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PROGRAMME APPROVAL PROCESS

Summary

The University follows a three stage programme planning process for the consideration and approval of major new developments to the curriculum. The first stage consists of initial collection of information and data which can be obtained from the Planning Department. The second stage is for a proposal to be submitted to the Curriculum Strategy Committee (CSC) to consider issues of strategy and sustainability. If it is supported by the Committee it may be granted 'approval in principle', at which point it may be advertised 'subject to validation' and can move forward into the third stage which is the full development of the curriculum. All new taught programmes involve the development of the programme specification, including module specifications, which will be considered by a University Approval Panel.

The relevant documentation is available on the [Academic Office](#) web pages.

Any new programme that is to be delivered in collaboration with an external partner is subject to a separate [process for approving a partner institution](#).

STAGE 1: Initial proposal

1. The programme planning process is initiated by the academic department who identifies a new opportunity that has academic merit and is worth pursuing. New proposals should be discussed and considered within the academic department, where academic colleagues will be able to provide advice on curriculum development and content, and fit with the academic department portfolio. This occurs at a very early stage before any work is undertaken to develop a curriculum and associated paperwork. New opportunities will be identified through the annual planning process and included in the academic department Business Plan, and may arise from new external funding opportunities and collaborative ventures in year. Where the proposal involves negotiations with external partners it is especially important that the discussion with the Partnerships Office is initiated at the outset.
2. In order to identify process, decisions, and information required, the proposal is discussed with the Academic Office (basic information about the proposal is required at this stage). The Academic Office is able to support programme teams in managing credit-bearing curriculum development and will be able to provide guidance on the appropriate process and documentation required.

STAGE 2: Preparation and consideration of the Business Case

3. The proposal, in the form of a Business Case (and costings) is presented to CSC. The information required is driven by the need to determine its sustainability, academic strength and contribution to institutional priorities. Proposals must be approved by CSC before marketing and detailed development of the curriculum can begin.
4. The Business Case should provide a reliable basis on which CSC can decide whether or not to approve a proposal for further development. It is important that the Business Case

is informed by full consultation as outlined on the template. The Business Case must include costings which provide information about income and expenditure.

5. The Head of Department will consider the detail of the proposal, in terms of academic merit and resourcing implications, and decide whether it should go forward for CSC scrutiny. Submission of the paperwork to CSC confirms acceptance by the Head of Department of the resourcing implications. It is expected that the majority of proposals will have been outlined in the academic department Business Plan for the year, although it is recognised that some will arise in-year from new unplanned developments in the external environment or from new funding opportunities.
6. The proposer or nominee is invited to present the Business Case to CSC. CSC will consider the Business Case and the outcomes will be communicated to the academic department. The outcomes include:
 - Approval in principle (with or without conditions)
 - Request for further information or to revise Business Case
 - Not approved

If conditions have been set by CSC these will need to be satisfied, before the programme can move forward to marketing and full development.

7. The approval method for the proposed programme is determined by CSC as either:
 - Method A (full new programme approval)
 - Method B (applied to programmes that meet a certain criteria in terms of new content and type of provision)
8. The programme can be marketed as 'subject to validation'. Deadlines by when new programmes must be approved are set by CSC. If the programme is not fully approved within twelve months the approval in principle status may need to be revisited.
9. Key departments, including Admissions, Recruitment, Registry, Communications, and the Library are informed the programme has been approved for full development.

STAGE 3: Approval documentation and event

Approval Method A

10. In order to approve a new programme, a University Approval Panel will be convened. The programme convener (designate) should nominate two external advisers who will be panel members and scrutinise the proposal. The external advisers will normally be senior academics from a comparable academic department in another UK University, with relevant subject expertise. In some cases, it may be appropriate to appoint a senior academic from outside the UK, or where professional/industry input is key to the programme, a senior employee from the relevant profession/industry.
11. The external adviser should be nominated on the basis of subject expertise and familiarity with comparable programmes elsewhere. Examples of this experience might include previous experience of panel membership in programme approval/validation; programme convener for a comparable programme; or membership of a PSRB. The externals' independence from the academic department and the University is crucial. They should not be a former member of staff, student, or a current external examiner for the University nor should she/he have acted in this capacity in the last five years.

12. The programme convener should make initial contact with the nominees to ensure that they are willing to take part, and will then need to submit the CVs to the Academic Office. They will be considered by the Deputy Provost for approval and if supported, reported to the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee.
13. The programme team should collate staff CVs, produce a context paper, and develop programme and module specifications with guidance from the following departments:

Department	
Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Unit	Advice on learning, teaching and assessment strategies for the programme, as well as applying the University's frameworks on design and delivery, assessment and graduate attributes. This may include a programme planning away day.
Academic Office	Advice on the documentation and procedure for the approval process.
Digital Learning Services	Advice on blended learning techniques, e-learning and study skills.
Library	Advice on reading lists and hard copy and electronic library resources. Programme teams should complete the Library Services Resources Requirements Form in collaboration with the Library's Academic Engagement Team.

14. Quality control for the programme documentation and internal academic scrutiny rest with the Head of Department. For example, this may be through a nominated individual with responsibility for learning and teaching or through the academic department's Learning, Teaching and Quality Group. The purpose of this scrutiny is to ensure that the documentation is at a standard to go forward for external scrutiny. This should happen in sufficient time before the scheduled University Approval Panel meeting as the documentation will need to be submitted to the Academic Office approximately 2.5 weeks before the date of that event. The confirmation to proceed to programme approval/periodic review form should be completed and submitted together with the other documentation to the Academic Office.
15. The Academic Office will liaise with the programme convener (designate) and the Head of Department to provide guidance and support, and will advise on the administrative aspects of completing the documents, e.g. where to obtain new module codes.
16. The University Approval Panel determines whether a new programme should be approved.

The Panel comprises:

Chair	An experienced senior member of academic staff
External Advisers	Two external advisors with subject expertise
Internal Members	Two members of academic staff from within the University
A Student Representative	One student representative
Secretary	A member of the Academic Office

17. The agreed agenda includes time for the panel to meet with those who have prepared/will deliver the programme. Normally, full attendance by the programme team is expected. It is the responsibility of the programme convener (designate) to issue the

invitations/agenda to their team members. Typically, the day's schedule will follow the following outline:

- 10.00 – 11.30 Private meeting of the Panel
- 11.30 – 11.45 Meeting with academic department (if required)
- 11.45 – 12.45 Resource visit (as appropriate)
- 12.45 – 13.15 Panel meeting and lunch
- 13.15 – 15.15 Meeting with programme team
- 15.15 – 16.00 Panel meeting to discuss outcomes
- 16.00 – 16.15 Feedback

18. The outcome of the approval panel is communicated to the academic department, the outcomes include:

- Approved with no conditions/recommendations
- Approved with conditions and/or recommendations
- Not approved

All conditions must be fulfilled prior to commencement of the programme. If recommendations are not accepted the programme convener (designate) is required to give reasons. The panel will approve a new programme for a maximum of five years.

19. Once all conditions have been satisfied the response is sent to the Chair for approval in full.

20. The programme will then be monitored annually through the Programme Annual Review Process (PAR) and will be subject to periodic review every five years.

Approval Method B

21. Whilst it is vital that formal and rigorous approval processes are used in these cases, it may not be appropriate for a full Method A University Approval Panel to be convened. Instead, Method B will be used. This alternative process is suitably rigorous, but is proportionate in relation to the amount of new material or revised content to be approved.

22. Examples of where the Method B approval process may be applied are as follows for the approval of:

- Variations on existing programmes that take existing modules as a basis for a new programme, with the addition of a small number of new modules;
- Non-degree programmes;
- Approved programmes wishing to move from combined to single degree status;
- The delivery of an existing programme by distance learning.

23. The academic department should follow point 14 above in relation to programme documentation required for the event.

24. The academic department should establish a process for consultation and internal approval of the documentation as with Method A (point 15 refers).

25. It is normal practice for the external adviser to submit their correspondence regarding the programme rather than attend the event. The external should provide information on any matters of concern and include a recommendation for approval or otherwise, and any proposed conditions and/or recommendations. The report should be sent to the Academic Office and will be forwarded to the panel and the Programme Convener (designate) who will be invited to the approval meeting to discuss the points raised in the report.
26. The University Approval Panel determines whether the revised programme should be approved.
27. The University Approval Panel will be convened and the Programme Convener (designate) should nominate one external adviser. The Panel will comprise:

Chair	An experienced senior member of academic staff
External Adviser	One external advisor with subject expertise
Internal Member	One member of academic staff from within the University
A Student Representative	One student representative
Secretary	A member of the Academic Office

28. The agreed agenda includes time for the panel to meet with those who have prepared/will deliver the programme. Normally, full attendance by the programme team is expected. It is the responsibility of the Programme Convener (designate) to issue the invitations/agenda to their team members. Typically, the day's schedule will follow the following outline.

0915 - 1015 – private meeting of the panel
 1015 - 1130 – meeting with the programme team
 1130 - 1200 – private meeting of the panel
 12.00 - 12.15 – Feedback

29. The outcome of the approval panel is communicated to the academic department, the outcomes include:
 - Approved with no conditions/recommendations
 - Approved with conditions and/or recommendations
 - Not approved

All conditions must be fulfilled prior to commencement of the programme. If recommendations are not accepted the programme convener (designate) is required to give reasons

30. Once all conditions have been satisfied the response is sent to the Chair for approval in full.
31. The programme will then be monitored annually through the Programme Annual Review Process (PAR) and will be subject to periodic review every five years.