Postgraduate Framework

1 Introduction

1.1 The Postgraduate Framework sets out the guiding principles for the design and delivery of all taught postgraduate level awards based on the Review of Postgraduate Education Report published in April, 2012. It is part of the suite of guidance on the University’s educational provision that includes the Undergraduate Framework¹ and the Academic Regulations.²

1.2 This Framework provides both structural guidelines and key reference points to the University policies that need to be embedded in taught postgraduate provision. Working within the Academic Regulations, the Framework is deliberately flexible and intended to encourage the development of an appropriate and current curriculum which:

- is consistent with relevant external reference points, notably the UK Quality Code for Higher Education³ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.
- is designed so that the shape and size of the modules best serve the needs of the students and subject disciplines;
- uses flexible modes of learning to maximise accessibility and relevance to students (and employers);
- allows for employer involvement in curriculum design, delivery and assessment and recognises prior and experiential learning (AP[E]L) and Work-Based Learning (WBL).

1.3 This document is intended to assist course designers preparing for the validation of new postgraduate provision or engaging in the periodic review of existing provision to ensure its currency in design, delivery and sustainability. The process of review, reflection and sharing good practice is essential to the successful implementation of the Framework and its continuing development and to quality enhancement in postgraduate teaching and learning. More generally, curriculum

¹ Undergraduate Awards Framework http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/fms/MRSite/psd/AR/Academic%20Regs/3_1.pdf
² Academic Regulations http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/academic-regulations/
³ QAA UK Quality Code http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/default.aspx
development is a key area for continuing professional development for academic staff (see the University’s CPD Framework for Academic Practice⁴).

2 Guiding principles

2.1 The overarching principle is to offer a high quality and sustainable postgraduate portfolio that supports the University’s mission to transform lives, meet society’s needs and build rewarding careers through fostering the development of scholarship, academic knowledge and professional competence.

More specifically to:

- develop demand-led postgraduate courses relevant to the academic, professional and career needs of a diverse student population, supporting their personal development and enhancing their employability;
- engage with the needs of employers, professions and the wider community, working in partnership in curriculum design, delivery and assessment;
- ensure that the design and delivery of postgraduate courses and professional training meets the requirements of the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education, PG Subject Benchmark Statements (where appropriate), and the relevant Professional, Regulatory and Statutory Bodies (PSRBs);
- promote clear progression routes within subject areas and enable students to build credit over time;
- enable more interconnection between undergraduate provision, taught postgraduate provision and postgraduate research through course design and credit architecture;
- ensure flexibility and innovation within course design whilst maintaining an overall coherence and upholding required quality standards;
- encourage courses to be offered in alternative modes and through different blends of learning in order to tailor provision to meet market demand;
- facilitate the integration of work-related learning and work-based learning within curriculum design to enhance vocational relevance and employability;
- encourage multi-valency in the design and delivery of postgraduate provision and greater commonality of approach to generic research and related skills;
- provide sufficient flexibility to enable modules to be structured and delivered in an appropriate format for CPD and short course provision;
- widen access to postgraduate education, including via accreditation of prior experiential learning, and encourage participation from those in all segments of society who have the potential to succeed;
- ensure the provision of effective and accessible academic and pastoral

⁴ University Learning, Teaching & Assessment Frameworks http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/celt/learning-teaching-assessment/university-frameworks.cfm
support, information and guidance for all postgraduate students.

3 Awards and credits

3.1 The awards included in this Framework are listed below. The credit structure permits links between Level 6 and Level 7, and between Level 7 and Level 8, enabling course designers to promote clear progression routes within subject areas. For example, a Level 6 module on an Undergraduate course may be used within a Postgraduate Certificate programme where the subject matter and learning objectives are clearly relevant (up to 20 credits); similarly Level 7 modules may be used within a Professional Doctorate programme (up to 120 credits).

- **Postgraduate Certificate**: 60 credits. Up to 20 credits may be at Level 6 with the remainder at Level 7.
- **Postgraduate Diploma**: 120 credits. Up to 20 credits may be at Level 6 with the remainder at Level 7.
- **Masters**: 180 credits. Up to 20 credits may be at Level 6 and the remainder at Level 7. Masters awards include MA, MSc, MBA, LLM, MEd, MPA, M. Ent. A Masters award may be designated as ‘by project’ where a minimum of 90 credits is in respect of artefact or portfolio-based submissions.
- **Professional Doctorate**: 540 credits. Up to 180 credits may be at Level 7 and the remainder at Level 8.

SECTION 1: Framework for taught postgraduate courses to Master’s level

4 Credit architecture

4.1 Taught postgraduate courses are based on a modular structure. This provides flexibility in the design of provision to meet market, subject-based and student needs, and also facilitates sharing of modules across courses with potential benefits for both quality of student experience and efficient use of resources.

4.2 The standard taught postgraduate module is valued at 20 credits (denoting a workload of 200 notional learning hours) and the project module at 60 credits. This means a typical Master’s course would be 6 modules of 20 credits with a 60 credit project module.

4.3 However, course designers may include modules of 10 credits, 30 credits or 40 credits to suit the subject discipline and nature of provision. For example, 10 credit modules can be useful in providing some optionality within highly specified PSRB-accredited courses. Alternatively they can be utilised in the context of designing CPD-based programmes, or in the development of credit-bearing short course provision. Larger modules, such as those of 30 credits, may be more appropriate for work-based learning, or for courses where the project element is in two distinct parts (i.e., 2 x 30 credits rather than 1 x 60 credits). A module of 40 credits may be relevant where there is a key practice-based element which extends across the academic year and supports integration of learning and skill
development throughout the course (e.g., clinical placement).

5 Course structure

5.1 Core and optional modules

5.1.1 All courses should have a specified set of core modules to ensure disciplinary coherence, but can include a mix of core and optional modules. Opportunity for student choice can be an important USP in the marketplace, especially where PSRB requirements reduce the scope for differentiation within the core curriculum. Optional modules are also a means of providing specialisation for courses with a common core and different exit titles. Specifying a list of options from which students must choose can help to maintain course integrity.

5.1.2 The PG Framework promotes sharing of modules across courses, with modules available as core or options to students from courses in cognate disciplines as appropriate (subject to restrictions justified in terms of curriculum coherence, PSRB requirements, student competence and/or efficient use of resources). In some cases it may be appropriate for a module to be shared in the delivery but to have differentiated assessments for students on different pathways – for example, where the application of theory is varied to suit the course specialisation or the designated level (e.g., set at Level 6 for undergraduate students but at Level 7 for postgraduate students). However, where this is the case, it is essential that the content and delivery are appropriate for the related assessments and learning outcomes.

5.2 Research methods and project element

5.2.1 In keeping with the QAA guidance on Master’s Degrees Characteristics (QAA 2010), all Masters courses should include some form of dissertation or project-based element through which to demonstrate application of knowledge and use of techniques related to research or advanced scholarship in the field. This means that the course design also needs to include appropriate project preparation and research methods training, including a proposal which must be passed, whether or not it carries marks. The nature of the project, and the type of preparation required, is likely to vary according to subject discipline and skill sets to be developed so this Framework adopts a flexible approach providing scope for diversity between courses in content and delivery.

5.2.2 Whilst the project preparation/research methods training should carry a minimum of 20 credits at Level 7, it may be delivered in a stand-alone module, integrated into a larger module, or split with a 10-credit stand-alone module and the other 10 credits integrated into a larger module. However, where it is integrated into other modules, it must be clearly identifiable. If appropriate, generic research methods modules may be developed by subject groups, Schools or Faculties.

5.2.3 As part of project preparation, course teams should ensure that students are
aware of the University’s guidelines on ethical research practice and, where appropriate, have obtained ethical approval prior to embarking on their project.

5.2.4 The project is normally worth 60 credits (although this can be less for specific vocational courses where a case can be made at validation). The project can be one 60-credit module, or may be split into smaller credit units if there are distinct parts to the project which are assessed separately (e.g., practice-based and research-based) as long as they are clearly identifiable as constituting the project element of the course. Where a course is proposed for the award of MA or MSc with the designation ‘by project’ the module, or modules, that constitute it should contain at least 90 credits.

5.2.5 Course designers are encouraged to provide opportunities for students to undertake the project element through a variety of means (e.g., enterprise activity, live projects with industry mentors, work-based pilot projects) and formats (e.g., report, portfolio, journal article, website or artifact plus analytical commentary) to enable them to demonstrate generic capabilities such as innovation, synthesis and application. Providing students with options for alternative forms of the project also enables them to shape their programme to their particular interests and career needs.

5.2.6 Unlike other assessments, the University sets three standard dates for project submission within the academic year (end of Autumn semester, end of Spring semester, end of summer studies period in September). These dates have implications for course design in terms of when students need to register for and carry out their projects (see course delivery section below for more details).

6 Course delivery

6.1 Taught postgraduate courses are generally semester-based, but the modular structure of the Framework does allow for non-standard patterns of delivery where there is a clear market need (e.g., intensive blocks of delivery for CPD-based provision).

6.2 The semester-based structure provides the opportunity to increase student access to provision with a Spring as well as Autumn entry point, with implications for course structure (e.g., pre-requisites, ordering of modules). Where the course can be designed so that the Spring entrants can take the Spring modules alongside the Autumn entrants (rather than re-running the Autumn modules) this can have benefits for peer mentoring and course identity as well as being more resource efficient.

6.3 For Autumn entrants the normal credit point delivery would be 60:60:60 (60 credits in each of the Autumn and Spring semesters and 60 credits over the summer studies period). These students would typically register their project for

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5 Research Ethics http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research/the-research-and-postgraduate-office/staff/research-ethics.cfm
the summer studies period (June-September). This pattern enables learning activity to be distributed and achieves some balance in workload across the academic year.

6.4 For Spring entrants, the credit point delivery for a full time student would normally follow the pattern of 60 credits in the Spring, 60 credits the Autumn, and then 60 credits in the following Spring. This means that Spring entrants typically take longer to complete their programme (around 16 months) because they are unlikely to have acquired sufficient coverage of the subject area in one semester to begin their project in the summer studies period. These students would typically register their project for the Spring Semester 12 months after enrolling on the programme. However, variation from this can be considered where there is a strong academic, professional or vocational rationale.

6.5 Delivery patterns for part-time programmes of study can be quite flexible, but normally comprise between 20-40 credit points for any semester (or summer studies period if appropriate). A part-time student will receive project supervision across a 30 week period and will hand in at the submission point following this.

6.6 While it is not normally a requirement to pass all the taught modules of a programme before commencing the project, a student will normally be expected to have attended and submitted assessments for all the taught modules before completing the project.

7 Modes of delivery and teaching, learning and assessment strategy

7.1 Modules may be offered in a variety of modes of delivery, including campus-based, online and work-based learning (e.g., placements, projects and internships) and using web-based and digital technologies to enable flexible learning (place, pace and mode) and to enhance teaching, assessment and feedback. This flexibility and variety also provides course teams with an opportunity to enhance vocational relevance and employability through curriculum design and pedagogy and to include internships or other opportunities. Where there may be distinct markets for a particular programme, course designers may wish to consider validating some modules in alternative modes (e.g., distance learning, or work-based, as well as campus-based).

7.2 The teaching, learning and assessment strategies should enable progressive student development throughout the course and support the achievement of learning outcomes by students with diverse strengths and learning styles. This implies a holistic, course-based approach to assessment and feedback, using an appropriate variety of assessment and feedback methods and balance between formative and summative assessment and feedback [see University Assessment Framework 6] - according to the requirements of the subject area.

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6 University Assessment Framework http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/celt/learning-teaching-assessment/university-frameworks.cfm
8 **Student experience**

8.1 The enhancement of the student learning experience lies at the heart of this Framework, through the allowance it makes for developing modules, programmes, CPD, modes of learning and forms of assessment that are responsive to students’ interests and needs, while fostering advanced scholarship, employability and professional competence.

8.2 Personal development is an important part of the student experience, providing an opportunity for students to plan their learning goals and reflect on their achievements, and can be embedded within the activities and assessments on the course in a variety of ways appropriate to the subject area (e.g., learning journals, e-portfolios, annotated sketchbooks, casebooks, skills audits, reflective commentaries).

8.3 Student support is an integral part of taught provision and is likely to include Faculty-based Personal Tutor Schemes alongside more course-specific arrangements. One element which will be common to all Masters courses is the provision of academic supervision for the project element of the course. Course leaders should ensure that the best possible arrangements are in place for this and that each student has regular and appropriate access to a named project supervisor. The amount of supervisory contact time may vary according to different subject discipline norms, but there is an expectation that Master’s students will receive at least 4 hours contact as a minimum.

9 **Increasing access to taught postgraduate provision**

9.1 The University is committed to delivery of postgraduate courses in ways that maximise participation and access to potential applicants. This Framework promotes opportunities for a range of entry routes onto postgraduate programmes, including enabling alternative modes of delivery to suit student needs and Spring and February entry points. In addition, the Framework also allows for CPD-based programmes and accreditation of prior learning.

9.2 **CPD-based programmes**

9.2.1 Programmes may be specifically designed to serve the CPD market by not only offering alternative modes of delivery but also by encouraging students to build credit over time. This Framework enables students to be recruited onto specified PG Certificate and PG Diploma pathways to open access to those who meet the entry requirements but may not wish to undertake a full Master’s degree from the outset. For example, students gaining the PG Certificate can return at a later date (via the APL route, see below) to complete the PG Diploma level and, possibly at a further point in their careers, a full Masters award.

9.2.2 Where course designers wish to promote this development pathway, the PG Certificate and PG Diploma *entry routes* (rather than simply exit awards) should be
specifying at validation.

9.3 Accreditation of prior learning (APL)

9.3.1 Accreditation of prior certificated learning (APCL) and/or prior experiential learning (APEL) can provide accelerated access into postgraduate courses through recognition of an applicant’s existing qualifications, knowledge and experience which exempts them from the modules where credit is given. APCL and/or APEL may be granted for up to two-thirds of the required credits for a postgraduate award, with three conditions: (i) APL cannot be given for any part of the project element of a Master’s award; (ii) where APL is given for a PG Certificate course, the remaining credits to be taken cannot be at Level 6; (iii) APL cannot be given for a Level 6 module which has contributed to their UG award. The minimum amount of APL credit that may be given to an individual student is equivalent to one module within the programme.

9.3.2 APL may be claimed against specific modules or against overall course learning outcomes and may include recognition of relevant learning acquired from the workplaces, PSRBs CPD courses and employers’ in-house courses. APEL claims may be made via oral presentation as well as by written submission, in accordance with University guidelines on APL.\(^7\)

9.3.4 These APL regulations also enable course designers to offer ‘top up’ Masters programmes for applicants with appropriate existing PG Diplomas.

9.4 Pre-entry/ bridging courses

9.4.1 While not formally part of the PG awards framework, these are generally short courses aimed at helping applicants to meet the entry requirements and/or prepare them for particular aspects of the programme (e.g., knowledge foundation, skills refresher, academic writing) and course designers are encouraged to consider whether these could be utilised to enhance access to provision. Bridging courses may be specifically designed for this purpose or draw on existing modules or pre-sessional courses.\(^8\) Such courses should be specified at validation, either as an integral part of the programme or as a possible entry route. Note that all short courses, whether or not they are credit-bearing, must be validated by the University.

SECTION 2: Framework for Professional Doctorates

10 Introduction

10.1 The extension of provision to Professional Doctorate level can enable subject areas to meet the increasing popularity of doctoral qualifications for career

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\(^7\) Accreditation of Prior Learning [http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/registry/Related-information/apel/](http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/registry/Related-information/apel/)

\(^8\) English Language Courses [http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/courses/english-language-courses.cfm](http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/courses/english-language-courses.cfm)
progression within a wide range of occupations. Professional doctorates enable students to integrate their professional work and doctoral study, providing an alternative route to doctoral qualifications for those for whom a traditional research PhD is less appropriate or attractive.

10.2 This Framework recognises the need for diversity in structure and delivery of Professional Doctorates in order to meet different PSRB, discipline and market demands, so the focus is on ensuring equivalence of quality and academic standards between programmes in enabling students to develop doctoral level competences and attributes.

11 Course structure and delivery

11.1 Professional Doctorates normally comprise a preparatory stage which is equivalent to a Master’s degree of 180 credit points, although credits can be at Level 7 and/or Level 8. The subsequent Doctoral Stage must comprise 360 credits at Level 8.

11.2 Preparatory stage

11.2.1 This stage should contain some taught elements, including appropriate training in research methodology to support doctoral work and acquisition of skills relevant to students’ professional practice, and is normally based on a modular structure. The preparatory stage will typically follow the same structure as for a taught Masters programme (see Section 1 above for guidance on credit architecture, course structure and course delivery), although there may be some variation where necessary to meet the demands of different disciplines. However, all preparatory stages must meet the minimum criteria of: (a) providing appropriate training in research methodology within the first year of the programme to support doctoral work and acquisition of skills relevant to a student’s professional practice, and (b) enabling an assessment at the end of the preparatory stage suitable for determining whether a student has met a sufficient standard to continue onto the doctoral stage.

11.3 Doctoral stage

11.3.1 Typically two years in full-time mode. Depending on the discipline and PSRB requirements, the doctoral stage may be organised on a modular basis comprising taught, professional and research elements, or on a supervision-only basis more akin to a traditional research PhD. Taught elements may be delivered on a semester basis but, given the nature of Professional Doctorates, it may be more appropriate for course designers to consider providing these via intensive block delivery.

11.3.2 Where there are taught elements and/or modules, the course-specific regulations must specify whether these are compulsory and need to be passed in order for a student to satisfy the requirements for the award.
11.3.3 As well as offering discipline-specific research training, all Professional Doctorate courses are encouraged to develop opportunities for integrating the University’s Researcher Development Programme\(^9\) into students’ programmes and to promote a broader doctoral learning community across different courses and subject areas.

12 Doctoral output

12.1 The nature of the output will depend on the discipline (e.g., research report, journal article, website, practical work, composition) and for a Professional Doctorate may typically comprise a portfolio of outputs (e.g., research project, case study plus practice intervention) with an accompanying critical commentary. The doctoral output should enable students to demonstrate a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for advanced academic enquiry, and the creation and interpretation of new knowledge through original research or other advanced scholarship which is at the forefront of their academic discipline or area of professional practice.

13 Access and accreditation of prior learning (APL)

13.1 The integration of Level 7 and Level 8 within this Framework enable clear links to be made between Masters courses and Professional Doctorates in design and delivery. For example, course designers can utilise existing Level 7 modules within the preparatory stage and/or consider granting APL for up to 180 credits to facilitate student progression to the higher qualification (see Section 1 above for details of APL).

13.2 The APL regulations also enable course designers to offer ‘top up’ Professional Doctorate programmes for applicants with appropriate existing Master’s awards.

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\(^9\) Researcher Development Programme [http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research/the-research-and-postgraduate-office/staff/researcher-development-programme.cfm](http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research/the-research-and-postgraduate-office/staff/researcher-development-programme.cfm)