Programme Statements of Purpose

Defining and regularly reviewing the purpose of a degree programme can strengthen the shared understanding of the programme among staff and therefore contribute to clarifying standards and expectations for students and staff engaged in the programme.

The **Statement of Purpose** should encapsulate, succinctly, the nature of the postgraduate programme such that anyone reading it is clear why the programme exists (purpose) and what makes it worth undertaking (value). It should be an expression of the shared understanding of the nature of the degree agreed by all those engaged in its design and teaching.

An applicant-facing Statement of Purpose can clarify ....

**Graduate-ness**
A Statement of Purpose may outline the type of graduate the programme hopes to produce. This is valuable in clarifying the utility of the programme for prospective students.

**Distinctiveness**
The Statement of Purpose can highlight the distinctive aspects of the programme. These may include connections to current research carried out by programme staff; particular subject areas covered and skills developed; connections to accreditation from professional bodies; or links to national or international qualification frameworks.

**Value**
An applicant-facing statement can serve to make explicit that which is too often implicit i.e. exactly what the teaching, learning, student work and assessment is for. Such a statement can make clear what students will gain from completing this particular programme and therefore why the programme is worthwhile.

**Expectations**
Stating the learning demands and challenges that will occur during the programme can be valuable in clarifying level expectations for students and in providing them with an incentive to engage. They should capture a sense of attractive challenge.
Example Statements of Purpose

Masters in International Humanitarian Affairs

This interdisciplinary Masters programme will provide professionals with the opportunity to reflect on core debates, policy and practice issues in international humanitarian affairs, whilst also strengthening their abilities to operate knowledgeably and decisively in areas subject to violent conflict and war, natural hazards and complex emergencies. As a result of the programme, students will be able to (re)enter the employment sector better equipped to play an informed role in the humanitarian arena in terms of both policy-making and operations. Graduates will also be in a position to advance the boundaries of knowledge and understanding of humanitarian practice through engaging in international communities of learning and research.

Masters in Medieval History

The MA in Medieval History offers an unparalleled opportunity to study at one of the world’s leading centres of expertise in medieval history. The degree is equally suitable for students who wish to pursue doctoral research or careers in teaching, public history, or archives, or for those with enthusiasm for the subject but not yet a clear career direction. The University of York’s Medieval MA programmes (in History, Literature, Archaeology, Stained Glass) are some of the most popular and sought after, making York the largest centre in the UK for medieval masters level study across the Humanities disciplines. The degree offers both thorough research training and the opportunity to explore new approaches to the history of medieval Britain and Europe with seminars led by experts in the area. You will be introduced to a wide range of sources and approaches from across the period. You will be able to participate in the lively scholarly community surrounding the active graduate school, and also have full access to the Centre for Medieval Studies and its active programme of seminars, conferences and reading groups involving both staff and graduate students. (Adapted from website) MA Medieval studies

And ……. How not to write a statement of purpose

a) express the aims of the department as a whole, rather than the aims of the specific programme of study;
b) describe the structure and content of the teaching rather than the intention in terms of learning;
c) list the programme learning outcomes rather than the purpose those learning outcomes are designed to achieve;
d) list generic aims which could relate to any degree programme and provide no indication of the distinctive nature or value of the programme;
e) use clumsy, bland, unreadable, ungrammatical or uninspiring statements which convey little sense of enthusiasm, coherence or intention;
f) present a lengthy business rationale for the programme which is not pitched at attracting applicants.