

Course Approval Process



Introduction

1. The process explained in this document is the operational guide to the approval element of the Course Approval and Amendment Policy.
2. The process aims to be proportionate, evidence-driven, and peer-led and is informed by the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#).
3. The Course Approval Process 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 as provided in the Policy and in **Appendix A**. Strategic Approval is the consideration of the financial and business case for a proposal and its alignment with the University's Academic Strategy. 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).

Stage One: Strategic Approval

4. Strategic Approval for new course proposals must be sought before the Academic Approval. The strategic approval route will be determined according to the type of proposal as outlined in **Appendix A**.
5. New taught courses/apprenticeships of 60 credits or more (including new courses delivered by collaborative academic partners) will be considered by the **Academic Planning Group**.
6. New courses of less than 60 credits; major course changes (revalidation); delivery of an existing course by an existing partner; and new delivery locations will be considered by the **School Senior Management Team**.
7. Proposals for new professional doctorates will be considered by the **Graduate School Committee**.
8. Further information, guidance and templates can be found in the Course Development Resource Room.

Proposals requiring approval by Academic Planning Group

9. The completion of a Part A-Outline Proposal Form (OPF) by the proposing School is the first part of the process for developing a new proposal. This short form provides information about the initial proposal including a brief overview of the subject area, the strategic reason for its development, market research to evidence student and/ or employer demand and an indication of initial resource requirements to determine an early assessment of the scale of curriculum development and associated resources.
10. If the proposal is for an apprenticeship, the Associate Dean-Apprenticeships should be consulted about the proposal.

11. If the course is to involve collaborative academic partner(s) discussion should take place between Dean(s) and the Director of Collaborative Academic Partnerships. The Director of Collaborative Academic Partnerships will determine whether the proposal should be considered at Partnerships Committee before its submission for APG.
12. Proposals relating to the delivery of a new taught course by a new collaborative academic partner will be considered in accordance with the University's *Due Diligence and Approval Procedure for a New Collaborative Academic Partner*. The Collaborative Academic Partnership Proposal form (approved by the University's Senior Leadership Team) and associated costings will be submitted to APG to note. In such instances, the Part A - OPF form will not be required. A completed Part B – Course Planning form should be submitted to APG in accordance with paragraph 16 below.
13. An OPF should be submitted for new taught course proposals to be delivered by existing collaborative academic partners. A single OPF can be used for multiple partnerships for the same course.
14. In all cases the completed OPF should be supported by the School Senior Management Team (SMT) and approved and submitted by the Dean's office to the Quality Enhancement Service (QES), for consideration at APG.
15. If the OPF is approved by APG, the School should complete the Part B-Course Planning Form (CPF) which includes a full description of the proposed course structure, alignment to University Regulations, HE quality frameworks, professional accreditation and risk assessment. The proposal should also be informed by comment from key stakeholders in the University. The School must work with its Finance Business Partner to determine more detailed student numbers and complete a financial costing spreadsheet which must be attached to the CPF. For proposals involving collaborative academic partners, the CAP team should be consulted during preparation of the Part B form.
16. The completed CPF and accompanying costing spreadsheet should be supported by the School SMT and approved and submitted by the Dean's office to QES, for consideration at APG.

Proposals requiring approval by School Senior Management Team

17. The Part A-Outline Proposal Form (OPF) should be completed by the proposing team (see paragraphs 9-11 above).
18. The completed OPF should be submitted for consideration at SMT.
19. If the course is to involve a collaborative academic partner(s) discussion should take place between the Dean(s) and the Director of Collaborative Academic Partnerships, who will determine whether the proposal should be considered by Partnerships Committee before its final approval by SMT.
20. The delivery of an existing course by a new collaborative academic partner will be considered in accordance with the University's *Due Diligence and Approval Procedure for a New Collaborative Academic Partner*. In such instances, An OPF form will not be required.
21. Complete OPFs, approved by the SMT, should be logged with QES.

Proposals requiring approval by the Graduate School Committee

22. If the proposal is for a professional doctorate, the appropriate form should be completed.
23. If the course is to involve a collaborative academic partner(s) then discussion should take place between the Dean(s) and the Director of Collaborative Academic Partnerships, who will determine whether the proposal should be considered by Partnerships Committee before its submission for consideration by the Graduate School Committee.
24. The completed form should be supported by the School Senior Management Team (SMT) and approved and submitted by the Dean's office to the Graduate School, for consideration by the Graduate School Committee.
25. Complete forms, approved by the Graduate School Committee, should be logged with QES.

Approvals and Decisions

26. The relevant final Strategic Approval Body will either approve the proposal; approve the proposal subject to conditions; defer for additional work to be undertaken before resubmission; or not approve the proposal.
27. The Director of Quality Enhancement and Standards will be responsible for overseeing and formally confirming all conditions of approval are met on behalf of APG and the Graduate School Committee. Deans of School will be responsible for overseeing and formally confirming all conditions of approval are met on behalf of the School SMT. Conditions of strategic approval must be met before academic approval takes place.
28. Following APG/School SMT/Graduate School Committee approval as required, a course planning spreadsheet must be fully completed in order that the data required for accurate course set-up and marketing is obtained. On receipt of the final spreadsheet by QES, the approved course(s) may set-up in SITS and advertised 'subject to validation'. Advertisement of courses at new collaborative academic partners can only commence once legal and finance due diligence has been approved by the Chair of Partnerships Committee.

Stage Two: Academic Approval

29. Once Strategic Approval has been given, the team should begin to develop their proposal and move to the Academic Approval Stage. To ensure that proposals remain current, no more than 12 months should normally have passed from the date when strategic approval was given to the date of academic consideration. If more than 12 months has passed, the proposal must normally be reconsidered for strategic approval.
30. Academic Approval will either be via a **Validation Panel**, or the **School Academic Committee**, according to the type of proposal, with the exception of provision for new collaborative academic partners (please see paragraph 34 below).
31. New courses of 60 credits or more (including apprenticeships, professional doctorates and new courses delivered by collaborative academic partners) and major changes to existing courses will be considered by a specially convened **Validation Panel**.
32. New courses of less than 60 credits; delivery of an existing course by an existing partner; and new delivery locations will be considered by the **School Academic Committee**. Where a proposal is a collaboration between two Schools, one School will take responsibility to host it and consideration will take place at that School's Academic Committee with representation from the collaborating School.

33. For collaborative academic partnership provision, consideration of the partner's ability to deliver the provision and the host School's capacity to manage its responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement is a key aspect (delivery approval). Delivery approval is necessary prior to partners running any new provision. Where the proposal is for an existing course to be delivered by a partner, and therefore the curricula is already in approval, delivery approval will form the key consideration. Such proposals will be considered by the relevant SAC (please see *Approval by School Academic Committee* below).
34. Academic approval of provision for new partners may be considered in line with the *Approval Procedure for a new Collaborative Academic Partner*, however the documentation requirements will mirror those outlined below.
35. Courses will be approved indefinitely but will be reviewed through periodic review to ensure that the quality is maintained and enhanced, and provision remains in alignment with the Academic Strategy.
36. Further information, guidance and templates can be found in the Course Development Resource Room.
37. As part of the development of a new course, the team should work with/seek the opinions of relevant stakeholders such as students, employers, professional bodies or service users and where applicable collaborative academic partners. For apprenticeship proposals the team should also liaise with Employer Partnerships during course design and development, and for proposals involving a collaborative partner, the team should liaise with Collaborative Academic Partnerships.
38. Validation Panels and School Academic Committees are expected to remain impartial, independent and objective in relation a proposal and to any personnel connected with it.

Approval by Validation Panel

39. Validation Panels will be arranged, managed and supported by QES and will make their decisions based on a set of documentation and discussions with the proposing team.
40. The proposing team is the body of people who will develop the proposal and its supporting documentation and attend the meeting with the Validation Panel. The team which meets the Validation Panel may not be the full team but should contain sufficient people who have the knowledge to be able to explain the proposal and answer questions.
41. A Validation panel will normally comprise:
 - A senior member of the University (normally a member of Executive, Dean, Associate Dean or Director of Learning and Teaching) as Chair. The Chair should be independent of the proposals under consideration. For apprenticeships the Associate Dean of Apprenticeships (or nominee) will normally act as chair.
 - One member of academic staff who is from outside the School in which the proposals under consideration sit.
 - An external academic panel member with subject expertise in the curriculum for the proposed course.
 - A student representative, normally a current student.
 - A representative from the Quality Enhancement Service.
42. Where the proposal under consideration is a professional doctorate the Head of Graduate School (or their nominee) will also be invited to join the panel.

43. Panel members will be selected from a pool of people who have been approved for the purpose. All members will receive training and guidance on how to execute their decision-making responsibilities.
44. The external academic panel member will be sourced by the team and a nomination made to QES for approval on behalf of Quality Enhancement Committee. The criteria for nomination and the nomination form template is available in the Course Development Resource Room. Nominations must normally be submitted and the right to work check completed satisfactorily at least three weeks prior to the validation date.
45. Where a course requires accreditation by a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB), the course approval process may align with the requirements of the PSRB as required. This may involve the inclusion of PSRB representatives or Service Users and Carers on the panel and a variation to the usual format (e.g. to the panel composition or the format of the meeting or the documentation to be considered). QES should be consulted at the earliest opportunity so that these requirements can be factored into the planning for the event.
46. Where a course is to be delivered by a Collaborative Academic Partner, the panel will consider the ability of the partner to deliver the provision and the support arrangements by the School i.e. the delivery approval.
47. The panel will normally feedback its conclusions to the proposal team on the same day. A written report will follow within two weeks.
48. The team will be given a deadline date by when they should submit their response to the panel's conclusions (see paragraph 62 below).

Documentation Required by the Validation Panel

49. As part of the University's commitment to sustainability, documentation used in the course approval process will, as far as possible, be collated, stored and circulated electronically.
50. For **new course proposals** (courses of 60 credits or more including professional doctorates) and **major changes** to existing courses, the following documentation will be required for consideration at the panel meeting:
 - Validation Support Document and Staff CVs
 - Programme Specification
 - Module Descriptors
 - For proposals involving a Collaborative Academic Partner: a CAP Resource Report (for the delivery approval element of the proposal)
 - For proposals involving a Collaborative Academic Partner: a draft collaborative delivery plan
51. The following additional documents will be required when the proposed course(s) will be delivered at a new site belonging to an existing collaborative academic partner:
 - Collaborative Academic Partnerships New Site Approval Form
 - A New Site Visit Report for Existing Partner
 - A Partner Library and Learning Resources Approval Form
52. For **apprenticeship proposals** the following additional documentation will be required:
 - Apprenticeship Handbook
 - Sample Job Description for an apprentice undertaking the proposed apprenticeship
 - Mentor Handbook

53. All documentation should be submitted on the appropriate University templates, available in the Course Development Resource Room.
54. Documentation should be submitted to QES two weeks prior to the panel meeting. It should be complete and have been approved by the School. If documentation is incomplete, or has not been approved by the School, or is not received two weeks prior to the panel, the panel meeting may not be permitted to proceed.
55. QES will circulate the documentation to panel members, who will be asked to provide initial comments two working days prior to the meeting. These will be shared with the chair and the proposal team.
56. All Module Descriptors should be approved by the School prior to submission, including any amendments required to existing modules, which should be considered by School Academic Committee in the usual way. Final approval of any new modules developed specifically for the new proposal will however rest with the Validation Panel.

Outcomes of the Validation Panel

57. The outcomes of the Validation Panel's consideration are made under authority devolved from Academic Board and Quality and Enhancement Committee.
58. The Validation Panel will make one of the following outcomes:
 - **Approval.** This may be given with or without conditions, requirements or recommendations.
 - **Referral.** This will be for additional work and resubmission to a panel within 12 months of the original panel date for further consideration. The panel will provide guidance about what aspects of the proposal need further attention.
 - **Not Approved.** This would give no opportunity to represent.
59. In approving a proposal, the Validation Panel may also make:
 - **Conditions.** These must be met before students can be enrolled onto the course. The panel will set a date by which conditions must be met. The proposal will not be signed off until they are met. If the conditions are not met by the date set by the panel, the School may apply to QES for an extension. The extension is at the discretion of QES and will not exceed 12 months from the original date set. If a condition has not been met within 12 months of the original date set, the proposal will normally be closed, and the team will need to start the approval process again (including obtaining new strategic approval).
 - **Requirements.** These must be met by a date determined by the panel, which can be after the commencement of the course.
 - **Recommendations.** These are suggestions which the panel feel will enhance or improve the proposal but are not essential and need not be pursued.
60. The Validation Panel will also highlight exemplary or innovative practice by making commendations as appropriate.
61. Where the proposal under review includes consideration of a partner's ability to deliver the provision (delivery approval), the panel will need to confirm that they consider that the partner is adequately resourced and has appropriate facilities to deliver the course. In addition, the panel will need to confirm that they consider that the university and partner have agreed processes to ensure effective oversight of academic standards and a positive student experience. A panel may reach differing outcomes relating to individual partners.

62. The team's response to the conditions, requirements or recommendations must be submitted to QES on the template provided, by the deadline set out in the report, with a full set of definitive course/apprenticeship documentation (Programme Specification and Module Descriptors along with any other documentation stipulated by the panel). The response and definitive documentation must be approved by the School prior to submission. School Academic Committees will oversee this activity at School level. QEC will also track the status of proposals through the process.
63. The course team should alert the relevant Associate Dean Recruitment to any changes made through the validation process that would have an impact on course marketing.
64. Responsibility for approving the team's response to conditions, requirements or recommendations will rest with the panel chair in consultation with the QES representative on the panel, and will be overseen by the Director of Quality Enhancement and Standards. QES will confirm with the proposal team when the response has been approved and the proposal signed off.
65. After the proposal has been signed off, the course/apprenticeship is fully approved and students can be enrolled onto the new course/apprenticeship.
66. Prior to delivery the School/partner must complete a Course Handbook and an Accessibility Course Profile and log these with the School Quality Administrative Officer (QAO).
67. Once delivery has begun all courses/apprenticeships will be monitored through [continuous monitoring](#) to capture any areas for development and enhancement and to highlight good practice. The QAO will ensure that courses/apprenticeships are included in a continuous monitoring group.

Approval by School Academic Committee

68. The [School Academic Committee](#) (SAC) for each School meets at least six times a year and will consider course approval proposals and amendments which fall under its remit as part of its main agenda of business, or it may choose to arrange a special ad hoc meeting(s). The staff member leading the proposal should attend the meeting to present it.
69. Where a proposal relates to modules or courses which are/will be delivered via a franchise arrangement by a collaborative academic partner, Collaborative Academic Partnerships should participate in its development and a representative from Collaborative Academic Partnerships will be present for the SAC discussion.
70. The SAC will normally feedback its conclusions at the meeting and these will be recorded in the formal minutes.

Documentation Required by School Academic Committee

71. For **new short course proposals** (under 60 credits):
 - Validation Support Document and Staff CVs
 - Programme Specification
 - Module Descriptors
 - Written external academic comments; these may be obtained from an existing external examiner with appropriate subject expertise.
 - For proposals involving a Collaborative Academic Partner: A CAP Resource Report

72. For new delivery location(s) for an existing course (including the delivery approval of an existing course by a collaborative academic partner):
- Validation Support Document and Staff CVs
 - Programme Specification
 - For proposals involving a Collaborative Academic Partner: a CAP Resource Report
 - For proposals involving a Collaborative Academic Partner: a draft collaborative delivery plan
73. The following additional documents will be required when the proposed course(s) will be delivered at a new site belonging to an existing collaborative academic partner:
- Collaborative Academic Partnerships New Site Approval Form
 - A New Site Visit Report for Existing Partner
 - A Partner Library and Learning Resources Approval Form
74. All documentation should be submitted on the appropriate University templates, available in the Course Development Resource Room.
75. Documentation should be submitted to the SAC Secretary by the deadline agreed. If documentation is incomplete, or is not received by the deadline agreed, the chair may withdraw the proposal from the agenda.

Outcomes of the School Academic Committee

76. The outcomes of the SACs' consideration are made under authority devolved from Academic Board and Quality and Enhancement Committee.
77. The SAC will make one of the following outcomes:
- **Approval.** This may be given with or without conditions, requirements or recommendations.
 - **Referral.** This will be for additional work and resubmission to the next meeting (or a meeting within the next 12 months). The committee will provide guidance about what aspects of the proposal need further attention.
 - **Not Approved.** This would give no opportunity to represent.
78. In approving a proposal, the SAC may also make:
- **Conditions.** These must be met before students can be enrolled onto the new or amended course or at the new delivery site. The SAC will set a date by which conditions must be met and the proposal will not be signed off until they are met. If the conditions are not met by this date, the SAC may opt to extend the time up to and not exceeding 12 months from the original date set. If a condition has not been met within 12 months of the original date set, the proposal will normally be closed, and will need to start the approval process again (including obtaining new strategic approval).
 - **Requirements.** These must be met by a date determined by the SAC, which can be after the commencement of the course.
 - **Recommendations.** These are suggestions which the SAC feel will enhance or improve the proposal but are not essential and need not be pursued.
79. The SAC will also highlight exemplary or innovative practice by making commendations as appropriate.
80. Where the proposal under review includes consideration of a partner's ability to deliver a course(s) (delivery approval), the SAC must confirm that it considers that the partner is adequately resourced and has appropriate facilities to deliver the provision. Additionally, the

SAC will need to confirm that it considers that the university and partner has agreed processes to ensure effective oversight of academic standards and a positive student experience.

81. The response to the conditions, requirements or recommendations must be submitted to the SAC Secretary by the deadline agreed at the meeting and recorded in the minutes, with the documentation required by the committee.
82. Responsibility for approving the response to conditions, requirements or recommendations will rest with the SAC chair in consultation with QES. The SAC Secretary will confirm when the proposal has been signed off.
83. After the proposal has been signed off it is fully approved and students can be enrolled onto the new course/site.
84. Prior to delivery the School/partner must complete a new or revised Course Handbook and an Accessibility Course Profile as necessary and log these with the School Quality Administrative Officer (QAO).
85. Once delivery has begun all courses will be monitored through the [continuous monitoring](#) to capture any areas for development and enhancement and to highlight good practice. The QAO will ensure that any new courses/sites are included in a continuous monitoring group.

Appendix A: Risk Based Approval Routes – Extract from Course Approval and Amendment Policy

	Approval Routes					
	New taught courses/ apprenticeships level 3-7 of 60 credits or more (including courses offered by Collaborative Academic Partners (CAP))	New Professional Doctorate ¹	New Short Course (including courses offered by CAP)	Course Amendment e.g. addition of new pathway, new course title (re-packaged course with same learning outcomes); new credit structure (same level/programme learning outcomes)	Major course change ² (revalidation)	New delivery location for an existing course for delivery by University &/ or an existing partner ³
Strategic Approval Body	Academic Planning Group (and approval by Partnerships Committee before APG for new courses with partners) ⁴	Graduate School Committee	School SMT	N/A	School SMT (& advised by SAC as appropriate ⁵)	School SMT (and approval by Partnership Committee before School SMT makes final decision) ⁶
Academic Approval Body	Validation Panel ⁷	Validation Panel	School Academic Committee	School Academic Committee	Validation Panel	School Academic Committee

¹ If a Professional Doctorate in a new subject area for the partner were to be delivered in collaboration with a CAP, Partnership Committee would also be consulted before Graduate School Board.

² A major course change is where there is change in mode (that is different from the standard academic delivery models available in the resource room) or where the content of the course is changed and equates to 30% or more of the total credit volume of the programme, or at least 50% of the credit volume in any single level of a UG degree programme.

³ Provision for new partners will be considered in line with the Approval Procedure for a New Collaborative Academic Partner.

⁴ The Director of CAP will determine whether the proposal needs to go to Committee. For example, proposals for new courses or existing courses where these are already included in the Partnerships Strategy for specified partners, would not need to go the Partnerships Committee.

⁵ For example, in cases where incremental drift as monitored by SAC is prompted a major review.

⁶ See footnote 4 above.

⁷ For validated collaborative academic provision academic approval may form part of the Partnership Approval event.