



# Programme Design and Approval

Procedure for Programme Design and Approval, including Academic Approval of Partnership Delivery

Responsible Office	Academic Governance and Policy
Responsible Officer	Head of Academic Governance and Policy
Approving Authority	Academic Board
Date of Approval	25th January 2022
Effective Date	25th January 2022
Related Procedures	N/A
Related University Policies	N/A
Amended (if applicable)	
Supersedes	Programme Approval Handbook
Next Review Date	January 2025

## Introduction

The process is designed to meet external regulatory requirements as well as internal strategic and operational objectives. Firstly, it meets the following conditions of the Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England (Office for Students, 2018):

- B1: to ensure that the students registered on each higher education course receive a high quality academic experience. A high quality academic experience includes but is not limited to ensuring that each higher education course: is up to date; provides educational challenge; is coherent; is effectively delivered; and requires students to develop relevant skills.
- B5: to ensure that, in respect of any relevant awards granted to students who complete a higher education course provided by, or on behalf of, the provider (whether or not the provider is the awarding body): any standards set appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards; and awards are only granted to students whose knowledge and skills appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards
- C1: to demonstrate that in developing and implementing its policies, procedures and terms and conditions, the provider has given due regard to relevant guidance about how to comply with consumer protection law.

Secondly, the process is designed to ensure that the University's Educational Aims and Objectives are met, as set out in its Education Strategy. The Aims include ensuring that *'programmes of study are inspiring and relevant, operating at the intersection of professional, creative and sustainable approaches to real world issues'*. The Educational Objectives include ensuring that *'the professional application of our programmes and the employability of our graduates is central to programme design and delivery, with opportunities for experiential learning and skills acquisition, application and articulation throughout each programme'*.

The principles that underpin the design and operation of the Programme Design and Approval process are therefore as follows:

- **Proportionality:** the process for programme approval takes a proportionate approach to risk in programme development. For example, new programmes that bring higher or lower risk have elements of the process added or removed accordingly: some programmes delivered by collaborative partners, or programmes proposed in a new discipline area may be approved by a dedicated Approval Panel; a slimmed down approach will be taken for programmes that are being re-designed or include existing modules.
- **Listening to Students:** student co-creation is a central part of programme design and approval. Students Course Reps work closely alongside academic staff to design programmes through a process of co-creation, and representatives from the Student Union are members of the Curriculum

Committee where final approval of new programmes is given. Student co-creation in curriculum development is intended to be a process of engaging staff and students to work together in partnership to design, develop and enhance curriculum. Students will be involved in the programme design process as a minimum at its start and at the end as members of the programme design team; it is up to schools and students to decide the appropriate level of student involvement in the 'middle' part of the programme design process; a minimum of two students should normally be involved in the process who are either Student Representatives or drawn from the wider student body (usually on similar programmes). Programme re-designs are driven by student feedback and additionally require affected students to give their consent, in accordance with the Modifications procedure.

- **Engaging Academic Staff:** Academic Governance and Policy and Portfolio and Planning teams provide support for academic staff, tailored to each proposal. They develop timelines, support the drafting of the business case and academic documentation, and signpost proposers to other teams where additional support may be needed. Briefing meetings with programme proposers support the exchange of information about proposals and the requirements of the process. Document development is managed through a central Programme Development Space supporting an exchange of views with academic staff and central stakeholders through the design stage rather than simply at approval stage.
- **Data Driven:** the provision of appropriate data by the Portfolio and Planning and Central Data teams provides proposers of new programmes with an understanding of market demand, both in terms of the applicant recruitment pipeline and labour market intelligence. Such data informs the business case for proposals as well as subsequent curriculum development, enabling a demand-led approach to the introduction of new programmes.
- **Enabling Enhancement:** the process of engagement between proposers and internal and external stakeholders (including External Advisors, who may be employers) provides enhancement of the design process, facilitating a culture of innovation, creativity, currency and continuous improvement.
- **Providing assurance to Governors:** the oversight of approval by Curriculum Committee provides assurance to Governors of the robustness of the process.

The process consists of two stages: the first stage involves the development and approval of a business case for the programme. This involves market research to indicate its potential to recruit students and identification of any significant resource issues. The second stage is the development of the programme, by a team comprising academic staff from the School(s) concerned, student co-creators, an

external advisor and staff from relevant central teams, leading to approval from Curriculum Committee.

## Procedure

### A. Business Case Approval

#### Procedure

#### **A1. Idea Generation and Early Scoping**

Portfolio and Planning should be contacted by members of staff to discuss early ideas and proposals for new programmes. The Head of School appoints a Proposer, who is the academic lead within the school responsible for developing the new provision. For partnerships this should be a BSU member of staff, and is likely to be the Link Tutor. A Scoping Instruction is completed by the Head of School to outline the description of the proposal and identify the Proposer.

A1a. Additional proposals may come from Portfolio and Planning following the completion of specific market research and the identification of opportunities for new or revised programmes. These will be referred to the most appropriate Head/s of School for review. If it is then decided to proceed, the process outlined in A1 is followed.

#### **A2. Market Research**

Portfolio and Planning undertake new or further Market Research as required; ensuring that members of the External Affairs Unit, Admissions and Recruitment, and Careers and Employability are consulted. Market research considers title, level, format, recruitment and employment prospects and relevant metrics such as Proceed and NSS and their equivalents for PGT provision. .

#### **A3. Decision to Progress**

Portfolio and Planning informs the Head of School, PVC for Academic Planning and the Vice-Provost if the market research is favourable and whether further development should progress.

#### **A4. Briefing and Development Space Set Up**

If the decision is that the proposal is progressed, Portfolio and Planning undertake a briefing with the Proposer on the Business Approval requirements and submission process, including:

- The timeline, including development, stakeholder review, approval, marketing and admission points, resourcing and staff appointments, and first cohort entry.
- The Submission process, including Business Approval and Academic Approval
- Market Research findings, including discussion of the Award Title
- Target recruitment numbers
- Initial resource scoping
- Access to the Programme Development Space

- Identification of other academic members of the programme design team

If the proposal is for franchised/validated provision, a member of the Centre for Educational Partnerships attends this briefing.

Portfolio and Planning set up Programme Development Space on Google Drive; populating files with all blank templates for the Business Case Approval and Academic Approval stages of the process; and setting up access/editing rights for Proposer/School, Portfolio and Planning, Academic Governance and Policy.

#### **A5. Existing, validated and franchised provision; new discipline areas**

The Head of Academic Governance and Policy will agree with the Head of Academic Portfolio a proportional approach to this process for partly-existing, redesigned provision, or provision in a new discipline area, that takes into account the specifics of the proposal and the level of risk.

The Associate PVC for Educational Partnerships will agree with the Head of Academic Governance and Policy a proportional approach to this process for franchised and validated programmes and delivery arrangements, that takes into account the specifics of the proposal and the level of risk. This may include:

- For higher risk proposals, the use of Approval Panels acting on behalf of Curriculum Committee for the approval of the new programme and any delivery arrangements. The report of the Approval Panel event, including any Conditions set, would be submitted for receipt to the Curriculum Committee at its next meeting.
- For lower risk proposals, the use of desk based reviews (if required) by Academic Governance and Policy of proposed delivery arrangements by partners; for consideration by the Curriculum Committee alongside the programme approval submission. Curriculum Committee Chairs action may be taken where required.

For franchised and validated provision, both the academic programme and the delivery arrangements (the 'Academic Approval') must be approved by Curriculum Committee or an Approval Panel convened on its behalf.

#### **A6. Stakeholder Liaison**

Portfolio and Planning notify wider stakeholders<sup>1</sup> that the proposal is being progressed, including proposed timelines and providing viewing access to the Programme Development Space. Stakeholders to be notified of any variation to the process for existing, validated and

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<sup>1</sup> Academic Governance and Policy; PVC Student Experience; Head of Schools; Heads of Schools Administrative and Technical Services; Technical Manager; Estates; Library and Learning Services; IT Services; Finance; Immigration Compliance and Advice; Admissions; External Affairs Unit; Recruitment; Data and Insights Service; Student and Registry Services; Careers; PVC Research; APVC Collaborative Provision, VP Education, SU President, Students Union Deputy CEO

franchised provision, or new discipline areas. The Proposer/School is asked to liaise with Stakeholders to highlight any significant resource implications.

#### **A7. Business Case Drafting and Approval**

Portfolio and Planning to provide advice and support to Proposer/Head of School in drafting the Business Case in the Programme Development Space.

Head of Academic Portfolio briefs the PVC Academic Planning and Vice-Provost on the Business Case; who then recommend approval to the Vice-Chancellor or recommend revision and resubmission, or refusal.

If Business Case Approval is granted, this is confirmation that the University wishes to offer the programme, and will therefore commit resources to further development of the programme. Any requests for resources or recruitment of new staff will be contingent upon adequate application numbers.

#### **A8. Notification to Stakeholders**

Portfolio and Planning to liaise with School to update timeline and identify External Advisor and Student Course Rep; set up Academic Approval briefing meeting with Academic Governance and Policy; and notify wider stakeholders of Business Case Approval and Marketing Approval/Conditions if required.

Portfolio and Planning to set up a meeting for proposers and wider stakeholder group to plan resourcing.

#### **A9. Marketing Approval and Recruitment Activities**

Marketing Approval and Activities may take place at any point after the Business Case Approval.

The Head of Academic Portfolio considers marketing and recruitment conditions; including whether marketing can proceed, enquiries can be registered and applications can be opened. This is considered at the point of submission of the Business Case Approval, with a recommendation accompanying the Business Case Approval if appropriate; and will depend on whether elements of the 'material information' for the proposal have both been established and are unlikely to change.

A principal condition for marketing will normally be the satisfactory completion of a Programme Information Document, which will contain sufficient detail for setting up web-pages, SITS and UCAS.

The Head of Academic Portfolio will make a recommendation (with or without Conditions) in respect of Marketing Approval at the same time as the Business Case Approval; or at any point during the Academic Approval stage. The Head of Academic Portfolio will also confirm when any Conditions set for Marketing Approval have been met.

Any amendments to programme award titles after the completion of the Programme Information Document to be approved by the PVC Academic Planning.

**Marketing Approval is defined as opening marketing, enquiries and/or applications for a new programme. No offers can be made on new programmes until Academic Approval has been granted.**

Portfolio and Planning will be responsible for ensuring that the Proposer, Head of School, stakeholders and any relevant partners are aware whether a proposal has received Marketing Approval, a reminder of the definition of this (as above).

Portfolio and Planning will also be responsible for liaising with the School, External Affairs Unit and Admissions and Recruitment to ensure that appropriate web-pages are set up and actions taken (including SITS and UCAS set-up).

Portfolio and Planning will monitor student applications and liaise with the Proposer/School, PVC Academic Planning and Vice Provost to confirm programme launch date.

External Affairs Unit to check any changes or updates to marketing material with the Head of Portfolio and Planning whilst programmes are in development; to ensure information remains accurate and up to date.

## B. Academic Approval

### **B1. Academic Governance and Policy Briefing**

Academic Governance and Policy to meet with Proposer/Programme Team, and the Student Course Rep to brief them on the Academic Approval process. If the proposal is for franchised/validated provision, a member of the Centre for Educational Partnership attends this briefing.

The briefing to include:

- The drafting of programme documentation including programme and module descriptors; with particular signposting to support for writing ILOs and using Level descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements.
- Discussing the involvement of PSRBs; including the order and timings for external accreditations and validations.
- Agreeing the expectations for the involvement of External Advisors (Academic and/or Industry) in line with the guidance.
- Setting expectations for the involvement of Student Co-Creators in line with the guidance.
- Ensuring that staff understand the templates and forms required for completion as part of Academic Approval; and that these can be found in the Programme Development Space.

- Confirming that feedback on programme documentation in the Programme Development Space will take place as Comments within files.
- Briefing staff on how to populate the fields in the Academic Approval Report as a record of the activity undertaken during the Academic Approval stage; including consideration of how the proposal maps to the objectives within the Education Strategy.
- Discussing any notable features of the programme to consider during programme design stage; including where alignment to internal and external regulations and frameworks should be considered; and where implementation issues need consideration.
- If approval panels are being used for higher risk proposals (e.g new validations or new discipline areas), the membership, proposed dates and documentation to be submitted for this.
- Ensuring that staff are clear on their Key Contact within the Academic Governance and Policy team; and the deadlines for the submission of documentation.

## **B2. Other Stakeholder involvement/ Briefings**

Careers and Employability, and Academic Developers to contact the Proposer and provide signposting/support or arrange further meetings or workshops where required to support the development of DPDs.

## **B3. Programme Documentation Development**

Proposer/Programme Team to begin drafting programme and module descriptors; and contact Academic Governance and Policy with any queries.

Proposer to have completed the first draft of programme and module descriptors in the Programme Development Space by the First Draft Deadline. Academic Governance and Policy, and Registry and Student Services will provide initial input to guide further development of the documentation. Proposers to respond and amend using Comment function.

Portfolio and Planning to remind Proposers of the Final Draft Deadline. Proposers to ensure that the Programme Development Space includes the final draft of the programme and module descriptors by this date. Portfolio and Planning close the DPD to editing from Proposers, and open a final window for input from Stakeholders<sup>2</sup>.

Portfolio and Planning to seek confirmation from each Stakeholder by the feedback deadline that they have considered the proposal and provided input if required.

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<sup>2</sup> Academic Governance and Policy; Student and Registry Services; Library and Learning Services; Careers and Employability; PVC Student Experience and Academic Developers; (cc Head of School for information and update).

Proposer/Programme Team to continually document programme development activities (including the outcomes of co-creation, the use of externality and the exchanges with stakeholders) within the Academic Approval Report.

**B4. Academic Approval Submission**

Approval via Curriculum Committee: Final versions of the Definitive Programme Document; the Business Case and the Academic Approval Report (incorporating the Desk Based Review Report where applicable for franchised and validated provision) to be submitted to the Curriculum Committee for approval; or revision. The Head of School will draft the covering paper for the proposal and present the documentation to the Curriculum Committee.

Approval via Approval Panel: In accordance with Section A5 above, the Head of Academic Governance and Policy may request that the Chair of Curriculum Committee (or nominee) convene a separate Approval Panel to consider the new programme and delivery arrangements. The Chair of Curriculum Committee will approve Approval Panel members.

This Approval Panel acts on behalf of the Curriculum Committee and grants approval, revision, amendment or refusal of the new programme proposal and delivery arrangements. The Approval Panel to report to the next meeting of the Curriculum Committee.

**B5. Notification to Stakeholders**

Secretary to the Curriculum Committee to confirm to Head of School, Proposer, Stakeholders<sup>3</sup> and any relevant partners the decision of the Curriculum Committee or the Approval Panel. If the Academic Approval is granted, the notification will include confirmation of start date, links to final approved DPDs and confirmation that applicant Offers can be made.

**B6. Documentation Updating/Publishing**

School Operations Team, Academic Governance and Policy to update, download, publish and archive DPDs in accordance with the DPD Management Protocol.

External Affairs Unit to publish Web DPDs on course pages.

**B7. Implementation**

Other stakeholders to implement approval decisions as required.

## Appendix 1: Roles and Responsibilities

## Portfolio and Planning

1. Commission Market Research from Data Improvement, and inform the School and PVC Academic Planning if Market Research is favourable
2. Undertake Business Case Approval Briefing with the Proposer and provide ongoing advice to the Proposer in drafting the Business Case
3. Set up Programme Development Space; manage editing/access rights and populate with templates
4. Agree with the Head of AGP the approach for the approval of redesigned programmes or those in a new discipline area.
5. Notify wider stakeholder of existence of proposal; keep them updated on timelines, the approval of the Business Case and Marketing Approval/Conditions. Provide viewing access to the Programme Development Space to all stakeholders
6. Brief PVC Academic Planning, Vice-Provost on Business Case; recommend approval to the Vice-Chancellor
7. Set, monitor and keep under review the timeline for approval
8. Notify wider stakeholders of Business Case Approval
9. Arrange meeting for proposer and wider stakeholder group to plan resourcing following Business Case Approval
10. Liaise with Proposer to identify External Advisor and Student Course Rep
11. Set up Academic Approval Briefing Meeting
12. Make a recommendation in respect of Marketing Approval and confirm when Marketing Conditions have been met
13. Work with Proposer, EAU, Admissions and Recruitment to ensure course pages, SITS and UCAS is set up
14. Monitor student applications and confirm launch date

## Academic Governance and Policy

1. Agree with the Head of CEP the approach for the approval of franchised and validated provision (including the use of Approval Panels and Desk Based Reviews)

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<sup>3</sup> Academic Governance and Policy; PVC Student Experience; Head of Schools; Heads of Schools Administrative and Technical Services; Technical Manager; Estates; Library and Learning Services; IT Services; Finance; Immigration Compliance and Advice; Admissions; External Affairs Unit; Recruitment; Marketing; CRM Manager; Data and Insights Service; Student and Registry Services; Careers; PVC Research; APVC Collaborative Provision, VP Education, SU President, Students Union Deputy CEO

2. Agree with the Head of Academic Portfolio the approach for the approval of redesigned programmes or those in a new discipline area.
3. Lead Academic Approval Briefing Meeting and provide ongoing advice to the Proposer in drafting the programme and modules descriptors, and Academic Approval Report
4. Provide comment and feedback on draft and final versions of module and programme descriptors
5. Provide briefing to the Student Course Rep
6. Collate the papers for Curriculum Committee
7. Request from the Chair of the Curriculum Committee to convene an Approval Panel
8. Confirm the decisions of Curriculum Committee and Approval Panels to Stakeholders
9. Update DPDs in accordance with the DPD Management Protocol

### Proposer

1. Attend Business Case Approval Briefing and draft the Business Case with support from Portfolio and Planning
2. Attend Stakeholder Resource Meeting following Business Case Approval
3. Attend Academic Approval Briefing Meeting
4. Draft module and programme descriptors with support from Academic Governance and Policy
5. Respond to comment and feedback on draft and final versions of module and programme descriptors
6. Draft the Academic Approval Report, with support from Academic Governance and Policy
7. Work with External Advisor and Student Course Rep during drafting of programme and programme descriptors.

### Head of School

1. Appoint a Proposer
2. Complete the Scoping Instruction

3. Provide comment and feedback on module and programme descriptors
4. Approve and present the final submission to Curriculum Committee for approval

### Student Course Representative

1. Work with the proposer to design the new programme
2. Provide comment and feedback on draft and final versions of module and programme descriptors
3. Attend briefing meeting with Academic Governance and Policy

### External Advisor

1. Work with the proposer to design the new programme
2. Provide comment and feedback on draft and final versions of module and programme descriptors

### Student and Registry Services

1. Provide comment and feedback on draft and final versions of module and programme descriptors
2. View Business Case and comment if required
3. Implement approval decisions as required

### PVC Student Experience

1. View Business Case and comment if required
2. Provide comment and feedback on module and programme descriptors

### PVC Academic Planning

1. Approve any changes to award title during programme development
2. Recommend approval of the Business Case

3. Approve the convening of a separate Approval Panel, to act on behalf of Curriculum Committee

### Associate PVC for Educational Partnerships

1. Attend Business Case Approval Briefing and Academic Approval Briefing
2. Inform Portfolio and Planning of proposed new collaborative partnerships and programmes
3. Agree with the Head of AGP the approach for the approval of franchised and validated provision (including the use of Approval Panels and Desk Based Reviews)

### Careers and Employability

1. Input into Market Research
2. Contact the Proposer to provide signposting/support
3. Provide comment and feedback on draft and final versions of module and programme descriptors
4. View Business Case and comment if required

### School Operations Team

1. Provide comment and feedback on module and programme descriptors
2. View Business Case and comment if required
3. Implement approval decisions as required
4. Update DPDs in accordance with the DPD Management Protocol.

### Library and Learning Services

1. View Business Case and comment if required
2. Provide comment and feedback on module and programme descriptors
3. Implement approval decisions as required
4. Attend Resource Planning Meeting

## Academic Developers

1. Contact the Proposer to provide signposting/support
2. Provide comment and feedback on draft and final versions of module and programme descriptors

## External Affairs Unit

1. Input into Market Research
2. Work with Portfolio and Planning, Proposer, Admissions and Recruitment to ensure webpages, SITS and UCAS is set up
3. Check any changes to marketing material with the Head of Portfolio and Planning whilst programmes are in development
4. Implement approval decisions as required

## Admissions

1. Input into Market Research
2. Work with Portfolio and Planning, Proposer, EAU to ensure webpages, SITS and UCAS is set up
3. Implement approval decisions as required

## Immigration and Compliance Advice

1. Provide comment and feedback on module and programme descriptors

## Data Improvement

1. Undertake Market Research
2. View Business Case and comment if required

## Estates, IT Services, Finance

1. View Business Case and comment if required
2. Attend Resource Planning Meeting

2. Implement approval decisions as required