



LJMU CURRICULUM DESIGN GUIDE

OVERVIEW

This guide is designed to help teams plan, review and design their programmes. It offers a framework of curriculum principles that align with LJMU and national regulations and guidelines. These are that an LJMU curriculum:

1. Is inclusive.
2. Is active and blended.
3. Is developed in partnership,
4. Is research informed.
5. Includes subject-appropriate opportunities for careers, employability & enterprise development
6. Follows the LJMU Academic Framework.
7. Uses assessment to support student development.
8. Takes account of the learning environment, resources and staffing.

Good curricular are central to how the University can deliver the Learning and Teaching Strategy (click [here](#)) that recognises the importance of research, scholarship, partnership and collaboration for the optimal development of teaching, learning and assessment.

AN LJMU CURRICULUM IS INCLUSIVE

Teams need to explore how the curriculum will work for every student on the programme, regardless of background, experience and pattern of study. Moreover, they need to think about what messages the curriculum sends to prospective students. Does it welcome all students or imply that some are more welcome than others are? The curriculum must also be accessible in the sense of enabling all students, irrespective of physical disability/learning differences, to access content and take part in learning activities. General principles of inclusive curriculum design [click [here](#) for further information] are that the design should be:

- Equitable
- Transparent
- Anticipatory
- Flexible
- Accountable
- Collaborative

An inclusive curriculum means learning opportunities where students feel represented, accepted and valued.

The programme team's awareness of and assumptions about their students may adversely affect some groups of students or applicants. Factors such as expectations about prior knowledge; decisions on marketing and publicity; timetabling, the use of technology; staff knowledge of cultural differences; delivery and assessment techniques; the choice and use of field trips, excursions, practicals will all affect students differently. Hence, the team's decisions may unintentionally exclude or disadvantage particular groups of students. Using varied methods of learning, teaching and assessment to meet the needs of a wide range of students may benefit all students and improve performance. Likewise, teams should consider the feasibility of offering alternative arrangements for those students who are unable to access parts of the programme, such as field trips.

An inclusive curriculum uses technology to support all students' learning

Technology has the potential to contribute to inclusive practice. However, teams should be aware of the potential impact of digital poverty. A student's circumstances may mean that they have limited access to technology or data. In addition to that, some students may have a lack of suitable space to engage online. A skills deficit in the use of technology may also limit the extent to which students can take part. Consequently, teams should identify how students can be supported to get the best out of technology. [see how [Universal Design](#) for Learning support efforts to address digital poverty. Detail of specific measures to support students with IT equipment and data can be accessed [here](#)]

An inclusive curriculum supports students' transition into Higher Education

University can be a shock to the system for a new student. Students who have come straight from school may struggle to adapt to a rhythm and structure of higher education that unfamiliar. Those who are returning to study may face new ways of learning and expectations of technology that were not part of their earlier educational experience. As a result, curricula should be designed so that new students are eased into university life and helped to understand what is expected of them. In addition, the circumstances and educational histories of some LJMU students means that they are unfamiliar with, and unprepared for, university education. This could be because they studied outside the UK but can equally be the case for home students. Such students can face a cultural and academic shock when they come to university. Programme teams should consider how the curriculum will support these students' transition to university.

An inclusive curriculum recognises diversity.

Students will have a richer learning experience if they see their identities represented in course content. Knowledge, in whatever discipline, is the result of power dynamics associated with, for example, class, race, gender, faith and sexuality. Hence, teams need to think about what knowledge is included in the curriculum and why it has been selected. Without this process of reflection, there is a risk that curricula may reflect dominant perspectives and exclude those who considered 'different'.

In recent years, colleagues in LJMU have been using the principles of 'decolonising the curriculum' to support curriculum diversification. Decolonising the curriculum is the act of rethinking, reframing, and reconstructing courses to move away from knowledge that is solely informed by historical colonial perspectives. These present a white, western intellectual tradition as universal and superior to other forms of knowledge. The curriculum is Eurocentric and reinforces white and Western dominance and privilege. Decolonising the curriculum calls into question conventional hierarchy and knowledge, shifting from a Western framework to incorporate all cultures and knowledge. [See [Decolonising the Curriculum](#) at LJMU. Staff can also self-enrol on this [Decolonising the Curriculum Resources Canvas site](#).]

A curriculum that is rooted in colonial perspectives offers a diminished learning experience for all. However, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students are disproportionately affected. They are under-represented, with their histories and experiences omitted from their education. This can feed into the feeling of isolation, marginalisation, alienation, and exclusion. Consequently, students may not feel confident to engage or may feel actively excluded.

In LJMU, decolonising the curriculum is a significant step in making curricula more inclusive. This frames decolonisation in the broader ambition to diversify the curriculum. The efforts and energies that go into the process of decolonisation can help establish how curricula conform to, or challenge other power dynamics. This can include, but is not limited to, whether the curriculum is a gendered space, reflects and reinforces class hierarchies, overlooks queer perspectives or is ableist. The aim should be that all students see themselves reflected in the programmes that they study, as well as developing an awareness of other cultures, values and beliefs.

In this sense, decolonising the curriculum:

- recognises that knowledge is not owned by any group. It is collectively produced and

anyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender identity, sexual orientation or disability can shape intellectual thought and achievement.

- acknowledges that the status of knowledge is fundamentally shaped by power relations.
- expands the perceptions of good evidence and literature, so it does not promote a single voice, experience, or way of being in the world.
- goes beyond naming token minority writers and theorists to consider how different frameworks and traditions can inform one another, as well as how new perspectives emerge from mutual learning.
- requires sustained collaboration, discussion, and experimentation among and between teachers and students.
- appreciates that the development of inclusive curricula is an ongoing process.

Proposed Curriculum Audit Process

There are a variety of curriculum audit tools that may be helpful (see Canvas site above).

Broadly speaking, these align with the following:

- Contextual reading about BAME attainment gap and subject specific concerns (e.g., National Reports; Institutional Access and Participation Plan, subject benchmark statements)
- Scrutiny of programme data (link to [APP dashboard](#))
- Programme and Module mapping of race and diversity in terms of content and means of delivery
- Consultation with students
- Consultation with staff.
- Identification of Good Practice within the programme
- Recommended actions to address issues or enhance considerations of Equality and Diversity in Validation process.

QUESTIONS THAT COULD BE USED IN DISCUSSION WITH THE PROGRAMME TEAM.

Whilst issues related to equality and diversity have long been a focus in programme development, for many, decolonisation presents a new way of interrogating curricula. A useful first step is to reflect upon the extent to which the existing curriculum echoes colonial perspectives.

Does the planned curriculum:

- acknowledge bias within a disciplinary context?

- provide opportunities for students to examine and discuss different perspectives on diversity, both from within and outside the UK?
- raise awareness of different perspectives on issues relating to diversity in ethnicity, culture and nationality?
- encourage students from diverse backgrounds to work together and learn from each other?
- include topics where personal experience and views can be expressed?
- include reading lists and resources that have a diverse range of author from a range of cultural perspectives and ethnicities?
- use materials that interrogate different data, models and theories related to diversity?
- allow students to gain an understanding of how varied factors (e.g., environmental, social, economic, ethnic) influence outcomes and perspectives?
- engage students in diverse ways of learning?
- enable students to understand and practice assessment approaches?
- empower students to challenge any limitations of the curriculum, and contribute their own perspectives and insights associated with diversity?
- facilitate the evolution of knowledge and insights across the programme?

AN LJMU CURRICULUM IS ACTIVE AND BLENDED

Active Blended Learning is a combination of face-to-face and online instruction, where students interact with their teacher(s) and fellow students, as well as relevant learning materials. Guidance on Active blended learning is available [here](#).

Active blended learning brings together several concepts from learning theory and technology. It shows how student learning is enhanced by capturing their time-on-task, as well as involving them in complex collective and individual problem solving. Technology can support this both in physical and online learning spaces. This, in turn, helps educators by demonstrating student progress through formative tasks.

Active blended learning offers different approaches to teaching

Students come to university with different learning experiences and preferences. Relying on a small range of teaching styles is likely to privilege some students' learning over that of others. Therefore, teams should adopt a range of approaches, both across the programme

and within individual modules [guidance is available [here](#)]. In addition to instruction and content delivery, teaching should encourage participation and interaction, as well as providing pauses for clarity, emphasis or reflection. This approach reduces the emphasis on didactic teaching (in class or digitally) to facilitate students' engagement with the content, and with each other. Class time focuses on debriefing learning materials that have been provided previously (usually digitally) in a flipped classroom approach.

Active blended learning and technology

Building active blended learning effectively into the curriculum involves what is best managed through in-person teaching and what can be delivered online. This signals to students that they can learn both within the class and outside of it, and that online learning and in-person teaching are complimentary.

All programmes have access to Canvas (the Institutional VLE (Virtual Learning Environment)) with its wide range of associated technologies, applications and uses [click [here](#) for advice on using Canvas]. It is a space where students can engage with learning materials and interact with each other. Canvas is free from the limitations of the physical estate and teams should consider how to exploit this to offer flexibility of pace, place, and mode of learning in conjunction with the timetabled curriculum.

Programme teams should identify the best way to manage Canvas across modules in a coordinated and coherent manner. This does not mean that there should be strict uniformity across sites but recognises the importance of a degree of consistency. This can help develop student sense of security and confidence in accessing resources. Likewise, too much diversity can leave students feeling confused, over-burdened and unsure where to access the materials that they need.

Blended social presence

Active learning is characterised by students having both a cognitive and social presence in the learning environment.

- Cognitive presence reflects the critical thinking, problem solving and construction of meaning.
- Social presence is the extent to which students connect through interactions with their peers and academic staff.

It is critically important to prioritise this early in the programme when students need to get to know and trust their peers and tutors.

Students who can make interpersonal networks are more likely to engage and succeed. Conventional approaches tend to see the classroom or lecture theatre as the 'location' of presence, with the VLE in a supporting role to offer materials for independent learning. The blended approach recognises that cognitive and social presence should be a feature of both online and face-to-face teaching.

Examples of blended technology use

Blended learning retains some conventional uses of the VLE within an enhanced functionality. This includes:

- Curation of high quality, independent learning resources. These can include:
 - Conventional 'broadcast' materials such videos
 - Documents, including presentations and supplementary notes
 - Links to relevant readings and external sources of information
 - Suitable external learning resources
 - 'Live' teaching that allows structured participation in real-time
 - Provision of interactive activities. Examples are:
 - Quizzes
 - Blogs/Wikis
 - Discussion forums
 - Voting /polling
 - Shared documents
- Submitting short 'low stakes' work for quick feedback
- Sense-making activities that help students to understand and consolidate learning from both online and in-person activities/delivery. This includes opportunities for reflection, debate and testing ideas.

Active blended learning uses formative assessment and feedback

Formative assessment plays a valuable role in supporting students' learning. It is likely to be particularly beneficial to those who are unfamiliar with a specific assessment type or approach because of their educational history or unfamiliarity with UK higher education.

The curriculum should offer:

- Opportunities for low-stakes assessment that will have no impact on grades.
- Regular feedback on performance with an emphasis on feedforward to help students apply these insights to future assessment.
- The chance of an holistic review of overall assessment performance in line with the LJMU personal tutor strategy. [See information and guidance on the [Feedback](#)

[Dashboard](#) that enables tutors to view all the feedback in Canvas for an individual student]

Active blended learning emphasises time-on-task and private study

Students are expected to work outside their contact hours. The typical model is 200 hours for a 20-credit module. Only a fraction of these are 'contact hours', with the rest being characterised by the potentially vague notion of 'independent study'. Teams should communicate to students a realistic expectation of what they should do in this time. Reviewing this at programme level will support a balanced curriculum with workload spread across modules.

Examples of independent study include:

- Reading articles, journals, blogs.
- Working with other students on tasks.
- Undertaking 'real life' projects or challenges that have the potential to challenge the students and/or connect with employment and professional activity.
- Contributing to discussion boards etc.
- Using peer review and evaluation to encourage students to comment on each other's work.
- Relating out of class activities/study directly to assessment tasks.
- Developing an activity into a student showcase event (e.g., student conference, debate, display, or production).
- Working with an outside organisation, employer, or local community group to apply their knowledge.

On-campus activities that student can engage with in between classes PDP /tutorial activities to discuss time management and out of class study activities.

In summary, varied but carefully curated approaches to teaching and assessment can encourage learning by:

- Aligning learning outcomes, teaching and learning approaches and assessment to help students achieve the learning outcomes.
- Designing the subject in a way that matches students' prior knowledge and learning skills and helps students to develop further.
- Offering assessment that rewards students for demonstrating understanding, making connections, etc.

- Helping students to identify clear goals and standards for learning.
- Encouraging active engagement with learning tasks, e.g., engagement in inquiry or creative production, exploring complex issues, real life problems or case studies of practice.
- Bringing out the structure of the subject explicitly and encouraging students to make connections with (or challenge) what they already know.
- Giving students opportunities to discuss, debate and compare their understanding with each other and with the teaching staff.
- Providing students with formative feedback.
- Giving students opportunities to make reasonable choices about what and how they will learn.
- Emphasising subject relevance.

Active blended learning promotes deep learning and facilitates independence University study is characterised by the notion of independent learning. Therefore, any programme should be able to support students' progression from entry-level skills through to critical analysis, reflection and problem-solving. A student's approach to study is inevitably shaped by how the curriculum design leads to an effective learning environment.

Research has highlighted the diverse ways that students approach their learning. The key dimensions are:

- Deep approaches, where the learner is driven by intrinsic curiosity and motivated by a desire to learn, engage meaningfully, and master the subject.
- Strategic approaches, where the learner's focus is on achieving good grades. These students focus on assessment and tend to make decisions about module choice and learning strategy that they see as the route to good grades.
- Surface (or shallow) approaches, where the intention is to achieve a pass, usually by the shortest or easiest route possible. These students may put insufficient effort into their workload or genuinely misunderstand expectations and see it as acceptable simply to recall information.

The reasons students adopt different approaches are complex. They include personal goals, motivations and prior experiences. However, the curriculum and associated learning environment is likely to influence how students respond. Curricula that are tightly packed or where assessments are clustered (leading to pinch points of high workload) encourage surface or strategic approaches. Teams should consider what a reasonable workload is for a

student. The coordination of the curriculum must then ensure that not only is the overall workload reasonable, but it is equitably distributed within and across modules. Moreover, teams should review the curriculum to establish whether initiative, persistence, reading and effort are rewarded.

Active blended learning should be authentic, real-world and relevant

Assessment strategies that help students make connections between the subject and the 'real world' can help them develop a deeper approach to learning. Enquiry-led assessment can encourage a sense of control and ownership. In addition, self or peer assessment may encourage students to understand what is expected of them, as well as fostering a sense of control and ownership of learning.

QUESTIONS THAT COULD BE USED IN DISCUSSION WITH THE PROGRAMME TEAM

- Does curriculum recognise learning as a social, as well as individual activity?
- Does the programme use a variety of teaching and learning tools and techniques?
- Does the curriculum include activities that increase a sense of belonging for all students?
- Does the programme reinforce connections between students and staff?
- What is the influence of digital technologies on the subject area or profession?
- Will the team's approach to using technology offer a consistent experience to students?
- How confident are staff in their knowledge and use of technology?
- What is the predicted impact of the assessment strategy on a student's approach to learning?
- How does the assessment strategy support the development of students' skills as they progress through the programme?
- How are students prepared for increasing levels of critical thinking?
- How will the curriculum support students' engagement in collaborative activity?
- What opportunities are there in the curriculum to foster initiative and creativity?
- How does the programme encourage independent enquiry?
- How clear are linkages between modules and progression through the programme?
- How is formative feedback provided?
- What digital skills are needed (of both staff and students) and how will these be supported?
- What are the opportunities for engagement, participation and interaction - in both physical and online learning spaces?

AN LJMU CURRICULUM IS DEVELOPED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH STUDENTS

Effective curriculum design should be a team approach and involve students as much as possible. This will best ensure that the programme addresses the needs of students and any internal or external partners. It will also help create a sense of collective ownership of the programme amongst relevant academic and support staff.

The aims of partnership are:

- To work collaboratively with students to ensure genuine and authentic partnership and engagement.
- To work with students as key stakeholders
- To work within a model of co-production, designing a programme to allow students to take ownership of their learning in a less prescribed way, from induction through learning and teaching, academic support and practice learning.

Partnership working signals a shift from a consultation model whereby the programme team refine their ideas and present ‘the finished article’ to students for comment. Instead, students should be involved throughout the process. This will maximise their influence on teaching and learning strategies and assessment. Teams are advised to work closely with course representatives, inviting them (where appropriate) to meetings. In addition, there are a range of other opportunities to listen to the student voice that may prove valuable for encouraging engagement.

Partnership is shaped by student feedback and evaluation data

Student feedback and evaluation is a valuable source of information for curriculum development and review. Even when a programme is a completely new offer, teams should be able to access this information from similar programmes to inform their decision-making.

Key sources of information* include:

- Entry statistics.
- Progression and retention rates.
- Analysis of career paths of graduates (e.g., Graduate Outcomes).
- External examiner reports.
- National Student Survey/Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey data.

- LJMU student surveys.
- Module evaluation.
- Student feedback provided in Boards of Studies, Student Councils etc.
- Programme Enhancement and Development Plans generated for Continuous Monitoring and Enhancement.
- Student engagement data, such as attendance and Canvas analytics as well as Learner Digital Engagement.
- Student performance data at both module and programme level.
- Analysis by demographic characteristics.

*Much of this information is available on [WebHub](#) [see guidance on using [WebHub](#)]

Programme teams should show how such information has informed the development of the programme. This should include paying attention to any unexplained differences in attainment between groups of students.

Qualitative data

In addition to the predominately quantitative data sources outlined above, teams should make use of a range of qualitative data. This provides insight into issues raised from numerical information, as well as casting light onto factors that quantitative techniques may overlook. A significant source of qualitative information comes from open text comments provided in National and local surveys, as well as module evaluation. In addition, teams are encouraged to collect their own qualitative information from varied interactions with students. Triangulating this information with quantitative data offers a more robust evidence base for decision-making.

Qualitative analysis also allows teams to recognise the “intangible assets” of their programmes. This can support the identification of the indicators that they will use to measure success once the programme is operational. This will be valuable when they come to review their programmes, whether as part of LJMU procedures for relevant external bodies such as the OFS (Office for Students), OFSTED or PSRBs (Professional and Statutory Body)

QUESTIONS THAT COULD BE USED IN DISCUSSION WITH THE PROGRAMME TEAM.

- Has the team reviewed student data to help understand likely requirements?
- Has the team worked across the university to connect with teams that can help support their design and delivery?

- Where in the curriculum design does it encourage partnership between students and staff to support the co-creation of knowledge?
- How does the curriculum support students' active participation in their learning and
- assessment (both in-class and out-of-class).

AN LJMU CURRICULUM IS RESEARCH INFORMED

The link between the curriculum and contemporary research is a defining feature of higher education [click [here](#) for information on research informed teaching]. Hence, it is expected that all curricula are informed by up-to-date research, as well as supporting the development of research skills and understanding.

Research shapes the curriculum through:

- Current and emerging knowledge and theory
- Development of research skills (e.g., research methods, project design, data collection and analysis techniques)
- Development of critical thinking (i.e., recognition of knowledge as an evolving process, ethics, interpretation and critical evaluation, argument construction)

Study skills type modules early in the programme help demystify academic conventions, but students need time to safely practice and develop academic skills. Diagnostic, formative, and low-stakes assessment in the first weeks will help students to recognise areas for improvement. Moreover, teams need to examine their expectations of entry-level students to ensure that these are realistic. It is also important to recognise that new students may be unprepared for the teaching, learning and assessment methods used in the programme. Hence, early in the curriculum, thought needs to be given to how ideas such as note-taking, independent study, groupwork, online learning, assessment methods are explained to students. In line with that, teams should identify where students will be given practical experience of these in a low stakes environment to develop their awareness and proficiency.

QUESTIONS THAT COULD BE USED IN DISCUSSION WITH THE PROGRAMME TEAM.

- Where is research understanding, research methods, skills and ethics taught and/or practised?
- Is contemporary research clear in programme outcomes, delivery, and assessment?
- Is student exposure to current ideas and the research culture in the subject presumed

or managed?

- Is there a strategy to ensure 'cutting edge' developments in the subject are embedded across the programme?
- In what ways do research skills interface with employability (e.g., project management, initiative, creative thinking)?
- How are outputs from staff research reflected in the curriculum?
- Can the team show how they draw upon research, scholarship, or professional activity in their teaching?
- Is there a clearly identifiable pathway of research understanding and skill development through the programme?
- Where do students get the opportunity to experience research-led learning?
- Are there opportunities to raise awareness of student research outputs?

**AN LJMU CURRICULUM INCLUDES SUBJECT-APPROPRIATE OPPORTUNITIES
FOR CAREERS, EMPLOYABILITY & ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT**

LJMU career readiness from students at Levels 4, 5 & 6 reveals that less than 1% say their studies are unrelated to their career aspirations. At level 7, career progression is cited as students' primary motivation in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES). Students appreciate support from academic teams to develop as professionals, explore career possibilities and engage in relevant experiential learning. More widely, graduate employment outcomes, especially progression into High Skilled Employment, are key contributors to national league tables, Office for Students dashboards and information available to prospective students.

The LJMU Student Employability, Enterprise and Employment Strategy (link [here](#)) sets out a 'whole university, whole lifecycle' approach. This ensures that all students can benefit from a transformative change in their skills & mindset, agency and career trajectory as a result of studying at LJMU. The Strategy outlines four curricular elements of teaching & learning).

These are:

- A Level 4 'Future Focus' e-learning task & in-curriculum workshop provided by Student Futures - LJMU's Careers, Employability & Enterprise Service.
- Employability skills & mindset foregrounded, developed & affirmed throughout the lifetime of every course.
- An assessed work-based learning experience as a core feature in every

undergraduate Programme.

- Action in the final year of undergraduate study designed to ensure no student leaves without a compelling onward plan

'Future Focus' was developed and is delivered by Student Futures, LJMU's Careers, Employability & Enterprise Service. It draws upon consultation with academic & student stakeholders and was introduced in 2020/21. 'Future Focus' (link [here](#)) consists of an e-learning task and follow-up workshop. It encourages students to explore their talents, passions and purpose early, and start developing the proactivity & adaptability necessary to thrive in future careers. Teams seeking to strengthen student employability & graduate outcomes may wish to consider how 'Future Focus' is locally contextualised, and whether additional content is built around it.

Knight & Yorke (2006) define employability as 'a set of achievements - skills, understandings & personal attributes - that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy'. A shared Employability Skills and Mindset framework is used across LJMU [link [here](#)]. This draws upon analysis of over 40 independent studies into the attributes that employers are seeking in new entrants. Teams are asked to reference the nine skills at the heart of this framework in the programme. These are:

- Analysis, problem solving & decision making
- Professional written & spoken communication
- Planning & organisation
- Creativity & enterprise
- Numeracy & financial literacy
- Leadership & mobilising others
- Planning & organisation
- Team working & collaboration
- ICT & technology: digital capability

This will include finding a suitable place in the core curriculum for a learning outcome associated with each of these nine skills. In line with this, there should be assessment to demonstrate achievement of each outcome. Teams should also give thought to how the value of employability skills can be reinforced through co-curricular activities such as Personal Development Planning and Personal Tutoring.

Work-based & placement learning

LJMU has adopted the definition of work-based learning set out by the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) in 'UK Quality

Code for Higher Education – Advice & Guidance: Work-Based Learning' as,

'...authentic structured opportunities for learning which are achieved in a workplace setting or are designed to meet an identified workplace need. This type of learning typically has a dual function of being designed to meet the learning needs of [students], developing their knowledge, skills and professional behaviours, and also meeting the workforce development needs of the organisation. Work-based learning is, therefore, learning which is distinguished from work-related or simulated learning activity that has not been formulated or commissioned by, or in partnership with, employers to address a current workforce need'.

This definition allows programme teams the flexibility to adopt practices that sit comfortably within disciplinary expectations. This will include placement learning but could involve student engagement in projects for external clients, for example. Moreover, 'workplaces' could include community, as well as business, settings.

Data shows that participation in work-based & placement learning has a significant, positive impact for LJMU students. This is not only related to progression into high-skilled employment, but degree attainment more generally. Work-based learning allows students to contextualise and apply their knowledge and skills. It expands students' professional networks and facilitates the exploration of career possibilities. The Student Employability, Enterprise and Employment Strategy envisages that all undergraduate programmes will include an assessed work-based learning experience as a core feature of the course within five years.

Transition-focused activity for final year undergraduates

To help ensure graduates embark upon their post-study careers confidently and successfully, programme teams are asked to identify at least one substantial, transition-focused activity in the final year. This should be associated with core learning to maximise student participation. Such activity could include, but is not limited to, careers sessions, enterprise-oriented workshops and opportunities to network with employers.

Advice and support

The Student Futures team includes experienced Careers & Employability Consultants who are available to provide expert advice & practical support to teams as they embed careers, employability & enterprise within the curriculum. A Start-Up & Enterprise Consultant supports the Liverpool School of Art & Design and Liverpool Screen School, where students are most

likely to pursue self-employment after graduation. Consultants will also integrate their own in-curriculum delivery with a bespoke package of wider support from Student Futures (e.g. employer engagement; state-of-the art digital tools and resources; specialist advice & support around work-based learning; targeted 1:1 careers advice & guidance surgeries).

QUESTIONS THAT COULD BE USED IN DISCUSSION WITH THE PROGRAMME TEAM

- What are the career options for students?
- How will the programme support students' potential career aspirations?
- How is work-based learning embedded in the curriculum?
- How will students demonstrate the 'employability skills and mindset' across the full programme?
- What are the best transition-focused activities for final year undergraduates?

AN LJMU CURRICULUM FOLLOWS THE UNIVERSITY'S ACADEMIC FRAMEWORK

The LJMU Academic Framework (link [here](#)) requires a standard structure for all LJMU programmes. Programme teams should adhere to this. Variance from the Framework is granted in exceptional circumstances, primarily because of PSRB (Professional and Statutory Body) requirements. Application for variance is a straightforward process and guidance can be found [here](#).

All undergraduate programmes of greater than 240 credits and all postgraduate taught programmes of greater than 120 credits should:

- Operate to a standard academic year, divided into two semesters each of up to 15 weeks.
- Deliver and assess most modules in a single semester. Research and work-based learning modules at level 6 and 7 can be an exception to this, as can skills-based modules at levels 3 and 4.
- Enable all referred and deferred assessment items to be completed by the end of the academic year.
- Be based on a standard module credit size of 10 or 20 credits, with the provision for up to 40 credits at Level 6 and 60 credits at Level 7 for research projects. A project/dissertation at level 7 must be 60 credits. This must be supported by at least 10 credits of research skills.

- Have a maximum of seven modules per level. Only two 10-credit modules are allowed per level in a Bachelor's programme. A maximum of five modules at Level 7 of Undergraduate Masters programmes is allowed.
- Utilise a realistic and achievable number of summative assessment items per module. This normally equates to one task per 10-credit module and a maximum of two for 20-credit modules.
- Align assessment tasks to learning outcomes to ensure that students who pass the module, the level and the programme have met the intended learning outcomes.
- Assess to a standard threshold mark, which is 40% for levels 3-6 and 50% for level 7.
- Allocate a named Personal Tutor to all students. In addition to any group tutorials or informal meetings, Personal Tutors will meet with their tutees individually at least twice per academic year for a progress review. You can view the Personal Tutoring Policy [here](#) and self-enrol on the Personal Tutor Canvas course [here](#)

In addition:

- Every professional programme should be recognised and/or accredited by the right professional body.
- Undergraduate programmes of 240 credits or more should provide work-related learning [click [here](#)]. They must also include an opportunity for students to complete the online Future Focus programme.

AN LJMU CURRICULUM USES ASSESSMENT TO SUPPORT STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

Assessment can be very time consuming and put a considerable burden on the programme team. However, effective curriculum design can contribute to more efficient, but still high-quality assessment. Carefully designed and well-explained assessment supports students' understanding and reduces the need for added (and often one-to-one) support. It will also increase the likelihood of students passing the module at the first attempt. Appropriate curriculum developments include:

Assessment mapping

Assessment mapping is a straightforward process of plotting all programme assessment requirements in a timeline. It can help manage assessment bunching, as well as supporting diversity in assessment tasks. Crucially, it also enables teams to reflect on the student's

assessment journey through the programme, the extent to which students are prepared for assessment tasks and how those tasks reflect increasing levels of complexity and higher order thinking skills.

Assessment mapping clearly exposes the range of assessments in a programme. This will enable teams to revise strategies to offer sufficient diversity. In addition, managing this across the whole programme engagement shows whether the strategy developmental and associated with increasing levels of proficiency. It can, for example, expose a novel assessment method introduced into the final year with no prior opportunities for students to become familiar with the method.

Avoid assessment bunching

Assessment bunching occurs when coursework deadlines are closely scheduled. It is most common when modules run concurrently rather than consecutively. This means that teaching tends to end at the same time, with congestion of summative assessment activity as a natural consequence. Bunching of assessment can create a bottleneck in work, with students having to complete several tasks at the same time. Inevitably, this leads to stress and anxiety. It may also undermine students' performance. Assessment mapping may not fully eliminate bunching but will alert teams to periods of high assessment activity.

Feedback strategy

All programmes should have a feedback strategy that explains the purpose of feedback (diagnostic, formative and summative) and how and when feedback and feed-forward will be provided. The latter refers to commentary, advice and guidance that students can apply to later assessments.

QUESTIONS THAT COULD BE USED IN DISCUSSION WITH THE PROGRAMME TEAM

- Has the team completed a process of assessment mapping and devised a feedback strategy?
- Does the curriculum offer opportunities earlier in the programme for students to gain experience of an assessment type in a low-stakes environment before it is used as a summative assessment?
- Does the curriculum have final module assessment that clearly builds from earlier work in the module, such as group work or student-generated questions?
- Does the curriculum have opportunities for diagnostic assessment that helps students to understand areas for development?

- Does the curriculum build self or peer marking exercises into the teaching and learning strategy to give students the opportunity to both practice assessment and better understand marking criteria?
- Does the curriculum have assessments that assimilate and test knowledge from across the module or programme, so that students integrate learning from multiple lectures?
- Are there compartmentalised assessments that break complex tasks into manageable sections?
- Does the curriculum have 'Capstone' assessment that brings together learning across several modules into a final project or portfolio?
- Does the curriculum use assessment templates to make explicit what is needed in a specific task?

**AN LJMU CURRICULUM TAKES ACCOUNT OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT,
RESOURCES AND STAFFING**

Programmes work in the context of the available learning environment, the resources that the team have access to and the number of academic staff who can contribute to a programme. Whilst programmes should attract the proper resource, teams need to consider the constraints that the programme works within. This will enable them to maximise what they have. Considering how resources affect the whole programme is more effective than focusing on individual modules. It will help the team to create a programme where students have a balance of experiences.

QUESTIONS THAT COULD BE USED IN DISCUSSION WITH THE PROGRAMME TEAM

- How is delivery of the curriculum affected by the rooms available?
- Does the delivery of the curriculum include small group activities?
- Does the programme help develop an environment for learning that uses spaces and interactions outside the formal curriculum, particularly using technology and co-curricular activities?
- Does the team liaise with Library Services, the Teaching and Learning Academy, Leadership and Development Foundation, local technical staff in relation to technology enhanced learning and developing digital capability of staff?
- Have the team liaised with Library Services to assess the availability of books and journals to support learning? Is the team aware that Library Services also offer a

range of academic skills support to students, details of which are available [here](#)

IMPLEMENTATION OF CURRICULUM DESIGN PRINCIPLES AND REQUIREMENTS

The term programme team is used loosely here but it is useful to include people who may not be directly involved in delivery. Consider how administrative and professional service staff can contribute to curriculum review and development. In addition, think through how external stakeholders will be involved, as well as the role of alumni from earlier programmes in this area. Finally, student engagement is an important part of the design process. Ideally, students should be involved in all stages of curriculum development.

Curriculum development outlined in this document illustrates the key stages that teams should follow. That said it is important to recognise that curriculum design is not a straightforward, linear journey from stage to stage. Rather, it is an iterative process, with decisions made in earlier stages being revisited and revised.

The development process below outlines six key stages, ranging from securing institutional support to the development of a programme specification.

1. The business case
2. The vision
3. The framework
4. The detail
5. The review
6. The programme specification

STAGE 1. A BUSINESS CASE

The first stage in programme design is to show that there is market for the programme. This involves scoping out potential competitor programmes, liaising with potential employers and identifying likely students. This business case is the first stage of the planning process. All new programme proposals must receive approval within the Faculty from the Director of School and Faculty PVC, and then from the institutional Academic Planning Panel (APP).

The business case should cover market analysis, planning projections, a risk analysis and costs of resource requirements. In addition, the case needs to address the requirements for

student support resources, any needs for specialist equipment and software, as well as for off-campus support. Teams also need to demonstrate the potential for healthy recruitment of suitable applicants and evidence of employment opportunities for graduates. Finally, the case must reference competitor institutions that offer similar programmes.

Likely characteristics of prospective learners

Teams need to be aware the types of students that their programme is likely to attract. A good starting point is to check the background of existing students on similar programmes to establish:

- Entry qualifications and other entry statistics.
- Earlier education – sixth form college/school, Further Education college, access, overseas.
- Balance of home and international applicants and students.
- Graduate outcomes.
- It can also be useful to have some insight into:
 - Likely socio-economic background.
 - Expected diversity of the student body
 - Location - i.e., from the city region or beyond.

This may help the team to draw some conclusions with respect to:

- The possible expectations that students might have of university in general and this programme.
- Potential career aspirations.
- Possible expectations about topics or subject areas students might expect to study; provision of specialist equipment, software or other resources; prerequisite knowledge.

STAGE 2. THE VISION

The first stage of planning should focus on an holistic overview of what the programme should be. Programme design across the Higher Education Sector is based on a modular system. This offers some advantages. Modular systems are easy to understand, they facilitate credit transfer and can be efficiently managed and timetabled. The risk is that modules can be seen as isolated units of study. Hence, it is important to recognise that a good programme is more than a collection of modules. There should be clear connections between modules so that the programme is presented as a cohesive whole for students.

Below are some useful questions that the programme team should address in the preliminary stages of curriculum design.

- What should a student be able to do at the end of this programme?
- Will the programme relate to any specific employment opportunities?
- What is the core knowledge that students should acquire on this programme?
- What are the most important intellectual/professional/creative/technical processes that a student will undertake on this programme?
- What are the skills, techniques, behaviours, professional practices that a student will develop?
- What distinguishes this programme of study in this University?
- How does the programme relate to similar offerings in the sector?
- What values inform this programme?
- Does the team have a particular approach to the curriculum – if so, what is it and why is this important?
- Does this programme of study relate to professional practice – if so, is professional recognition/accreditation possible?
- Are there subject benchmarks that inform this subject area? [click [here](#)]
- Where relevant, how will the programme address the appropriate Degree Apprenticeship standards [you can search for the standards associated with your programme [here](#)]

Teams should enter this stage with an open mind and try to be unencumbered by the structure of current curricula. Likely, some existing content, approaches and modules can be revised and reused. However, that decision should be made later when the curriculum structure emerges. Likewise, whilst it is important to think about teaching approaches and assessment strategies, these should follow from, and not lead, the curriculum.

At this stage, teams might benefit from running initial meetings as workshops, having an external facilitator or utilising creative techniques (such as modelling, Lego or art) to expose the overarching vision of the curriculum

STAGE 3: THE FRAMEWORK

The next stage in curriculum design is to begin the process of ordering the ideas generated in stage 2 into a more coherent structure that can bring the curriculum vision to life. This is where some of the practicalities of the curriculum will start to be considered.

- How will knowledge and skills be reflected in a curriculum structure?

- What broad topics are there and how could these be shaped into modules?
- How is the curriculum content going to be sequenced?
- Does the structure clearly show how knowledge and skills will be developed as the student progresses?
- How will assessment enable students to demonstrate learning?
- Is there a balance between breadth of study and depth of study?
- For undergraduate programmes - what is the best level for delivering specific content and skills?
- How will in-person approaches and learning technologies work together to shape the student experience
- What is the approach to supporting students' employability within the curriculum?
- Will students see the connections between modules - how can connectivity be encouraged?
- What are the aims and learning outcomes for each level of the programme?
- What alternative exit awards will be available?

At the end of this stage, the broad curriculum will emerge. In line with the modular approach, it should reflect discrete units of learning. To align with the Academic Framework, these units should meet the requirements outlined earlier. At the end of this stage, broad module outlines should be clear. There should be indicative module content, a sense of how the module will be taught and some insight into assessment.

STAGE 4: THE DETAIL

This is the stage where the curriculum picture developed in stage 3 is clarified. If the curriculum is a jigsaw, then each piece is a module. So, this stage involves the refinement of the discrete modules that will make up the programme

- Are there existing modules that can be revised and repurposed for the new programme?
- What are the learning outcomes for each module?
- Do learning outcomes reflect the level of study?
- How will the module be assessed and how will this assessment be authentic and make sense for the student?
- Are the skills demanded of the student in the module or its assessment right for the level of study?
- What is the best way of presenting content to engage students?
- How will content be delivered – in both in-person and online contexts?

- How will technology enhance learning?
- Are there opportunities to use 'real-world' settings or scenarios to engage learners?
- How will module content reflect diverse voices and perspectives?

STAGE 5: THE REFLECTION

This stage is vital in ensuring that the modules developed in stage 4 fit together as intended. Now that the detail of the curriculum has been decided, teams should review the curriculum to ensure that:

- All programme learning outcomes are met (at the relevant level of study).
- There are a variety of teaching and assessment methods.
- Assessment is appropriate to the level of study.
- Assessment evolves in complexity so that students can learn from early assessment and apply skills to later assessment.
- There are opportunities for low stakes and formative assessment to allow students to experiment and develop their skills without fear of failure.
- The curriculum balances content delivery with opportunities to explore and interrogate ideas.
- There are opportunities for students to learn together and discuss curriculum content through a range of activities such as seminars, problem solving, unassessed group tasks, tutorial groups, peer support and mentoring.

Depending on the outcome of this review stage, it may be necessary to revisit and revise the modules developed in stage 3 and 4. By the end of stage 5, module information should be entered into Modcat (link [here](#)).

Curriculum auditing

Curriculum auditing is a key approach to creating a balanced and coherent curriculum. The process is at the discretion of programme teams, but auditing should collate learning outcomes, delivery and assessment in an accessible, diagrammatic overview of programme structure. This enables programme teams to:

- Understand how elements of the programme align
- Expose any gaps, content duplication and redundancies in the programme
- Which elements of the original programme intention are missing.
- Where learning outcomes and associated content are replicated across modules.
- If there are core outcomes that a student could avoid through judicious module choice.

- If there are module learning outcomes that do not contribute to programme/level learning outcomes.
- Reveal potentially problematic clustering of assessment.
- Ensure scaffolding of concepts to support student learning.
- Review the distribution of assessment methods across the programme.
- Address over (or under) assessment.
- Examine the balance of teaching methods in the curriculum.
- Establish the feasibility of the programme within the resources available.
- (Where relevant) Expose potential issues with modules shared across programmes.
- Consider how feedback and feedforward can support student learning.

STAGE 6: PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION

In effect, this is the final stage of the process and involves the production of a programme specification that will be part of the validation/review documentation. Hence, although teams may choose to develop and refine the specification as they work through stages 2-5, the process should be completed at the very end. A programme specification is a concise description of the intended outcomes of learning from a programme, and how these outcomes are achieved. Programme specifications are publicly available to students, applicants, employers and other interested parties. It is essential that that they are accurate and clear in their description of the programme for both current students and applicants.

Developing a programme specification

Programme teams need to be sure that the programme outcomes align with the level of qualification. The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree Awarding Bodies (Oct 2014) (link [here](#)) provides descriptors of what a student should be able to demonstrate for a qualification at levels 4-8. These also include a statement of the wider abilities that a typical student could be expected to have developed. Please refer to these descriptors discussing and articulating programme outcomes.

A programme specification will include intended learning outcomes for every alternative exit award as well as the final award. This articulates progression through the programme.

Programme aims

The aims of the programme are the broad purposes or goals of the programme. They are broader than the learning outcomes that articulate what students should know and do whilst engaging in the programme.

Learning Outcomes [click for [guidance on writing learning outcomes](#)]

LJMU curricula are developed in line with the concept of 'constructive alignment' [click [here](#)]
This starts with the outcomes that we intend students to learn. It then aligns teaching and assessment to those outcomes. The outcome (learning outcome) is a statement of what a learner is expected to be able to do or know at the end of their study.

Subject benchmark statements or professional standards

Subject benchmark statements offer a reference against which individual programme specifications may be justified. They allow flexibility and innovation in programme design within an overall conceptual framework established by an academic subject community. [click [here](#)]. Professionally accredited programmes must align with the relevant professional standards.