# ACADEMIC COURSE APPROVAL: DESIGN SPRINT PROCEDURE

Quality Assurance and Enhancement

December 2024

# Academic Course Approval: Design Sprint Procedure (for courses 60 credits or more)

## 1) Introduction and Context

At the University of Staffordshire all new course proposals are subject to a rigorous course approval procedure. Course approval involves two stages: Strategic Approval and Academic Approval. The approval route and decision-making body will depend on the nature of the proposal, as provided in the Course Approval and Amendment Policy.

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.

The procedure aims to be proportionate, evidence-driven, and peer-led and is informed by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

## 2) Design Sprint Procedure

Once a course (60 credits and over) has gained University-level strategic approval, it then progresses to a design sprint. Design sprints enable course design and development to take place with all the relevant stakeholders informing the design throughout.  Course proposals may join at different stages of the sprint process; the most appropriate design journey will be agreed at the Preliminary meeting (please see section 2a below).

Initially a design sprint team will be established and allocated to work on the course proposal.

### The Design Sprint Team

The design sprint team is made up of the following core members (who will attend all core sessions of the sprint):

- Course lead(s)
- Core module leads (recommended number of 4; the inclusion of additional module leads should be agreed with QAE)
- Quality Assurance and Enhancement Representative
- Academic Developer[1]

The following will also be invited to relevant stages as required. Details of representatives to be invited will be agreed at the Preliminary meeting.

- Associate Dean Students
- Associate Dean Curriculum
- Course Director(s)

---

[1] An Academic Developer is not normally required to attend the Partnership Delivery session.

- Digital Pedagogies Representative

- Quality Manager (Apprenticeships) or nominee (for apprenticeship proposals)

- Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships (for partnership proposals)

- School Quality Champions

- Academic from another department or School

- Careers Liaison Manager

- Student representative(s) from the subject area

- Employer and industry representatives

- Service Users and Carers (where applicable)

- Partner representatives (where applicable)

Optional sprint Members: The design sprint procedure compensates one student representative and one core external panel member to attend the Validation Event. Other relevant attendees, 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.

**The Stages of a Design Sprint**

A design sprint is split into a number of individual sessions as detailed below.  Between each of these sessions, proposing teams will have a period of time to progress their proposals in preparation for each subsequent session.

a) **Preliminary Meeting between the School Proposal Leads and Quality Assurance and Enhancement**

At the preliminary meeting, a Quality Manager will ensure that course teams are fully cognisant of the design sprint procedure and the related timescales, and that appropriate members of staff have been identified for each stage.  The level of experience of the course team, in relation to course design and development, will be discussed at this meeting so that subsequent sprint sessions can be tailored to each course team. Optional development activity, outside of the core sessions, may also be recommended.

It will be agreed at the preliminary meeting where the proposal will join the design sprint procedure.  For example, courses for which design work has already been undertaken, or courses that are being revalidated, may join the procedure at a later stage.  Any other variations to the standard procedure (for example to meet PSRB requirements or funding body requirements) will also be confirmed at this stage.

Where the proposal involves partners, the Head of Collaborative Academic Partnerships and relevant Associate Dean Curriculum will be invited to join this meeting. For apprenticeship provision the Quality Manager (Apprenticeships) (or nominee) will be invited.

b) **Design Sprint Session 1 (3 hours) – Mapping the Student Journey for Successful Learning Outcomes and Course Design**

Before Session 1, course teams should reflect on the following areas, following their strategic approval:

a) The unique aspects of the course and the rationale for it being proposed

b) Curriculum design and alignment with the Academic Strategy

c) Employability Framework

d) Inclusive learning

e) Learning resources required

f) Student support arrangements

g) Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours mappings (for Apprenticeship provision)

h) Collaborative regulatory and policy context (for Partnership provision)

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, PSRBs). Such documents should be uploaded by the Course Team into their Design Sprint digital space (created by Quality Assurance and Enhancement).

Session 1 is called 'Mapping the student journey for successful learning outcomes and course design'. In this session the design sprint team will:

- Map the student learning journey

- Identify skills, knowledge and behaviours

- Develop module level and course level learning outcomes

- Initiate course structure design

By the end of the session, the course team will have developed a clear idea of module and course level learning outcomes, informed by backwards course design and based on their identified learning journeys. This will inform the design of the course structure.

Between session 1 and 2, course teams should continue work on module and course learning outcomes, as well as the course structure.

### c) Design Sprint Session 2 (3 hours) – Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategies

In Session 2, the design sprint team will:

- Consider the proposed course structure

- Develop the learning and teaching strategy for the course

- Develop the course assessment strategy

- Consider the Employability Framework and how this will inform the curriculum

By the end of this session, the team will have produced the Learning and Teaching strategy as well as the Assessment Strategy for the course.

Additionally, for **apprenticeship proposals**, there will also be a focus on the following during sessions 1 and 2:

- Consideration of the academic requirements of a University award alongside the applied requirements of an apprenticeship

- Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours

- Global Apprenticeship Curriculum Components

- End Point Assessments (and Gateway requirements)

### d) Additional 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 finalisation session (section e below).  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).

### e) Design Sprint Session 3 (half day) – Documentation Review session

At this stage, the sprint team will agree the documentation to progress to the final validation event.  The relevant Associate Dean Students (ADS) (or nominee) will be involved at this point.  The review of the documentation may take place synchronously (in a face-to-face or Teams meeting) or asynchronously (through the Teams channel).  The proposal will not be progressed to a final validation event until this review has taken place and the ADS (or nominee) and sprint team have agreed that the documentation is ready to be distributed to validation event panel members.

If any 'non-standard' aspects of the proposal e.g. block delivery, are identified through the sprint process, these will be raised with the Chair of QEC before the final documentation is confirmed.

### f) Validation Event

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 Quality and Enhancement Committee[2].

For partner provision the role of the validation panel is also consider for approval the delivery of the course by the respective partner(s).

The validation panel will be comprised of the following members:

- A senior academic member of the University (Executive Dean, Associate Dean, Executive Director of Curriculum and Academic Affairs or Head of Department) as Chair.

- External academic from the subject area

---

[2] In the case of dual awards, the Validation Panel will recommend approval to Quality and Enhancement Committee, in accordance with the University's Dual Award Policy.

- One member of academic staff who is from outside the School 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)

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.

The final course documentation will be sent out to the validation event panel 2 weeks prior to the validation event. This will include:

- Proposal overview. 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).

- For dual awards – a Collaborative Operational Framework and copies of the partner's academic regulations (in English)

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 meeting.

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

- Curriculum design and alignment with the Academic Strategy

- Employability including the Employability Framework

- Inclusive learning

- Learning resources required (including staffing)

- Approach to Technology Enhanced Learning

- Student Support arrangements

- Fundamental British Values, Prevent, Gateway requirements for end point assessment and end point assessment (for Apprenticeship Provision)

- The partner's ability to deliver the proposed courses (for Partner provision)

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.

At the end of the meeting both good practice and further areas of work (where required) will be confirmed and a deadline 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 QEC either for approval (dual award provision) or noting (all other courses).

Following the final validation event, an additional sprint meeting may be scheduled at the request of the course team to review the areas of further work set by the panel and agree a plan for the completion of the final documentation.

### 3) Confirmation of Final Course Documentation

Following the validation event, the course documentation will be finalised and submitted to QAE for final approval by the Chair of the Validation Event on behalf of QEC.  At this point the course/partner delivery of the course (where relevant) is fully approved.

Exceptionally, if the Chair of the Validation Event is not available, the Chair of QEC may appoint an alternative senior member of academic staff to review the final documentation and confirm final approval of the course.

### 4) Design Sprint Digital Space

Each School will have a designated digital space within which each approved course will hold key documentation.

This space will house all the outputs from the sprint activities, support quality assurance and version control elements for paperwork involved with course design and approval procedure and will also be the main communication channel for the sprint team.

### 5) Revalidation

For provision requiring revalidation, a preliminary meeting will be held with the course team and the aspects of the sprint procedure to be engaged with will be agreed (this can be the full sprint procedure where required). A documentation review session will always be needed ahead of the validation event.