



**Programme Framework for Northumbria
Awards (PFNA)**

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Brief Description & Purpose:	This document sets out a framework within which Northumbria programme design will occur in order to ensure that all Northumbria Programmes align with, and hence directly contribute to, the outcomes of the Northumbria Corporate Strategy 2013-18 and Vision 2025. The overall framework seeks to incorporate these outcomes into the concept of the Northumbria Graduate, and sees the development of the latter to be the common aim of all programmes. Disciplines specificity will occur in programme design through 'how' the aim is achieved in applying relevant Northumbria principles and policies and conformance to relevant subject benchmarks. The Northumbria principles and policies have all been developed in light of the above strategies and plans.		
Applicable to (list cohorts):	Staff: All staff	Students: All students	Third Parties: All who are in a formal relationship with the University
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PROGRAMME FRAMEWORK FOR NORTHUMBRIA AWARDS (PFNA)

1 INTRODUCTION

- This document sets out a framework within which Northumbria programme design will occur in order to ensure that all Northumbria Programmes align with, and hence directly contribute to, the outcomes of the Northumbria Corporate Strategy 2013-18 and Vision 2025. The overall framework seeks to incorporate these outcomes into the concept of the Northumbria Graduate, and sees the development of the latter to be the common aim of all programmes. Discipline specificity will occur in programme design through 'how' the aim is achieved, reflected in specific programme learning outcomes, in applying relevant Northumbria principles and policies and conformance to relevant subject benchmarks. The Northumbria principles and policies have all been developed in light of the above strategies and plans.
- Section 2 of the framework identifies outcomes of the Northumbria Corporate Strategy 2013-18 and seeks to ensure that Vision 2025, the Student Learning and Experience Strategic Plan 2013-18 and the Business and Engagement Strategic Plan 2013-18 are integral considerations in the design and delivery of all Northumbria programmes.
- Section 3 of the framework considers how these outcomes may be articulated in the concept of the Northumbria Graduate
- Section 4 describes how the concept of Research Rich Learning will seek to enjoin students as partners in knowledge creation and facilitate student transition from learner to scholar, the development of the latter being relative to their level of study and captured in the concept of critical scholarship.
- Section 5 considers how programme design contributes directly to the achievement of the Northumbria Employability, Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Plan through the embedding of the Employability Framework and providing the student with the opportunity to apply their developing critical scholarship to discipline practice.
- Section 6 addresses external considerations for Northumbria programme design, including professional body requirements and regulatory frameworks.
- Section 7 re-emphasises the importance of Learning Outcomes in programme design, and the relationship between programme and module outcomes. It introduces the requirement for learning outcomes to be established at each level of an undergraduate programme and at each award stage at Masters level.
- Section 8 discusses the design and development process, with the intention of re-establishing programme design as a critical stage in the programme life cycle, with an equal focus given to the content of the programme and the resultant student journey. Reference is made to the role of University Policies and Principles in the design process. The expectation that programme design will be carried out as a team activity involving students and other stakeholders is also introduced.
- Section 9 focuses on structural and delivery considerations within which design must take place, and emphasises the design of learning opportunities in the context of

agreed programme policies in order that programme and level outcomes may be demonstrably delivered along with those at module level. This section also addresses the naming conventions for awards, including those with year-long study abroad or placement opportunity.

- Section 10 identifies considerations of PFNA for collaborative activity including designing dual and joint awards.
- Section 11 presents approaches to the design of top-up degrees and completion pathways.
- Section 12 presents considerations to be taken at the approval stage, the composition of an approval panel and the documentation to be provided to aid the approval process
- Finally, section 13 considers the relationship between the design, approval and review processes, in order to ensure that there is strategic alignment between these different but related stages throughout the programme life cycle

2 CORPORATE STRATEGY AND VISION 2025 “THROUGH EXCELLENT RESEARCH, TEACHING AND INNOVATION WE TRANSFORM LIVES”

- The University Corporate Strategy articulates its mission as “Northumbria University creates and applies knowledge for the benefit of individuals, communities and the economy. Through excellent research, teaching and innovation we transform lives, making a powerful contribution to cultural and economic development and regeneration locally, nationally and globally. “Northumbria University, Corporate Strategy 2013-18
- In addition, Vision 2025 captures the real opportunity that the University has to transform itself, bringing benefits for students, staff and other stakeholders. Bringing together “academic excellence and professional, business and real-world focus” in a distinctive offering, students will benefit from leading-edge teaching and research, a globalised student experience and outstanding graduate employment prospects.
- The Corporate Strategy 2013-18 is the first phase of the implementation of Vision 2025, and is the “route map for the next five years”; associated with the strategy are a number of KPIs including average undergraduate entry points; number of leavers in graduate employment and further study; and proportion of students who express overall satisfaction in the National Student Survey (NSS)
- The latter two KPIs above represent outcomes from the ‘transformation’ that we seek to achieve from a student journey and as arguably the programme of study is the primary vehicle of that journey, the programme design process should be undertaken with a view to delivering the desired corporate strategy outcomes. The success of that transformation will, in turn, enable the achievement of the first of the KPIs above, namely to attract high calibre students into the University, thus enabling programme design to contribute directly to a range University Corporate objectives.
- Programme design falls within the remit of the PVC Learning and Teaching, and therefore has a direct impact upon the objectives associated with the Student Learning and Experience Strategic Plan 2013-18, including:

- Increase the proportion of good degrees
 - Improve retention, progression and completion rates for students
 - Improve module and programme student satisfaction scores
 - Improve overall ranking as measured by the International Student Barometer, Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, NSS and League Tables.
- These are further articulated as Business Outcomes which include to:
 - Improve student satisfaction, as measured by the NSS, by developing and embedding University, Faculty and Service satisfaction improvement plans
 - Ensure all learning is informed by research
 - Implement technology enhanced learning (TEL) solutions that enhance the on-campus student experience
 - Improve support for student retention and progression
 - Implement a plan to improve the proportion of students achieving good honours
 - Develop Northumbria students into global graduates

Further, the Business and Engagement Strategic Plan has an aim to

 - increase the proportion of graduates in professional employment and graduate further study and
 - produce and implement a plan to increase student employability and enterprise
- All of the above are influenced by the student's programme of study, and it is the aim of this document to ensure that programme design is integral to the strategic success of the University by ensuring that all of the above are considered within the design process, primarily through the principles and policies developed to support the outcomes but also within the operation of the design process itself. The above are all encapsulated below which reflect the Student Learning and Experience plan within the corporate strategy, and provide the overall context within which programme design and delivery occurs and which this framework seeks to support
- To support the Corporate Strategy and the Student Learning and Experience Plan, Northumbria curricula will: reflect contemporary knowledge and practice; be informed by global perspectives; nurture intellectual curiosity and independence; enable and develop critical academic skills; and prepare students to contribute positively and responsibly in a global society. This will be demonstrated and delivered by:
 - Currency and relevance in relation to the subject and programme being studied, as measured by subject benchmarks, QA processes and audits, professional body standards and contemporary and international research and/or professional practice.
 - Development in students of the critical, practical, academic study and information literacy skills to enable the full achievement of learning outcomes at the module and programme levels.
 - Inspiring and encouraging intellectual independence and creative curiosity, by constructively challenging students to engage meaningfully with the dynamic process of knowledge generation, and thereby take greater ownership of their learning
 - Preparation of students for life beyond the university through the development of graduate skills (including preparation for employment), lifelong learning skills, ethical behaviour, global citizenship and responsibility, opportunities to participate in placement, and to study abroad.

3 THE NORTHUMBRIA GRADUATE

- In order to meet the objectives of the corporate strategy and other plans mentioned above through programme design, it is helpful to articulate what the characteristics of a successful Northumbria Graduate would be. This was originally stated as – Through the designed combination of excellent discipline knowledge, academic skills developed through research rich learning, and embedded employability activities, the ‘Northumbria Graduate’ defines the characteristics that students will demonstrate at the successful completion of their programme of study. As such all Northumbria programmes will adopt these characteristics as their primary aim.
- As currently articulated, a Northumbria Graduate will be:

 - Equipped with contemporary knowledge of theory, research and professional practice related to their programme of study.
 - Able to utilise their knowledge through critical analysis to create new knowledge and / or innovative approaches to practise proportionate to their level of study.
 - Equipped for employment, enterprise or further study through transferrable, lifelong learning, employability and research skills
 - Culturally and ethically aware and equipped to contribute positively to a diverse and global community
- This has been further developed to facilitate the programme design process to be – A Northumbria graduate will be able to:

 - Be able to think independently, understand and justify their own opinions, and will recognise the need to challenge their thinking, and the thinking of others
 - Be able to apply their disciplinary knowledge to complex problems in their discipline and its professional or industrial practice in order to identify appropriate solutions which are sustainable and justifiable.
 - Value curiosity, collaboration and analysis as keystones in the creation of new knowledge and practice
 - Be able to communicate effectively to diverse audiences utilising a range of formats and media
 - Display the attitudes and skills to engage and work constructively and sensitively in multi-cultural environments and teams and have an awareness of ethical considerations
 - Combine all of the above to support their future employability and long term career prospects
- In addition, a Northumbria Masters graduate will be able to:

PG Cert / Diploma will be able to:

 - Critically reflect on their own work and that of others
 - Present and justify their work, in the context of wider theories and practice, to their peers
 - Display and critically apply expert knowledge within areas of their discipline and /or its practice
- *Master’s degree will further be able to:*

 - Conceptualise, theorise and undertake research which addresses complex issues and which advances understanding within the discipline or practice
 - Contribute to the creation of new knowledge and /or applications to practice within their discipline through a critical understanding of the processes through which knowledge is created.

- Formulate balanced judgements when considering incomplete or ambiguous data and can communicate these judgements clearly to both specialist and non-specialist audiences

These will represent the overall aims of a Northumbria programme, with learning outcomes more specifically articulating how each programme will seek to develop their students to the Northumbria Graduate.

4 RESEARCH RICH LEARNING

- Vision 2025 sees Northumbria as:
“A research-rich, business focused professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence.”
It also states that:
“The ability to create new knowledge is an integral part of being a University.”
The Student Learning and Experience Plan 2013-18 highlights “Academic Excellence through symbiotic research and learning ...” and “Partnership in Learning between staff and students at all stages...”
- The link between research and the student learning experience therefore becomes crucial to achieving synergy between the work of staff and students, and to avoid the danger of seeing research and teaching as two separate components of University life. Taking the view of partnership articulated above, and accepting that knowledge creation is integral to University work, enjoining students as partners in knowledge creation will create the desired synergy and will clearly define the expectations of the Northumbria Learning Process and its subsequent outcomes.
- Research rich learning (RRL) is the Northumbria approach within which programme design takes place. Its aim is to overtly establish the research / learning relationship, thereby to increase student engagement with a consequent improvement in academic achievement and to develop real partnerships within an academic community and to contribute directly to the development of employability. (The latter is strengthened where business is involved in framing and/or facilitating the research process).
- ‘Criticality’ in its various representations is widely acknowledged as a required outcome of undergraduate and postgraduate study and for Northumbria this will be encapsulated internally in the concept of ‘critical scholarship’. Critical Scholarship will be a required outcome of all Northumbria programmes and the development and application of critical scholarship to the discipline and / or its practice will guide the design and delivery of the learning process for all of our students for all of their time with the University. Within this overall approach, it is anticipated that staff expertise and discipline expectations and benchmarks will allow programmes to maintain and develop their own unique identities.

Northumbria programmes will therefore seek to develop Critical Scholarship through Research Rich Learning approaches as outlined in the document “A Framework for Research Rich Learning for Critical Scholarship.”

- There are a range of established pedagogical approaches through which learning can be seen as ‘research rich’, e.g. Enquiry Based Learning, which develop critical scholarship and deliver the desired synergy between research and teaching and which importantly engage students fully as partners in the learning process. This framework does not seek to impose a particular pedagogy on programmes, but does

require that programmes are designed and delivered to introduce and expose students, from the start of their programme, to the theory and practice of critical scholarship and academic research as the foundations for the production and creation of knowledge. Moreover, dependent on the discipline, this should take place using work related learning, in order to develop 'application to practice' as a key outcome for the Northumbria Graduate. Ideally, such work related learning would occur through a placement opportunity, but can also be developed using industry partners to provide 'live' case studies etc.

Critical scholarship thus is both a process and outcome of Northumbria learning and each level of the programme will have clearly articulated outcomes which mark the development of the student against this outcome.

- The approach will be embedded actively and consciously across the whole of the student journey, and as such has implications for the design of programmes and their learning opportunities, and for the expression of learning outcomes. (See section 7)

The approach will contribute directly to the achievement of strategic objectives whilst clearly benefitting students and is a major component of the Northumbria Programme Framework.

Programme designers should reference the abilities of the Northumbria Graduate and the Research Rich Learning Plan when reflecting on how their programme develops research rich learning in its students.

5 EMPLOYABILITY

- Employability is a key strand of the University Corporate Strategy, reflected by the existence of a strategic performance indicator for employment and further study.
- Within programme design, consideration should be given as to how the programme itself is developing employability in its students, over and above the generic support provided by the university.
- In practice, in adopting the development of the Northumbria graduate as the primary aim of all Northumbria programmes, many of the attributes associated with employability will be developed through the student journey on their programme, both through content and the research rich, practice based process of delivery.
- Embedding the Employability Framework in programme design will contribute towards the development of the Northumbria Graduate and is a central feature of the Employability, Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Plan. Based on the Higher Education Academy's own 'Framework for Employability' published in 2013, this document outlines a process to enable programme teams to develop a defined, consistent and comprehensive approach to employability in their subject areas. Three core 'Employability Principles' have been highlighted which all programmes must take into account in their planning. However it is also important that programme teams take ownership of this process and are therefore required to make explicit, additional areas beyond these three principles, which they will then seek to address in practice with their students. Ultimately this work will very much align and contribute towards the development of the Northumbria Graduate and is not something that should be viewed as additional or separate.
- Without producing an exhaustive list of the component features of employability, these will typically include independent learning, intellectual curiosity (and hence a

commitment to lifelong / further learning), team-working, cultural awareness and sensitivity, communication skills, analytical skills, self-awareness / reflection and a commitment to maintaining strong moral, ethical and professional values.

- The Employability and Enterprise Plan also makes significant reference to opportunities to engage in work related learning. The modular framework encourages programme design teams to build in placement and study abroad opportunities to enhance employability (and demonstrably enhance the academic achievement of students) and where practical, expects students to have the opportunity to develop their criticality skills through engagement in inquiry related to the practice of the programme discipline(s).

Programme designers should reference the abilities of the Northumbria Graduate and the Northumbria Employability, Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Plan and Framework documents when reflecting on how the programme develops employability in its students.

6 EXTERNAL CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)

- Northumbria is rightly proud of its relationship with PSRBs, and indeed is constantly looking to strengthen those relationships through accreditation of its programmes and PSRB involvement in Programme Design.
- A clear aim of this framework is to support students in their employability, and clearly accreditation or meeting the expectations / requirements of PSRBs is vitally important for students aspiring to certain career paths.
- Where programmes are being developed which are subject to PSRB requirements, and / or PSRB accreditation is being sought, variations to the framework will be allowed where it is necessary to meet such requirements. Programmes should indicate potential variations at the proposal stage, and present full variation requirements with supporting evidence to Academic Registry for consideration prior to the formal validation of the programme. This is to confirm that the variations can be accommodated within Northumbria's academic regulations. The programme development team should also seek confirmation that the proposal meets the requirements of the PSRB following the latter's procedures. Where PSRB attendance at the validation event can facilitate this, or is required, the programme development team should consult with Academic Registry to discuss the particular arrangements.

6.2 Regulatory Frameworks

- The Programme Framework for Northumbria Awards exists within the extant national frameworks governing Higher Education. Prior to November 2022 these were encapsulated within the UK Quality Code for Higher Education 2018. . Note: The 2024 UK Quality Code uses a principles based structure rather than the previous chapter based format. References to this document to specific chapters reflect the framework at the time of writing but should be understood in the context of the current code's 12 principles.
- . Post November 2022 the framework also aligns to the Office for Students Regulatory Framework
- The framework will also include consideration of.
 - The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

- Higher Education Credit Frameworks
- Relevant Subject Benchmarks.
- Compliance to these, and to other frameworks as required by the Office for Students and UK Quality Code 2024 will be a necessary and fundamental consideration of any approval process for a programme leading to a Northumbria Award.
- Programme designers should consider how their programmes align with the principles in the 2024 UK Quality Code particularly those relating to academic standards, programme design and quality assurance.

7 LEARNING OUTCOMES

- The UK Quality Code emphasises that once the purpose of the programme has been established, programme design considers which intended learning outcomes are necessary to achieve that purpose and how students are enabled to achieve these. This takes into account the knowledge, understanding and skills which students are intended to gain, and the level of knowledge, understanding and skills which they are expected to have on entry to the programme. The mechanisms by which students demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the learning outcomes are also planned, as well as any formative assessment elements.
- Section 3.above has discussed the development of the Northumbria Graduate as a fundamental aim of all Northumbria programmes. Within this however, programme differentiation will occur reflecting the nature of both the discipline and its target student body. Each programme at the design stage will answer the questions relating to knowledge, understanding and skills in determining the characteristics that make the programme unique and attractive to staff, students and employers, meet appropriate benchmarks and deliver the aspirations of the Northumbria Graduate. In so doing, attention will turn to the development of the particular learning outcomes that students successfully graduating from the programme will be able to demonstrate and thereby recognise their transformation to a Northumbria Graduate.
 - The 2024 UK Quality Code principles emphasise that programme outcomes must be demonstrably achieved and assessed with clear progression between qualification levels. That programme outcomes are expected to have been demonstrably achieved by successful students, and by implication therefore assessed. **(Reference Northumbria Assessment and Feedback principles / policy)**
 - The concept of ‘change’ between qualifications at each level. As this change is demonstrated via the changing language of outcomes, arguably it relates directly to the development of the student in their transformational journey taken on their programme of study.
- In short, there is a development process where the outcomes at each level would act as measurable staging posts to assure readiness for the next stage of the process. The concept of development is referenced within EBL in the work of Healey and Jenkins (2009) where “...students are introduced to enquiry based learning at the beginning of their programme in order to stimulate intellectual growth and curiosity; this is then consolidated in the subsequent year and culminates with a capstone experience in their final year.”

As part of Northumbria programme design, outcomes will therefore be expressed for each different level of study which the student undertakes.

- In an undergraduate honours degree therefore there will be outcomes for level 4 study, level 5 study with the final programme outcomes articulated at level 6.
- In order to further support the concept of the continuing scholarly development of students on their learning journeys, outcomes will be expressed at each level in both content (knowledge and understanding) and process (intellectual and transferrable skills) terms.
- For example, it is particularly important at level 4 that programme design ensures that all students at completion of level 4 are fully and equally prepared to engage with both the knowledge content of level 5 and the research rich learning process adopted. Also that the process outcomes associated with the research rich approach are fully assessed. Learning and teaching activities are designed to enable every student who engages appropriately to achieve the learning outcomes. The learning opportunities support students to make the transition into higher education and to progress academically and intellectually through their programme of study, whatever its level.
- In a postgraduate Masters programme, whilst there is no differentiation of level to inform the development of learning outcomes, where the design intention is to make named postgraduate certificate and diploma awards, separate qualification outcomes will be required for each award. Where the certificate and diploma awards are to be given through credit accumulation, a generic rather than named award title will be used.
- For Masters programmes, the expectation is that there will be a progression point between the 'taught' and 'dissertation' stages of the programme, and that there will be specific learning outcomes which the student will have demonstrated before progression occurs.
- Northumbria will continue to adopt a modularised approach within its programme design, and therefore module learning outcomes will remain a vitally important aspect of programme design. The programme and level outcomes confirm what a student has demonstrably achieved at their level progression or award stage. As achievement is gauged through module assessment, the relevant module outcomes, taken as a whole, must directly assess the student achievement of the level and programme outcomes (if a separate set of programme assessments are not to be developed). (See also section 8, Design and Development Process)
- The introduction to Chapter B1 of the UK Quality Code, Programme design, development and approval, states
- "UK higher education is based on the principle of the autonomy and responsibility of the degree-awarding body for the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities of the programmes it offers and the qualifications and credit it awards."
- Higher Education Review will contain a judgement on an Institution's management of the learning opportunities offered to its students, guided by the expectation that the programmes offered to students make available learning opportunities that enable the intended learning outcomes to be achieved

- The Northumbria design process will therefore overtly recognise the programme outcomes and ethos as reflecting the purpose for which the programme is being developed. Module outcomes, and associated learning opportunities, will be designed in relation to that overall purpose to deliver a coherent and enabling student experience. (This means that programme ethos and outcomes and associated learning and assessment philosophies are drivers of the design process, rather than being the result of individual module approaches.) This approach will recognise the primacy of the student experience at the programme level in influencing the subsequent design of modules.

8 DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

8.1 Programme design, development and approval

The 2024 UK Quality Code emphasises that programme design, development and approval depend on reflection and critical self-assessment by individuals, groups and higher education providers. Designing a programme is a creative activity, which leads to an iterative process of development, depending on feedback from a range of sources, which may include other staff, students, employers and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. Programme approval involves a number of steps, but there is clarity for all parties involved about the point at which the degree-awarding body definitively approves a programme for delivery”

- Throughout the 2024 UK Quality Code, and the guidance provided for Higher Education Review, the ‘programme’ is seen as the primary focus through which evidence is provided / gathered when making judgements. . It also recognises the importance of programme design as a deliberate and systematic process involving critical review, creativity and feedback.
- Section 12 below provides further details of the approval process, and these are given in the context of the Single Approvals Framework (SAF) approved by Academic Board in 2013. This framework identifies the governance arrangements related to programme approval, and this section aims to build upon these and identify how programme design might be undertaken within Northumbria.

8.2 Initial Concept

- The initial idea for a new programme may arise from any number of sources, ranging from an individual member of staff to a formally constituted group created specifically to identify new programme development. Whatever the source, stage 1 of the SAF requires strategic approval of the proposed development, and as a minimum this will require the Faculty Executive to consider and approve the proposal to go forward to the design stage. In so doing, the Faculty Executive are confirming their support for the proposal in so far as it:
 - Offers a strategic ‘fit’ to the University Corporate Strategy and / or the agreed Faculty Annual Plan
 - Establishes a sustainable demand for the proposed programme which will meet the financial requirements of the University
 - Offers a reputational value to the University
 - Can be delivered within existing human and physical resource, or where this is not the case such resource can be identified and costed as part of the proposal consideration
 - Offers low risk to the academic standards and positioning of the University.

Where the proposal involves the introduction of a new subject discipline, it is expected that the proposal will be considered and approved by the University Executive / Academic Board.

8.3 Design Process

- Once the proposal is approved, the detailed programme design can proceed. The Faculty will determine an appropriate 'team' to undertake the design, and it is expected that students will be represented on this team. The precise composition of the team will be dependent on the particular proposal, but either through the composition or through wider consultation, it is expected that all stakeholders, particularly employers and PSRBs where applicable, will have provided feedback on the design. This will include consideration of the fit between programme philosophies and outcomes and those of contributing modules, the cohesiveness of the student journey and the consideration of the application of relevant university principles and policies as outlined below.
- At an appropriate point within this design stage, relevant documentation should be submitted to stage 2 of SAF to ensure consistency with Northumbria Academic Quality requirements and to refine the business case.
- NB. Reference has been made in section 7 to Learning Outcomes, and the importance of the relationship between modules and programmes, and that learning outcomes should be demonstrably achieved, and therefore be capable of being assessed. Assessment takes place at the modular level, and therefore the design aspiration would be that in assessing module outcomes, programme outcomes are also assessed. Without this, demonstration of programme outcomes will require additional assessment, burdening both staff and students. Part of the 'design team' consideration will therefore involve a clear articulation of how the achievement of module outcomes provides evidence for the demonstrable achievement of programme outcomes, and therefore the language used to express these two levels of outcome.
- Current practice involves the generation of an outcomes matrix to demonstrate the relationship between module and programme. Within this framework such a matrix will not provide the required level of detail, and the new programme specification requires a clear articulation of how programme outcomes are achieved, either through one or more module assessments and / or as a separate process of assessment.

8.4 Principles and Policies

- The Business Outcomes Map produced as part of the Corporate Strategy 2013-18 highlights key stages in the University's transformational journey. To support these, principles and policies have been, or will be developed relating to key aspects of the student journey. These principles and policies, developed through the offices of the relevant PVCs and DVC are therefore a prime consideration in developing programme proposals, and as part of the detailed design process teams will be expected to consider how the principles and policies will be adopted and evidenced within their programme.
 - Current principles and policies include
 - Assessment and Feedback
 - Employability
 - Internationalisation

- Research Rich Learning
 - Student Engagement
 - Technology Enhanced Learning
 - Timetabling Principles and Policy
- NB These principles and policies are presented as factors which need to be taken account of during the design process. As such, the approvals process will seek to explore how they have been incorporated within the overall programme and module design, and therefore the extent to which students can be assured of these aspects of their student journey and/or subsequent outcomes.
 - Technology Enabled Learning (TEL) challenges programme designers to explore alternative / additional delivery mechanisms to support learning opportunities and its adoption aims
 - to maximise the 'added value' of staff / student contact time
 - to contribute to development of Digital Literacy skills in students
 - to facilitate ongoing student engagement with learning
 - to facilitate self-evaluation of progress against outcomes
 - The choice of which aspects of TEL to adopt will depend on individual programmes, however it is expected that all programmes will adopt Electronic Submission and Feedback (ESAF), or alternative method of e-submission & feedback, as standard, except where exceptions have been approved.
 - The principles are contributory to, but separate from, the quality assurance processes which govern various aspects of the student journey and which seek to assure academic standards and/or conform to expectations set by relevant bodies, e.g. QAA, accrediting PSRBs. The extant Northumbria quality assurance procedures will apply to all Northumbria programmes, and these will only be modified through an approved variation order.

9 MODULAR FRAMEWORK

Northumbria adopted a modular structure for its programmes in 2002. Prior to the development of PFNA, the approach to programme structures and titles was defined in the Modular Framework for Northumbria Awards (MFNA). As a result of a review in 2005 MFNA included the requirement for there to be a maximum of four ten point modules in a 120 point level or programme, Apart from this change, the modular structure of programmes has not been significantly reviewed since its introduction. This section of the Programme Framework for Northumbria Awards will replace MFNA as the definitive source of information on programme structures and delivery.

9.1 Module Size

The basic module building block in Northumbria will be 20 points for undergraduate programmes and other module sizes will be in multiples of 20 points. For postgraduate programmes, module sizes will be multiples of 20 and 30 points. There is no upper limit to the size of modules, other than the considerations of semester based delivery outlined below, and the due consideration of the consequence of failure on a large module in relation to the assessment Regulations for Northumbria Awards.

9.2 Progression considerations in Programme Design

The first year of an undergraduate honours degree will be designed to ensure that all students on completion of their first year of studies are fully enabled to achieve the learning outcomes of their level 5 studies. To achieve this, the content of level 4 will be divided between providing the underpinning knowledge required for level 5 modules and an introduction to the skills required in the practice of Research Rich Learning for applied critical scholarship. The expectation therefore is that the knowledge content to be delivered at level 5 and the delivery and assessment methods employed, informed as they are by RRL, will drive the content and delivery of level 4.

A similar progression logic will apply between levels 5 and 6 of an undergraduate programme.

Programmes which intend to offer advanced entry to a programme within a level (e.g. at the beginning of semester 2 of a programme) must also ensure that modules are semester based to facilitate such entry or have alternative plans for transferring students in and out as per those above.

9.3 Project / Dissertation

As a culmination of the development of Northumbria students as independent learners and critical scholars through research rich learning all programmes will contain a project / dissertation as described below (See also design of top-up programmes and completion pathways)

- All Northumbria honours degree programmes will normally contain a 40 credit project / dissertation at level 6. Programme teams wishing to include a larger / more complex final project / dissertation will be expected to justify this within the overall programme design.
- All Masters programmes will contain a 60 point project / dissertation.
- Integrated Masters degrees are, typically, a four year programme comprising 120 credits at each of levels 4,5,6 and 7. An Integrated Masters degree will normally contain a minimum of a 40 point project / dissertation at level 7. Where students can exit from the Integrated Masters degree at level 6 with an Honours Degree, the level 6 structure and content, if it is not to include a 40 point UG project / dissertation, must assure that students who exit with an honours degree have met the learning outcomes normally delivered by a project / dissertation at level 6.
- NB. Different faculties / programmes may have specific views on the nature of the project / dissertation, and the framework does not seek to remove the option to adopt the different types that already exist within Northumbria, or which may be developed in the future through standard approval procedures. The framework does however require that the size of the project / dissertation is as defined above and that the investigation addressing the project / dissertation topic is carried out and presented in a form which meets the expectations of an academic inquiry within research rich learning.

9.4 [Option Choice \(see Appendix 1 for design principles\)](#)

- Option choice can be an important aspect of a student journey, allowing students to specialise and differentiate themselves from other graduates. The decision to offer and/ or approve options within a programme however is subject to:
 - The option(s) contributing positively to the learning outcomes of the programme
 - The programme being viable in its own right, that is the programme should not only be viable as a result of economies achieved by sharing options
 - There should be no option choice at level 4, no more than 40 points at level 5 and 80 points at level 6, and in all cases options must contribute to the achievement of the level and /or programme learning outcomes and will normally fall within the discipline of the programme.
 - The number of options offered within the above being dependent on recruitment to the programme.
 - Within Single Award Frameworks linked option clusters may contain more than 40 credits at level 5 but student choice must be at the level of the cluster and not individual modules.

NB. The 2024 Quality code principles relating to information provision emphasise that higher education providers make available valid, reliable useful and accessible information about their provision. Given the growing importance of this aspect of the code, where options are included in the programme structure, programme documentation must make clear how option choice and delivery is to be managed. If a diet of options is publicised, the expectation is that all publicised options will run, and that if a student chooses an option they will be able to study it. Equally, the programme must remain financially viable within Northumbria expectations if all options are running.

9.5 [Pathways](#)

- The development of programmes utilising a 'core' with named pathways, or 'core' with linked module clusters without named sub-award, is an alternative to offering a free option choice. It is clearly a consideration for such developments that there is clear alignment between the 'core' and 'pathway' module learning outcomes and those of the generic programme and specific pathway learning outcomes. The requirements for a pathway are defined in the table below

9.6 [Joint and Major / Minor Awards](#)

- Joint (non-collaborative) awards are made where the programme of study is made up of an equal proportion of study as defined in the table below from two main subject disciplines. The joint programme will normally consist of two separately validated 'half programmes' but may also be a customised combination. In a major /minor award, the student will study the proportions from the 'major' and 'minor' subject as indicated in the table below.

9.7 Use of 'and' and 'with' in award titles.

- 'and' and 'with' are used in award titles where discrete subjects have been combined, i.e. 'and' denotes a joint degree; 'with' denotes major and minor part subject combinations.
NB 'Discrete subjects' implies a cognate grouping of modules within each subject. Where the full 80 credits of the minor subject are included at level 6:
- 20 credits of this may be included within the Dissertation which must then contain equal focus on both subjects within the award title.
- The level 5 structure must ensure adequate subject underpinning for the modules to be studied at level 6
- Programme designers may include 'specialism' within the award title, e.g 'BA Hons <Major> with <Minor> specialism'

9.8 Bracketed Award Titles

- Brackets may only be used in an award title to indicate a branch specialism within a generic award, e.g. BSc (Hons) Anthropology (Biological Anthropology). Such an award title would be based on the inclusion of 60 credits from subject specialist modules across levels 5 and 6, or around one **quarter** of subject specialist modules at level 7.
- "(With Study Abroad Year)"/"(With Work Placement Year)" "(with Study Abroad and Work Placement Year)" Titles. Brackets may only be used in an award title to indicate that the student had completed a Year of Study Abroad/Year-long Work Placement or a combination of the two (usually within a 4 Year UG Programme), e.g. BSc (Hons) Geography (With Study Abroad Year). Such an award title would be based on the inclusion of 120 credits (usually Level 5) reflecting successful completion of a full year of academic study abroad/year-long work placement. NB. Where the Year is split equally between 1 Semester of study abroad and 1 semester of work placement Programmes may use the title "(with Study Abroad and Work Placement Year)".

NB For all of the above, the learning outcomes at the relevant level should appropriately reflect the content of each subject.

9.9 Single Award Frameworks

- Similar to programmes leading to "Bracketed Awards" containing clusters of linked modules at levels 5 & 6 but do not lead to named sub / bracketed awards. Within these awards Programme learning outcome reflect the award title only e.g. BSc (Hons) Graphic Design and must be attainable regardless of which linked module cluster is studied. Student choice relates to linked module clusters and any free option choice must not exceed the option module limits expressed in section 9.4 above

Award Types and Structural Requirements

Award Type	Example Title	Nature of level 4	Distribution of Level 5 & 6 credits	Focus of Dissertation	Design Consideration
Joint Hons AND	BSc (Hons) Counselling and Childhood	Level 4 must be design to prep students for each half	60 credits/ 60 credits split at both levels 5 & 6	Specifically design requiring equal focus on both half's of the award	Each half approved as distinct programme elements with specific Programme learning outcomes
<i>Level 7</i>			<i>60 credits / 60 credits split across taught element</i>	<i>As above</i>	<i>As above</i>
Major / Minor WITH	BSc (Hons) Business with HR	Level 4 designed to prepare for major minor requirements of level 5 & 6	80 credits across levels 5 &/ or 6, of which at least 40 credits at level 6*	Require focus on major area of study but can draw on aspect of minor for context	Programme Learning outcomes should reflect distribution of major minor subjects
<i>Level 7</i>			<i>80 credits / 40 credits across 120 taught credits</i>	<i>As above</i>	<i>As above</i>
4 Year UG Programmes with a Year-long work/study placement (WITH STUDY ABROAD YEAR)	BA(Hons) Geography (with Study Abroad Year)		<i>120 additional Level credits awarded on successful of study programme during study abroad Year</i>		
4 Year UG Programmes with a Year-long work/study placement (WITH WORK PLACEMENT YEAR)	BA(Hons) Geography (with Work Placement Year)		<i>120 additional Level credits awarded on successful of placement during work placement Year</i>		



Award Type	Example Title	Nature of level 4	Distribution of Level 5 & 6 credits	Focus of Dissertation	Design Consideration
4 Year UG Programmes with a Year-long work/study placement (with Study Abroad and Work Placement Year)	BA(Hons) Geography (with Study Abroad and Work Placement Year)		<i>120 additional Level credits awarded on successful of study programme during semester abroad/ semester-long work placement</i>		
Pathways	BSc (Hons) Business (Computing)	Level designed to enable progression into level 5 & 6	60 credits of the pathway subject across 5 & 6 with a minimum of 20 credits at level 6	Free Choice but NOT included as an element of the 60 credit pathway modules	
<i>Level 7</i>			<i>30 credits of pathway with 120 taught element</i>	<i>As above</i>	
Single Award Frameworks Generic Title only no specific sub titles as this would constitute and / with or pathway as designated above	BSc (Hons) Graphic Design or BSc (Hons) Health Care Practice Development	Designed to enable transition into level 5 & 6	Generic Programme design cluster of linked / related modules Linked Clusters at level for may include more than 40 credits. Students choose cluster of linked module not individual option choice	Must relate to Framework title but can draw on linked module clusters one Related to students area of practice	Single set of programme learning outcomes that must be achievable via any combination of core & link module cluster Only considered for specific markets e.g. CPD / closed programmes Northumbrian Water / NHS
<i>Level 7</i>			<i>As above</i>	<i>As above</i>	<i>As above</i>

*See notes on p17 under 'Use of 'and' or 'with' in award titles

9.10 Shared Modules

- Where modules are shared between programmes, there will be a designated 'owner' programme for which the module is primarily designed, and it is critical that all 'sharing programmes' must assure the alignment to their own programme outcomes is not compromised for the sake of efficiency, and on-going review should actively monitor the continuing suitability of the shared module in light of the aims and outcomes of specific programmes.
- In either case, module changes will only be instigated by the 'owning' programme and will require the consent of all programme leaders of the programmes affected, and in giving consent the programme leaders are confirming the alignment of the module to their programme aims and approaches.
- Mapping to Programme Learning Outcomes within the Module Specification should follow the following principles:
 - Modules written for a specific programme then 'borrowed' by another programme should only map to the original programme PLOs.
 - A module written for a number of programmes should map to all the PLOs for all programmes for which it is designed.

9.11 Non-Specific Programmes

- Where programmes are 'made up' from a free choice within a framework, or where a programme has been put together to allow a student to 'recover' a qualification, e.g. CATS, then the title of the award should be generic to reflect the variable nature of the content. Specific named awards will only be granted where programme structures and learning outcomes have been agreed in advance of programme commencement.

9.12 Undergraduate Programmes with an Integrated Placement Year (Work Placement or Study Abroad)

- Programmes may contain a compulsory, or optional, year of study where students undertake work placement or study abroad which is equivalent to 120 credits of full-time study. (Work placement involves students undertaking a minimum of 30 weeks of work related activity within an organisation. **Study abroad involves the students undertaking a minimum of two semesters of full-time academic study at a non-UK institution).**
- In order to maintain a consistent approach to the recognition of the work placement / study abroad year, the following will apply:
 - On a standard 3 Year FT UG degree a placement year (work/study abroad) is taken as an additional (fourth) year, normally becoming the third year of a four year degree.
 - Credits earned during the placement will be included within the transcript/HEAR (Diploma Supplement). Students will graduate with 480 credits.
 - The work placement, or study abroad, year (including ERASMUS) will be defined by a generic 120 point module descriptor or by two 60 point module descriptors which are designed to record either successful completion of credits earned abroad or to accredit work placement activity. In the case of Study Abroad successful completion of courses studied abroad will mean that the student "passes" the 120 or 60 credit Northumbria Study Abroad Modules. Awarding 120 credits ensures that the placement year complies with the requirements of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education which is necessary for access to funded work placements / traineeships or periods of study abroad.

- The placement year (work or study) will be assessed on a pass/fail basis.
- Where the placement / study abroad is integrated within a 4 year programme which does not have an alternative 3 year version, failure of the study abroad / placement year will result in transfer to an alternative programme, or failure where no such alternative exists. Programmes should therefore ensure an alternative programme does exist and that consequences of failure of the placement year are made clear to students.
- The placement / study abroad year can be made up of 60 credits of study abroad and 60 credits of work placement.
- The work placement / study abroad year will normally be positioned at level 5.
- As the work placement / study abroad year carries Northumbria credits, achievement of the learning outcomes does need to be assessed. The nature of assessment will clearly depend on the articulation of learning outcomes, and will be covered by normal Northumbria procedures of approval and moderation, including External Examiner involvement.
- All accredited work placement / study abroad activity will be subject to relevant principles in the 2024 UK Quality Code and, for Erasmus funded traineeships/study periods abroad, the requirements of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education. In the case of Erasmus Activities this is specified as follows: "Recognition / transfer procedures should ensure that the student's mobile activities at the partner institution are recorded in a transparent way...and that the credits gained abroad have been recognised as an integral part of the student's degree programmes. All the credits that the student earns during the mobility period and which were originally agreed in the Learning Agreement should be recognised by the home institution without the need for the student to take any further courses or exams."

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- Northumbria satisfies this requirement by recognising the credits earned abroad within the 120 or 60 credit generic study abroad modules as stated above.
- Students can start on the 4FT scheme (with placement year) and then drop down to a 3 Year version (if they elect not to do the placement year post arrival) **OR** start on the 3 Year version and then move up to the 4 Year version. (Students who have originally applied for the 4FT scheme (with placement year) are covered by the Student Loan Company for the full duration of the programme). (Students who opt in to a 4FT version post arrival (if they had originally applied for a 3 year programme) access the "gift Year" in Student Loan Company funding.) In either case once students have secured a placement (work or study) they will be transferred onto the 4 Year variant of the existing Programme.
- UK HEIs are permitted to charge up to **15%** of full UG fees (max. £1350) for study years abroad (Erasmus or Non-Erasmus) or for Erasmus Work Placement Years abroad and **20%** of full UG fees for year-long placements (taken in the UK or abroad). Currently Northumbria charges £1000 for the Work placement Year. The fee charged has no impact on the credit weighting of the Work placement.

NB. Where Faculties have elected to introduce a study abroad year as an integral replacement year (i.e. where the year of study abroad replaces a Year of the three-year UG degree) marks earned on the year abroad will usually contribute to the final degree classification.

The diagram below represents schematically a standard 3 year programme with additional placement / study abroad year.

NB Where the placement year is optional, programme learning outcomes for the standard programme should not reflect an expectation that a placement year is undertaken, nor should their achievement rely on the completion of a placement year. Additional programme outcomes may, however, be articulated to reflect the outcomes achieved by those students successfully completing the placement year.

9.13 Undergraduate Programmes with an Integrated Semester Long Placement (Work Placement or Study Abroad)

- Programmes may contain, within a semester, optional or compulsory work placement or study abroad module(s) equivalent to up to 60 credits of full-time study. Work placement involves students undertaking activity within an organisation of a minimum of the equivalent of the module NSW. The activity will be related to the functioning of the organisation. Study abroad involves the students undertaking an equivalent set of study which equates to the modules being replaced, although it is anticipated, given the logistics, that this will normally equate to a full semester of full-time academic study at a non-UK institution.
- In order to maintain a consistent approach to the recognition of semester long work placement / study abroad, the following will apply:
 - Normally, on a standard 3 Year FT UG degree a semester placement (work/study abroad) is taken in Semester 2 of the second year of study and will normally be positioned at level 5.
 - The work placement / study abroad semester will be subject to the relevant principles of the 2024 UK Quality Code relating to partnerships and learning opportunities and, for Erasmus funded traineeships/study periods abroad, the requirements of the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education.
- (a) Semester-Long Placements (Work/Study Abroad) in programmes with semester based module delivery:
 - The work placement, or study abroad, semester (including ERASMUS) will be defined by a generic module descriptor, the credit rating and outcomes of which are clearly mapped to those of the modules being replaced. Awarding credits enables students to graduate on-time with the correct number of credits.
 - The work placement semester will be assessed on a pass/fail basis where passing the work placement module(s) leads to progression and achievement of Level Outcomes.
 - The study abroad placement semester is assessed on the basis of marks earned on the study abroad where equivalence of marking scales has been established and so will usually contribute to classification, under such circumstances students will not be required to complete any additional Northumbria assessments.
- (b) Semester-Long Placements (Work/Study Abroad) in programmes with Year based/mixed module delivery:

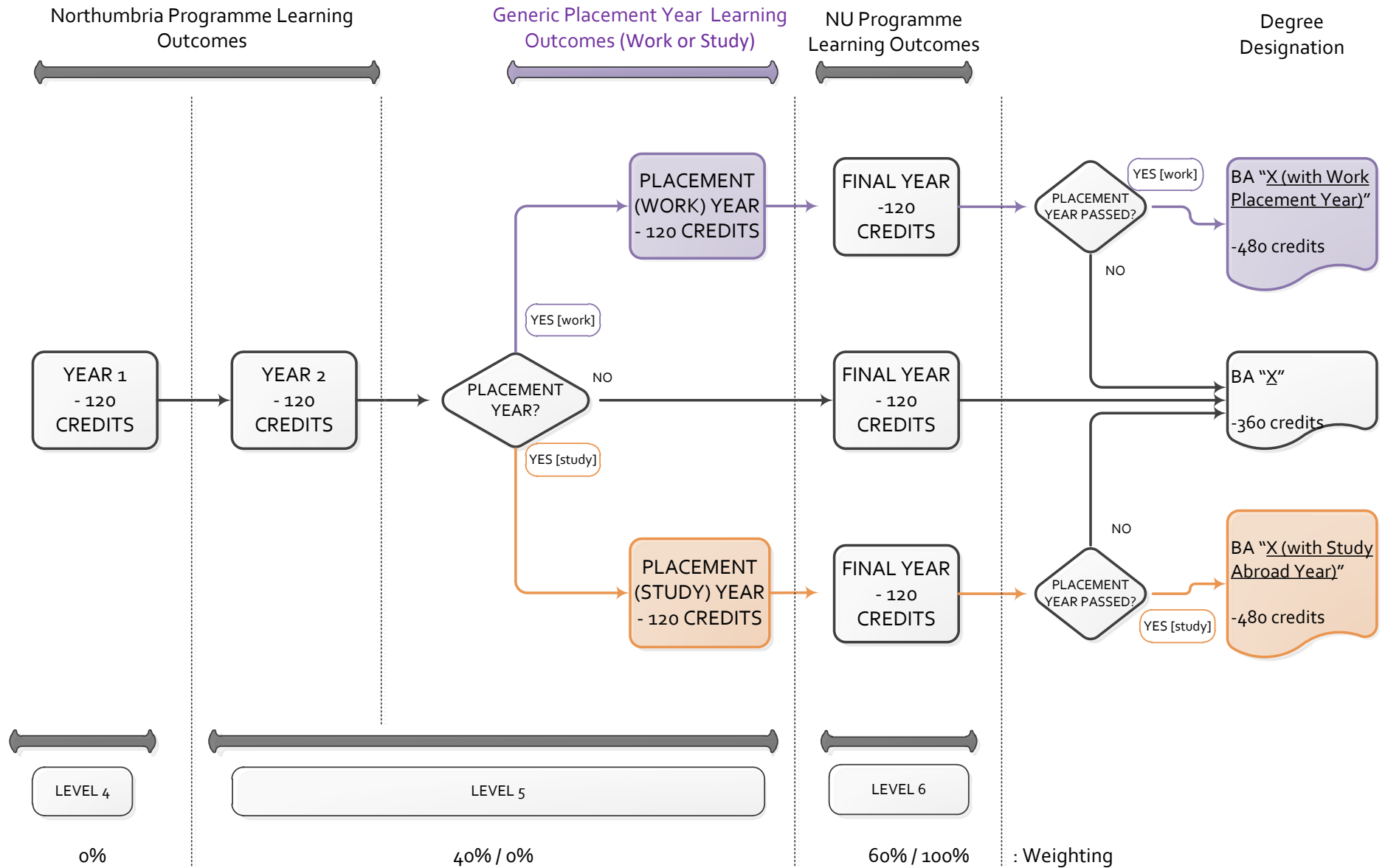
Where programmes do not wish to adopt semester based module delivery, the design must articulate how semester long study abroad or placement will be facilitated such that level outcomes are achieved. The framework does not seek to impose how programmes will achieve this, as there may be several alternative approaches to this. Some of these include

 - Direct accreditation of learning from modules studied abroad where mapping identifies this is feasible.
 - Distance learning provision for semester 2 of the Northumbria programme to be undertaken alongside study abroad
 - Creation of a module(s) which address the programme rather than module learning outcomes not already covered by semester 1 assessment, to be completed during study abroad.
 - A hybrid solution involving elements of more than one approach
 - A customised solution for a specific programme / student

- Whatever method is adopted it must be recognised that during a semester of study abroad the student must complete a full-time study programme equivalent to 60 credits. In the design process programmes teams must be aware of:
 - the impact on the total NSW (i.e. if a student is studying a 60 credit full time workload at a non-UK HEI then it should be considered whether that student can also be reasonably asked to complete a full-time 60 credit workload for Northumbria by distance)
 - the need for a transparent recording of placement (work/study abroad) activity on the student transcript/ HEAR (Diploma Supplement)
 - any external regulations such as the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education, cited above, which states that

“Failure to ensure that the mobile student receives recognition for the study / traineeship period abroad, as stipulated in the Learning Agreement, may result in the withdrawal of the Charter.”

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- This approach is designed to:
 - Bring a higher degree of consistency to the structures adopted by Northumbria programmes and, as a consequence, to the equivalence of student workloads
 - Ensure that undergraduate students are enabled to fully engage in the learning process and therefore to achieve their learning outcomes.
 - Facilitate the opportunity for semester long placements / study abroad for all students on all programmes
 - Allow late differentiation for students in preparation for their journey beyond their current qualification
 - Facilitate the delivery of the programmes via timetables which maximise student and staff satisfaction
 - Provide a consistent thread of academic development culminating in the Northumbria graduate as a critical scholar

The guidelines above provide the framework within which a programme structure is determined, i.e. the number and size of modules in a given level / programme.

9.14 Pattern of Module Delivery

The pattern of delivery of a module is a further variable where this framework will provide guidance to be considered at the design stage.

- The Notional Student Workload (NSW) for a 20 point module is 200 hours, each of which should represent a learning opportunity for the student. The NSW will be made up of a combination of taught hours and guided independent learning.
- For taught hours, each faculty will determine a limited number of delivery patterns which will apply, covering lectures, seminars, workshops, laboratory sessions, tutorials, supervision etc. Module delivery will be expected to comply with one of the patterns approved by the faculty.
- For the purpose of this framework, a learning opportunity is any activity undertaken by staff and/or students, utilising other resources where appropriate, as part of their NSW. The UK Quality Code, as identified in section 6 of this framework views learning opportunities as enabling the achievement of learning outcomes.
- The expectation therefore is that the design of individual learning opportunities within a module will be cognisant of the overall Notional Student Workload, and will contribute to the achievement of module and programme learning outcomes.
- Within NSW, the concept of guided independent learning normally comprises the majority. This may be undertaken as an activity directed by staff, (tutor guided independent learning, TGIL) or may be an activity identified by the student as contributing to their overall learning (student independent learning, SIL)
- As part of module delivery, module handbooks, learning and teaching plans etc. will be produced and uploaded on the eLP outlining the content of each contact session and any pre-activity to be undertaken by the student as directed by staff (TGIL). Faculties may develop their own versions of such documentation, but the minimum expectation is that there will be consistency in presentation for students on a particular programme.
- When undertaking Tutor Guided Independent Learning, at all levels, it is important that students know what is expected of them in relation to study they will undertake in this aspect of the module, and this should include the amount of time the activity

should take, the outcomes expected from the activity and how the students will receive feedback on the work undertaken.

- As part of their higher education development, students are expected to take an increasing amount of responsibility for their own learning, the proportion of time given to the TGIL proportion of guided independent learning should be of the order of:
- Level 4 – 80-85%
- Level 5 – 65 – 75%
- Level 6/7 – 50 – 60 %

9.15 Part Time and 'Non-standard' Delivery Patterns

For reference purposes, the 'standard' delivery pattern for a Northumbria Award by full time study is 120 credits per academic year delivered as 60 credit equivalence (600 NSW hours) per semester over two semesters.

- Adopting a 'non-standard' delivery pattern, i.e. one that varies from the above, may require consideration at the design stage; e.g. students undertaking a Northumbria programme by part time study will normally take up to 60 or 80 credits in the academic year as 30 or 40 credit equivalence (300 – 400 NSW hours per semester) over two semesters. Such patterns may require a modification to the structure of the equivalent full time programme where one exists. For example, a full time programme delivering 3 x 20 credits per semester over two semesters, may in the part time version delivering 60 credits per year, require one of the semester based modules to become year-long to remain within the framework, or deliver a non-symmetrical semester pattern, e.g. a 20 – 40 split of modules by semester.
- It is expected that the maximum time period for completion of an award by part-time study will be the design length plus 2 semesters.
- Under normal circumstances, it is not anticipated that programmes delivered via part time study will be expected to provide the facility for study abroad or placement
- In all cases, the programme design will require the facilitation of progression by level as required by the Assessment Regulations for Northumbria Awards.

9.16 Credit levels and use of lower level credits

Modules must be level specific. However, programmes may be validated with some lower and higher level credit (including Unilang modules) as follows:

- Undergraduate awards (including Integrated Masters programmes) (within a 120 Credit Level)
 - up to 30 Level 2 credits in Level 3
 - up to 30 Level 3 credits in Level 4
 - up to 20 Level 5 credits in Level 4 (for option modules only)
 - up to 20 Level 4 or Level 6 credits in Level 5 (for option modules only)
 - up to 20 Level 5 credits in Level 6 (for option modules only)
- **Note that all credit at the award level of Integrated Masters programme must be at level 7.**
- Postgraduate awards
 - up to 20 Level 6 credits in postgraduate certificates
 - up to 30 Level 6 credits in masters qualifications

- up to 30 Level 6 credits in the taught element of the professional doctorate.

Where such modules are included, they will be designated at the current level of the programme of study for progression and classification purposes.

10 EDUCATION PROVISION WITH OTHERS (COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS)

10.1 Northumbria Programmes delivered in partnership (Franchise)

- Where collaborative partnerships involve franchise of Northumbria programmes, the expectation is that delivery of the programme at the partner institution will normally follow within one academic year of the delivery of the relevant Northumbria programme approved under this framework.
- Where the entire programme is franchised, this should be a relatively straightforward process to ensure that requisite staff and physical resources, or plans for staff development and / or resource procurement, are in place.
- Where not all of the programme is franchised, e.g. the franchise consists of the final year of an undergraduate programme, the faculty will need to ensure that those students entering the final year of the programme are fully enabled to meet the expectations of study. Most obviously, this will require mapping of the 'qualifying' prior study against the stated learning outcomes of levels 4 and 5 of the equivalent Northumbria programme, as per the requirements for joining a completion pathway described in section 11. Where such mapping does not produce an equivalence of content and/or the process of learning, alternative or additional qualifying study must be sought or consideration given to the development of an alternative 'top-up' award.
- (Where a programme with such a franchise is re-approved under PFNA, a review of the existing mapping will need to be undertaken to ensure the continuing ability of incoming students to meet the programme learning outcomes)

10.2 Partner Programme leading to a Northumbria Award (Validated)

- Whilst validated programmes are clearly owned by the collaborating partner, in approving the use of the Northumbria name in the final award, there is an expectation that validated programmes deliver an equivalence of standards and outcomes to the relevant Northumbria award.
- It would not be appropriate to require a validated award to have exactly the same aims as a Northumbria programme, but the principles of developing Research Rich Learning and employability should be evident in the validated programme, as should due consideration of all of the design pillars underpinning PFNA.

10.3 Articulation / Advanced Entry

- Where advanced entry is allowed within a Northumbria programme, either through consideration of individual applications or via an articulation agreement, the same principles apply to those described above for franchise of a part of a Northumbria programme. That is to say, to maintain the principle that all students are equally enabled to achieve the programme learning outcomes, the expectation that the incoming student will have undergone a similar development journey, in terms of both

content and learning process of the programme they have studied, to their Northumbria equivalent, as articulated through Northumbria programme level or stage learning outcomes, will be the paramount consideration.

- Where programmes have developed augmented articulations, the approach would be similar to the franchise of full programmes above, i.e. discussions with the partner around the amendment of their articulating programme(s) to meet the level / stage outcomes of the equivalent Northumbria programmes.
- Where a student is applying to join a Northumbria programme at an advanced stage, or to join a top-up programme, the process of mapping prior learning is crucial to the entry decision. The schematic and accompanying notes (pp 29-30 below) outline the process, whilst the sections below provide more detail of the nature of top-up and completion awards.

10.4 Design of Dual and Joint Awards

As defined in the Principles for Approval of Northumbria Awards

(<https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/static/5007/arpdf/aq/Principles>) :-

A Joint Award is a programme of study created from existing education provision at Northumbria University and one or more educational institutions with degree awarding powers, leading to a single award being granted by Northumbria and the partner institution/s.

A Dual Award is a programme of study created from existing education provision at Northumbria University and another educational institution with degree awarding powers, leading to separate awards being granted by both Northumbria and the partner institution.

For the purposes of the Programme Framework for Northumbria Awards, within the principles set out above, when considering a Dual or a Joint award agreement with a partner organisation, how the Northumbria Graduate characteristic are developed, and demonstrated, within the award must be considered. Through either route, students will be exiting with a Northumbria award and therefore the programmes must be subject to the design considerations contained within PFNA.

11 TOP UP PROGRAMMES AND COMPLETION PATHWAYS

11.1 Design of Top-Up Programmes

- Top-up programmes at level 6 are specifically designed for students with an existing qualification or prior learning equivalent to 120 credits at each of levels 4 and 5 who wish to take additional study to 'top-up' their current achievements to a Northumbria honours degree).
- Top-up programmes will typically be developed for a recognised market, and the task for Northumbria programme design is to design the programme such that the content and learning process meet internal and external expectations whilst recognising the entry characteristics of its anticipated student body. For example, a top up may be being designed for holders of international diplomas. Given the variation that can exist in such awards, however, the design team may choose to limit entry to named international diplomas which they know, or discover, produce students with the desired entry characteristics. In terms of approach, the top-up programmes will reflect the likelihood that their students will not necessarily have gone through the 'research rich learning' experience' as those who have already studied for two years at Northumbria. As such, the students will need to be 'developed' into critical thinking and research rich learning rather than building on a foundation which already exists.

This inevitably has implications for the design and delivery of the programme, and to facilitate the enabling of students to achieve learning outcomes, the structure of top-up programmes may vary from PFNA in that it:

- Typically may not require a 40 point project / dissertation to be included in the structure; students will however be expected to undertake a 20 point piece of work which is aimed at the development of independent and research rich learning skills.
 - Will include a 20 point module, the content of which delivers, and the outcomes of which demonstrate Northumbria's concept of research Rich Learning, as a compulsory element of all top up programmes. It remains an expectation that all level 6 modules will utilise research rich learning approaches to deliver their discipline content.
 - Will require students for whom English is not their first language, to undertake compulsory English for Academic Purposes sessions. Satisfactory attendance on the EAP module is required as part of the criteria for the award being made. A diagnostic test may be applied to all entrants to top-up programmes to determine the specific nature of their EAP programme.
- Entry to a top up programme will involve having the necessary credits as defined by the Framework for Higher Education awards, the National credit Framework and Northumbria's own award regulations. It will also be dependent on the student's learning experience on their existing award sufficiently matching the subject and intellectual expectations of the final year of a Northumbria honours degree to enable them to successfully achieve the learning outcomes of the top-up award
 - (Where mapping of the 'qualifying' prior study indicates a gap in requirements additional learning may be required to be added to the programme to fully enable achievement of learning outcomes. Where this may be accommodated within 1 year of study, the top up programme may be augmented to include the additional learning for such students (where demand justifies the additions). If this is not possible, where demand is sufficient, a new top-up programme may be required.)
 - The learning outcomes of a Northumbria top-up award will be related to, but different from, those of a Northumbria ab initio programme. The top-up programmes will share the aim of developing the Northumbria Graduate, but differ in the structure and approach that they adopt to reflect the nature of the student entry characteristics. The learning outcomes of the top up award therefore, will be unique to that award (or cluster of awards) but will still ensure that students who successfully achieve the award will meet the expectations of the Northumbria Graduate.
 - Acknowledging that all students are different, there is no expectation one Northumbria Graduate will be a clone of another, but that within their individual differences the characteristics of the Northumbria Graduate will be seen. Similarly with top up programmes it may well be the case that entrants to the programmes share certain characteristics which may emphasise some of differences, e.g. international students may well demonstrate higher levels of cultural awareness and continue to do so throughout their programme. As a result of the differing entry characteristics of students, what emerges is not a single pattern that defines the Northumbria Graduate, but rather a myriad pattern within the overall concept of the Northumbria Graduate.
 - These patterns are not a reflection of achievement, but represent a celebration of the differences that can be accommodated within the Northumbria learning experience. The learning outcomes of individual programmes will more clearly articulate the expectations in relation to the various aspects of Northumbria Graduateness, and

these will not always be the same, but taken as a whole, all Northumbria programmes will deliver a fit for purpose Northumbria Graduate.

11.2 [Entry to Completion Pathways](#)

- A completion pathway is a pathway taken by students who join a Northumbria programme at a point other than the standard entry point, either by having started, but not completed an equivalent award in their own institution, or by possession of a recognised level 5 qualification. In this way, a student 'completes' their academic journey to a Northumbria award, having started the journey elsewhere.
- The process of joining a programme at a point other than the standard entry point is known as 'advanced entry', and a mapping exercise will be undertaken to establish the precise point at which a student, or group of students, may join the programme, e.g. level 5 or level 6. The mapping exercise will also determine whether, and to what extent, variation from the existing Northumbria programme will be required to ensure that advanced entry students will be enabled to achieve the learning outcomes whilst maintaining the integrity of the Northumbria award. Normally, advanced entry via a completion pathway will be formalised in an agreement with partner institutions via articulation or augmented articulation of the partner institution's programmes with those of Northumbria.
- In authorising advanced entry, the challenge for Northumbria is to assure that a student entering the programme at an advanced point has the pre-requisite knowledge and skills to successfully achieve the programme learning outcomes at a level of performance which meets Northumbria expectations. Augmented articulations, which represent a greater degree of engagement within a partnership, arguably offer a far greater alignment of a student's prior experience with that of their Northumbria equivalent, thus reducing the risk associated with entry to later levels of the programme. Students entering from articulation agreements may benefit from joining the programme at earlier levels, and / or from additional learning designed to facilitate their achievement of outcomes at a level of performance which meets Northumbria expectations.
- The completion pathway will be exactly the same as the standard Northumbria programme, except where additional learning has been added, and approved, to enable the students to achieve the learning outcomes. In all circumstances the learning outcomes of the completion pathway will be the same as those for the standard Northumbria programme. In order, however, to facilitate the variation in programmes which may seek to articulate to a completion pathway, a minor variation in the structure of the Northumbria award may occur. This is, similar to the top up programmes, a 40 point project / dissertation may be replaced within the structure; by a 20 point module which is aimed at the development of independent and research rich learning skills and a 20 point module which delivers, and the outcomes of which demonstrate, Northumbria's concept of research Rich Learning.
- NB. Where the 40 point dissertation / project is not included, the modules described above must deliver the learning outcomes associated with the former. Under no circumstances must the content of the approved level 6 modules be modified to suit the pathway. Similarly, no modules may be added to the award to suit the pathway alone, unless they are additional to the approved modules required to achieve the award, whether or not the additional modules are credit rated.
- Where variation in structure or delivery occurs, the variation will need to be formally approved as a pathway of the existing Northumbria award which maintains the integrity of that award. Where this involves delivery only, this can be approved at

Faculty level, where structural change is involved, this will be approved at University level via the Programme Approvals and Review sub-committee.

COMPLETION SCHEMATIC

*NB – action dependent on viable numbers

Notes Related to Top-up & Completion Schematic

- **Box 1:** The student(s) will present to the schematic in several different ways, e.g. an individual student applying for a particular programme, with or without an articulation agreement, a request made on behalf of a group of students by a host institution, a market need identified within Northumbria etc., thus the path through the schematic will vary with the particular characteristics of the issue being addressed.
- **Box 2 & 3:** The aim of the mapping process is to ensure that students are fully enabled to achieve the learning outcomes of the programme they are seeking to join. Some students will present with awards or prior learning which have already been mapped via articulation agreements. However, given the new design philosophy for Northumbria programmes, it is important to ensure that the mapping appropriately addresses the principles encompassed in the PFNA design pillars to ensure incoming students are able to engage with the process of learning at level 6 in addition to the content. For advanced entry into final year, this may be facilitated by consideration of the level 4 and 5 learning outcomes for the Northumbria programme. For 1 year top-up programmes these will not exist, so that the gap analysis may have to depend on an assessment of what their equivalent may be in relation to the specifics of the learning process adopted in the top-up.
- **Box 4:** Where the mapping and / or articulation show direct compatibility with the level 5 outcomes and content expectations of a Northumbria programme, the student(s) may be given advanced entry to level 6.
- **Box 5:** Where there is a 'gap' between the requirements for advanced entry to level 6 and the students' current award or prior learning. An assessment will be made as to
 - Whether the gap can be bridged by amending the 40 point dissertation to two 20 point modules, one of which is aimed at the development of, and whose outcomes measure the achievement of, independent and research rich learning skills, and one which delivers, and the outcomes of which demonstrate, Northumbria's concept of research Rich Learning, as a compulsory element of all top up programmes. In total, the outcomes of these two modules must be equivalent to the outcomes of the 40 point dissertation.
 - Whether the gap can be bridged by adding content to the final year for these students. This can be either additional modules, and / or additional contact time within the existing level 6 modules to address content and / or process gaps. (NB The additional modules must not replace the modules in the existing level 6 structure, and therefore will reflect learning over and above the 120 points at level 6 needed for the award.)
- Particularly in the case of b) above, consideration must be given to the additional workload applied to the affected students, and the recommendation would be that this should not exceed the equivalent of 200 notional student workload hours per semester
 - An alternative to b) would be to design a bridging programme which students must undertake prior to entry to level 6. This may be particularly relevant for overseas cohorts seeking advanced entry to a franchised level 6 of a Northumbria programme. The bridging programme could be intensively delivered.
- **Box 6, 7 & 8:** Once the additional content has been designed and approved, the student can join the 'augmented' level 6 programme. Where a bridging programme is utilised, the student may join level 6 of the existing Northumbria programme. In both instances, the 'augmentation' will be dependent on there being viable numbers.

- **Box 9, 10, 11, 12 & 13:** A similar process to that applying to Boxes 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 will be undertaken, this time in relation to existing top-up awards.
- **Box 14:** Where demand allows, if an existing top-up programme, or an augmentation of it, cannot be matched to the students' profiles or preferred choice of programme, a new top-up may be designed for the specific market the students represent.

12 PRINCIPLES OF APPROVAL

- When designing and approving programmes, higher education providers will wish to ensure that a coherent learning experience is delivered and that due consideration is given to the principles in the 2024 UK Quality Code relating to programme design, quality assurance and student engagement. In addition, higher education providers will wish to take account of the regulatory and other requirements of the PSRBs which accredit specific professional programmes.
- Northumbria has a long tradition of rigorous programme approval processes. Nevertheless, within this new framework, an opportunity has been taken to review the approval process and, as a result, to place equal weighting to the content and process aspects of the programme design. This in turn has implications for the composition of the approval panel, and for the operation of the approval event which are outlined below.
- Northumbria will retain a list of Approval Panel Chairs. The role of the Chair is to ensure that all of the requirements for approval are fully considered, either through presented documentation or at the event itself. The Chair does form part of the panel and can take an active role in the event, and will also provide the judgement of the panel to the proposing team.
- The panel will comprise, in addition to the Chair
 - A subject expert drawn from the proposing faculty who is independent of the current proposal
 - An External subject expert drawn from the higher education sector or the profession
 - A Learning and Teaching Professor / Fellow / Champion / Director of Review and Approvals / Academic Development Officer drawn from outside the proposing faculty
 - A student representative, normally an SU or faculty representative
 - A Professional Services representative as required (ie Marketing, Student and Library Services)
- Dependent on the proposal, the panel may wish to delegate aspects of the approval event to members, in which case the expectation would be that the subject experts focus on the academic cohesiveness of the proposal, i.e. how the modules combine to form a cohesive programme of study, whilst the Learning and Teaching experts and the student representative focus on the learning process cohesiveness and the student journey.
- To facilitate the latter, it is expected that a student handbook, or electronic equivalent, is provided as part of the approval documentation which will include sections, written from a student perspective, such as
 - How will I learn on the programme
 - How will I be assessed on the programme
 - How will I be supported, pastorally and academically, on the programme
 - How will my academic development be facilitated on the programme

- How will I be involved in the programme
- What opportunity will I have for placement/ study abroad
- How will I be prepared for employment / further study on the programme
- Other documentation required for the approval event include
 - The programme specification
 - All module specifications
 - Sample Module handbooks / Learning and Teaching plans or electronic equivalents
 - Sample assessment briefs, accompanied by associated assessment criteria which will be 'typical' of the expectations for the programme, for each type of assessment within each level of study
- The aim of this approach to approval, as stated, is to ensure the integrity of the programme in its own right, and the integrity of the student journey in assuring a challenging and stimulating learning experience which leads to the opportunity for all of our students to maximise their potential in a safe and supportive environment resourced to support the learning journey. It also overtly aims to re-establish the approval event as a celebration of the design expertise of staff, and as such will be seen as a major event with which to begin the life cycle of a programme. Further details of approval will be found on the academic registry web pages.

13 MEASUREMENT AND REVIEW

- Programme design, development and approval depend on reflection and critical self-assessment by individuals, groups and higher education providers. The review processes for Northumbria are well documented within the Academic Registry web pages, and have themselves been subject to recent review. As a result the Annual Programme Review process has been aligned to provide information which itself will feed into the Periodic Review process.
- The 2024 UK Quality Code emphasises that programme design, development and approval depend on reflection and critical self-assessment.. It is this self-assessment which should drive enhancements to a programme, whether they be content or process driven, which themselves may or may not lead to fundamental revisions or re-design of the programme. As stated elsewhere, in order for the design – approval – review – enhancement cycle to operate virtuously, it is essential that review is carried out against the same criteria that are applied at the design stage, and that these are clearly defined and measured consistently at all stages. Inevitably, as the higher education environment develops, criteria will change, and the emphasis then will be to communicate these changes clearly and to incorporate them into the relevant processes in a transparent manner.
- Approval of Northumbria programmes is currently given with no defining period of approval. Whilst it is not proposed to change this, more attention will be paid to internal review outcomes such that
 - Annual review may identify the need for a deeper review of a programme against the required design criteria. This may lead to a re-design and re-approval of the programme. The specific criteria for such a review will be identified but is likely to comprise of failure to meet performance indicators associated with the University Corporate Objectives
 - Periodic Review will take a more overt role in identifying how programmes have responded to changes since the original approval. This is of course in addition to the Faculty's own scrutiny, but might include response to new university policies, changed performance criteria, University and Faculty enhancement plans etc.

- The final part of the review process, the strategic review of academic programmes, differs from the above only in that it is likely to apply when there has been a somewhat catastrophic performance against design criteria. It is the role of annual and periodic review to give early and systematic warning of such a happening, and to allow programmes to take timely action. It is for this reason that review is such a vital part of the programme cycle, and why critical self-assessment is the fundamental component of success. As practitioners in higher education, it behoves us to bring the same criticality to our provision that we bring to our discipline, and Faculties will be expected to take an overt role in ensuring that this has occurred.
- A full list of extant performance criteria will be provided at the beginning of each programme design process, and a list of extant criteria will be published on the academic registry web pages, updated annually.

14 PFNA Operating Principles:

Programme Framework for Northumbria Awards

Operating Model and Principles

1. The programme is the principal unit of design, recruitment, delivery and review.
2. The Northumbria University design process always commences with the Programme Learning Outcomes for the final stage award (Level 6 or 7).
3. Programme Learning Outcomes will be expressed for each level / stage of the programme in the context of:
 - Northumbria Graduate Characteristics
 - QAA subject Benchmarks
 - QAA code Chapter A National Qualification Framework
 - Employer / Professional Statutory Body requirement
4. All programmes will embed the four Northumbria Design Pillars and will:
 - Articulate a learning and teaching strategy that delivers research rich learning experience that is genuinely engaging for the student and in line with the Northumbria Research Rich Learning Policy. Smaller more interactive / enquiry based learning activities will be the primary mode of delivery and learning;
 - Provide employability and work based opportunities to develop students' understanding and experience of work, professional practice and entrepreneurship across all stages of the programme in line with the Northumbria Employment Framework including:
 - Year-long work based placement
 - Year-long study abroad opportunities
 - Semester long work / study abroad opportunities;
 - Deliver an assessment strategy embodying the Northumbria Assessment for Learning and Achievement Policy designed to demonstrate achievement of the programme / level learning outcomes as delivered by the programme modules;
 - Utilise technology to enhance the learning experience as appropriate in all aspects of programme delivery and student support and in line with the Northumbria Technology Enhanced Learning Plans;
5. Modules are the building blocks of all programmes and will primarily be designed, delivered, evaluated and reviewed in the context of the programme for which they were created. All modules (core and option) will be designed to contribute directly to the Programme Learning Outcomes and achievement of the Northumbria Graduate Characteristics.
6. Arising from the integration of the four design pillars into all Northumbria programmes, the educational experience through which students are engaged in learning will utilise interactive learning, teaching and assessment methodologies to develop curiosity and scholarship through collaboration and the co-creation of knowledge. A learning experience:

- which is delivered through a range of engaging interactive methodologies including; small group learning, enquiry based learning, supported independent enquiry, real life industry informed project based learning;
- where lectures can be delivered face to face, but will often be delivered digitally via webcasts and text in order to support effective and timely transmission of information;
- that utilises online digital and technological resources and material to support learners and all staff and students to take risks, develop curiosity, explore problems and create solutions;
- supported by “Smart” assessments specifically and carefully constructed to deliver variety and complexity of learning through formative and summative approaches and that encourages a deep approach to learning (e.g. essays, problem-based, portfolios, real time work related projects);
- articulated through a transparent learning, teaching and assessment workload model for staff and students that is clear, transparent manageable, achievable, timely and supported.

15 APPENDIX 1:

Principles to Guide Inclusion of Options in Programme Structures

Principles:

1. Options must align to the aims, philosophy, ethos etc. and the discipline of the programme.
2. The option must have a role in relation to the Programme Learning Outcomes and, by association, to the development of the Northumbria Graduate. This may be most relevant to those PLOs associated with process outcomes, but the overarching principle is that PLOs must be met regardless of option choice.
3. Associated with above, programmes may wish to consider whether they will specify which outcomes are to be met by options and therefore require that options are designed to deliver these in order to be included in the programme.
4. Where modules which are 'core' on a programme or pathway are to be offered as options on other programmes / pathways, programmes should be aware that whilst the primary aim will be to timetable these as a common occurrence, in some instances this may over-constrain the scheduling process in which case it may be necessary to schedule the core and option occurrences separately. The latter will result in additional delivery of the module.
5. Given the recent findings of the 'Which?' report and the requirements of Section C of the UK Quality Code, 'Information about Higher Education Provision', programmes must make clear within programme publicity (in any form or media), and in their management of the programme
 - The minimum and maximum numbers which can be accommodated within an option
 - Where the option may not run due to failure to recruit, the arrangements for informing students and enabling an alternative choice
 - Where the option may be capped due to over demand, the criteria that will be applied to allocating places on the option and, as above, the arrangements for informing students and enabling an alternative choice
 - Essentially, where the option is publicised the assumption must be that it will run and clear and unambiguous guidance provided on the circumstances that may prevent the option from running and the arrangements for alternatives to be provided.
6. Where options are dependent on individual members of academic staff, programmes (or disciplines) should ensure arrangements are in place to enable the option to provide 'cover' for planned absence of staff that will enable the option to run.
7. Whilst options are a key element in enabling students to 'achieve their potential', programmes should ensure, through collaboration with University marketing, that the options offered are based on market research of both provision within the sector and employer trends.
8. The above principles recognise the contribution of specialist option modules to the Research Rich Learning pillar of PFNA, and seek to incorporate the expertise and research excellence of colleagues into the student learning experience in a structure which is deliverable and sustainable.

16 LOG OF CHANGES

16.1 [Post consideration by Academic Board 25/03/15](#)

- Section 3 (The Northumbria Graduate) page 6, Northumbria Graduate Characteristics updated to include Masters graduate characteristics
- Section 9 Modular Framework
 - Range of option modules per level updated
 - Naming conventions use of 'and' 'with' etc. in award titles clarified and table amended
- Section 10 page 26 Section header updated to Education Provision with Others / terminology update to reflect Education Provision with others
 - Top Up and Completion awards and structures clarified
 - Decision flow diagram added
- Review by SLE 04/06/15

16.2 [Post consideration by SLE 4/06/15](#)

- Section 9 page 15, wording amended: Undergraduate dissertation / project will normally be 40 credits, justification required for large module size.
- Section 9 page 18, for clarity "... (WITH STUDY ABROAD YEAR)" AND "... (WITH WORK PLACEMENT YEAR)" variant designations added to "Award Types and Structural Requirements" table and included in **"Bracketed Award Titles" section on p 17**
- Section 9 page 17, wording amended: Undergraduate dissertation / project will normally be 40 credits, justification required for large module size.
- Section 9 Modular Framework further amendments to clarify and differentiate design consideration for Semester based study abroad / placement and Yearlong study abroad / placement
- Section 9 page 18, for clarity "... (WITH STUDY ABROAD YEAR)" AND "... (WITH WORK PLACEMENT YEAR)" variant designations added to "Award Types and Structural Requirements" table and included in **"Bracketed Award Titles" section on p 17**
- Sections 10 and 11 updated to separate design consideration for EPWO and Top up / Completions awards.
- Appendix 1 added (Principles for Option Module Design)
- Section 9.15 Credit levels and use of lower level credits
- Section 12 updated panel composition, 3rd bullet point to add Directors of Review & Approvals and Academic Development Officers and 4th bullet point to note that professional services representative is 'as required'
- Section 9.9 amended (paragraph 3 added).

16.3 [Additional Amendments](#)

- 08/07/16 following consultation with PFNA steering group amendments to add references to Single Award Frameworks made to: Sections 9.4, 9.5 and table entitled 'Award Types and Structural Requirements' on page 19, new Section 9.9 added.

- 07/06/2022 following Chair's Action taken by Education Committee, all references to students receiving bracketed awards, unless it is an integrated degree, have been removed.
- 09/11/2025 Changes made to reference the 2024 UK Quality Code and Office for Students.