Nottingham Trent University

# Quality Handbook

**Part D: Course Design, Management and Enhancement**

## Section 12: Course Design - Requirements

Section **12**

# Contents

# Section 12

## 1. Considerations

**The University has effective processes for the design and approval of its academic courses, and takes a strategic approach to the processes for, and outcomes of, course design and approval.**

1.1 All NTU courses must be systematically designed to ensure that the curriculum provides a high quality learning experience that is aligned to the Strategic Plan and meets internal and external benchmarks. Systematic design is linked to the academic approval process (Quality Handbook (QH) Section 5), which subjects the outcomes of the design process to peer scrutiny. Once approved, NTU courses do not remain static – monitoring and review processes prompt the need for enhancements to the course so that it remains contemporary and relevant to the needs of students, employers and other stakeholders.

1.2 The design of any course needs to take into account:

   a. the University mission and Strategic Plan and School strategies and academic plans;

   b. relevant external reference points, national trends and developments in the subject, the requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), and the needs of employers;

   c. internal reference points, including relevant University policies and regulations contained in this QH;

   d. inclusivity and the promotion of equality of opportunity.

1.3 New course design (or the major re-design of existing courses) should not take place in isolation – ideas for new courses or major re-designs should first be discussed with the appropriate Head of Department for consideration by School Executive. In addition, before detailed course design or re-design is started, the proposal will need to undergo appropriate Business Evaluation.

1.4 Where changes to a course are approved, appropriate notification to prospective students should take place in order to meet the requirements of the Competition and Markets Authority.

## 2. Course Design Criteria

**The University has clear criteria for course design, and the course design and approval process tests proposals against these criteria.**

2.1 In translating its ideas (and the outcomes of its consultations) into a course design, a course team should take into account the following principles:

a. coherence – consideration should be given to the intellectual integrity of the course and to ensuring that the student's overall learning experience has a logic that is clearly linked to the aims of the course;

b. progression – the design should promote an organised progression so that the demands on the student increase throughout the course in terms of intellectual challenge, skills, knowledge, conceptualisation and learning autonomy;

c. level – consideration should be given to the level of a course and to the level of the stated learning outcomes at named stages in the course; reference should be made to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) Standards and Guidance and to the Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Award Frameworks in the QH;

d. balance – consideration should be given to the underpinning principle of depth over breadth in the curriculum, to an emphasis on simple course structures that prioritise the core curriculum over optional choice, and to other elements within the course, such as the balance between academic and practical elements and between personal development and academic outcomes;

e. inclusivity – the range of requirements of learners likely to enter the course should be considered, as should equality and diversity issues;

f. feasibility – the expectations given to students and others (through course information) should be honest and deliverable.

2.2 The design of the course must meet the following Strategic Plan requirements:

a. All students will develop relevant professional attributes gained through meaningful work placement or experience embedded into the design, learning, and assessment of every course. All courses must embed assessed work-like experience (AWLE) equivalent to 240 hours of learning for undergraduate courses.

b. We will continue to address differences in attainment between, and obstacles to, equal access to opportunities across all student groups.

c. Initiatives that stimulate staff-student research collaboration will be supported as part of the overall approach to personalisation.

d. All courses must integrate comparative international curriculum content.

e. We will reform curriculum structures to facilitate greater international mobility.

f. We will continue to be recognised as a leading exemplar of an environmentally responsible and sustainable organisation.

g. To facilitate academic and professional sustainability literacy encompassing knowledge, skills and competencies, all courses must: (i) include one or more sustainability course learning outcomes encompassing environmental, social and economic sustainability; (ii) must have the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) referenced in core modules, as relevant to the academic discipline with a clear articulation of which SDGs are being covered; and (iii) must include a range of UNESCO sustainability competencies

> relevant to academic discipline facilitated through core modules with a clear narrative of scaffolding throughout the course.

h. Every course will attain appropriate accreditation where available.

i. Academic colleagues will be given the skills, tools, and capacity to enhance a tutorial system that will underpin a personalised learning experience for all our students.

j. Every course team will articulate the mechanisms by which personalisation is facilitated.

2.3 In addition, the course team will wish to consider the following elements at the design stage:

a. how the learning outcomes will be taught and assessed, and the teaching, learning and assessment strategies to support this (including Assessment Schedule and Feedback Plans (see QH Supplement (QHS) 15D) and the utilisation of e-learning);

b. the relationship between overall course learning outcomes and module learning outcomes;

c. the award designation and course title – to reflect the aims and outcomes (see QH Sections 3 and 4);

d. the qualifications and personal profile required on entry, including how the course might recruit from international markets;

e. the ways in which the course's academic health and currency will be monitored and enhanced;

f. how the course might provide the opportunity for students to make a civic contribution (e.g. through involvement in volunteering or a student society);

g. how Alumni Fellows might be used to support the course.

## 3. Course Structures

3.1 The course structure and design takes precedence over the specification of its contributing modules; each University course must be structured in such a way that it provides a substantial, coherent and straightforward curriculum.

3.2 A course must contain an extensive core. For undergraduate courses, there should be no options at level 4, while option choices at levels 5 and 6 should be kept to a minimum. Options should be structured into sets, with students choosing a single module from a maximum of four in each set. All modules within a set should run at the same time.

3.3 Modules should be sufficiently large to ensure depth of study. For undergraduate courses, the minimum module size is 20 credits. Larger modules should be multiples of 20 credits.

3.4 A 20-credit module represents the learning outcomes to be achieved by a typical student in 200 notional hours of student effort. For full-time students, a learning week comprises 40 hours.

3.5 For undergraduate courses, where modules are not delivered over a whole 30-week academic year, consideration should have been given to the potential impact of the structure on timetabling, examination board scheduling, module sharing (particularly between Schools), central examinations and any possible implications for international students' visa requirements.

**Further information**

- In certain circumstances, it may be possible to approve the design of a course which does not adhere fully to requirement 3.2 above. Approval would be subject to the provision of strong evidence that the proposal retains the principle of course community and has no detrimental effect on timetabling; for example where blended learning is used.

- At Level 5 it is possible to operate a split year of two parts. Part one will begin in teaching week 1 and part two will begin in teaching week 16. Assessment of study in part one will, normally, be by methods other than examination.

- Taught postgraduate courses have more flexibility in these respects, e.g. multiples of 15 credits can be approved and examinations may be held at different points in the year – provided they do not disrupt undergraduate teaching.

- For new courses, or changes to courses, the considerations set out in requirement 3.5 above will be made as part of the viability check stage of the course design process.

3.6 All undergraduate courses should be designed so that students have a minimum of 20% contact time across their course.

3.7 Each module within a course will have aims, content, learning outcomes and assessments that serve the course information. Each module may be assessed separately, although it is possible to assess more than one module through a course-based assessment.

**Further information**

- More guidance on course and module assessment can be found in QH Section 15. For ease of reference, the following are the key expectations to be factored into course design:
  - Whole-course design of assessment;
  - Many, regular, small formative tasks, often in class;
  - Frequent feedback, with greater use of peer- and self-evaluation;
  - One or fewer summative assessments per module;
  - A limited range of assessment types;
  - A synoptic assessment piece should be incorporated into all courses.

3.8 Where a module is shared across a number of courses, it should be designed to be run in course cohort groups in order to enable students to identify with their own

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course. Exceptionally, a multi-course module can be designed with common lectures. Where the specific module outcomes rely upon an interdisciplinary mix of students within the class, it can be exempted from the above rules provided that this point is clearly articulated in the module information and approved.

3.9   All undergraduate courses must include a capstone project in the final year.

3.10  A capstone project should be a substantial piece of work that provides students with an opportunity to draw together substantive learning with subject-specific theories and methods in an integrated manner.

3.11  While it is possible to propose large modules for approval purposes (i.e. 60, 80, 100 or 120 credits), course teams should consider at the planning stage any potential consequences for student progression.

3.12  Where a course wishes to offer a year-long visa to international students, it must be 53 weeks long.

3.13  Accelerated routes may be designed to allow students to complete a full-time degree in two years or a part-time level in one year. If a course has been designed in such a way then the details will be set out in the course information.

3.14  Course teams are encouraged to include a placement or other form of work experience within the curriculum. Such activities can either be subsumed within the overall credits required for the course or be additional to the standard curriculum (i.e. a sandwich year). If an activity is integral, a course must include an academic alternative in case the placement or other form of work experience cannot be secured (except in cases where PSRB requirements take precedence). A sandwich course must have a route enabling a student who is unable to secure a placement to transfer immediately to the final year of the degree. More information on placements can be found in QH Section 10D.

3.15  It is possible to structure a course in non-modular ways. For example, a course may comprise negotiated learning outcomes designed to meet work, professional or practice-based needs of a highly individualised, independent and evolving nature (such as courses geared toward demonstrating professional competence). Where a course is structured in ways that do not meet the definition of a module (or includes modules beyond the normal parameters), each unit should still be credit rated wherever possible to indicate the proportional weight of the unit.

3.16  In the development of undergraduate courses, the team should decide whether the final award classification will be based on just level 6 performance or whether it will include a contribution from level 5. If the latter is agreed, this will be based on a 20% / 80% split, with the larger contribution being from level 6.

## 4.   Roles and Responsibilities

**The University defines the processes, roles and responsibilities for course design and approval and communicate these to relevant staff.**

4.1   Course design is coordinated by a course planning team comprised of a designated team for new courses and an existing course team for changes to courses; a

course sponsor will usually be identified at an early stage to lead the process. The course team will have responsibility for:

    a. constructing a curriculum to meet a perceived market need in line with the University's Strategic Plan;

    b. ensuring consideration of external reference points including the UK Quality Code, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, Subject Benchmark Statements and the ENQA Standards and Guidelines;

    c. ensuring the course's fit with University and School strategies, policies and practices;

    d. consulting with a range of interested parties, internally and externally;

    e. providing complete documentation for academic approval, as detailed in QH Section 5;

    f. responding to requests for modifications or further documentation.

4.2    While it is recognised that one individual, or a small group of individuals, will lead the design process, it is imperative that as many staff as possible have input into these stages.

## 5. Consultation

**The University takes account of reference points and draws on expertise from those outside the course in its processes for course design and approval. The University also engages students in its process.**

5.1    Course teams should make use of the following contributions during course design (proportional to the nature and scale of the proposal):

    a. current or outgoing external examiners (or those on cognate courses) who may comment on the proposal in light of their knowledge of existing provision;

    b. external academic peers who may provide relevant information and guidance on developments in the discipline(s) (Advance HE is a useful resource in providing access to staff working in specific subjects);

    c. the course design members and academic peers from other disciplines within the University who may have particular expertise in aspects of course management, design or delivery;

    d. collaborative partners (if any) who can comment on the proposal from their perspective;

    e. students (or their representatives) on the current course (or cognate courses) who may comment from their own experience of studying the existing provision;

    f. graduates from the current course or cognate courses;

g. School Standards and Quality Managers and Learning and Teaching Managers who may provide valuable information on good practice elsewhere in the University and outside;

h. the Centre for Academic Development and Quality (CADQ);

i. appropriate PSRB representatives who may comment from a practice perspective and from a knowledge of similar developments in accredited courses at other institutions;

j. advisers or contacts from relevant employers or practitioners who may provide relevant insights and guidance on current developments in the workplace and the industry more widely.

5.2   As far as possible, the entire course team should be involved in course design. Such an approach provides useful staff development for all members; encourages team building; creates a sense of ownership; and ensures a more rounded proposal. While it is expected that a course leader and / or core team will coordinate documentation and develop drafts for comments, the extent of ownership and team commitment will be explored through the approval process.

## 6.   Course Information, Module Information, and Learning Outcomes

**The University maintains definitive records of each course which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the course, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students.**

### Course Information

6.1   The purpose of course information is to inform a range of interested parties (including potential students and their advisers; students who are already on the course; employers; and internal and external peers) about the learning outcomes for a course and the means by which these outcomes will be achieved. The primary intended audience for the course information is the student and should be written in a way that is accessible to students.

6.2   In all cases, advice can be sought from CADQ about the most appropriate way to specify courses. However, the underlying advice is to keep course information simple and accessible.

6.3   Course information on CourseLoop is presented alongside supporting artefacts for course approval purposes (see Section 5 of the QH). Once approved, the course information may be subject to change and modification as the course develops and in response to reflections derived from course monitoring and review. Such changes must be considered and approved through formal and defined channels.

6.4   It is possible for several versions of the course information to be in operation for different cohorts of students - for example, where a change to the option or core

curriculum balance is being 'rolled in' over a couple of years. The publicly available version of the course information will always be the latest one.

6.5 It is recognised that some courses share curricula features or have routes or pathways within them that lead to separate named awards. For such courses, which have route-specific learning outcomes, it may be appropriate to provide route-specific information to complement the overall course information. Thus, for example, the overall course information would indicate which routes were available and the generic outcomes to be achieved by all students on the course, while route-specific information would give further detail on their particular learning outcomes and the distinctive features of the route or pathway. Where sections are common across all routes the route-specific course information can simply refer to the 'parent' information.

6.6 In Combined Studies schemes, which offer free choice in the combination of subjects, it may be unwieldy to produce separate course information for each combination. Instead, the salient features of the scheme should be specified in the standard course information, with learning outcomes indicating typical outcomes. The course information will be expected to detail the organising or design principles that provide the framework within which the various combinations of awards sit. The available awards and course structure sections on CourseLoop should be used to specify which combinations of awards are available.

6.7 Where two subjects are specifically coupled on a major or minor or joint honours basis outside a Combined Studies scheme, a single source of course information is preferred.

6.8 Some of the University's courses do not fit easily into an outcomes-led pedagogy, especially those with a large number of combinations of awards sitting within an overall framework and those that have negotiated or flexible learning outcomes. In such cases, course information should indicate typical outcomes or indicate the parameters within which the outcomes will be located. As well as 'standard' courses, the following variants can be specified:

   a. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses;

   b. 'top-up' courses;

   c. courses by project or thesis;

   d. individualised courses of study (CATS);

   e. Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP).

6.9 The NTU Digital Framework should be used to inform the design of learning outcomes for digital practice.

#### Further information

- In respect of CPD courses, see QHS 3B on Professional Diploma and Professional Certificate awards.

- The NTU Digital Framework can be found on the Organisational Development webpages.

### Module Information

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6.10 Modules should be specified on CourseLoop.  When changes are subsequently proposed to the course, updated module information will need to be approved at the same time.

**Further information**

- QHS 5B should be consulted for further information on the relevant procedures for making changes to modules and courses.

6.11 Module changes may also need business case 'sign off' as set out in the University's Business Evaluation Process.

6.12 The module information should present a succinct, accurate and accessible summary of the module's key features. Detailed information elaborating the syllabus, its delivery, indicative reading, student participation, assessment briefs and criteria etc. will be provided to students through other means, usually a module guide or handbook made available through the NTU Online Workspace (NOW).

6.13 Most modules will require some updating each year, for example changes to the syllabus and to the reading. Changes to definitive module information will be subject to formal approval as set out in QHS 5A.

6.14 Module Leaders need to think carefully about the degree of detail they include on the module information; modules need some room to breathe outside of the formal approval process. It is not necessary, for example, to specify the material to be covered each week over the full academic year in the 'Contents' section. Neither are more than a few indicative texts necessary for the reading list. This is an important balance to be struck – there needs to be sufficient detail for the modules information to be useful and meaningful as a source of information and a summary of the module's key features, but sufficient flexibility to accommodate normal, ongoing updating of the module.

### Learning Outcomes

6.15 A learning outcome is a statement of what a student is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate at the completion of a process of learning. Learning outcomes set the minimum achievement required for the satisfactory completion of the course or module. Course and module learning outcomes should be set out in CourseLoop (see QHS 12A).

## 7.  Module Learning Room Template

**The University utilises a Module Learning Room template to maintain consistency in the student experience and support quality assurance.**

### Module Learning Rooms

7.1 All members of the Module delivery team should have access to the relevant learning room(s) in the most appropriate role.

7.2 The default Learning Room home page should be adhered to unless clear justification exists to support the implementation of a custom home page. The default home page has been designed to support consistency in design, accessibility and best practice in layout.

7.3 The three default units and related content items should be retained and updated accordingly; these are Start Here, Module Information, and Assessment units.

7.4 The Start Here unit consists of the Welcome to the Module template. This should be updated with a brief introduction of the Module Lead and the module itself.

7.5 The Module Information unit consists of 7 content topics, 6 of which are editable of which 5 relate directly to the module. They should be updated before the learning room is made available to students, as follows:

   a. Module Overview: This should be completed providing the module aims, delivery mode, schedule, module content, and peer support and collaboration sections. This enables students to understand how and when the module will be taught, and how they are expected to interact with each other.

   b. Engaging with this Module: This section should be completed to provide an overview of how students are expected to engage with their module content, and also outlines any special technology requirements needed.

   c. Learning Outcomes: The learning outcomes for the module should be listed to support students in understanding what they will learn.

   d. Module Help and Guidance: This section should be updated with the contact information for key module staff, with the availability and preferred method of contact listed provided.

7.6 The Learning Room Accessibility Statement, located within the Module Information section should be updated, using the Learning Room Blackboard Ally Report, providing the initial overall accessibility score for the content within the learning room, and with information on how students on the module can access alternative formats or request accessibility support. This should be updated periodically throughout the delivery of the module as content is added and accessibility improved.

7.7 The Assessment section contains the Assessment Details content item, which should be completed with information as to how students are to be assessed during the module, together with any relevant information such as marking matrices and links to relevant assessment regulations.

7.8 The assessment briefs for any assessment should also be provided ahead of the learning room being made available to students, and should include the submission date, method and format of the assessment, and method of submission, together with any instructions.

7.9 To support students with the locating of module content, a clear, well-constructed navigation structure should be applied, using well-considered naming conventions. This should be applied consistently across the learning room and the course.

7.10 Learning materials should be hosted alongside related items and structured into unit folders that reflect how they are to be delivered, i.e. weekly or by topic or theme.

7.11 Instructions should be provided alongside any task or activity set to ensure that students are clear about what they should do. The use of due dates, start dates and/or end dates also support students planning and time management.

## 8. Review of Processes

**The University regularly evaluates its processes for course design and approval and takes action to improve them where necessary.**

8.1 CADQ produces a synopsis of course development and approval issues, trends and themes that is presented to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC) and School Academic Standards and Quality Committees (SASQCs). Where appropriate, ASQC will act to amend or otherwise enhance the University's process for course design.

| Policy owner |
|---|
| CADQ |

| Change history | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Version:* | *Approval date:* | *Implementation date:* | *Nature of significant revisions:* |
| Sept 2016 | 30.09.16 | 01.10.16 | Removal of reference to graduate attributes<br>Additional references to Strategic Plan and Curriculum Refresh Framework<br>Additional requirement to notify students holding an offer of any change approved which affects the material information |
| Sept 2017 | 12.09.17 | 01.10.17 | Addition of reference to accelerated routes (moved from CAR). |
| Sept 2018 | 12.09.18 | 01.10.18 | References to Curriculum Refresh Framework removed and replaced with references to the Strategic Plan<br>Reference added regarding requirement for a synoptic assessment piece to be included in all courses |
| Sept 2019 | 11.09.19 | 01.10.19 | None |
| Sept 2021 | 07.09.21 | 01.10.21 | None |
| Feb 2022 | 02.02.22 | 01.03.22 | Amendment of requirement 3.5 (module length). |
| Sept 2022 | 22.09.22 | 01.10.22 | None |
| Sept 2023 | 14.09.23 | 01.10.23 | None |
| Marh 2024 | 21.03.24 | 22.03.24 | Inclusion of section mandating the use of module learning room templates. |
| Sept 2024 | 19.09.24 | 01.10.24 | Addition of AWLE and sustainability requirements. |

| Equality Impact Analysis | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Version:* | *EA date:* | *Completed by:* |
| Sept 2015 | 16.11.2015 | CADQ |
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