

ACADEMIC COURSE APPROVAL PROCEDURE

Quality Assurance and Enhancement
October 2025



Academic Course Approval Procedure (for courses 60 credits or more)

Purpose and scope:

1. At University of Staffordshire all new course proposals are subject to a rigorous course approval procedure which involves both Strategic Approval and Academic Approval stages. The approval route and decision-making body will depend on the nature of the proposal, as outlined in the Course Approval and Amendment Policy.
2. This procedure outlines the **academic approval element of the Course Approval and Amendment Policy for courses with a credit value of 60 credits or more**. This includes apprenticeships, professional doctorates and new courses delivered by collaborative academic partners. Major changes to existing courses (revalidation) will also be considered through this procedure.
3. The procedure aims to be proportionate, evidence-driven, and peer-led and is informed by the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#).

Academic Course Approval Procedure

4. Once a course (60 credits and over) has gained University-level strategic approval, it then progresses to academic course approval. This procedure consists of the following stages:
 - Design stage
 - Documentation check-in
 - Documentation review
 - Validation event
5. The design stage enables course design and development to take place with all the relevant stakeholders informing the design throughout.
6. The documentation check-in and review provide course teams with support and guidance, facilitating the development of high-quality documentation and ensuring thorough preparation for the validation event.
7. The validation event will assess and, where appropriate, approve the course on behalf of Education Committee.
8. The Academic Course Approval Procedure represents 'Milestone 3' within the broader New Course Development Process.

The Course Design Team

9. The course design team is made up of the following core members:
 - Course lead(s)
 - Core module leads (recommended number of 4; the inclusion of additional module leads should be agreed with Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE))
 - Head(s) of Department(s)
 - Course Director(s)
 - QAE Representative
 - Educational Developer (EduDev)
10. The course design team will be established and allocated to work on the course proposal prior to the commencement of the preliminary meeting.

11. Upon receiving strategic approval, course design teams are required to consider the following areas before progressing to the design stage of the Course Approval Process:
- The unique aspects of the course and the rationale for it being proposed
 - Curriculum design and alignment with the Curriculum Framework
 - Learning resources required
 - Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours mappings (for Apprenticeship provision)
 - Collaborative regulatory and policy context (for Partnership provision)

Course teams may wish to refer to guidance provided by Curriculum and Academic Affairs for support.

The Stages of Academic Course Approval

Preliminary Meeting

12. Following strategic approval, a preliminary meeting will be arranged by QAE. At this meeting the most appropriate Design Stage session will be agreed.
13. The preliminary meeting will be attended by the Course Lead, the Associate Dean – Portfolio Development and relevant representatives of Curriculum and Academic Affairs (CAA). Where the proposal involves partners, the Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships will be invited to join the meeting. Where the proposal is for a Dual Award partner representatives will be invited. For apprenticeship provision the Quality Manager (Apprenticeships) (or nominee) will be invited.
14. At the preliminary meeting, a Quality Manager will ensure that course teams are fully cognisant of the academic course approval procedure and the related timescales, PSRB related processes/timescales and that appropriate members of staff have been identified to take part in all relevant activities.

Individuals invited to the design session may include (but are not limited to) to the following:

- Associate Dean Students
 - Digital Education Representative
 - School Quality Champions
 - Academic from another department or School
 - Careers Liaison Officer
 - Student representative(s) from the subject area or a sabbatical officer
 - Employer and industry representatives
 - Service Users and Carers (where applicable)
 - Partner representatives (where applicable)
15. For apprenticeships, evidence of active employer involvement in programme design and delivery must be presented at the validation.
16. QAE will compensate one student representative and one core external panel member to attend the validation event. Other relevant attendees participating in the design session/activities, as outlined by the course team, are welcome to attend, however compensation for these attendees will need to be sourced and organised from within School/Department budgets.
17. Normally, a single design session will be held, except in cases involving partnership or apprenticeship provision. At the preliminary meeting the course design team, QAE and EduDev will agree the agenda of the design session which could include one or more of the following topics:

Meeting the Curriculum Framework requirements

- Inclusive learning design
- Simulation based education (physical and digital)
- Digital and AI Literacy in Teaching
- Embedding Employability, Entrepreneurship and Professional Practice across the curriculum

- Sustainability in the curriculum
- Completing the Curriculum Framework mapping document

Assessment design

- Facilitating a whole course approach to assessment (including assessment load and mapping)
- Authentic assessment design

High quality course approval documentation

- Progression and Levelness in Learning Outcomes
- Completing the module descriptor templates
- Completing the programme specification

18. Additional design session topics may be identified and agreed at the preliminary meeting, based on the specific needs of the course design team.
19. Any additional requirements (for example to meet PSRB/funding body requirements) will also be confirmed at the preliminary meeting.

The Design Stage

20. The course team should ensure that they have the foundations in place to begin the course design process. This includes collating, reviewing and reflecting on essential key features of the course (e.g. QAA Subject Benchmarks, PSRB requirements). Such documents should be uploaded by the Course Team into their Course Approval digital space (created by QAE).
21. Design sessions agreed at the preliminary meeting will usually consist of one three-hour session. Requests for further bespoke sessions are encouraged and will be managed on a case-by-case basis with the relevant CAA team members.
22. **Partnership Delivery Session** (for partnership provision only)
For partnership provision, an additional partnership delivery session will be included to scrutinise the collaborative context and implementation requirements for the course. This will take place prior to the documentation check-in. Partner representatives will be invited to attend this session. The format of the partnership delivery session will vary according to the type of proposal under consideration; however, the following will be covered:
 - Resource requirements (staffing, physical and library resources)
 - Regulatory considerations
 - For overseas provision, any in-country ministry approvals
 - Academic calendar and delivery considerations
 - Plans for the effective operationalisation of the course at the partner including partner support, oversight and CPD requirements
 - For dual awards, development of the Collaborative Operational Framework

By the end of this session a plan for the production of the partner documentation required for validation will be agreed (please see validation event section below).

23. **Apprenticeship-specific Session** (for apprenticeship provision only)
For apprenticeship provision, an additional apprenticeship-specific session will be included to ensure that the distinctive requirements of apprenticeships are embedded within course development on a quality-first basis. This will take place prior to the documentation check-in session. The format of the apprenticeship session will vary according to the type of proposal under consideration; however, the following will be covered:
 - Entry pathways and requirements, including use of Apprenticeship Operational Maps (Skills England) to identify progression routes from lower-level standards, potential for advanced standing, and consideration of English and maths requirements to support accessibility and social mobility.

- Mapping of Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs) across programme outcomes, module content and assessment strategy.
- Embedding of statutory curriculum components (e.g. Safeguarding, Prevent, EDI, Fundamental British Values).
- Integration and sequencing of on-the-job and off-the-job learning, including calculation and evidencing of required hours, and distribution across delivery modes (synchronous and asynchronous).
- Consideration of the on-programme period and End Point Assessment (EPA) arrangements, including timing, Gateway requirements, external EPA provision (where applicable), and implications for qualification achievement rates.
- Treatment of embedded and/or aligned awards, ensuring these follow the timing of the EPA so that apprenticeship achievement is not dependent on their completion.
- Review of assessment to confirm opportunities for work-integrated practice and demonstrable value to employers, ensuring authentic application of KSBs in workplace contexts.
- Collective review to confirm compliance with regulatory requirements and incorporation of employer feedback.

By the end of this session a plan for the production of the apprenticeship documentation required for validation will be agreed, with clear reference to regulatory and quality assurance expectations.

Documentation Check-in

24. Course teams are responsible for producing high quality documentation. CAA will work proactively with course teams, providing support and guidance ahead of the formal documentation review and validation.
25. Course teams will be required to present their progress to date during the documentation check-in which may take place synchronously (in a face-to-face or Teams meeting) or asynchronously (through the Teams channel).
26. The documentation will be reviewed by colleagues from EduDev, QAE and Careers, and constructive feedback will be provided to support improvements prior to the formal documentation review.
27. If any 'non-standard' aspects of the proposal (e.g. block delivery or remote delivery blends between 21-40%) are identified through the course approval process, these will be raised with the Chair of Education Committee before the final documentation is confirmed.

Documentation Review

28. At the documentation review the course design team will agree the documentation to progress to the validation event. The relevant Associate Dean Students (ADS) (or nominee) will attend this session.
29. Documentation review may take place synchronously (in a face-to-face or Teams meeting) or asynchronously (through the Teams channel).
30. The proposal will not be progressed to a final validation event until this review has taken place, and the ADS (or nominee) and course design team have agreed that the documentation is ready to be distributed to validation event panel members.

Validation Event

31. The purpose of the validation event is for a panel of key stakeholders to assess the course(s) and approve the provision on behalf of Education Committee.¹

¹ In the case of dual awards, the Validation Panel will recommend approval to Education Committee, in accordance with the University's Dual Award Policy.

32. For partner provision the role of the validation panel is to also consider for approval the delivery of the course by the respective partner(s).
33. The validation panel will be comprised of the following members:
- A senior academic member of the University (Dean, Associate Dean, Executive Director of CAA or Head of Department) as Chair.
 - External academic from the subject area (For dual awards, it is essential that an external academic has demonstrable experience in the design and development of dual award programmes)
 - One member of academic staff who is from outside the Department in which the proposal(s) under consideration sit
 - Student representative chosen from a pool of student representatives trained by QAE
 - PSRB representative (where required)
 - Quality Officer (Secretary)
34. A Quality Manager will also be in attendance (to provide advice and guidance where appropriate). For apprenticeship proposals, the Quality Manager (Apprenticeships) will be in attendance.
35. The final course documentation will be sent out to the validation event panel 2 weeks prior to the validation event. This will include:
- Validation Support Document. For partner provision this will include additional information on the partner's plan to deliver the course and how this will be resourced.
 - Programme Specification for the course(s)
 - Module Descriptors
 - Staff CVs for the team delivering the course(s) (and a Partner Staffing Profile for partner provision)
 - For dual awards – a Collaborative Operational Framework and copies of the partner's academic regulations (in English)
36. QAE, in consultation with the School Associate Dean Students, may decide to cancel events if deadlines are missed.
37. Panel members will be asked to submit comments on the documents and lines of questioning 1 week prior to the validation event (a comments template will be distributed with the documentation). These will be shared with the course team ahead of the validation event.
38. The validation event will take the form of an online meeting between the panel and the course team. At this session, the course team will present the proposal to the stakeholders, with a focus on the following areas:
- The unique aspects of the course and the rationale for it being proposed
 - Alignment to the Academic Strategy
 - Alignment to the Curriculum Framework pillars:
 - Accessibility and Inclusivity
 - Simulation
 - Employability, Enterprise and Professional Practice
 - Sustainability
 - Academic, Digital and Research Skills
 - Learning resources required (including staffing)
 - Student Support arrangements
- For partner provision:**
- The partner's ability to deliver the proposed courses
- For apprenticeship provision:**
- Clear entry pathways and progression routes (using Skills England Operational Maps)
 - Mapping of KSBs to outcomes and assessments
 - Embedding of statutory components
 - Integration of on- and off-the-job learning
 - EPA arrangements
 - Appropriate treatment of aligned awards
 - Authentic work-based assessment
 - Overall compliance with regulatory and employer expectations

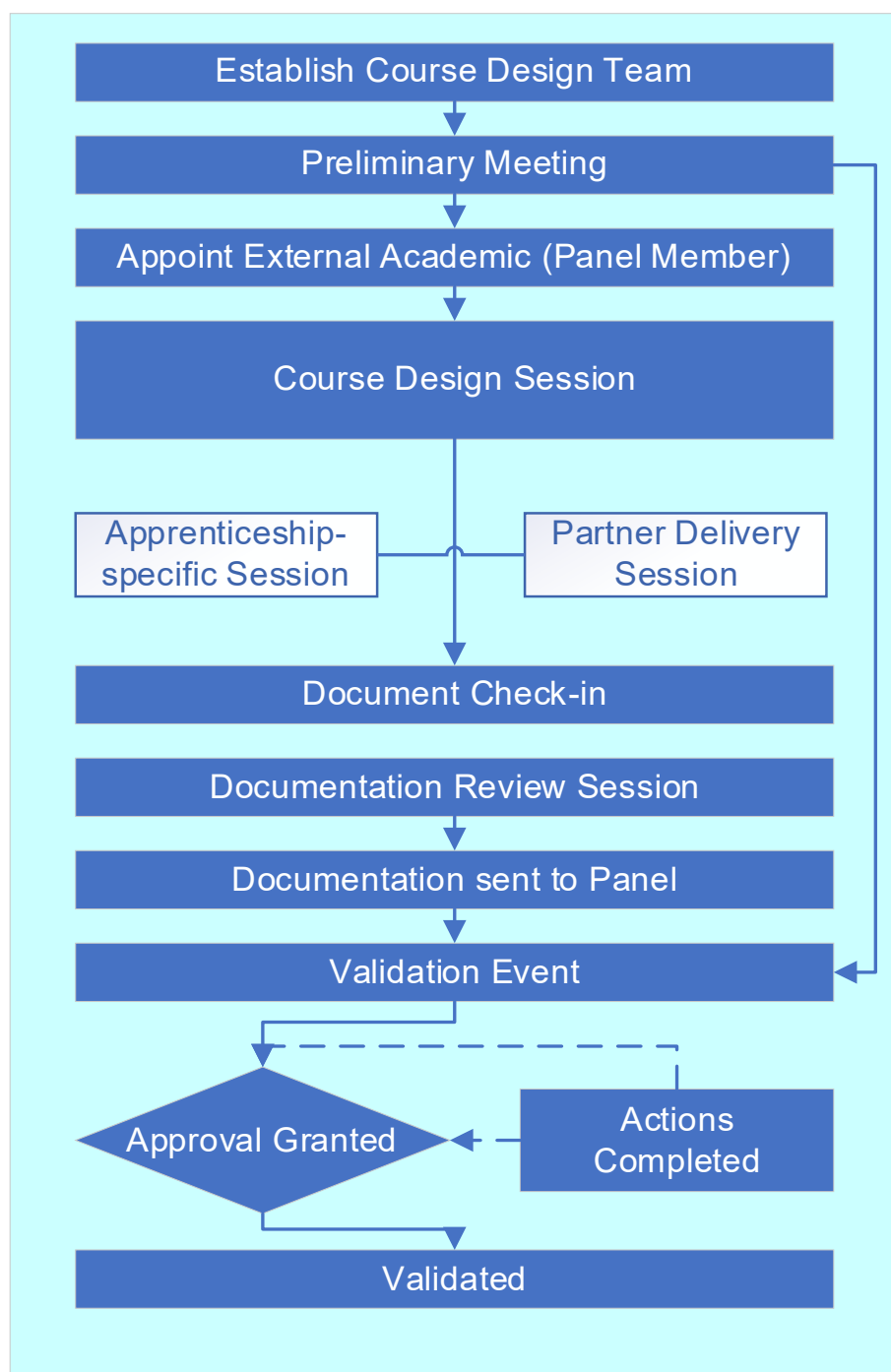
39. This meeting will provide the opportunity for the panel to discuss the proposal with the team; identify good practice and further areas of work if required; and decide whether the course proposal should be approved.
40. At the end of the meeting both good practice and further areas of work (where required) will be confirmed and a deadline (usually within two weeks) for the resubmission of the documentation (if needed) agreed. These will be recorded by the Quality Officer. Reports from validation events will be presented to Education Committee either for approval (dual award provision) or noting (all other courses).

Confirmation of Final Course Documentation

41. Following the validation event, where actions have been identified, the course documentation will be finalised and submitted to QAE for final approval by the Chair of the validation event on behalf of Education Committee. At this point the course/partner delivery of the course (where relevant) is fully approved.
42. Exceptionally, if the Chair of the validation event is not available, the Chair of Education Committee may appoint an alternative senior member of academic staff to review the final documentation and confirm final approval of the course.

Appendix A:

Academic Course Approval Route



Normally, from start to finish this process will not exceed 18 weeks.

