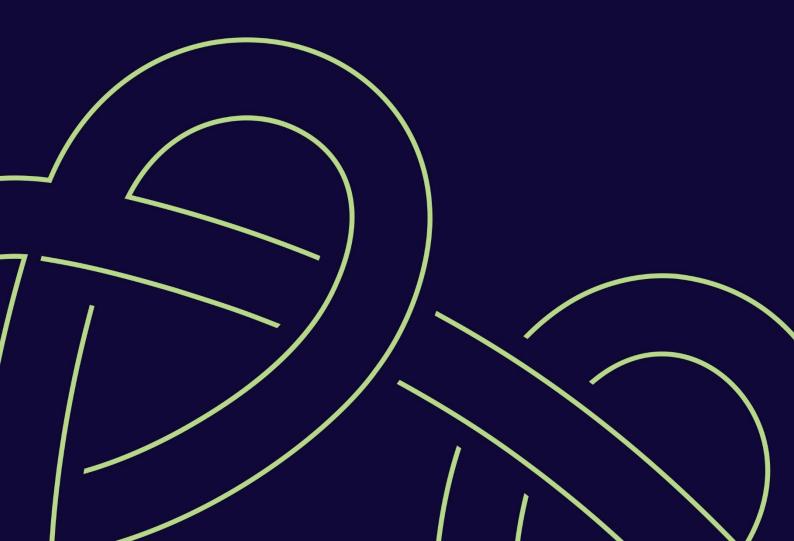# COURSE APPROVAL AND AMENDMENT POLICY

Quality Assurance and Enhancement
November 2023

Course Approval and Amendment Policy

Scope

This Policy applies to all taught courses and Professional Doctorates leading to a University of Staffordshire award.

Policy Principles

- Course approval should be evidence-based with reference to external sector reference points and supported by appropriate external independent scrutiny.
- Decision-making processes should be proportionate and empower academic schools.
- Our approach must be agile and efficient, while assuring coherence of our portfolio and the quality and standards of our provision.

Approval Routes

a)   At the University of Staffordshire, all new course proposals will be subject to a rigorous course approval procedure.

b)   The course approval procedure involves two stages: Strategic Approval and Academic Approval. The approval route and decision-making body will depend on the nature of the proposal and associated level of academic risk.

c)   Strategic Approval is the consideration of the financial and business case for a proposal and its alignment with the University's Academic Strategy.

d)   Academic Approval is the consideration of the overall academic coherence; the quality of the curricula, and its associated teaching, learning and assessment; and opportunities for enhancement. For courses delivered by collaborative academic partners the partner's ability to deliver the provision and the host School's capacity to manage its responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement will also be considered (delivery approval).

e)   Courses will be approved indefinitely but will be reviewed through course monitoring and periodic review to ensure that the quality is maintained and enhanced, and provision remains in alignment with the Academic Strategy. Periodic Review panels recommend to Quality and Enhancement Committee whether the indefinite approval of courses by a Department should continue.

The table below outlines the approval routes for each type of proposal:

	New taught course/ Professional Doctorate - level 3-7 of 60 credits or more	New taught courses offered by Collaborative Academic Partners (including short courses and microcredentals)	New Apprenticeships and HTQs	New Short Course /Microcredential	Course Amendment	Major course change (revalidation)	New delivery location for an existing course for delivery by University or an existing / new partner
Strategic Approval	Strategic Course Approval Board	Partnerships Committee	Apprenticeship Strategy Group	Short Course Committee	N/A	School SMT (advised by SAC as appropriate)	University Delivery – School SMT Partner Delivery - Partnerships Committee
Academic Approval	Design Sprint	Design Sprint (Short Course Committee for short courses and microcredentials)	Design Sprint - New courses Mapping of existing course to an HTQ – Apprenticeships and HTQ Committee	Short Course Committee	School Academic Committee	Design Sprint	New Partner – Design Sprint Existing Partner – SAC*

* If the course is considered to be in a new subject area for an existing partner, then it will be approved through the design sprint process. A new subject area in this scenario is one that is significantly different from those already being delivered by the partner. This will be determined by University Partnerships Committee as part of the strategic approval process.

Responsibilities of Key Decision-Making Bodies

- All Strategic Approval Bodies are responsible for ensuring that course proposals within their remit meet the following criteria:
  - Strategic fit with the Academic Strategy and the Academic Roadmap and aligned to University KPIs, particularly in relation to student number growth and graduate employability;
  - Financial sustainability;
  - Market and relevance– educational pipeline, employer needs, and USP among competitors.

- All Academic Approval Bodies are responsible for ensuring that all proposed courses meet the following criteria regardless of where, how or who delivers the course:

  1. **OfS Conditions of Registration for Quality, Reliable Standards and Positive Outcomes for all Students:**

  The following conditions are particularly relevant to academic approval:

Condition B1 - Academic Experience: The provider must ensure that the students registered on each higher education course receive a high quality academic experience.

Condition B2 – Resources, support and student engagement: The provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure:

- Students receive resources and support to ensure: (a) a high quality academic experience for those students; and (b) those students succeed in and beyond higher education.
- Effective engagement with each cohort of students to ensure: (a) a high quality academic experience for those students; and (b) those students succeed in and beyond higher education.

Condition B3 – Student Outcomes: The provider must deliver positive outcomes for students on its higher education courses.

Condition B4 – Assessment and awards: The provider must ensure that: students are assessed effectively; each assessment is valid and reliable; academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible; academic regulations are designed to ensure the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a way which appropriately reflects the level and content of the course; and relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.

Condition B5 – Sector-recognised standards: The provider must ensure that 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.

2. **The UK Quality Code Expectations for Standards and Quality:**

- The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework, including the FHEQ.

- The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards, including relevant Subject Benchmarks (designed with key employer groups) and PSRB requirements.

- Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.

- From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.

3. **Our University Strategic Academic Priorities:**

The Educational Philosophy as set out in the Academic Strategy is reflected in the design and proposed delivery of the course.

Empowering Schools and Institutes to drive Course Approval and Development Work

In addition to the approval routes described above, Schools will be empowered through the following mechanisms:

- Deans / Directors and their teams will have oversight and involvement at every touch point in the approval process.
- Staff training and development.
- Professional advice and facilitation provided by relevant Curriculum and Academic Affairs teams at all stages, through sharing good practice and sector development in course design.

Academic Governance and Oversight

- Quality and Enhancement Committee (QEC) has full oversight of all academic course approval processes through the receipt of regular overview reports.
- Academic Board will receive assurance from QEC that the course approval process is being appropriately implemented, through the receipt of minutes from QEC and the annual Quality, Standards and Student Success Report.
- QEC has full oversight of the decision making by the SACs and the Short Course Committee in their capacity as an Academic Approval Body (see table above) through the receipt of minutes and updates from relevant committee members.
- QEC will continue to identify and share enhancement opportunities both in terms of curriculum and course design and the support and infrastructure for course teams (including continuous review and improvement of the relevant procedures).