8	PROGRAMME APPROVAL

Introduction

8.1 Programme approval / reapproval forms one element within the university's quality framework, and operates in conjunction with other elements to provide assurance to the university and to external stakeholders of the standards of awards and of the quality of the student learning experience provided within the university. Approval is the process by which the university ensures that proposed new or revised programmes meet curricular and quality requirements. Programmes are approved for delivery for a defined period (normally five years but up to a maximum of six years) and are then subject to re-approval. If a programme is not submitted for reapproval at this time, it will lapse and no further recruitment will be permitted.

8.2 Programmes in the same broad subject area may be clustered for the purposes of approval and/or reapproval, so that a number of programmes may be considered at a single event.

8.3 Unless noted otherwise, throughout this section of the regulations, the term 'approval' refers to both new and existing programmes. The term 'validation' is used for programmes where the awarding body is not the university.

Objectives

8.4 The objectives of the approval process are:
   i. to ensure that programmes offered by the university meet its curricular and quality requirements. This is achieved by:
      a. ensuring that programmes satisfy its academic standards and quality criteria
      b. ensuring that programmes meet SCQF guidelines, are in line with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, and are mapped against QAA subject benchmarks appropriately
      c. ensuring that the academic standards of programmes are comparable with those of similar programmes across the UK higher education sector
   ii. to provide opportunities for enhancing the quality of programmes through peer review.

8.5 Approval ensures that:
   a. the aims and intended learning outcomes of the programme are clearly defined
   b. the strategies for learning and teaching are clearly defined
   c. clear mechanisms for programme management and student support are in place in each academic partner and the integration of these systems, if appropriate, has been achieved
   d. an appropriate assessment strategy is in place, including mechanisms for co-ordination of assignment and assessment scheduling by the responsible academic partner to ensure that no students are advantaged or disadvantaged
   e. appropriate learning resources, guidance and access to facilities, scheduled and unscheduled, will be provided in all Home Academic Partners
   f. sufficient and appropriately qualified and experienced staff are available
   g. the overall academic integrity of a programme involving network delivery can be assured
   h. the programme structure and design demonstrates considered and appropriate implementation of relevant institutional policies and strategies.

8.6   Approval of programmes comprises three stages:
        a. planning approval (Faculty Board and Academic Council, which delegates this authority to Academic Planning Committee)
        b. Faculty approval (Dean of Faculty)
        c. approval event (approval panel).

Planning approval

8.7   Proposals for new programmes must be approved by the relevant Faculty Board before being presented to Academic Planning Committee for planning approval.

8.8   Academic Planning Committee, taking into consideration the recommendation of the Faculty Board, may decide:
        a. to grant planning approval for the proposed programme
        b. to grant planning approval for the proposed programme with recommendations for consideration by the programme development team
        c. not to grant planning approval for the proposed programme.

Peer review or advisory group

8.9   The Dean of Faculty will determine whether an Advisory Group or Peer Review process is required.

8.10   New programmes will normally only require an Advisory Group where:
        a. The award is to be accredited by a professional body
        b. The programme is within an entirely new discipline area for the university
        c. The programme will be delivered using a new mode or model of delivery for the university
        d. The programme is delivered in collaboration with an external partner.

8.11   For the majority of proposals, the peer review process will be adopted.

8.12   The peer reviewers will be confirmed by the Dean of Faculty in accordance with the guidance in Section 7. External peer reviewers are expected to be discipline experts, industry or accrediting body representatives, as appropriate. Internal peer reviewers, with their institutional perspective, should have a particular focus on areas such as strategic fit, resourcing and management, operational issues, pedagogical approaches, alignment with institutional policies and student support and engagement.

8.13   The programme leader is responsible for submitting final draft documentation to the peer reviewers in accordance with the agreed timescale.

8.14   The peer reviewers will provide feedback on the programme documentation using a template report. The programme leader will provide their response to this feedback within the relevant section of the same report.

8.15   The Associate Dean is responsible for providing written confirmation to the Dean of Faculty that:
        a. the programme is at a sufficient stage of development to go forward to an approval event, and

b. the required documentation is ready, complete and appropriate for consideration by the approval panel.

Advisory group (if required)

8.16   Membership of the Advisory Group, if one is required, will be confirmed by the chair of the Advisory Group, normally the Associate Dean in accordance with the guidance in Section 7.

8.17   The programme leader is responsible for submitting final draft documentation to the chair of the Advisory Group and to the chair of the responsible academic partner's quality committee in accordance with the agreed timescale.

8.18   The chair of the Advisory Group is responsible for providing written confirmation to the Dean of Faculty that:
a. the programme is at a sufficient stage of development to go forward to an approval event, and
b. the required documentation is ready, complete and appropriate for consideration by the approval panel.

Faculty approval

8.19   The Dean of Faculty will decide whether:
a. the programme may go forward to an approval event with no revisions/changes to the documentation, or
b. the programme should not go forward without a significant re-write and reconsideration by an Advisory Group where relevant. Specific comments about the omissions / weaknesses of the documentation must be given.

8.20   If the Dean indicates that the programme cannot go forward, they will convene a meeting with the chair of the Advisory Group or internal peer reviewer, programme leader designate and chair of the responsible academic partner's quality committee to discuss their comments and resolve any outstanding issues.

8.21   For required documentation to be submitted, see Sections 8.40 and 8.41.

Approval panel

8.22   Membership of the approval panel will be established by the Dean of Faculty (or nominee), in discussion with the chair of the responsible academic partner quality committee, and the programme leader designate.

8.23   The approval panel acts with delegated authority from the Faculty Board to approve programmes, and to set any conditions as it deems appropriate.

8.24   Panel membership should be appropriately balanced, comprising individuals who do not have a direct involvement with the provision being considered. Each panel shall include:
a. chair of the panel
b. at least one external member with subject expertise. More external members may be required if several programmes are being considered at a single event
c. at least one internal member with appropriate experience
d. a student member, from another subject area

    e. officer(s): appointed by the Head of Academic Standards and Enhancement, and where appropriate by the awarding body.

8.25   Observers may also be in attendance, with the permission of the chair of the panel.

8.26   Where appropriate, additional member(s) for the panel can be drawn from any of the following: industry, commerce, relevant employer group, or professional body.

8.27   Panel members must be independent of the programme(s) being considered for approval. No member shall have had a close association with the programme(s) (as external examiner, programme adviser or through involvement in the management of the programme) during the five years prior to the approval event.

Approval event

8.28   The date for the approval event will be established by the chair, in discussion with the officer and chair of the responsible academic partner quality committee, and the programme leader.

8.29   Members of the approval panel will receive the documentation for the proposed programme(s) at least two weeks prior to the approval event.

8.30   The schedule for the approval event will normally include the following:
    a. private panel meetings - to allow the panel to discuss the documentation received and information gathered through meetings with staff and students, and agree the final outcomes
    b. a meeting with senior management representatives of academic partners to ascertain whether the infrastructure for learning will be fully supported
    c. one or more meetings with the programme team(s) to explore various aspects of the proposed programme(s)
    d. a meeting with students where applicable, or potential students if possible (eg HN provision leading to degree provision)
    e. final meeting with programme team(s) and senior managers to provide informal feedback on likely outcomes of the approval event. These outcomes will be confirmed in writing, normally within five working days.

8.31   Approval events will normally be conducted wholly online, to enable engagement by a wide range of participants and remove geographical or other barriers to participation.

8.32   A draft report summarising the outcomes of the approval event will be circulated by the officer within two weeks of the event for comments and amendments by the panel. The chair of the panel will approve the report on behalf of the panel. The report will then be sent to the programme leader(s) to comment on factual accuracy. Any modifications to the report will be approved by the chair on behalf of the panel. The report will be circulated to the programme leader(s), the Dean of Faculty, academic partner quality manager(s), and other relevant staff.

8.33   For required documentation to be provided to the panel, see Sections 8.40 and 8.41.

Approval outcomes

8.34   The approval panel, acting with delegated authority from the Faculty Board, will determine one of the following outcomes, that the:
   a. Programme(s) be approved, for a specified period up to a maximum of six years
   b. Programme(s) be approved, for a specified period up to a maximum of six years, subject to meeting specific conditions
   c. Programme(s) should not be approved at the current time.

8.31a   **Approved unconditionally.** The approval panel may, at its discretion, determine that a programme be approved for a period of less than six years, at which point it will be subject to reapproval or will lapse.

8.31b   **Approved with conditions** - approval may be made conditional upon fulfilment of certain conditions by a specified date. In all cases, the responsibility for ensuring that such conditions are fulfilled lies with the programme leader, the relevant dean, and chair of the relevant academic partner quality committee.

8.31c   **Not approved** – in the event that the approval panel does not approve a programme, it is the responsibility of the Dean of Faculty to convene a meeting with the chair of the approval panel, programme leader designate and chair of the responsible academic partner's quality committee to decide how to proceed.

Signing off approval conditions

8.35   The approval panel will specify a date by which any conditions must be met, which should normally be no more than twelve months after the approval event. Where a longer timescale is appropriate, the period of approval should be carefully considered.

8.36   The programme leader is responsible for providing written evidence demonstrating how the conditions have been met to the officer, who will liaise with the chair of the panel. Both the chair of the panel and the officer(s) must agree they have been met.

8.37   The programme team and the panel will be informed in writing when the conditions have been met; or if deemed unmet, why the conditions are outstanding.

8.38   The programme leader is responsible for providing an electronic version of the definitive programme document to the officer once all conditions have been met.

8.39   Following the approval event, the programme leader must include an update on actions taken in response to any conditions and recommendations in their annual monitoring self-evaluation reports.

Documentation for approval

8.40   For approval of a new programme the following documentation must be submitted by the programme team:
   a. programme specification (which when finalised after the approval event will become the definitive programme document)
   b. module descriptors
   c. library resource reading lists (see Section 8.39)
   d. draft student handbook
   e. Peer review or advisory group report
   f. operational handbook (for external partnerships only)

The approval panel will also receive:

g. confirmation from the Dean of Faculty that they are satisfied that the programme is ready to go forward to approval

h. guidance for approval panels

i. external panel members will also have access to *Academic Standards and Quality Regulations* and general information about the university.

8.41   For reapproval of an existing programme the following documentation must be submitted by the programme team:

a. critical review of the programme since its last approval, including any modification made during that time, and drawing on student and stakeholder feedback, outcomes from monitoring and review activity and analysis of relevant KPIs and trends

b. summary of main changes to the programme being proposed and rationale

c. revised programme specification and, where appropriate, module descriptors

d. library resource reading list (see Section 8.39)

e. draft student handbook

The approval panel will also be sent:

f. guidance for approval panels

g. external panel members will also have access to *Academic Standards and Quality Regulations* and general information about the university.

Learning resources

8.42   During development, programme teams will identify an appropriate threshold level of resource required to be provided by Home Academic Partners.

8.43   Levels of resource must be defined for adequate and appropriate learning resources and facilities, including specialist equipment where appropriate. This will depend on the subject area of the programme and the mode of delivery.

8.44   Programme teams must supply specific information on resources for the following areas in their documentation:

Library resources reading list:

a. all core and recommended texts or journal subscriptions

b. electronic resources, including electronic journals, access to databases, CD-roms, etc

c. availability of these resources.

Specialist facilities and equipment (within programme specification or module descriptor):

a. all specialist facilities and equipment, including software and other resources used by students

b. availability of these facilities and equipment.

8.45   The chair of the quality committee at each Home Academic Partner and the university librarian must sign off the library resource document before approval.

8.46   The approval panel will endorse or modify the levels of resource that each Home Academic Partner must provide.

8.47   During the approval event, the approval panel may undertake a tour of the academic and support facilities at the responsible academic partner. The approval panel may, as a

condition of approval, require site visit(s) to be undertaken at some or all of the Home Academic Partners.