Programme Statements of Purpose

The Statement of Purpose should encapsulate, succinctly, the nature of the degree programme such that anyone reading it is clear why the degree 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.

Defining an applicant-facing statement of purpose or aims

**Graduate-ness**
The Statement is valuable in clarifying the utility of the programme for prospective students, their advisors, their parents, the programme team and employers.

**Distinctiveness**
It can also be valuable to use the statement of purpose to highlight aspects of distinction related to the programme. These may include connections to current research carried out by programme staff; particular subject foci and skills development, connections to accreditation from professional bodies; or links to national or international qualification frameworks.

**Value**
Pinning down the precise aims of a degree programme in 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**
A statement which outlines 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.
Shared Understanding
Defining and regularly reviewing the over-arching 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.

Some examples of draft statements of purpose:

**BSc in Natural Sciences in Nanoscience**
Nanoscience is the study and manipulation of atoms, molecules and nano-scale objects to create unique functional systems. As such, Nanoscience crosses discipline boundaries in its scope and application and this is what this interdisciplinary degree programme is designed to address. As a Nanoscience student, you will have the chance to learn about quantum and statistical mechanics; the thermodynamics of the very small; and the arrangement of atoms and molecules in specific ways to produce new materials and systems with remarkable functions. As a result, as a graduate of the programme, you will be prepared for a range of careers in and beyond the boundaries of chemistry, electronics, physics and other related disciplines and, more broadly, will be in a position to contribute a valuable outlook and way of thinking to society at large through the pursuit of interdisciplinary knowledge.

**SPS statement of purpose**
The BA in Social and Political Sciences aims to equip you with the social scientific knowledge and skills that are essential to understanding and meeting the challenges of a complex, inter-connected global society. While the SPS degree is strongly interdisciplinary, it is distinctive in allowing students to design their own programme of study alongside a common foundational and research methods skills programme. Graduates emerge as well rounded and well-trained social scientists with excellent analytical and communication skills and with the essential knowledge and critical understanding needed for higher degrees and graduate careers in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors.

**BA Sociology and Education**
The Sociology and Education programme (BASE) explores the social processes and educational contexts that shape and characterise learning and development in contemporary societies. As such, the Sociology and Education programme explores educational issues and cultural trends from multiple perspectives that range from the individual to the institutional, and from the local to the global. As a Sociology and Education student, therefore, you will develop the ability to analyse educational topics and social practices in critical and complex ways, drawing on the richness of multiple disciplines to do so. You will build the skills needed to follow your curiosity about, and challenge, commonly held assumptions about the ways societies work and the learning cultures that shape them. You will be enabled to make links between theory, policy and practice implications across the disciplines studied in the programme.
BEng Electronic Engineering
BEng Electronic Engineering (H610 (3-year))
BEng Electronic Engineering (with a year in industry) (H611 (4-year))

The electronics industry has revolutionised life in the last few decades, and continues to push the boundaries of the physical world to produce faster, more powerful and more cost-effective technologies that enable products such as personal computers, mobile phones and the Internet. This programme provides a solid core of knowledge in the discipline, allowing students to choose specialist options for deeper study later in the degree, providing considerable flexibility for you to develop your subject-specific knowledge according to your own developing interests. Electronics is an exciting and fascinating world of large-scale projects with ever-increasing demands for solutions and innovation. To succeed in such an environment, graduates need to be knowledgeable, highly-skilled, professional and adept at communication and project management.

Drawing on the expertise of the teaching and research staff at York, and including individual and group projects at every stage of the degree to develop practical, organisational, management and business skills, this programme will provide you with precisely the abilities and approaches you will need to operate with confidence – as a designer, operator or manager - in the challenging world of Electronics. As with all our undergraduate degrees, the BEng Electronic Engineering is fully accredited by the Institute of Engineering and Technology.

Computer Science

This programme produces highly competent graduates who are equipped to become leaders in computer science with a specialism in embedded real-time systems, and who understand the implications of their work both for themselves and for society as a whole. Through the programme, you will see two integrated strands of work which help you to develop both your computational thinking abilities and your skills as an engineer. It is the combination of these two areas that will make you attractive to employers, enabling you to make an immediate contribution when you move into employment. The programme will provide you with a solid foundation in the principles and practices of computer science and embedded systems, including coding, mathematics and basic engineering; with breadth in computer science and embedded systems; and with advanced training in focussed areas of your choice covering topics such as the theory, modelling, design and implementation of embedded real-time systems. You will understand engineering trade-offs that cross disciplines, for example between hardware and software, and you will be able to participate effectively in multidisciplinary teams. You will also develop the skill to contribute professionally to solving complex commercial and industrial engineering problems.

By choosing the Integrated Masters (MEng) programme, rather than a Bachelors (BSc/BEng), you will have the opportunity to study a larger number of advanced optional modules, allowing a broader exploration of the discipline, and to work on a larger final-year project, enabling greater depth of independent study in an area that you have chosen yourself.

History of Art

This programme equips you with the ability to analyse images and material objects, skills which are of increasing importance in today’s visual world. Art historians study works of art and architecture in their historical contexts to understand who creates and who views them, how and why they are used, and what they reveal about human culture. History of Art is an
international discipline which encourages you to think about art and architecture in local, national and global contexts. Like other subjects in the humanities, History of Art requires you to develop a body of knowledge, formulate complex arguments and communicate ideas effectively.’

Perhaps ... 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 of the programme for the learner;
c) list the programme learning outcomes rather than the purpose i.e. what 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.