Engaging with Information Literacy
Engaging with technology to support learning
Seeking out good practice

As well as meeting these challenges, there are some specific expectations that will need to be addressed in module development. These are described below.

Indicative Content

If you have used the Programme Specification Diagram as a way of mapping content, this section will be far easier to construct. Try to remember that indicative content is exactly that. Ensure that the themes and broad topic areas of study for the module are included. You may not need to provide a fully detailed teaching schedule here but you should also give a good idea about how the module will work in practice in terms of lectures, workshops, online work, private study etc.

Learning Outcomes

At BCU there is a fixed maximum number of 4 learning outcomes for each module. All learning outcomes must be assessed, but one assessment may cover more than one learning outcome. Single modules may only have one assessment, larger modules may have two. The learning outcomes should inform both the module content and the choice of assessment methods used (for both summative and formative assessments) – remember to ask yourself – is this the best vehicle to deliver the LO?
Learning outcomes should be designed to ensure that a range of knowledge, skills and learning experiences are developed and assessed. Try not to make the learning outcomes overly complex or too detailed as this can make it difficult to align both your content and assessment approach. Writing good learning outcomes is one of the most important and challenging parts of the process, so do find ways to support the team by, for example, providing workshops from the Education Development Service. For more detail about writing good learning outcomes, see the appendix.

Learning & Teaching Methods

Here you should describe the range of delivery methods you intend to utilise and how students will experience the module. You should consider this in relation to the design challenges for module development and the approaches to learning and teaching and assessment you discussed as a programme team earlier in the process. The information will likely contain the combination of approaches, e.g. lectures, seminars, online peer assisted learning, workshops, tutorials and visits. These must match the KIS data you will be completing later.

Feedback & Assessment Methods

You will need to be able to identify both the nature and the timing of the summative and formative assessment opportunities throughout the module. Remember that these ought to be considered in light of the discussions around your programme’s overall approach to learning, teaching and assessment. Further advice, guidance and resources to support the design of assessment and feedback are included in the appendix.

BCU has rules about the scope of the assessment see Figure 7.

Traditionally scope is expressed in the currency of word count for coursework and hours for examinations. If you are using more innovative methods such as presentations, posters, videos and observed activity there is an equivalency table. If the method is particularly unusual, try to consider the scope of the activity in terms of the amount of time and effort that students are likely to need to
put in, in order to be successful. Where the scope of an assessment is defined by a PSRB requirement and is greater than the BCU recommendation, you will need to seek an exemption. Your Dean/Associate Dean/Head of School will be able to help with the process.

The following table gives an indication of the appropriate scope for a range of the most common assessment types. Where academic staff are using an assessment type not indicated (e.g. performance, physical artefact etc.) they should use the table as a guide taking into account both the required time and commitment expected of a student and the overall assessment strategy of the programme. In these cases advice should be sought from the Academic Lead for Curriculum Design & Development and Associate Dean Student Learning Experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Assessment</th>
<th>Assessment Scope**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essay, report, case study or other written text submission*</td>
<td>20 Credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3,000 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poster</td>
<td>A2 size (Min. Pt. 12 font)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video or Audio presentation</td>
<td>10 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal presentation (individual)</td>
<td>10 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal presentation (paired)</td>
<td>15 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal presentation (3+)</td>
<td>5 Minutes per person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam*</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahara or similar e-Portfolio</td>
<td>1 page</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Where PSRBs explicitly state a requirement with regards to word count or exam time, programme leaders should ensure that the PSRB requirements take precedence.  
** These scope statements must be adapted as necessary for students with a specific disability support statement.

Where there is more than one summative assessment, explain the learning outcomes that will be assessed by each item of assessment, and consider the weighting of each assessment item. At this stage, although levelled assessment criteria may not need to be developed in detail, it is worth doing this as early as possible in preparation for constructing the student-facing assessment brief following validation. There should certainly be some thought given to the pass/fail boundary at this stage.
It is important to identify the timing of the summative assessment points. These may be taken partway through the module (when students have had the opportunity to complete the learning needed for that assessment) or at the end of the module.

Also consider the points at which formative assessments can take place to facilitate enhanced student understanding of their progression. These opportunities are key to generating feedback and feedforward to offer better levels of student support and to enable greater and more effective intervention if students are not progressing as expected. It also enables the module tutor to consider (or sometimes reconsider) the effectiveness of the methods being employed to both deliver and assess the module. This is an invaluable opportunity to review and evaluate the module experience by adopting an iterative approach.

You must also consider how students will receive feedback/forward throughout the learning experience and it is important to identify the modes of this too (will it be face-to-face during lectures/seminars, workshops, tutorials or electronic for example, through VLE forums?).

Finally, consider assessment in terms of student and staff workloads. A significant number of programmes focus on back-ended assessment, that is to say, at the end of the module. This can create problems for students and staff alike, so use your Programme Structure Diagram to map potential flashpoints. This approach often means that the team have more time to deliver iterative and supportive feedback in a timely manner and that students have the opportunity to stagger and manage their assessment loads.

Learning Resources

Here, it is crucial to include indicative reading and refer to any electronic or other resources the student will need access to. You should also consider whether these resources are readily available and liaise with Library and/or Learning Resources to discuss this, especially if this is a new
programme or you have updated the materials following a shift in design or emphasis from a previous module within a reapproved course. Particular reference should also be given to any non-standard critical resources – i.e. those resources which are essential to the delivery of the module and which are not part of the University’s core provision. For example, you may wish to identify specialised teaching space which is required to run the module, such as a computer lab. It is vital not to assume that colleagues in the library, academic services, estates, timetabling etc. will automatically be able to make significant changes without significant notice. Early communication is essential to avoid problems later.

KIS

KIS (Key Information Sets) have been introduced as a means for students to compare institutions and programmes. Your institution is likely to have internal guidelines on how to provide accurate KIS data. Try to ensure that your team has access to this information as early as possible so that they can map their design decisions and delivery plans.
4 Stage Two Sign Off

Reviewing the Modules

Once all the design challenges have been explored, and the module templates have been completed they should be reviewed in a holistic manner across the stakeholder group. This is likely to be an electronic exercise, however, if time and availability permits, another physical meeting of all stakeholders can be useful to continue to ensure a team ethos and programme coherence. Depending on the size of the programme, a couple of hours/half day should suffice. Presentations from the programme leader can reinforce the community decisions that have been made and each module leader can show how their module fits in with the programme philosophy and aims.

Module Sign-Off

Once everyone is satisfied that the documentation reflects the design process and the programme you want to deliver, this can be considered as an interim sign off for this stage. The key components of this sign-off is to ensure that:

- Completed modules are aligned with both the Programme Philosophy and Aims
- Completed module information includes Learning Outcomes, Feedback and Assessment methods, Indicative Content, Resources and KIS information
- Stakeholder input and evidence of discussions demonstrates the rationale for the design decisions taken.

If this process is handled electronically then modules can be signed off either one by one or as a collective.
Philosophy Sign-Off

At stage 3 the following documents were described as ‘Final working drafts’

- Programme Philosophy and Aims
- Programme Structure Diagram
- Statements of Intent around the Design Challenges

As a result of the module writing process it is possible that some changes have been made in your thinking around the philosophy, aims, structure and other design challenges. An changes now need to be agreed and these documents confirmed as final versions

5 Creation of Programme Specification and Other Definitive Documentation

Final Documentation

This is the stage where all the work that has gone before is pulled together. The Programme Specification and other definitive documentation including the Student Handbook and the Context Document is a combination of much of the content you have already developed, but it will take some time to gather all of this into a coherent document. It is always a time consuming business, but the more engaged your stakeholders have been throughout the process, the easier it should be. Doing this is essentially the responsibility of the programme leader, although it is likely you will want to get support from other members of the team, not least in terms of proof reading and consistency checking. BCU has a recommended format for this (although there may be some local variation so do check)
Context document

The context document is the introduction to the programme and how you have developed it for the panel members, none of who have been involved in the curriculum design process. The current BCU template requires that you cover the following items:

**Strategic Context**
Describing the programme, its key attributes and qualities and how meets the needs of BCU in relation to the Academic Plan, University strategy and Faculty development plan.

**Review Process**
Describing the processes the team undertook to review and develop the programme including detail of which external and internal stakeholders were consulted, why and how. There should be a particular focus on the role of students and alumni and how they have influenced the proposed curriculum content and programme structure.

**External References**
Describing how the team used the Quality Code, the relevant subject benchmarks and any other external reference points in the development of the programme and module design.

**Data**
Detailing the impact and influence of quantitative and qualitative data (e.g. annual monitoring, programme and module performance statistics, DLHE, module evaluation and student feedback and NSS outcomes) used to support the development process and on the final proposal.

**Resources**
Confirming that the programme has sufficient resources required for successful delivery. New programmes will have provided and had approved a resource statement by APG. Revised curriculum will have considered and ensured that any new or additional resources required will have been authorised by the time of approval by the appropriate authority e.g. Executive Dean or appropriate Professional Services Director.

**Exemptions**
Listing any exemptions to the design principles or academic regulations the programme wish to have applied because of PSRB or other similar governance requirements. Evidence must be provided and attached to this document.
Further Information  Providing any further or additional information that is pertinent to the development and/or re-design of the programmes or modules that have not been covered elsewhere.

Programme specification

The programme specification is the document that sets out most of the decisions you have made for the programme. The current BCU template requires the following:

Programme Philosophy  Articulating why the programme is relevant, identifying the core values of the programme team, and programme specialisms and graduate outcomes in terms of skills, abilities, attributes, attitudes, and knowledge.

Programme Aims  Stating the programme level learning aims framed by the themes of the Academic Plan.

L, T & A Strategy  Explaining the learning and teaching approaches, activities and experiences that the programme will offer and the range of assessments and types of feedback and feedforward students will encounter.

The Whole Experience  Explaining how students will experience the programme and how it will address each of the identified issues of:

- Widening Participation
- Inclusivity
- Information & Digital Literacy
- Sustainability & Global Citizenship
- Student Engagement
- Partnership Engagement
- Induction & Transition
- Progression & Retention
- Support & Personal Tutoring
- Personal Development Planning
- Employability (incl. BCU Graduate Attributes)
Overview of the Modules  Showing collated key information about each year of study including module level, study time & KIS data, assessment method & scope and learning outcomes

Additional Information  Covering anything that is not included in the ‘whole experience’ section including the Course Structure Diagram, routeways and options and any special requirements relating to PSRB requirements

Module guides

Assuming the writing team have used the approved module template, the only work the programme lead will need to do is to review these and check there are no typographical or other errors. In addition to basic information such as the module title, module code (usually assigned later) and credit value, The current BCU Template includes the following sections:

Module Overview  Including the rationale for the module, how it aligns with the Programme Philosophy and Aims, and how the module will be taught in alignment with the programme level LT&A strategy

Learning Outcomes  A maximum of four all weighted equally

Resources  Including Library and Learning materials and any other key resources. If students are expected to purchase anything this must be clearly stated with an indicative cost.

Learning Schedule  An indicative schedule showing how the amount and type of different learning experiences, usually shown by week or session.

Assessment Method  The type of assessment, an explanation of why the assessment method has been chosen and how it supports achievement of the learning outcomes and alignment with the programme LT&A strategy

Assessment outline  Giving guidance on what the assessment should include, level of criticality, articulation, expectations of referencing, the impact of formative activity, etc.
**Assessment Scope**
Describing the expected the word count, length of exam, size and structure of presentation etc.

**Feedback Scope**
Indicating how and when students will receive feedback on their summative assessment

**Grading Criteria**
Showing how the final grade will be arrived at through the marking process

**Resource Requirements**
For internal use only, this describes likely group sizes, rooming requirements, specialist rooms, technical support etc. to allow timetabling and room bookings to understand the requirements.

**Staff CVs**
It is usual to provide the curriculum vitae for each member of the teaching team.

**Language**
Whatever the expectation in terms of the content, do try to be conscious of the potential audiences for these documents. They need to be understandable by students, employers, professional body representatives, internal and external academics and your own course team. As such, try to write concisely in plain English. Where there are specialist terms, jargon or acronyms, be sure to explain them on first usage. Remember that sometimes a diagram (for example showing routeways, provisional awards, options etc.) can be much better at explaining a process than a page of text.

The Statements of Intent generated from the discussion around the Design Challenges will support the creation and articulation of most of this documentation but you may need to arrange some further discussions either online or in person to tie down some of the more specific requirements and to take into account changes in professional service provision.
Internal Scrutiny

There will be internal processes for review, usually through the Dean, Associate Dean or Head of School/Department, before the programme is able to go to the final panel for approval. Ensure you know what the expectations are, including timescales. Following the internal scrutiny you may need to make some amendments or changes to the documentation. Hopefully this will be minor such as correcting typographical errors which you can handle yourself, but if there is a major issue, you may need to consult with the writing team or other stakeholders more widely.
6 Programme Approval

The Panel Event

For final approval to take place, the programme will be subject to a panel event. This is the culmination of all the hard work and an opportunity for you and the team to share with your peers not just the final programme that you have designed but the processes you have been through to get there. You can expect a robust but positive and friendly event. You will need to confirm the date, agenda and structure of the event with your Dean, Associate Dean or Head of School/Department beforehand.

Make Up of the Panel

As already mentioned, membership and the processes of the panel will vary according to context, especially where PSRB requirements are to be concerned. However, the panel will generally look like this:

- Panel Chair (A senior member of academic staff from another Faculty)
- Panel members (The number to be determined by the size of the programme)
- External representation (usually relating to common sector employment routes)
- PSRB representation (where applicable)
- Student representation
- Member of the Quality Office (who will act as secretary)

The Presentation and Questions

All members of the programme team will need to attend along with as many representatives of the stakeholder group as possible. After introductions, the event will begin with a presentation from yourself to the validation panel. After that, you and the team will normally be asked to leave the room so that the panel can discuss what they have seen so far. When you return to the room the panel
will ask a series of detailed questions to you and the team about the design and structure of the course. The more the team were involved in the creation of the course, the more able they will be to respond. The questions will be a mix of programme and module level questions. You can expect the PSRB representative to ask about PSRB requirements, the student representative to ask about student matters and so on. The panel will have seen the documentation in advance and it is also possible that they will have submitted some questions before the event. If so if possible, do your best to address these during the presentation.

The Outcome

Following the questioning session, you and the team will again be asked to leave whilst the panel considers what they have heard and what the outcome should be. You will then be invited to return to hear the outcome. The panel will highlight any areas of particularly good and/or innovative practice and make some suggestions for the team to consider. They may make one or more of the suggestions a condition of approval. In essence, there are three main outcomes possible:

- **Approved**
  The Panel considers that the programme may run as it is. They may make some recommendations for minor changes and improvements which you should consider but are not obliged to accept.

- **Approved with Conditions**
  The Panel considers that the programme may run pending some essential changes. After the event you will need to provide evidence to the chair of the panel that the changes have been made before the programme can run.

- **Not approved**
  The panel considers that the number, range and/or significance of any changes they consider essential is such that another approval panel is necessary before the programme can run.

At the end of the validation event, the most likely outcome is that the programme will be approved pending minor conditions. In rarer circumstances the programme is approved ‘as is’ and, providing you have followed all the available guidance, non-approval is highly unlikely.
Appendix - Design Challenges

The appendix is designed to be dipped into as and when necessary rather than read through in order. Each of the programme and module design challenges has a brief discussion, some suggestions for exploring the issues with your stakeholders and some online resources to get you started.

**Designing and evaluating effective induction**

**Designing for a widening participation agenda**

**Designing for inclusivity**

**Designing for Personal Development Planning (PDP)**

**Designing for retention and progression**

**Designing for stronger student engagement**

**Designing for sustainability**

**Designing for the needs of international students**

**Embedding employability in the curriculum**

**Engaging employers in curriculum design and delivery**

**Engaging representatives of professional bodies in curriculum design**

**Engaging students in curriculum design**

**Engaging technology to support learning**

**Engaging with information literacy**

**Seeking out good practice**

**Writing good learning outcomes**

**Designing module assessments**

**Designing feedback mechanisms**

**Developing assessment literacy**
Designing and evaluating effective induction

Student induction should set the foundations and expectations of the experience to come and as such, we should not underestimate the value and impact of it. Students’ initial perceptions and attitudes towards their university experience is often grounded in course induction. There are also links between effective induction and progression and retention rates. Effective induction (especially with those experiencing their first year of HE) can facilitate a learning community and not simply a cohort of students. There is also some value in considering whether induction should take place at all levels, that is to say, a re-induction at the beginning of years two and three respectively. This may also facilitate continual re-evaluation of the effectiveness of induction and increases student engagement with on-going course redevelopment.

For existing courses (aiming at re-approval) do you have any data relating to course induction available to you? Any student evaluation of previous induction experiences is useful – perhaps used in conjunction with progression and retention figures. Is there any correlation between the satisfaction levels found in the evaluations and the number of students that progress beyond their first year? If you are revalidating a course and your retention and progression figures are healthy, you may feel that your induction processes are sufficiently rigorous – but it never hurts to ask for further feedback. It might still be worth considering asking your student representatives for their thoughts about existing induction activities.

So how might we begin to consider incorporating effective induction into course design? Firstly, it is assumed that most courses will have an induction cycle already in place that goes beyond Freshers’/Welcome Week and that any new course will be designed to include or incorporate such activity. The degree to which this is central to the learning experience and the time allocated to this activity will obviously vary from course to course. It is essential to find the right balance for your programme. Some teams will feel it important to dedicate a significant amount of time (and perhaps an entire module) to induction/foundation activities and combine this with a philosophy underpinned by approaches to Personal and Professional Development. Others will feel that short bursts of learning community activity (not assessed and/or structured within module learning outcomes) will be sufficient.
Give some time to consider what you’d like the induction to look like. Ask yourselves as a programme team, ‘What are the aims of the induction? What information do we want you students to know at the end of the induction process? What activities might facilitate this? What resources will we need to support this? How does the induction experience align with the learning and teaching approaches our programme team has adopted?’ Commit some time to construct a Statement of Intent which will help you to articulate both your philosophy for this activity and help you to structure the delivery of it.

You may find the following useful:

http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/resources/publications/first-year-experience

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/first-year-experience
Designing feedback mechanisms

Evaluation of the student experience, regarding feedback, features prominently in all aspects of student satisfaction and QAA expectations, so it should be no surprise that feedback mechanisms are an essential consideration for curriculum design. Students are often unsure as to what is meant by ‘feedback’ and can sometimes perceive this as either the mark given to their assessments, or to any text attached to that returned assessment. It is important that we are explicit about when we are providing feedback (and also feedforward). Any Statement of Intent should be aligned with your course philosophy and aims and your institution’s own Learning & Teaching strategy.

The key areas you may wish to consider are;

**What do we mean by feedback?**

As a course team, map what you view as ‘feedback’ activity that is used/planned in your programme – also consider any forms that you don’t currently use but would like to (this might include audio, video or online formats). Try to ensure that feedback is varied. If you have any concerns about using a new approach/method, use this as a development opportunity. Seek out specialists in your own institution that can help.

**Who is responsible for this feedback activity?**

Does the feedback actually need to come from the module tutor? For example, if you are doing a peer reviewed activity, is peer feedback more appropriate?

**What form will that feedback take?**

The mode, tone and volume of feedback needs to be carefully considered. The most effective mechanisms try to mirror the feedback to the activity and manage the student expectation of this as well. Is the feedback formal or informal?

**How will the student know that it is feedback?**
Have you been explicit? Will the student know that feedback has been given? Is there an expectation of student development following the feedback? Can we be sure that the student will interact with the feedback – in other words, go beyond the ‘what’s my mark’ strategy? How might you go about doing this? Some mechanisms incorporate only releasing student assessment marks after feedback/feedforward has taken place. Could/should you support such an approach?

**What is the expected impact of the feedback and how will that manifest itself?**

Is it also feedforward? Is there a consequence to the transaction? Can the student use the feedback to improve the outcome of subsequent (similar) activity or other aspects of their own learning experience? If there is an expected impact – is the student aware of this?

You may find the following useful:

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/heav/assessment-and-feedback

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/assessment-and-feedback-higher-education-1

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/individuals/strategic-priorities/assessment
Designing for a widening participation agenda

Widening participation is as a broad expression that covers many aspects of participation in HE, including fair access and social mobility. The university has a responsibility to support students from all walks of life and a diversity of backgrounds. The aim of the policy is to ensure that all those who have the ability to benefit from higher education have the opportunity to do so.

Widening participation relates to the whole 'life-cycle' of a student in HE. This covers pre-entry, through admission, study support and successful completion at undergraduate level, to progress on to further study or employment. The HEA define the activities as:

- raising knowledge about and aspiration to participate in higher education;
- influencing the individual's decision to participate in higher education
- helping individuals make an informed choice of course and institution best suited to their needs;
- encouraging and facilitating entry to higher education;
- supporting inclusion and successful continuation in higher education;
- facilitating exit from higher education to employment.

It is essential to recognise that widening participation can be built into the curriculum and isn't just about offering financial support to those with disadvantaged backgrounds. You should also consider that some students may need other support, such as additional academic mentoring, confidence building and pastoral care. It is important to consider the Widening Participation Agenda when considering things such as your Programme Admission policy (usually part of the Programme Specification document), induction process, academic support and intervention to support better progression and retention and also team awareness of the support available through Student Services.

You may also want to consider whether within your programme you may wish to include interactions and activities with schools and FE environments. This might include live project work with other educational stakeholders, talks or workshops in schools/FE colleges from both Under/Postgraduate students to encourage aspiration levels of children in disadvantaged environments or by encouraging students to work with mentoring programmes in both education and community groups and charities (this type of activity could carry academic credit and be used to demonstrate presentation and
communication skills, or as an extra-curricula activity that will improve skills development, experience and Student Employability). Try to factor all of these things into a Statement of Intent around this area.

You may find the following useful:

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/widening-participation-why-bother


https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/widening-participation-postgraduate-study-decisions-deterrents-and-creating-success
Designing for inclusion

Broad consideration of what 'inclusive' actually means will enable you to incorporate the full diversity of your students - whether that is a consideration of disability, sexuality, religion, gender or other socio-cultural identities – is important when constructing a Statement of Intent. This should help to guide you so that we do not have to 'build things in' or redesign learning activities/ assessments whilst the programme is running to 'accommodate' particular students. There are, of course, legal and regulatory requirements as to why we need to design our programmes to be accessible for all students. For example, the Equality Act 2010 brought together previous legislation found in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001, and the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2005. This legislation states that the needs of disabled students must be anticipated within the Higher Education sector and this is endorsed through most institutions Learning and Teaching strategies. But on the philosophical level, it is important as an institution to understand that diversity in all its forms leads to a richer learning experience for us all.

There will almost certainly be specialists within your university (and staff development opportunities to extend your own knowledge, if you feel that would be helpful), but there are also a series of reasonable questions you can ask yourself to test the viability of your design for universal accessibility:

**Can all students participate in the activities?** For example, if the programme/module includes a number of field trips, are they all accessible? If not, is there another site/place of interest you can include that is? Could you provide a virtual field trip as an alternative?

**Have you embedded an understanding of ‘diversity’ into your core philosophy and how does this manifest itself in the programme content?** Have you created opportunities to broaden student (and staff) engagement with the notion of inclusivity? For example, are there learning activities that encourage discussion and understanding of these issues – you might want to consider if these can be embedded into induction, PDP or core module activities.

**Have you considered your LT&A strategy in light of potential adjustments for disabled students?** Do you have exams within the strategy? If so, you will need to factor in additional time
for some students—could you create an alternative assessment? Have you considered you feedback mechanisms? For example, would audio feedback work better for certain students?

**Have you considered the ways in which students will receive programme/modular content?**
(from the Student Handbook at induction to lecture notes at their final taught session) Have you ensured that you have the systems in place to produce information in a variety of alternative formats without unreasonable delay? E.g. large print/electronic/ Braille, video, audio, podcast.

There is a significant amount of support within most institutions to aid disability support by integrating best practice into course design rather than making adjustments after the fact. Most institutions have a Disability Support Team and may even offer Disability Awareness workshops and to advise and support your design decisions. You may wish to consider integrating a member of that team into the design stakeholders.

You may find the following useful:

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/previous/ied/
http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/Pages/inclusion-equality-diversity.aspx
https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/inclusion/Disability/Inclusive_curriculum_design_in_higher_education
https://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/AcademicStudentAffairs/CentreforEducationalDevelopment/CurriculumDevelopment/Inclusion/
Designing for PDP

PDP (Personal Development Planning) is an expected regulatory requirement from the QAA and effective PDP practices integrated into academic practice have been shown to improve student employability and their broader learning experience. PDP is most effective when it is practice-led and where the institutional culture anticipates, values and encourages full engagement.

The first thing to stress here is that PDP is often considered a ‘bolt-on’ module that doesn’t necessarily dovetail with other modules in the learning experience. This can mean that students perceive it as something separate to their academic, subject specific activities when, in fact, PDP can actually help students to reflect and critically evaluate their progression, achievements and development areas within their academic pursuits. Effective PDP increases student abilities to identify their aspirations and ambitions, to construct action plans, to seek support and advice and create autonomy around their own personal, educational and career development. PDP can also be used as a foundation for Personal Tutoring within the university; it helps to focus discussions and benchmark self-defined, student progression.

According to the QAA, PDP is:

- A structured process that is integral to learning at all levels concerned with learning in a holistic sense (in academic, personal and professional contexts)
- An inclusive process, open to all learners
- Something that an individual does with guidance and support which decreases as personal capability is developed so that it becomes self-sustaining
- A process that involves self-reflection, the creation of personal records, and planning and monitoring progress towards the achievement of personal objectives
- Intended to improve the capacity of individuals to communicate their learning to others (for example, academic staff and employers).

Ask the following questions of course and module design:

Are you able to track PDP throughout your programme at all levels? If so, is it integrated and embedded across the programme as a whole or isolated within one module?
Have you designed sufficient ‘scaffolding’ for PDP during its introduction to the learning experience? The intention is to reduce the scaffolding across the levels to create self-sustaining practice.

Does you approach to PDP aid student articulation of their skills and abilities? Particular attention should be given to the medium used to communicate and/or assess PDP within the programme – try to ensure the vehicle for articulation is the most suitable on for the aim.

You may find the following useful:


http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/flexible-learning/personal-development-planning
Designing for retention and progression

Progression and retention within HE has become a key indicator of success for both the institution and from a regulatory perspective. There are obviously financial and reputational considerations of low retention and progression for the institution, but there can also be a huge emotional and financial cost to students as well. The marker of progression and retention can sometimes be perceived as a controversial one and, if taken in isolation, it can give a distorted view of the course performance. However, progression and retention encompasses many aspects of successful course design - from effective induction, to assessment and feedback practices and the mechanisms for supported intervention by programme teams to facilitate better student experience.

As inclusion, it is important to consider progression and retention in the broadest sense. It is not as simple as just improving the statistics by getting students ‘through to the next level’. It may be useful to think of progression and retention in conjunction with other challenges - induction, assessment and feedback and student support. You might also include the Widening Participation concern, as research shows that students from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to suffer from a higher rate of attrition.

At induction stage, consider the routes of communication available to students who may need additional support - can you strengthen this message? You may wish to integrate this into the programme team approach to Personal Tutoring and pastoral support. Have you considered introducing peer mentoring (both pastoral and academic) into your course offer? Might there be a way in which this process of peer support could be embedded throughout your programme philosophy and aims, or even be included as a module activity?

You may find the following useful:

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/individuals/strategic-priorities/retention


https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/individuals/strategic-priorities/retention/what-works

Designing for stronger student engagement

High levels of student engagement facilitate a more coherent, active and vibrant learning community, which increases student ownership of their learning experience (both at programme and institutional level) which in simple terms, leads to better student satisfaction levels. You should consider ‘learning experience’ in the broadest sense which incorporates engagement with Students’ Union activities and membership, extra-curricular (but university-led) activities and participation in schemes such as SAP, Peer or Employer Mentoring and volunteering.

This is a complex issue and shouldn’t be addressed in isolation. Increasing levels of student engagement does not come with a quick fix solution. It needs to be considered and integrated from pre-induction to post-graduation. The primary issue is to see the student as a partner in the learning experience. If you construct curricula with that in mind, it is more likely to offer opportunities to develop learning communities. Ask yourself the following questions as an initial scoping activity:

Within the programme/module you're designing, to what extent are students able to influence, shape and contribute to the learning experience itself? Are students involved in the design process itself (actively – not confirmation driven)? How do they see their role? How do you make it clear their voice is valued?

Using the stakeholder model – Can you map were your students are in terms of engagement and ownership at the moment? Where would you like them to be? What activities could you integrate into the programme/module that would aid this progression?

How active are the student representatives within your department/school? – could you increase their level of autonomy?

Are students rewarded for ‘engaging’? Should/Could they be? How?

Are they rewarded for self-reflection, personal development planning and participation with extra-curricular activities?
Are students actively encouraged to learn from each other? To what extent is peer mentoring, peer assisted learning or peer assessment used within your programme/modules?

Try to encourage an environment that fosters partnership. Not all students will want to engage at all levels, but you should find ways to support them if they do.

You may find the following useful:

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/individuals/strategic-priorities/student-engagement
https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/studentengagementliteraturereview_1.pdf
http://tsep.org.uk/
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2009/Student_engagement/
Designing for sustainability

Most institutions will have made a commitment to sustainability their Corporate Plan and Environmental policies which will often include a commitment to integrate sustainability into the curriculum where appropriate. The notion that all institutions should look to find ways to support reduced waste, increase recycling, and lower levels of environmental impact will be familiar to us all and most institutions will have a structured approach to environment management. This view of sustainability can be too narrow and we should consider it in terms of social, economic and environmental sustainability. In Higher Education, the greatest impact we can possibly have is through educating our students to live and work more sustainably. This sustainability literacy will also contribute to employability, as most industries now have a commitment to operating more sustainably, and welcome individuals able to think laterally around this issue.

It may be fair to ask yourself the question as to how the broadest definition of sustainability can apply to programme design and delivery. The obvious solution to this is to look at ways you can reduce things such as paper waste by providing electronic resources or exploring options for online delivery of certain learning activities to reduce the carbon footprint of both you and your students. There is also a broader issue surrounding the ‘sustainability literacy’ of your students and the application of notions around sustainability that are integrated into the subject they are studying and thereby become relevant to them and their learning experience. For example, an English student may be asked to explore the progression of e-books and the environmental impact of this form of publishing. This will offer them the opportunity to review an area of interest, present their findings and increase their sustainability literacy. An integrated, embedded approach to ‘sustainability’ that is directly relevant to the subject specialism and can be applied to ‘real world’ professional or personal practice has the best chance of engagement with both staff and students alike.

You may find the following useful:

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/workprovide/Framework/
http://www.eauc.org.uk/
http://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development
Designing for the needs of international students

It is important to recognise that we have a diverse student population and that we should design curriculum that reflects this. Internationalising a programme should be holistic in its approach and consider the potential cultural differences and ways to address these to ensure that international students enjoy the best possible learning experience regardless of culture. This can also be seen as an extension of inclusive design. A Statement of Intent will help you to articulate the approach appropriate to your programme and to encourage better marketing to international students.

It is worth considering the international students’ life cycle as being defined by 5 key stages and structure your design decisions around these areas.

- Pre-arrival and pre-sessional support
- Induction
- Teaching and Learning in the classroom
- Life outside the classroom
- Employability and next steps

You may find the following useful:


https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/internationalising-higher-education-framework

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/resources/internationalisingheframeworkfinal.pdf

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/internationalisation/Supporting_international_students
Designing module assessments

It stands to reason that module assessment is important. Students focus on completing them, and they are the acid test of the learning & teaching that happens within the modules. It is important to remember that in most instances, any module guide will need to include an assessment outline as part of the validation process, but it is essential at this point to consider the impact of the choice of assessment and its alignment with the your Learning, Teaching & Assessment strategy and your institution’s own assessment guidelines. By choosing the right type of assessment for the learning outcomes, you will ensure that students are evidencing the learning that has taken place. Without this alignment you can find yourself, and more importantly your students, frustrated with the process.

It is difficult to be prescriptive here since you will know which modes and methods of assessment work best for your subject area. But just because these types of assessment have worked in previous practice, that doesn’t mean they may not be an even better approach. Ask yourself the following questions in relation to module assessment:

**Have you chosen the best type of assessments to allow students to demonstrate the learning outcomes you expect?** For example, if one of the outcomes is to demonstrate use of relevant technology, an essay may not be the best vehicle to deliver the outcome.

**Across the modules, do students have a variety of assessment types?** All students have different skills and abilities in relation different assessment types. A range of assessment types may aid progression retention.

**Is it possible to offer them a choice of assessment types?** If so, how can you ensure consistency of effort between them?

**Are there any constraints on assessment types for PSRB requirements?** This is much rarer than it appears to be as custom and practice can sometimes obscure the reality of what is expected.
Have you considered when the assessment needs to be completed? If staggered summative assessment is integrated earlier in the module there are more opportunities for intervention and student support to improve progression and retention and student satisfaction.

Have you aligned the formative activities with the summative ones? Can you create a symbiotic relationship between these so that students can gain a level of confidence and competence in the assessment type?

If you have more than one item of assessment within the module, have you distributed the weighting appropriately? Is there any reason why equal weighting is not appropriate?

Can you make reasonable adjustments to the assessment to incorporate students with Special Educational Needs?

Does the assessment need to be redesigned to incorporate retakes?

What role do External Examiners have in agreeing assessment tasks that change annually? This is a particular concern for examinations.

Whilst this list isn’t exhaustive, it gives you the opportunity to consider how best to construct your assessment approach – you should also liaise with other members of the team and ensure that student assessment is staggered across the programme as much as possible. This type of distribution of assessment activity helps students plan and structure their workload.

You should also consider the section on writing good learning outcomes.

You may find the following useful:

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/individuals стратегические приоритеты/оценка

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/transforming-assessment


Embedding employability in the curriculum

It stands to reason that we would like our students to enjoy full and fulfilling careers after they graduate. The key idea to explore here is to explore what we mean by the term 'employability'. There has been a tendency to focus on employment outcomes as a marker for this, (although this is data that feeds into our KIS statistics, and is therefore is important) but on a philosophical level, employability is more complex. It can also be easy to rely on 'skills' as a way of demonstrating employability within the curriculum, and once again – this, as an approach, has its deficits. Here are two definitions of employability that you can share with the team that may help to shift the focus to a broader application of employability within your programme:

[Employability is] A set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy.

Learning & Employability Yorke, M (2004) Employability in higher education: what it is - what it is not. Learning and Teaching Support Network

Employability is not just about getting a job. Conversely, just because a student is on a vocational course does not mean that somehow employability is automatic. Employability is more than about developing attributes, techniques or experience just to enable a student to get a job, or to progress within a current career. It is about learning and the emphasis is less on 'employ' and more on 'ability'. In essence, the emphasis is on developing critical, reflective abilities, with a view to empowering and enhancing the learner.

Harvey, L (2003) Transitions from higher Education to work. Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team & LTSN Generic Centre

Any notions of embedding employability should be considered in conjunction with student induction (especially finding ways to raise student aspirations at an early stage in their HE experience), PDP,
Personal Tutoring, reflective practice, student engagement activities, diverse employer engagement (both embedded and extra-curricula) and integration of lifelong learning strategies. On a practical note, use the Programme Specification Diagram to map where these activities take place to ensure a consistent approach is adopted throughout. You may also want to consider integrating additional activities such as career management workshops or providing networking opportunities within course delivery. This might incorporate employer/peer mentoring experiences which will extend the range of activities that contribute towards holistic development of the student’s employability.

It is also worth noting that not all students are looking for a ‘job’ – their intentions may be to become self-employed. There are a number of ways in which institutions can support entrepreneurial activity, particularly through connections with local employers, Social Enterprises and Business Start-up programmes – check whether your institution has this type of support for budding entrepreneurs. Programmes which are designed to support this type of enterprise and anticipate high levels of self-employment should also consider developing entrepreneurial activities as an assessed activity; this might include practical things such as constructing a business plan, reviewing financing, developing and pricing prototypes.

The most important aspect of this process by far is consideration as to how students can articulate their learning experiences and translate these into a professional context. This can be supported through active PDP, encouragement of critical reflection and presentation tools such as e-Portfolios or even external blogs/personal websites. It is important to help students analyse their experiences to isolate skills, attributes and attitudes that employers are looking for. There may be a pan-university system in place for employability that can feed into your programme such as Birmingham City University’s Graduate+ scheme.

You may find the following useful:

https://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/esecttools/esectpubs/Employability%20in%20HE.pdf
http://www.jobs.ac.uk/media/pdf/careers/resources/improving-student-employability.pdf
http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/esecttools/
https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/resources/employability_framework.pdf


http://www.employability.ed.ac.uk/documents/Staff/HEABriefings/ESECT-6-WideningParticipation.pdf

http://www.employability.ed.ac.uk/documents/Staff/HEABriefings/HEABriefing5-Helping_depts_develop_employability.pdf
Engaging employers in curriculum design and delivery

In the current economic climate, the employability of our students is more important than ever. One of the ways in which HE is addressing this is to involve employers in a more active way within the university. In terms of traditional provision at Under/Postgraduate level this should include the integration of employers into the design team to ensure that the programme reflects practice. This is also an opportunity to broaden and deepen relationships with employers and create a reciprocal relationship.

The following questions will help to initiate discussion with employers and to encourage opportunities to discuss potential to develop areas such as guest lectures, employer mentoring, networking opportunities, student placements, etc.

What are the three key attributes you would expect to find in a new graduate employee?

Which of the following are the most important? Why?

- level of qualification
- amount of work experience
- type/quality of work experience
- personality/disposition/attitude
- sector specific knowledge

Was there anything your most recent graduate employee was unable to do upon commencing their employment that you had expected them to be able to? If so, what training and support was required?

What would be the top three things that students studying to join your sector should learn before graduating?

If you could structure a two-hour teaching session for future graduates in your industry, what would be the main focus?
In your experience, how effectively do universities engage with employers? What works well? What could be improved?

You may find the following useful:

http://www.ncub.co.uk/reports/strategies-for-effective-he-employer-engagement.html
https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10036/114714
Engaging representatives of professional bodies in curriculum design

Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) are those organisations that oversee specific subject, industry or sector standards that are aligned with some higher education awards.

PSRBs include:

- Ofsted
- Nursing & Midwifery Council
- British Psychological Society
- The Engineering Council
- Architects Registration Board
- Bar Standards Board
- Chartered Management Institute
- Association of Business Executives

Each PSRB will have its own rules and regulations. Some are very ‘light touch’ in their expectations, whereas some go so far as to define curriculum content and assessment methods. Each will have its own preference in terms of contact and some representatives will be used to the ‘confirmation approach’ discussed in Section One. Try to approach representatives by explaining the stakeholder approach if possible – it may be a breath of fresh air for some.

Remember that nothing is set in stone. Just because you are proposing to try something new in your approach or delivery, doesn’t mean that the PSRB won’t support it. If the stakeholder approach has been taken, these design decisions should be evident to those conferring accreditation. Compromise may be necessary, but don’t assume that just because it hasn’t been done, it can’t be done.

Ensure your information is accurate and up to date. As with all organisations, things change. PSRBs often draft new guidelines or change structures of accreditation so be sure you are using the most up-to-date information to inform your choices rather than some member of the team’s version of ‘received wisdom’.
You should be able to find contact information for any appropriate PSRB through your department.

You may find the following useful:

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/partners/professional-bodies

https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c16061/accreditation_guidance

http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/hebg-professional-bodies.aspx
Engaging students in curriculum design

The Design Initiation Event can be little overwhelming for students, especially for a large course with a large team. Some students may also feel nervous about voicing what may be seen as criticisms of the current programme and, by association, teaching team. It might be sensible to do some small group focus work with your students/alumni separately. It may also be useful to ask for a neutral party to manage the process for you. Here are some suggestions for conversation starters. You probably wouldn’t want to use all of them and you may have some of your own specific questions to ask.

What advice/information would you give to a new student beginning your course with regards to the following:

- Induction
- Learning and teaching methods
- Use of technology
- Access to resources (library, student services, careers, etc)
- Relationships with course team
- Feedback and assessment
- Work experience
- University life on campus

What three things would you focus on more closely if you had the opportunity to do your course again?

Was there anything in your course experience that you wished there was more/less of? What and why?

Which of the following are the most important? Why? Do you think future employers would think the same?

- level of qualification
- amount of work experience
- type/quality of work experience
- personality/disposition/attitude
- sector specific knowledge
How well were your views taken into account by the course team? Were you aware of the communication routes?

What has been/was the most challenging part of your course?

Can you identify three skills and/or attributes developed within the course that are directly transferable to your chosen career path?

You may find the following useful:

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/downloads/glasgow_caledonian_university_-_student_as_partners_1.pdf

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/student-engagement-curriculum-design-developing-practice

http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/ch/E3%20Students%20and%20staff%20co-creating%20the%20curriculum%20Research%20into%20three%20case%20studies.pdf
Developing assessment literacy

For students to be able to succeed we ask them to demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes for a programme or module. To do this they need to understand the assessment criteria that are being applied to their work and be able to judge their own progress against these criteria. Analysis of the BCU’s Student Complaints, Appeals and Disciplinary (SCAD) procedures in 2015-16 showed that a high proportion of claims and cases featured a lack of student understanding of what constitutes academic judgement, how assessment criteria are applied, and how the academic conventions of the discipline are enacted in practice.

The transition into HE is widely recognised as a challenging period for all students as our expectations differ from those of their previous educational experiences. Induction processes are necessary, but not sufficient to enable students to succeed in their chosen subject. As each new area is encountered, and as students progress through levels, the assessment criteria change and students need to understand what we expect of them as a professional in their field.

As part of the work with students and alumni, you could seek to find out their understanding of these issues and see if any lessons can be learned from their experience. You could ask a few simple questions such as:

Did you always understand the assessment procedure?

How were assessment criteria introduced to you? What worked well? What not so well?

Did you ever get a mark or feedback wildly different from your expectation? Why? What did you do as a result?

Successful activities generally involve students practising applying the criteria to their own, and others’ work, explaining their reasoning, and getting corrective feedback on their interpretations. This can take many forms depending on the discipline, level and context. For example:

- Having students assess samples using assessment criteria, compile a rationale for discussion with peers (preferably in tutor-selected, non-friendship groups), share their findings with the class, and review after tutor comment and explanation;
- Asking students to submit drafts with their own evaluation of their performance against the assessment criteria, for discussion;
- Offering student-led tutorials on assessment preparation, led by students from a previous year who have been trained in the application of the assessment criteria to the particular assignment.

The distinctive feature of all these suggestions is student engagement over and above receiving an explanation of the criteria.

You may find the following useful:


https://ioelondonblog.wordpress.com/2016/04/06/more-than-marking-what-is-assessment-literacy/

http://www.teaching-matters-blog.ed.ac.uk/?p=644

Engaging with technology to support learning

Your students will have an expectation to be supported via technology. The old days of ‘talk and chalk’ are, in the main, gone. As part of your programme philosophy and your LT&A strategy, you should consider how you will support the learning experience through technology. Using new technologies such as hosting materials on the VLE and linking to e-books and e-journals in the library can make traditional pedagogies more effective.

However, technology also enables you to change pedagogies by blending online and face-to-face activities. Flipped approaches, whereby students watch video lectures, study materials and take part in discussion forums before they attend interactive workshops are becoming increasingly popular as a replacement to the traditional lecture/seminar approach. Embracing educational technology to facilitate learning will also help you to address flexibility and inclusion issues.

Use of technology may well be a point for staff development across the team and, as such, you may wish to seek out the educational technology specialists in your institution. However, before deciding on what technology to use, it is important to first decide what problem educational technology is the solution for. The following questions about the use of technology on the programme are a good starting point:

**What technology do the students want/need?** How digitally literate are they?

**What do you use ‘technology’ for at the moment?** How well does it work?

**Who are the technology champions on the team?** How do/can they support others?

**How confident are the team with trying out new technologies?** What have people tried? What has worked, what has not?

**How is the VLE used?** How could it be used more effectively?
To what extent is technology embedded in the learning outcomes of the modules you are designing?

You may find the following useful:


http://oro.open.ac.uk/36675/1/TEL%20in%20Higher%20Education-What%20is%20enhanced%20and%20how%20do%20we%20know.pdf

https://www.alt.ac.uk/

http://edtechnology.co.uk/

http://melsig.shu.ac.uk/

https://www.ucisa.ac.uk/groups/exec/learning_spaces/chapt5
Engaging with information literacy

Students should develop high levels of Information literacy both within an academic environment and beyond. It is an essential ‘life skill’ to be able to access, process and assimilate information in the broadest sense. The ability to articulate that information and to construct new understanding is also critical. It is important that we go beyond the notion of simply expecting students to find the right resources within the library and to know how to correctly reference them. The development of the idea of ‘Information Literacy’ requires a collaborative and integrated approach to curriculum design and delivery based on close co-operation between academic, library and staff development colleagues and embedding information literacy and study skills development within the curriculum is often articulated in one of the goals of a university’s Learning and Teaching Strategy.

Students must be encouraged to recognise types of information and resources, to develop their ability to question the validity of that information or resource, to recognise the importance of both print and online resources to facilitate development of their own knowledge and to know where they can find them. Information literacy can be defined as, ‘knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner’ (CILIP – The library & information association). The key to high levels of Information Literacy is to encourage high levels of activity around guided and independent research in induction activities and throughout the course. This can include information searches within seminar/workshop activities, research and critique activities which incorporate peer debate around resources, and student generation of resource packs for specific learning activities. The key thing is to allow as many opportunities as possible to develop the following skills:

- the ability to recognise a need for information
- the ability to distinguish ways in which the information ‘gap’ may be addressed
- the ability to construct strategies for locating information
- the ability to locate and access information
- the ability to compare and evaluate information obtained from different sources
- the ability to organise, apply and communicate information to others in ways appropriate
- the ability to synthesise and build upon existing information, contributing to the creation of new knowledge
Remember, your library & learning contact should be an integral part of your design team and they will be able to provide you with extensive resources relating to your own library resources.

You may also find the following useful:

https://www.cilip.org.uk/research/topics/information-literacy

http://skil.stanford.edu/intro/research.html

Seeking out good practice

It is important that we find ways to share good practice and to facilitate opportunities to work across departments, schools, faculties, the wider university and the sector to improve the student learning experience. The principle behind this is to encourage a community of practice that extends across and beyond your discipline.

Sharing the Learning & Teaching Review Grids of the team as part of the Design Initiation Event is a good starting place for discovering what expertise exists with the team. You should also review module evaluations to see what comments are being made by students about good practice.

Most institutions hold a number of events throughout the academic year which act as an opportunity to explore best practice. These include learning & teaching conferences and teaching festivals etc. and attendance at these is a valuable way of finding out what others within your institution are up to. You will probably also have a network of Senior, Principal and national Teaching Fellows within your university to draw on. Most staff are more than willing to share ideas, so just stopping by when people are setting up or finishing teaching and chatting about what is happening can also be illuminating. External examiners will also be able to offer thoughts on good practice and many of your colleagues will have informal networks to draw upon.

The Higher Education Academy hold a series of seminars throughout the year, in addition to their annual conference and JISC also provide resources, activities and events that encourage best practice dissemination. The QAA also offer consultation opportunities and events to engage with academics across the sector. In some instances there are funding streams available for attendance and travels costs.

You may find the following useful:

https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/training-events
https://www.jisc.ac.uk/events
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/newsroom/events
Writing good learning outcomes

The learning outcomes of each module form the basis of both the teaching content and the summative assessment. The essence of constructive alignment is to ensure that all three aspects of the module are in sync. They need to be clear, concise, and measurable. Outcomes are usually expressed as the application of knowledge, skills, or attitudes to a specific situation. The best learning outcomes do not merely express what a student knows, but what they can do with that knowledge. Learning a skill is only valuable if the student can apply that skill.

‘Levelness’ of the learning outcomes against the QAA quality code and subject benchmarks and against the standards set down in any PSRB documentation is an essential part of ensuring standards, so this must be the starting point.

BCU has a maximum number of four learning outcomes within a module. This enables students to focus on the key outputs expected of them. You may wish to consider using the following activities to aid you development of appropriate learning outcomes:

When designing learning outcomes, the key question is always the same:

What is it you would like a student to be able to know, understand or do as a result of studying this module?

It is important to mention at this stage that not all learning can be planned, and on occasion it may be more beneficial to allow students to negotiate their own learning outcomes and sometimes assessment type, this is, in essence, student-centred learning in action. It is unusual for this to happen in Undergraduate programmes, although a Dissertation/Independent Learning type module will include elements of this. As with all aspects of Learning and Teaching, your local curriculum design/learning & teaching support department will be happy to provide support and advice.

The revised taxonomy divides up learning outcomes into two domains:

The knowledge domain has four increasingly challenging components:

Factual knowledge ⇒ Conceptual knowledge ⇒ Procedural knowledge ⇒ Metacognitive knowledge.

The six cognitive processes, from easiest to most challenging are:

Remember ⇒ Understand ⇒ Apply ⇒ Analyse ⇒ Evaluate ⇒ Create.

Selecting appropriate verbs can help with the creation of appropriate outcomes. For example, consider these learning outcomes:

- **List** the key features of methodology A and methodology B…
- **Explain** the difference between methodology A and methodology B…
- **Demonstrate** how methodology B is superior to methodology A…
- **Compare and contrast** methodology A and B…
- **Revise** the processes for methodology A to take account of the benefits of B…
- **Propose** a new methodology combining the best of both A and B…

Listing requires *remembering* facts

Explaining something shows *understanding*

Demonstrating something is a form of *application*

Comparing and contrasting are forms of *analysis*

Revision requires *evaluation*

Proposing something new is a form of *creation*

Careful selection of verbs (see Figure 7) can help to ensure the level of the learning outcomes is appropriate to the level expected of the student.
Use these verbs to apply Bloom’s (revised) Taxonomy to learning outcomes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remember</th>
<th>Understand</th>
<th>Apply</th>
<th>Analyse</th>
<th>Evaluate</th>
<th>Create</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retrieving relevant info</td>
<td>Explaining important info</td>
<td>Carrying out or using a procedure in a given situation</td>
<td>Solving open-ended problems</td>
<td>Making critical judgements based on a sound knowledge base</td>
<td>Creating ‘unique’ answers to problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrieve information from long term memory</td>
<td>Explain important information</td>
<td>Carry out or use a procedure in a given situation</td>
<td>Solve open-ended problems</td>
<td>Make critical judgements based on a sound knowledge base</td>
<td>Create unique answers to problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Define</th>
<th>Translate</th>
<th>Interpret</th>
<th>Distinguish</th>
<th>Judge</th>
<th>Compose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Repeat</td>
<td>Restate</td>
<td>Apply</td>
<td>Analyse</td>
<td>Appraise</td>
<td>Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record</td>
<td>Discuss</td>
<td>Employ</td>
<td>Differentiate</td>
<td>Evaluate</td>
<td>Propose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List</td>
<td>Describe</td>
<td>Use</td>
<td>Appraise</td>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recall</td>
<td>Recognise</td>
<td>Demonstrate</td>
<td>Calculate</td>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>Formulate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Explain</td>
<td>Practise</td>
<td>Experiment</td>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>Arrange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relate</td>
<td>Express</td>
<td>Illustrate</td>
<td>Test</td>
<td>Assess</td>
<td>Assemble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underline</td>
<td>Identify</td>
<td>Operate</td>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>Collect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Locate</td>
<td>Schedule</td>
<td>Contrast</td>
<td></td>
<td>Create</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Report</td>
<td>Sketch</td>
<td>Criticise</td>
<td></td>
<td>Construct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review</td>
<td></td>
<td>Diagram</td>
<td></td>
<td>Start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tell</td>
<td></td>
<td>Inspect</td>
<td></td>
<td>Organize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Debate</td>
<td></td>
<td>Manage</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Question</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prepare</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Solve</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Examine</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Categorize</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 8 Verbs for levelling outcomes by Bloom’s Taxonomy**

Once completed, mapping your learning outcomes on a grid (Figure 8) will further help with levelling.

Modules where the assessment criteria are more to the right and down are more challenging, and therefore pitched at a higher level, than those where the criteria are to the left and up.
If you find you have higher level assessments at lower levels of the course, consider adjusting the criteria using verbs from a more appropriate process or knowledge domain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Remember</th>
<th>2 Understand</th>
<th>3 Apply</th>
<th>4 Analyse</th>
<th>5 Evaluate</th>
<th>6 Create</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assessment Criterion 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assessment Criterion 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assessment Criterion 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assessment Criterion 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You may find the following useful:

http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code


https://www.ets.org/education_topics/learning_outcomes
