



Summary			
<p>The policy outlines the structural principles for programme design at the University of Bristol. This includes the five key elements: standard size of units; arrangement and format of units; mandatory and optional units; level integrity and sharing of units.</p> <p>The guiding principles are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure coherence with attention to student progression through levels • Reduce assessment volumes and workloads for students and staff • Create space and thinking time through simple, consistent, harmonised approaches • Facilitate programme-level approaches and programme-level assessments • Facilitate joint programmes, interdisciplinarity and shared units • Optimise timetabling and space usage • Avoid time-consuming exceptions and unevenness in student experience • Provide some flexibility to accommodate different disciplines and types of programmes • Strengthen cohort identity and students' shared appreciation of the discipline through managed student choice • Enable the University to operate within its resources, especially time, space, and staffing 			
Scope - this document applies to:			
UG and PGT students			
For applicants entering in:	2024/25	Applies to academic year:	2024/25 onwards
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Keywords	Units; Credit Points; Size; Shape; Mandatory; Optional		

Transition Policy for Programme Structures

Key Elements

There are five key elements outlined in full in the policy. These are:

Standard size of units	Sets out standard credit weightings
Arrangement and format of units (year-long, semester, block)	Aligns units within teaching blocks, and sets out permissible combinations
Mandatory and optional units	Sets minimum parameters
Level integrity	Standard expectations for levels
Sharing of units	Guidance for sharing units across programmes

1. Standard size of units

All UK higher education degrees come under the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications which stipulate the credit weightings and stages of a degree programme. These represent the progressive achievements of students in relation to standards and learning outcomes, some of which also link to professional accreditation. These are:

- Levels 4-6 in undergraduate programmes (UG): 120 credit points per year
- Level 7: for taught postgraduate programmes (PGT): 180 credit points¹

Each credit notionally represents 10 hours of study for a student. In years which are divided into two semesters or teaching blocks, the split between each half of the taught component should be even. In both UG and PGT programmes, each semester typically contains 60 credits.

Policy:

- All conventional² UG units on modular programmes are 20 credits long, or a multiple of 20 credits.
- All conventional PGT units on modular programmes are 20 or 30 credits long, or a multiple of 20 credits.
- Taught units are evenly balanced across each semester (60 credits per semester).
- Programmes will not offer, and students will not take, more or fewer credits than the standard 120 (undergraduate) or 180 (standard postgraduate) tariff in any programme year ('level').

Rationale:

- These arrangements balance breadth with a manageable volume of assessment.
- A standard approach facilitates sharing of units, joint honours, and interdisciplinary working
- Optimises timetabling and space usage.

2. Arrangement of units and combinations

Policy:

- A limited mix of different unit formats and sizes is permitted

¹ The University also operates a small number of PGT programmes of other sizes.

² Non-conventional units are study abroad, dissertation, research project, and placement units.

- The size and shape of units should fit the purpose of the unit of study
- All on-campus students will experience weekly in-person formal teaching on taught units throughout teaching blocks³:

The following arrangements of units and credit points (cp) are possible and permitted:

- 3 x 20cp units in Teaching Block 1
- Up to 3 x 20cp units in Teaching Block 2

- Up to 1 x 40cp unit in TB1
- Up to 1 x 40cp unit in TB2

- 1 x 20cp unit in TB1A⁴ AND 1 x 20cp unit in TB1B⁵ (block teaching model)
- 1 x 20cp unit in TB2C⁶ AND 1 x 20cp unit in TB2D⁷ (block teaching model)

- 1 x 60cp unit in TB1 – only for placements or projects
- 1 x 60cp unit in TB2 – only for placements or projects
- 1 x 60cp postgraduate dissertation/project unit (in 180cp programme years)

Year-long (TB4) units

- 1 x 120cp unit or 2 x 60cp units – only for placements and study abroad years⁸
- 2 x 20cp units (requires FED permission to permit a single 20cp TB4 unit) OR, to accommodate projects/dissertations, practical (typically laboratory) and language teaching, 4 x 20cp units
- Up to 2 x 40cp units⁹ – normally for projects/dissertations, practical (typically laboratory) and language teaching
- Where 2 x 40cp, or 4 x 20cp TB4 units appear in a programme year, they must be balanced by 1 x 20cp unit in each teaching block)
- Other combinations of 20cp and 40cp units to a maximum of 80cp in any year, where year-long units are academically appropriate to support skills or project development; teaching and assessment to be balanced through the year

30 credit point units

M-level units in taught postgraduate programmes and the final year of integrated Master's programmes only:

30cp units are possible where this facilitates deeper engagement with subject matter appropriate at this level, but must be arranged to allow a balance of student work through the taught element of the programme, i.e. pairs of 30cp units in either or both teaching blocks, or as TB4 units. 30cp units should be restricted to programmes, or groups of programmes, which do not share units with other programmes based around the university's standard 20/40cp patterns. On programmes where 30cp units are being developed from 15 credit units, redesign will be necessary to avoid

³ Excludes distance learning programmes. In person contact hours should align with university norms. Dissertation and project units are expected to include some scheduled contact hours, though these need not be weekly. Placement units should also schedule regular opportunities for students to be in contact with Bristol staff.

⁴ The first half of TB1 = TB1A

⁵ The second half of TB1 = TB1B

⁶ The first half of TB2 = TB2C

⁷ The second half of TB2 = TB2D

⁸ TB4 placements of other sizes (60cp, 80cp) are also permitted, to be balanced by other non-TB4 units.

⁹ TB4 60cp project units are also permitted, to be balanced by at least 40cp of non-TB4 units.

compartmentalised design. Support is available from AQPO, BILT, and the Curriculum Enhancement team.

Projects and dissertation units in MRes, taught doctoral and other programmes with specific regulations:

To reflect the significance of projects/dissertations in MRes and certain other programmes with specific regulations, these units may be of a larger size which is compatible with the standard size of the accompanying taught units.

Rationale:

- Some agreed flexibility in the format of units enables innovation in design, and caters to the wide range of disciplines on offer at Bristol
- Larger credit units enable depth of study and challenge, at PGT level and for research or placement activities
- Block teaching is permissible for immersive and intensive topics of study
- Limited year-long units are permitted to enable students to have longer periods of study where this is necessary.

3. Mandatory and optional units

The combination of mandatory and optional units across degree programmes varies across the university. Some professionally regulated programmes consist almost exclusively of mandatory units. In other programmes, optionality is a central feature of the discipline. It facilitates student choice, allows for broader disciplinary coverage, and links to academics' research interests, fulfilling our ambition for research-rich education. Programme design needs to ensure that we do not over-promise on options and that options are deliverable and viable.

The design of programmes needs to ensure coherence, develop cohort identity, and provide for a shared academic focus, while at the same time enabling students to explore areas of interest through options. Programmes should seek to develop clusters of options and pathways through the years of UG study for students to deepen their understanding of an area of the discipline, increasing in challenge through the degree. Proposals for optional and mandatory units need to balance the need for coherence and choice.

Policy:

- Across three-year UG degrees, there are at least five mandatory units,¹⁰ or the equivalent of 100 credit points out of 360 credits. On four-year degrees (integrated masters) there are at least six (120 credit points). This means about one third of each student's taught UG degree is mandatory.
- In first undergraduate years, it is recommended that at least 40 credits are mandatory to build cohort identity.
- Programmes have discretion to distribute the remaining mandatory 60 credit units through the UG degree, but it is recommended that at least one mandatory unit is included in each year.
- PGT programmes must incorporate at least one mandatory unit.
- Programmes may wish to develop clusters of options across years constituting pathways for students.

¹⁰ For technical reasons, mandatory units may use a maximum of two unit codes. Separate codes are only used when students must select (a) between two direct alternatives (e.g. they must complete either beginners or post A-level variants of a subject) which are not in practice options for the student, or (b) one of two defined supporting activity strands that accompany the whole-cohort teaching that forms the majority of the unit's delivery.

- All units need to be financially viable, with the number of students making a unit viable to be determined by faculty. This calculation should examine the number of students on a unit and balance between student fees and cost of running the unit.

Rationale:

- Ensures coherent design and overarching programme philosophy
- Facilitates academic focus of a degree
- Seeks to build cohort identity
- Enables student choice and pursuit of varied interests
- Builds on research strengths to develop research-rich education
- Provides a realistic set of choices for students.

4. Level integrity

The UK degree framework outlines a system of levels where students learn at increasing sophistication, challenge, and independence as they progress through UG degrees and continue at Master's level. On many programmes, optional units are offered to students at different levels to facilitate choice and increase the viability of options. There is a balance to be struck between choice, viability, cohort-identity, and progression. This policy seeks to balance these competing concerns.

Policy:

- As a standard principle, units should be taught to a single level.
- Where this is not possible, students on PGT programmes may take 1 x 20cp undergraduate unit
- Undergraduate students may take 1 x 20cp unit from a lower level at each stage of the programme – excepting students in the final year of an integrated master's programme who are required to take all 120cp at level M for the award.
- The same assessment may not operate across units badged at different levels and should be tailored to challenge at the level of the student.
- In general, increasing word lengths is not an adequate way of levelling up a unit's assessment.

Rationale:

- Enables some flexibility and sharing of units across cohorts
- Focuses on the academic rigour expected as students progress through a degree
- Ensures cohort identity is not compromised.

5. Sharing of units

Each programme of study must have a distinct and cohesive core of its own units. There is additional value for students in undertaking units which share cross-disciplinary expertise. Given the aspirations of the Bristol Futures Curriculum Framework, we want to promote some sharing of units between programmes in the interests of fostering interdisciplinary insights about global challenges, for example.

Policy:

- Units can be shared within cognate groups of programmes, including families of joint honours programmes.
- By agreement with the owning school, units may be added to the specifications of other schools' programmes.
- Some units may be designated as university-, faculty- or school-wide units and made generally available across the programmes owned by the relevant organisation level.

- The delivery and organisation of each unit is the responsibility of the owning school; decisions about the progression and awards of individual students remain with the school which owns the student's programme.
- Where units are shared, all participating cohorts should be subject to the same expectations and timescales; where this cannot be achieved, separate parallel units must be created for different cohorts.
- Individual students may only take units listed as a part of their programme or which are designated as university-, faculty- or school-wide units.

Rationale:

- To facilitate interdisciplinary study by students
- To promote Bristol Futures and language units to a wider constituency of students
- To ensure that students have a wider learning experience than in their home programme without compromising cohort identity.