



UNIVERSITY OF  
PORTSMOUTH

# Curriculum Framework Specification

**June 2018**

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<b>Document Title</b>		
Curriculum Framework Specification		
<b>Date effective from</b>		
June 2018 for courses running from August 2019		
<b>Document Author and Department</b>		
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) Vice-Chancellor's Office		
<b>Approving body</b>	<b>Date of approval</b>	
Academic Council	26 June 2018 Min Ref 45.6 (url update Nov 22)	
<b>Review date</b>	<b>Edition number</b>	<b>ID code</b>
June 2021	2 (Annexes removed)	217
<b>EITHER</b> <b>For public access online (internet)?</b>	<b>OR</b> <b>For staff access only? (intranet)</b>	
Yes	Yes	
<b>Substantive changes since last edition</b>		
<p>This Curriculum Framework Specification document replaces the <a href="#">previous version</a> for all courses running from August 2019. This updated version allows greater flexibility in course design, delivery and assessment. The document has been organised into Principles and Commitments, a Technical Framework and a series of Operational Annexes. Included in the Operational Annexes is the Hallmarks of a Portsmouth Graduate and an updated Assessment for Learning Policy.</p> <p>University Education and Student Experience Committee approved 12 May 2020 the replacement of Annexes 8 and 9 with a new Personal Tutoring and Development framework as a single new Annex 8 replacing the previous Annexes 8 (Personal Tutor framework) and 9 (University framework for Personal Development Planning). The Curriculum Framework Specification and Operational Annexes are now provided as two separate documents.</p> <p>For queries relating to this document please email Quality Assurance, Academic Standards and Partnerships <a href="mailto:gasp@port.ac.uk">gasp@port.ac.uk</a>. If you require this document in an alternative format please email <a href="mailto:corporate.communications@port.ac.uk">corporate.communications@port.ac.uk</a></p>		
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Please also see [The Curriculum Framework Operational Annexes](#)

# Curriculum Framework Specification

## Contents

Summary.....	3
What is this Policy about?.....	3
Who is this Policy for?.....	3
How does the University ensure that this Policy is followed? .....	3
Who can you contact if you have any queries about this Policy? .....	3
1. Preface.....	3
2. Principles and Commitments.....	4
Principle 1 - A coherent curriculum, based on academic, subject and research excellence .....	4
Principle 2 - An agile curriculum that is informed by relevant developments, innovations and professional practices in its subject areas .....	4
Principle 3 - Courses designed to provide an excellent, inclusive learning experience that engages students and promotes independence and deep learning.....	5
Principle 4 - Courses that integrate, within the core curriculum, the development of the knowledge and skills essential for roles in the global workforce.....	5
Principle 5 - Courses that engage students as active partners in learning, and enable continuous enhancement of curricula, incorporating feedback, evaluation and review into the design and development of the course .....	5
3. Technical Framework.....	6
3.1 Qualifications.....	6
3.2 Levels .....	6
3.3 Credit definition and volume .....	7
3.4 Stages.....	8
3.5 Credit delivery.....	8
3.6 Pre and co-requisites .....	10
3.7 Core and option modules .....	10
3.8 Structures to support mid-year entry or exit points .....	10
3.10 Student learning hours and credit loads.....	11
3.11 Course differentiation.....	12
3.12 Course specifications .....	12
3.13 Operational Annexes .....	12

# Summary

## What is this Policy about?

The Curriculum Framework provides detailed precepts and guidance for the design, development and review of all new courses, and amendments to existing courses, of the University of Portsmouth. With close reference to the University's strategic aims and objectives, as set out in the *University, Education* and *Global Engagement* strategies, it affirms the University of Portsmouth's commitment to ensuring an excellent student experience through the delivery of courses that provide the knowledge, skills and attributes for success, as defined in the [Hallmarks of the Portsmouth Graduate](#).

The associated [Operational Annexes](#) provide access to relevant guidance and policies, including those referenced in the Curriculum Framework Specification: The Hallmarks of the Portsmouth Graduate (Annex 1); Assessment for Learning Policy (Annex 2); Guidance regarding the Consolidation, Assessment, Examinations and Marking Periods (Annex 3); and Permitted Delivery Models (Annex 4). In addition, they provide specific information relating to Combined Honours Degrees (Annex 5), Master of Research (Annex 6), and Professional Doctorates (Annex 7), as well as the University's Personal Tutoring Development framework (Annex 8).

## Who is this Policy for?

This document will be of most interest to academic staff, external examiners, and both new and existing students.

It will be of interest to the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and it may also be of interest to the Competition and Marketing Authority, the Office for Students, and the wider public.

## How does the University ensure that this Policy is followed?

Initially the precepts and guidance laid out by the Curriculum Framework are embedded within the course approval process. Annually the Associate Deans (Academic) review each course to ensure that they follow the Curriculum Framework. The Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships team within the Department of Student and Academic Administration is responsible for periodic reviews to ensure that the Policy is followed. Additionally, there is an external examiner for every course in the University who ensures that this Policy is followed.

## Who can you contact if you have any queries about this Policy?

If you are external to the University and you have any questions about this Policy please contact the University's Quality Assurance, Academic Standards and Partnerships team at [gasp@port.ac.uk](mailto:gasp@port.ac.uk).

If you are internal to the University, and based in a Faculty, please contact your Faculty Associate Dean (Academic); non-Faculty based staff should contact the Quality Assurance, Academic Standards and Partnerships team.

# 1. Preface

- 1.1. This Framework Specification provides detailed precepts and guidance for the design, development and review of all new courses, and amendments to existing courses, of the University of Portsmouth. This Framework supersedes the 2016 Framework. It applies to all taught courses with effect from 2019-20. Whilst there is no requirement for Collaborative Courses (other than franchise courses offered with a 'Portsmouth based' strand, as occurs with some Foundation degrees) to comply, course teams are encouraged to consider and adopt this Framework at their next review point.
- 1.2. This document, with close reference to the University's strategic aims and objectives, as set out in the *University, Education and Global Engagement* strategies, affirms the University of Portsmouth's commitment to ensuring an excellent student experience through the delivery of courses that provide the knowledge, skills and attributes for success, as defined in the *Hallmarks of the Portsmouth Graduate* (see Annex 1). Whilst each course is defined by specific graduate outcomes, all courses embed the Hallmarks.

# 2. Principles and Commitments

These ambitions are achieved through these **five key principles** of the Curriculum Framework against which all courses will be validated and reviewed:

1. a coherent curriculum based on academic, subject and research excellence;
2. an agile curriculum that is informed by relevant developments, innovations and professional practices in its subject areas;
3. courses designed to provide an excellent, inclusive learning experience that engages students and promotes independence and deep learning;
4. courses that integrate, within the core curriculum, the development of the knowledge and skills essential for roles in the global workforce;
5. courses that engage students as active partners in learning, and enable continuous enhancement of curricula, incorporating feedback, evaluation and review into the design and development of the course.

Each principle has an underpinning set of **commitments**:

## **Principle 1 - A coherent curriculum, based on academic, subject and research excellence**

- 1.1. Courses demonstrate the critical and reflective knowledge and understanding of their subject, its principles, practices and boundaries.
- 1.2. Courses are designed to enable students to learn together, independently, analytically and creatively, and give students the opportunity to engage imaginatively with new areas of investigation within and across disciplinary boundaries.
- 1.3. Learning, teaching and assessment will support students to synthesise new and existing knowledge in order to generate ideas and develop creative solutions of benefit to the economy and society.
- 1.4. Learning, teaching and assessment will inspire students through pedagogic techniques, practices and technologies that facilitate engaged and interactive learning.

## **Principle 2 - An agile curriculum that is informed by relevant developments, innovations and professional practices in its subject areas**

- 2.1. Courses draw on research, innovation and professional practice, so as to remain current and relevant.
- 2.2. Courses provide career-enhancing opportunities that address the changing employment needs and landscape. Such opportunities include work-experience, internships and placements, real or 'live' projects, enterprise, research and volunteering, and embedding identifiable skills development within and across the curriculum.
- 2.3. Student assessment reflects the 'real-world' tasks, requirements and expectations of the professional workplace. It affords students the opportunity to direct their learning toward their professional goals and ambitions.

## **Principle 3 - Courses designed to provide an excellent, inclusive learning experience that engages students and promotes independence and deep learning**

- 3.1. Courses are designed to aid transition to higher education, the department and the subject area, and to provide both personal and academic support, and foster inclusivity and equality of opportunity.
- 3.2. Curricula are designed to achieve Assessment Of and For Learning (see Annex 2), and provide both formative and summative assessment.
- 3.3. Students are supported to become independent learners and engage in deep learning.
- 3.4. Courses support students to be intellectually curious, embrace challenges and seize opportunities for development.
- 3.5. Students are supported to communicate clearly and effectively, in a range of forms and to different audiences.
- 3.6. Courses enable students to locate, access and critically engage with information, using current and emerging technologies.
- 3.7. Students are supported to be proactive in recognising and addressing personal development needs.

## **Principle 4 - Courses that integrate, within the core curriculum, the development of the knowledge and skills essential for roles in the global workforce**

- 4.1. Courses demonstrate a global perspective, fostering informed citizenship, and promoting diversity and respect.
- 4.2. Courses are designed to support and enable student mobility, including through international exchange and work placement.
- 4.3. Courses provide opportunities to engage students in their development of an international perspective on their learning.
- 4.4. Courses are designed to support students to be informed citizens, with a sense of responsibility allied to a commitment to ethical practice and social justice issues, such as equality, respect and sustainability.
- 4.5. Students are supported to be able to work in a range of environments, responding positively to new situations by being aware, flexible, adaptable and realistic in their expectations.

## **Principle 5 - Courses that engage students as active partners in learning, and enable continuous enhancement of curricula, incorporating feedback, evaluation and review into the design and development of the course**

- 5.1. Courses are subject to continuous enhancement to ensure they remain dynamic, innovative, grounded on synergies between teaching, research, innovation and professional practice, and relevant to the changing needs of local and global economies and communities.

- 5.2. Student feedback is central to monitoring, review and continuous enhancement of courses, and is gathered regularly through a variety of formal, such as via the Students' Union, Course Representation, Staff-Student Consultative Committees, Faculty Fora, and informal mechanisms.
- 5.3. Course teams work in partnership with students to co-create elements of curricula.
- 5.4. Courses are informed by internal and external management information, and benchmarked, as appropriate.

## 3. Technical Framework

### 3.1 Qualifications

The QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup> describes five levels of qualifications: 4–8 (with 8 being the highest). Previously, the FHEQ termed these Certificate, Intermediate (Diploma), Honours, Master's and Doctoral levels. This change aligns with the England, Wales and Northern Ireland credit framework that encompasses post-16 levels of learning<sup>2</sup>. The relationship between these three systems is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Relationship between Framework for Higher Education Qualifications terminology (2001 and 2008) and the typical HE qualifications at each level

2008	2001	Qualification
8	Doctoral	Doctoral degrees
7	Master's	Master's degrees (including Integrated Master's, Postgraduate Certificates, Postgraduate Diplomas, Postgraduate Certificate in Education)
6	Honours	Bachelor's degree with Honours, Bachelor's degrees, Graduate Certificates, Graduate Diplomas, Professional Graduate Certificate in Education
5	Intermediate	Foundation degrees, Diplomas of Higher Education, Higher National Diplomas (HNDs)
4	Certificate	Certificates of Higher Education, Higher National Certificates (HNCs)

### 3.2 Levels

3.2.1 Qualifications comprise modules that are delivered and assessed at a particular level. The level indicates the relative academic demand, complexity of understanding, depth of learning, and degree of autonomy expected of the learner undertaking the module.

3.2.2 The University of Portsmouth has adopted the QAA FHEQ to describe the generic outcomes expected of learners awarded higher education qualifications. Table 1 includes the position of the various awards within this Framework.

3.2.3 Modules are assigned to a level within the overall Framework (i.e. 4 to 8). The expectation of learners at the different levels is based on the SEEC level descriptors as modified by Gosling and Moon<sup>3, 4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> QAA. The framework for Higher Education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. 2001

<sup>2</sup> CQFW, NICATS, NUCCAT, SEEC. Credit and HE qualifications. Credit guidelines for HE qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. 2001

<sup>3</sup> Gosling D, Moon J. Learning outcomes and assessment criteria. SEEC. 2001

<sup>4</sup> See [Guidance Notes for Writing Module Aims and Learning Outcomes](#)

3.2.4 Modules forming part of the Institution Wide Language Programme, and offered as options outside of a language course, will be assigned to an appropriate FHEQ level of learning through the use of a translation table. As such they will count towards credit accumulation and, where the level is appropriate, to classification.

### 3.3 Credit definition and volume

3.3.1 Each module has a set of learning outcomes and, to earn credit, a student must satisfy the assessment criteria for the module. The module is the smallest entity for which credit is awarded and a student cannot gain a proportion of the total credit. The credit awarded for the successful completion of the module is the credit value of the module<sup>5</sup>.

3.3.2 All taught modules will be credit-rated<sup>6</sup>. Undergraduate modules are rated in multiples of 20 whereas postgraduate modules are rated in multiples of 15<sup>7</sup>. Each credit point is equal to ½ ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) and is equivalent to ten notional hours of student activity regardless of mode or location of study. Student activity includes formal contact time, directed study, and self-directed study. Table 2 sets out the minimum credit requirements for qualifications at each FHEQ level.

Table 2 Credit Rating for University of Portsmouth Awards

<b>Award</b>	<b>Minimum credit rating</b>
University Certificate	30 credits at Level 4 or above
Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE)	120 credits at Level 4 or above
Certificate in Education (CertEd)	60 credits at Level 4 and 60 credits at Level 5
Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)	240 credits with 100 credits at Level 5 or above
Foundation Degree	240 credits with 100 credits at Level 5 or above
Higher National Diploma (HND)	240 credits with 100 credits at Level 5 or above
Bachelor's Degree	300 credits with 60 credits at Level 6 or above
Bachelor's Degree with Honours	360 credits with 100 credits at Level 6 or above
Graduate Certificate	60 credits at Level 6
Graduate Diploma	120 credits at Level 6
Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)	120 credits at Level 6 or above
Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)	120 credits of which at least 60 credits must be at Level 6 and 60 credits at Level 7
Integrated Master's	480 credits with a minimum of 120 credits at Level 7 and 100 credits at Level 6
Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert)	60 credits at Level 7 or above
Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip)	120 credits at Level 7 or above
Master's	180 credits at Level 7 or above
Professional Doctorate	540 credits with a minimum of 360 credits at Level 8

<sup>5</sup> [QAA Credit Framework for England](#)

For non-credit-bearing courses, please refer to the [Flexible Curriculum Framework](#)

<sup>7</sup> Note the Integrated Master's courses are an approved exemption to this pattern, and may have units in multiples of 20 credits at Level 7.

## 3.4 Stages

3.4.1 Undergraduate courses, whatever the mode of study, are divided into stages. These stages are based on the volume and level of credit that will enable students to exit with accumulated credit and, where sufficient credit has been accumulated, with a nationally recognised award. Placement years are not considered as progression points.

3.4.2 Postgraduate courses, whatever the mode of study, are not defined in terms of stages, unless specifically designed with staged exit awards.

## 3.5 Credit delivery

3.5.1 The academic year will run from September to June with exact dates published by the Department of Student & Academic Administration (DSAA). It will consist of 34 weeks in total with an embedded induction week in week 1, 24 teaching weeks, and 10 weeks of directed study, consolidation, assessment and formal examinations. It will be delivered as set out in Table 3. There is also a 3 week period in July during which reassessments will take place should they be required.

Table 3 Summary of academic year teaching and assessment activities (excluding referrals)

<b>Week number</b>	<b>Formal teaching week number</b>	<b>Activity</b>
8	1	Induction for all levels
8-20	1-13	Teaching Block 1
14	7	Teaching Block 1 Consolidation Period
21-23		Christmas Break
24-25		Teaching Block 1 Assessment Period and Directed Activity
26-41*	14-26	Teaching Block 2
32	20	Teaching Block 2 Consolidation Period
42-46	27-32	Examinations and Marking (Examinations in first four weeks only)

\*A three week Easter Break is included in this period which moves annually due to the nature of Easter.

3.5.2 The University Library and other services will be available for part of the Christmas and most of the Easter break, students can and should be encouraged to engage in self-directed learning during these periods.

3.5.3 There is a short Assessment and Marking break after Christmas during which students can consolidate their learning, undertake certain assessment activities, and additional activities, prior to the start of the second Teaching Block. The assessment and additional activities, work placements and field trips for example, that students are expected to undertake in this period must be made clear in course documentation. Course documentation must also set out the activities to be undertaken during Consolidation periods.

3.5.4 The final Examinations and Marking period will be used for formal (generally timetabled) contact time, directed activities, self-directed activities, assessments and examinations. Course documentation should make clear the expectations on students to engage in activity during this period, especially if there are few or no formal examinations. See Annex 3 for guidance on directed activities during these periods.

**3.5.5 Campus-based courses – Levels 4, 5 and 6**, will be delivered as follows (see permitted models of delivery in Annex 4):

- Full time and part-time – Level 4: all credits will be delivered through year-long 20 or 40 credit modules, structured to support students' transition to higher education, embedding Hallmarks and career-enhancing activity in the curriculum, and taking into account assessment load.
- Full time and part-time – Levels 5 and 6: predominantly half-year, 20 credit, short, fat modules, embedding Hallmarks and career-enhancing activity in the curriculum, taking into account assessment load, and designed to facilitate January starts, and part-year placements and exchanges, with year-long project/dissertation/work-based learning modules permitted up to 40 credits.

**3.5.6 Campus-based courses – Levels 7 and 8**, will be delivered as follows:

- Full time and part time – 15 credit modules and multiples of 15 credits allowed<sup>8</sup>, but single modules with credit loads above 60 credits are not allowed. Whilst a minimum number of academic year-long credits is not specified, there is an expectation that delivery will be appropriate to the student entry profile and mode of course delivery. Additionally, Course and Module documentation must be explicit regarding the expectations on students to undertake study during the summer period and the support that will be available to facilitate this.
- Levels 7 and 8 must be delivered through one of the following approved methods of delivery:
  - Campus Taught Standard Year
  - Distance Learning
  - Work Based Learning
  - Independent Study
  - Block
  - Blended Learning.

The following principles must apply to the delivery of all Master's-level units:

- Any 'Campus Taught' Master's-level module must be delivered and assessed within the 34 weeks of the academic year (i.e. the two 12-week teaching blocks, two Consolidation Weeks, the Assessment and Marking period between the two teaching blocks, and the final Examinations and Marking Period).
- Any other approved mode of delivery for a Master's-level module can involve delivery, assessment, and support at other times in the year and through other arrangements.
- The module instance end-date cannot be later than 12 months after the start date of the module instance.

These models are sufficiently flexible to accommodate most course and/or PSRB requirements. Any unavoidable exemptions should be sought at the time of Course Approval.

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<sup>8</sup> Level 7 of Integrated Masters courses are exempt from this requirement and may use a module base of 20 credits.

3.5.7 **Distance learning modules Levels 4 to 8** will be delivered taking account of the principles and commitments set out in section 2, and the FlexibleFramework<sup>9</sup>.

## 3.6 Pre and co-requisites

3.6.1 Modules linked by pre and co-requisites should be kept to a minimum in order to facilitate student choice and access to the curriculum.

3.6.2 Where it is essential that two modules are studied at the same time, the modules should be linked by the use of co-requisites.

3.6.3 Where it is essential that specific modules or groups of modules have been studied before another module, then the latter module in the module descriptor must explicitly state the pre-requisite modules. It is not permissible to state 'all modules at previous level' as pre-requisites – the essential pre-requisites must be identified by module code (with the module name as optional).

3.6.4 Where pre and co-requisites are specified, equivalent modules or learning will also be acceptable, as occurs in the case of advanced standing and RP(E)L.

## 3.7 Core and option modules

3.7.1 Within pathways, all modules must be designated as one of the following:

- i) **Core:** required modules for all students studying for the named award;
- ii) **Option:** where students are free to choose, within defined constraints, between alternative modules that are specified within the course specification and contribute to the course learning outcomes;
- iii) **Subject Core Option** (at Levels 5 and 6): where students have a limited choice of alternative modules but within a specified core subject area.

3.7.2 All modules at Level 4 will be core. The allocation and positioning of credit between core and option beyond Level 4 is a matter of academic judgement, and a balance should be struck between choice and the management of the student learning experience especially where there is a direct entry route beyond Level 4. Option choice, timetabling, etc., will be operated in accordance with the Timetabling Policy.

3.7.3 Except where accrediting professional body requirements dictate otherwise, all students will have the option to study 20 credits of languages during the delivery of Level 5, i.e. during the second year of study, in either Teaching Block 1 or Teaching Block2.

## 3.8 Structures to support mid-year entry or exit points

3.8.1 The short, fat module structure at Levels 5 and 6 enables January starts and part-year exchanges, although provision will have to be made for part-year optional modules if the course includes year-long project/dissertation/work-based learning modules of 20 or 40 credits.

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<sup>9</sup>See: [Flexible Curriculum Framework](#)

3.8.2 For structures to support mid-year entry points, multiple intake points, or non-standard years, see [the Flexible Curriculum Framework](#)

## 3.10 Student learning hours and credit loads

3.10.1 The University will adhere to UK and European expectations regarding credit and notional student learning hours (formal, directed, and self-directed). Thus 20 credits = 200 hours of learning and therefore 120 credits requires 1200 hours of learning – at 35 ½ hours per week this is equivalent to 34 weeks<sup>10</sup>.

3.10.2 A full-time undergraduate student cannot be required to study more than 120 credits at any one stage.

3.10.3 Credit loads for part-time courses, undergraduate courses, Master's courses and Foundation Degrees will be approved by the Course Approval Committee.

3.10.4 Whilst it is recognised that credit is awarded for achievement of learning outcomes, and the University expects students to experience blended learning, students also expect and deserve some consistency in the University's approach to contact time (face-to-face) for conventionally delivered modules<sup>11</sup> along with clear explanations as to how they are expected to spend the non-contact time. The following provides guidance<sup>12</sup> regarding typical ranges of contact time by level of study. Whilst there is no expectation that every week will have an identical delivery structure, there is an expectation that there will be a balanced spread of activities throughout the period of timetabled teaching<sup>13</sup>.

- Level 4 – 20 (200 hours) credits – typical contact hours would fall in the range 36–72 hours; 1–3 hours/week as year-long delivery.
- Level 5 – 20 (200 hours) credits – typical contact hours would fall in the range 24–60 hours; 2 – 5 hours/week for half-year delivery & 1 – 3 hours/week as year-long delivery.
- Level 6 and 7<sup>14</sup> – 20 (200 hours) credits – typical contact hours would fall in the range 18–48 hours; 1 – 4 hours/week for half-year delivery & 1 – 2 hours/week for year-long delivery.
- Levels 7 and 8 – 15 (150 hours) or 30 (300 hours) credits – typical contact hours would fall in the range 9 –24 hours or 18-48 hours.

3.10.5 The Module Specification will include explicit details about the range of activities that will comprise the total notional learning hours.

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<sup>10</sup> This is consistent with UUK credit framework for England, European Frameworks and the vocational Qualifications and Curriculum framework which is based on one credit per 10 hours of learning.

<sup>11</sup> Conventionally delivered modules are those with a regularly delivered mix of lectures and/or tutorials and/or seminars and/or practical classes. Projects, dissertations, work-based learning and field trips would not be considered 'conventional' for the purposes of this guidance.

<sup>12</sup> This is based on student expectations and the principle of students becoming increasingly independent as they progress through the levels.

<sup>13</sup> There is the opportunity for directed learning activities during the Consolidation Weeks to contribute to the total contact time.

<sup>14</sup> Referring to the Level 7 component of Integrated Masters courses.

### 3.11 Course differentiation

3.11.1 Rather than defining an arbitrary number of credits by which courses with different titles or designations (BSc/BA MSc/MA) will be differentiated, this matter will form part of the discussions of both Course Approval and Review processes. Course titles must be clear to students and all stakeholders, take account of Subject Benchmark Statements, the expectations of the academic community, accurately represent the content and not be misleading. Where courses share similar content but different titles, the justification for this should be made clear along with the marketing rationale.

3.11.2 The Academic Regulations<sup>15</sup> provide guidance regarding the designation of courses as BSc or MSc as opposed to BA or MA.

### 3.12 Course specifications

3.12.1 A course specification will be produced for each course or group of courses according to the University's guidelines<sup>16</sup> for the production of course specifications. The course specification will normally define the expectations of the level of award for which students are studying. Course specifications will be reviewed annually.

3.12.2 Subject Benchmark Statements (SBS) are not a prescription for course content, but the course specification and mapping table must make it clear which ones have been consulted and to what extent they have/have not been incorporated into the course and why. For Single Honours courses in specific subject areas this is relatively straightforward, but for Joint and Minor routes within the Combined Honours Degree Course and multidisciplinary courses, aspects of two or more SBS may need to be considered and documented.

3.12.3 Course Learning Outcomes are greater than the sum of the module learning outcomes. They should be expressed at threshold level and be developed taking account of SBS, PSRB requirements and/or other regulatory standards requirements, as well as staff research and scholarship.

### 3.13 Operational Annexes

The Operational Annexes provide access to relevant guidance and policies, including those referenced in this document. In addition, they provide specific information relating to Combined Honours Degrees (Annex 5), Master of Research (Annex 6), and Professional Doctorates (Annex 7), as well as the University's Personal Tutoring and Development framework (Annex 8).

Please see [The Curriculum Framework Operational Annexes](#)

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<sup>15</sup> See: [Awards of the University of Portsmouth](#)

<sup>16</sup> See: [Course Specification Guidance Notes](#)