

## Guidance for Curriculum Design Review

### Guidance on Optional Modules

This document is intended to support programme teams in their reflection on and review of Optional Module provisions (UG and PGT programmes) as part of the Curriculum Design Review process. The review should also take into consideration any external contexts relating to the options, such as PSRB requirements, guidance or recommendations.

Optional modules within our UG and PGT programmes can offer a variety of benefits, such as:

- Providing students with choice in subject specialisation that support their interests and career aspirations;
- Facilitating flexibility in the construction of coherent strands of specialisation within a programme;
- Connecting institutional research specialisations to teaching and UG/PGT research opportunities;
- Accommodating the background of students in programmes that involve diverse discipline groups<sup>1</sup>;
- Enabling staff to disseminate advanced and/or cutting-edge developments in the discipline, some of which offer external CPD training opportunities and other industry / commerce connection.

Option specialisation can be deemed an attractive feature for student recruitment, especially for PGT programmes, where applicants often have a broad range of subject interests and career aspirations.

However, care is needed in ensuring the viability and balance of option delivery, with regular review of the pedagogic, strategic and financial relevance of such modules. As part of the review, programme teams are asked to consider the following guidance, and be confident in providing a rationale for any significant deviations from these. As a starting point, the typical optional module diet illustrated in the table below may also be considered.

Level 3	No options
Level 4	No options
Level 5	Students may undertake up to 2 options out of up to 4 choices per year
Level 6	Students may undertake up to 4 options out of up to 8 choices per year
Level 7	Students may undertake up to 4 options out of up to 8 choices per year

1. There is a clear rationale of the contribution of each optional module (or combination of optional modules) to overall educational needs. Programme coherency, educational value and the student experience are key considerations in the optional module offering<sup>2</sup>.
2. A module diet that provides an efficient timetabling structure and resource needs (i.e. simplification is less resource-intensive), consistent with meeting the educational objectives. This may involve, for example, optimising / minimising the number of optional modules, and / or limiting cross-year option sharing.
3. Optional module offerings are predominantly (if not exclusively) at the latter years of study for UG programmes, with early years focussing on core / compulsory content that underpin the base knowledge and skills of the degree programme.
4. A long-term (e.g. 3-year) average module size of 12 students, or 25% of the total cohort size who have access to the module, whichever is the lower.

<sup>1</sup> Where permissible by a PSRB for an accredited programme.

<sup>2</sup> Where relevant, any stipulations by the accrediting body should also be considered.

5. Where an optional module is shared across programmes, as in the case of several PGT programmes within a department/school, there should in general be consistent long-term student enrolment on the module (e.g. at least 2 students annually) from each programme<sup>3</sup>. Otherwise, consider removing the inert optional module from the programme(s).
6. Optional modules should be able to be delivered by more than one member of staff within the department to ensure operational resilience and continuity of delivery in the event of staffing changes.

## Principles

- Maintain the simplest possible structure that supports the educational objectives of the programme
- Modules will be 15 credits or multiples of 15 credits. Be mindful of regulatory implications of larger modules e.g. eligibility for trailing credit and compensation and exit awards
- There will be an equal workload between SEM1 and SEM2, typically 60 credits each. Workload should also be even between years where an academic level is taught over several years e.g. a Master's programme taught over two or three years
- If yearlong modules are used, they should be well planned and fit within the programme structure, with equivalent (work-proportioned) credit distribution balanced across the semesters.
- For PGT programmes, Semester 2 optional module design should try to accommodate any February intake of students, e.g. does not require the completion of a pre-requisite module
- Assessment should be varied within a programme and no one form of assessment should dominate i.e. no single type of assessment will make up more than 60% of the programme assessment diet
- Be mindful of total assessment workload (students and staff)
- Every module should have formative assessment
- Sufficient distinction between programmes with different award titles<sup>4</sup>
- Sufficient distinction between principal and subsidiary award programme titles where there is a programme specialism
- Limit programme learning outcomes to between 5 and 10 per year
- Provide learning outcomes for each level and show their progression
- Placements should be embedded within the programmes and run within term time (visa implications if they are run in the summer) and meet any visa requirements
- Provide enough detail within the programme and module descriptors to be CMA compliant but vague and/or minimal enough that you have flexibility to make changes outside of the modification process, e.g. do not list module content week by week, avoid too great a detail about topics or give topic examples
- Exemptions to the regulations will need to be discussed with AQS and the approval sought through the University Committee structure
- Map out how a programme will be delivered if it includes both standard and intensive delivery for different modules
- Where modules from two or more Schools/Departments are being used on one programme ensure that module delivery is possible, this may mean running a module twice to accommodate timetabling and will ensure a better experience for the students.
- Any condensed delivery of modules or use of time outside of the standard Semester time would need to be discussed with AQS in the first instance and overtly covered in communications to applicants/students
- A detailed rationale must be provided when any of the above points cannot be met

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<sup>3</sup> It is recognised that the module may be compulsory in some programmes and optional in others, and so may be dominated by participants from the former.

<sup>4</sup> Paragraphs 15-18 of A1 University Taught Regulations