

## UNIVERSITY OF CUMBRIA

# Procedures and Processes for the Validation of Credit Bearing Academic Provision (Taught Programmes)

Policy Schedule	
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<i>NB. This policy is available on the University of Cumbria intranet and it should be noted that any printed copies are uncontrolled and cannot be guaranteed to constitute the current version of the policy.</i>	

## Introduction

This document sets out the procedures and processes for the consideration, approval and review of the University's taught provision. Further supporting information is provided in the accompanying Guide to Validation and Guide to Subject Level Periodic Review.

The approval and ongoing review of modules and programmes is one of the principal mechanisms through which the University secures academic standards and ensures the quality of learning opportunities within programmes of study that lead to a University of Cumbria qualification.

The approval of Degree/Higher Level Apprenticeship (HLA) provision and Academic Collaborative Provision (ACP) delivered through Associate Partners follows the same processes. The University's Processes and Procedures for the Approval and Management of Academic Collaborative Provision should also be referred to. The University does not have the authority to approve another provider to deliver a Degree/Higher Level Apprenticeship. However, the University can determine whether it will grant approval for an Associate Partner to deliver a University of Cumbria award as part of a Degree/Higher Level Apprenticeship.

Responsibility for approving the University's taught academic programmes is discharged through the Standing Validation Panel (SVP) which acts on behalf of Academic Board. The SVP comprises experienced academics from across the University who may act as Chairs and Panel Members of validations.

Validation Panels fulfil their role by judging new and significantly amended proposals against the University's Threshold Criteria for Validation and Curriculum Design Framework, which provide the benchmark against which all proposals are measured. These criteria have been developed to ensure that the University's portfolio satisfies the external requirements expected by the Office for Students, the Quality Assurance Agency, PSRBs and other relevant bodies and frameworks. Validation Panels also include a Student Reviewer who is drawn from a pool of trained student volunteers and whose role is to assess proposals in relation to the student learning experience and support arrangements.

In the case of Degree/Higher Level Apprenticeship (HLA) provision, the Standing Validation Panel are also responsible for judging proposals against the corresponding Apprenticeship Standard and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) funding and compliance rules. The Panel must therefore undertake a holistic review both of the academic University qualification and of the apprenticeship components.

The University's validation processes (including Minor Modification and Periodic Review) seek to assure the continuing appropriateness and currency of the existing programme (e.g. if a new or revised subject benchmark has been introduced).

Academic Board maintains oversight of the University's validation activity through its sub-committee, Student Success and Quality Assurance Committee (SSQAC). SSQAC considers and approves the membership of the SVP on an annual basis. It also receives an annual summary report of Validation, Minor Modification, and Periodic Review activity.

This document has been informed by the Office for Students Conditions of Registration (especially the B Conditions) and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education Advice and Guidance, in particular:

- [Course Design and Development](#)
- [Enabling Student Achievement](#)
- [External Expertise](#)
- [Student Engagement](#)
- [OfS Conditions of Registration](#)

The validation process is managed by the Quality Assurance Team in Academic Quality and Development (AQD).

# Section 1 - Principles

## General

1. University programmes are normally validated for open-ended approval subject to successful Periodic Review.
2. University programmes validated under the previous system of 6-year approval periods will remain validated until such point that the first Subject Level Periodic Review of the subject-group has taken place (subject to there being no quality or viability concerns). Provided that the Subject Level Periodic Review recommends ongoing approval, the programme validation will revert to open-ended approval.
3. When new Subject Benchmark Statements or Apprenticeship Standards are published these are considered within the relevant Academic Institute to determine what validation or minor modification activity may be required.
4. In cases of Academic Collaborative Provision involving Associate Partners, the Associate Partner must be approved by Academic Board before any validation event can take place.

## Changes to Programmes

5. Changes may be made to programmes and modules throughout their validated lifecycle through the Minor Modification Process.
6. Once a programme is validated, no changes should be implemented within the first year of the programme validation period before the affected module and/or level of study has run for the first time (with the exceptions of changes in PSRB requirements) unless approval has been obtained from the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic). Discretion will be applied in the case of shared modules within adopting programmes.

## External Engagement

7. Programme Leaders are responsible for engaging with a wide range of stakeholders in the development of the programme e.g. employers, service providers, placement providers and students. The nature of these activities may vary (e.g. employer/industry meetings, email feedback from an External Team Member, social media feedback from students, use of discussion boards, writing days with the academic team etc.). This engagement must be evidenced in the Validation Briefing Document. HLA proposals and ACP proposals for validated programmes and franchise proposals for a programme not already validated should follow the same processes for other stakeholder engagement. The University provides support to Associate Partners to enable them to fulfil this. This is not necessary for a franchise proposal of an already validated University programme (which looks at a partner's ability to deliver an existing programme).
8. Students must be involved in the development and periodic review of programmes. The Programme Leader is responsible for making arrangements for appropriate engagement and this must be evidenced in the Validation Briefing Document, along with detail of how feedback influenced final proposals. HLA proposals and ACP proposals for validated programmes and franchise proposals for a programme not already

validated should follow the same processes for student input. This is not necessary for a franchise proposal of an already validated University programme (where the programme itself is already approved).

9. The University's validation procedures require the involvement of experienced academics and/or practitioners. Such engagement is secured through the use of an External Team Member (during programme development) and External Panel Member (at the approval stage). In the case of minor modifications, and subject level periodic review, external expertise engagement is secured through use of External Examiners (and for Subject Level Periodic Review, External Panel Members) in approving changes.

## **Deadlines**

10. Dates for programme validation are set following approval of the Programme Initiation Process - Data Collection stage.
11. Validation events follow the Institutional Planning Cycle, agreed at ASPC for approval and subsequent delivery.
12. Exceptionally, compressed timescales may be negotiated, for example HLA programmes with employer led demands or other provision where permission is granted at the discretion of the Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic).

## Section 2 - Categories of Approval

The University operates a range of validation processes. All forms of approval use the same reference points to ensure a level of consistency as to what constitutes a University of Cumbria award:

**Validation** – Validation is the process used to describe the approval of new substantive programmes (as described in the Academic Regulations (B2.1), other than 'Other Awards').

**Franchise** –Where the University approves an Associate Partner to deliver an academic programme which the University owns ("Franchise Model") or approves an Associate Partner to deliver a part of an academic programme which the University owns, normally up to 50% ("Shared Delivery Franchise Model"). Franchise approval events largely follow the same process as Validation. However, where the provision is already validated as a University programme, the process will focus on the partner's delivery, management, and student support arrangements.

**Periodic Review** - Programmes are normally validated for open-ended approval subject to successful subject level periodic review. Operating on a 6-year cycle, the continuing appropriateness of provision is reviewed and confirmed via the appropriate mechanism; either revalidation or subject level periodic review. The Guide to Validation provides explanatory information on the different categories.

- **Revalidation** is the mechanism for the continuing approval of existing programmes which are seeking to make substantial changes. Revalidation can either be conducted through a Validation Event, or streamlined by correspondence (depending on the scope and level of change requested).
- **Subject Level Periodic Review** is the mechanism for the continuing approval of all programmes and modules within a subject-group which are seeking to make no changes or a limited amount of change through Periodic Review. Subject Level Periodic Review is the preferred method of reapproval to be applied to all of the University's credit-bearing provision including ACP and HLA programmes. The only anticipated exception may be where a significant amount of change is proposed or where PSRB procedures require that a separate programme level revalidation event takes place

**Minor Modification** – Minor Modification is the process by which validated programmes and/or modules can be changed during their validated period, ahead of their next scheduled Subject Level Periodic Review. Such changes could involve changes to programme content, structure or other delivery arrangements. Minor awards (defined in the Academic Regulations (B2.1) as 'Other Awards') may also be approved through the Minor Modification Process.

## Section 3 – Validation Processes

- 3.1 Programme planning and approval processes have three main phases – Planning, Development (Curriculum Design and Development) and Validation.

### **Planning Phase**

- 3.2 The Planning Phase is overseen by the Portfolio and Programme Development Manager, as set out in the University's Processes for Programme Initiation. This gated process comprises two stages:

Stage 1 Outline rationale, Market Analysis, Resourcing

Stage 2 Data collection

- 3.3. On approval of Stage 2, the proposal proceeds to the Curriculum Design and Development phase.

### **Development Phase - Curriculum Design and Development**

- 3.4 This phase describes the period used by the proposing team to design and develop the programme and produce the programme documents.
- 3.5 Following successful completion of Stage 2 of the Programme Initiation Process, a Validation Officer from AQD is assigned to the Validation Event and a Standing Validation Panel chair and panel are also assigned. Allocations are managed through AQD and the Dean for Student Success who ensure that there are no conflicts of interest.
- 3.6 The Validation Officer will liaise with the proposer to develop a timeline of activities and deadlines. This will include the following:
- Deadline/s for documentation to be submitted and approved by Institute senior management to proceed to validation, and the support the QA Team can provide to achieve this
  - Date of Validation Event
  - Deadlines for document submission for Validation Event
  - Any permitted variations required by PSRB accreditation/approval procedures
  - Templates that need to be completed
- 3.7 At this point, the Validation Officer will liaise with the proposer to confirm the name of the External Team Member (as captured in Stage 2 of programme initiation), to identify an External Panel Member<sup>1</sup> and to identify any PSRBs to be involved and ascertain their requirements and deadlines for the event.

### **Planning for Validation**

- 3.8 Planning for validation and review activity is an ongoing process, led by the Academic Institutes.

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<sup>1</sup> For details about the External Panel Member and External Team Member, refer to the Guide to Validation.

- 3.9 The Dean for Student Success and Institute senior management are responsible for ensuring that programme teams are undertaking planning and development activities to meet the requirements of the institution's validation processes and associated deadlines.

### **External Team Member**

- 3.10 The proposing team is required to consult with a nominated External Team Member as part of programme development for validation and revalidation. Detail of the feedback from the External Team member and how it shaped the final proposals must be summarised in the Validation Briefing Document.
- 3.11 In the event of sets of programmes coming forward within a joint event, a number of External Team Members may be required. This should be discussed with the Validation Officer (AQD) in the first instance. HLA proposals and ACP proposals for validated programmes and franchise proposals for a programme not already validated should follow the same processes for External Team Member input. This is not normally necessary for a franchise proposal of an already validated University programme (where the programme itself is already approved).

### **Institute sign-off to proceed to the validation event**

- 3.12 The proposer is required to submit the validation document set to the nominated Institute senior management and Validation Officer for scrutiny and assurance that the proposal is ready to be presented to the Validation Event. The deadline for submission of the validation document set will be agreed between the Institute and Validation Officer as part of the timeline of activities and deadlines, agreed after Programme Initiation approval. The Institute senior management and Validation Officer will liaise and determine if any further work is required on the documents before they are circulated to the Validation Panel.
- 3.13 3 weeks prior to the validation event, a final set of documents must be submitted to the Validation Officer (who will complete a full housekeeping and formatting check of the documents, correcting typos etc) before sending them to the Validation Panel for scrutiny.

### **Validation Phase**

- 3.14 The Validation Event is managed by the designated Validation Officer in Academic Quality and Development.
- 3.15 As a minimum, Validation Panels comprise<sup>2</sup>:
- A Chair (drawn from the SVP but out with the proposing team's Subject Group)
  - One Internal Panel Member (drawn from the SVP but outwith the proposing team's Subject Group.)
  - One External Panel Member (see below)

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<sup>2</sup> Where appropriate, validation panels may vary in size. AQD is responsible for agreeing the exact panel size. Typically, variants will be due to PSRB attendance, for complex validations or where the validation is seeking to approve substantial changes to an existing programme.



- A Student Reviewer (drawn from the SVP pool but out with the proposing team's Subject Group) (see below)
  - The Validation Officer
- 3.16 To enable the Validation Panel to comment on the appropriateness of the subject and curriculum content, an independent External Panel Member attends as a member of the Validation Panel. The External Panel Member is not involved in the Development Phase and is different to the External Team Member.
- 3.17 An External Panel Member is not normally required for Franchise events where the programme has already gone through the University's validation process that included external input. In such instances, it would be expected that the relevant External Examiner provide external commentary on the ability of the Associate Partner to deliver the validated programme. However, an External Panel Member would be required for Franchise events where the programme is not already validated.
- 3.18 To enable the Validation Panel to fully consider and comment upon the appropriateness of the proposal in terms of the student learning experience and support arrangements, an independent Student Reviewer attends as a member of the Validation Panel.

## **Validation Documentation**

- 3.19 The proposing team is required to submit a validation document set to the Validation Officer in the agreed timeframe. The document set comprises:
- Validation Briefing Document.
  - Programme Specification.
  - Module Descriptor Forms (MDFs).
  - Links to online staff profiles for University staff involved in the delivery of the programme (and staff CVs for external staff, such as ACP proposals, PSRBs, etc.).
  - Work-based Learning / Placement Handbook (where applicable, e.g. for PSRBs).
  - Critical Review (for revalidations).

Where there are multiple target awards proposed as part of a larger framework of interrelated programmes, the team should also provide:

- A mapping of the modules and awards, clearing identifying shared modules

For all Degree/Higher Level Apprenticeship programmes, the following is also required:

- Mentor Handbook

For Academic Collaborative Provision, the following is also required:

- Programme Handbook (draft)
- Operational Manual for delivery (draft)
- Institutional Agreement
- Memorandum of Co-operation (draft) or other programme-level agreement.

- 3.20 The Validation Officer will circulate the document set to the Validation Panel and ask for comments to be returned. This will normally be 2-3 weeks prior to the event. Note: Earlier deadlines may be required by PSRBs. The Validation Panel will normally be asked to submit comments one week in advance of the Validation Event.

- 3.21 The Validation Officer liaises with the Validation Chair to collate comments and questions into a Validation Agenda which is circulated prior to the Validation Event.
- 3.22 Programme Initiation documentation is not normally considered part of the validation document set. The Chair and Validation Officer are responsible for checking and confirming that the proposal as presented for validation aligns to the Programme Initiation proposal/s. Should queries be raised, a pre-validation meeting may be convened. Outcomes from this meeting will vary depending on the query but may lead to:
- A document rewrite.
  - Liaison with the Academic Institute and/or Academic Strategy and Planning Committee (ASPC) to consider and approve changes.
  - A report into the validation to enable further discussion and consideration by the Validation Panel.

## **The Validation Meeting**

- 3.23 Validation Events take the form of a meeting between the Validation Panel and the proposing team. The event is led by the Validation Chair and facilitated by the Validation Officer.
- 3.24 The Validation Officer will agree the timings for the Validation Event in advance. A Validation Event is typically either half day or a full day depending on the size and scope of the proposal. Longer meetings over more than one day may be arranged in the case of larger proposals or due to PSRB requirements.
- 3.25 For International validations, a report from the Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic) or other suitable representative of the University Senior Management Team may be presented to provide backing and context for the proposal.
- 3.26 For revalidations, it is expected that the panel will have the opportunity to meet with a representative group of students (or recent graduates) from the existing programme.
- 3.27 At the end of the meeting, with reference to the Threshold Criteria for Validation and Curriculum Design Framework, the Validation Panel is required to make a decision about whether to validate the proposal, to agree any conditions and enhancements and to identify areas of good and best practice.
- 3.28 In making its decision, the potential outcomes open to the Validation Panel are:
- To approve the proposal unconditionally
  - To approve the proposal subject to satisfying minor conditions and responding to any enhancements. Where this is the case, documents must be resubmitted within 3 weeks of the event.
  - To approve the proposal subject to satisfying major conditions and responding to any enhancements. Where this is the case, documents must be resubmitted within 6 weeks of the event.
  - To defer the proposal for a year. In cases where conditions are excessive in number or scale, the Chair will refer the proposal back to the Academic Institute for further detailed redevelopment before re-presenting to a new Validation Event in the next academic year.
  - To not approve the proposal.

- 3.29 Following the meeting, the Validation Officer produces a Validation Report. This describes the main points of discussion and outcomes and confirms any conditions, enhancements and good and best practice. It is circulated to the Validation Panel and the proposing team.
- 3.30 Where conditions and or enhancements are set, the proposing team is required to respond to these in the agreed timescale with associated documentation re-presented as appropriate. Where good and best practice is highlighted, responses are also required as appropriate to indicate how they might be more widely disseminated.
- 3.31 A condition of the validation event will be to complete a Programme Operating Guide. This document will contain the detailed programme structure, transitional arrangements (where applicable), adopted/stand alone modules and assessment map.
- 3.32 Post- Validation Event activity is undertaken between the Validation Chair, Validation Officer, and the proposing team. Exceptionally, Internal Panel Members and/or External Panel Members may be involved.
- 3.33 Once the Chair is satisfied that conditions have been met, that any enhancements have been responded to, and that appropriate avenues for dissemination of good and best practice have been identified, the Chair signs off the proposal. At that point it is considered validated.
- 3.34 The Validation Officer is responsible for notifying the programme team, internal stakeholders, and Associate Partners (where applicable) that a proposal has been formally validated.

### **Post Validation Activity - Definitive Programme Documents**

- 3.35 Following validation, AQD is responsible for the storage and maintenance of the Programme Specifications and Module Descriptors Forms (which form the Definitive Programme Document - DPD) during the life of the programme.
- 3.36 DPDs are stored on the Sharepoint and this will be the source from which staff will access validated programme documentation.
- 3.37 AQD is responsible for making Programme Specifications ready for publication and uploading to the web content management system to form part of the programme's webpage.
- 3.38 Updated Programme Specifications should be uploaded onto programme webpages by the end of June, prior to the start of the recruitment and application cycle. Until validation approval is confirmed a placeholder is made available on the website to indicate the status of the programme to prospective applicants.

## **Section 4 – Periodic Review of Programmes**

- 4.1 Programmes are normally validated for open-ended approval subject to successful Periodic Review. Operating on a 6-year cycle, the continuing appropriateness of provision is reviewed and confirmed via the appropriate mechanism, either revalidation, or subject level periodic review.
- 4.2 AQD maintains the definitive record of validated programmes and the 6-year schedule for subject level periodic review.
- 4.3 The schedule is reviewed on an annual basis to identify whether any subject-groups should be brought forwards early. Academic Institutes will also have the opportunity to indicate whether substantial changes are proposed that would require full revalidation of particular programmes.

### **Revalidation**

- 4.4 Revalidation is reserved for programmes seeking to make substantial changes to the existing programme. Additional guidance is provided in the Guide to Validation.
- 4.5 Programmes going through revalidation will normally follow the University's Programme Initiation Processes and timelines after which a Revalidation Event date, and other deadlines, will be set by AQD.
- 4.6 Revalidation follows the same process as Programme Validation and can be presented to a Validation Event or managed via correspondence.
- 4.7 For revalidations, it is expected that the panel will have the opportunity to meet with a representative group of students (and/or recent graduates) from the existing programme. The proposing team will liaise with the Validation Officer to secure appropriate representation.

### **Subject Level Periodic Review**

- 4.8 Subject Level Periodic Review represents a streamlined mechanism for the continuing approval of existing programmes where no changes or limited changes only are proposed (and programme aims and outcomes remain largely unchanged).
- 4.9 Subject Level Periodic Review is reserved for programmes which can evidence that they continue to meet the standards expected by the University and set out by the QAA and PSRBs. Proposals must demonstrate that they continue to meet the Threshold Criteria for Validation. There must be evidence of successful evaluation by students, External Examiner(s) and other stakeholders.
- 4.10 Subject Level Periodic Review is normally appropriate where effective and appropriate use has been made of the Minor Modification process to ensure that programmes and modules continue to be current and meet internal and external requirements.

- 4.11 Subject Level Periodic Review provides a regular, systematic process that provides a check on ongoing learning and teaching provision at an operational level.
- 4.12 Depending on the amount of provision within a subject-group, discretion will be applied when determining whether to merge or split subject groups for the purpose of Subject Level Periodic Review scheduling.
- 4.13 The maximum duration between successive Subject Level Periodic Review for any subject-group will not normally exceed 6 years. However, subject-groups may move up/down the schedule depending on the perceived level of risk to academic standards, quality of the student experience and/or student success. Reasons for a subject group moving up the schedule may include changes to PSRB or industry standards, shorter PSRB approval cycles, or other extraordinary and unforeseen factors/circumstances/concerns raised by the Academic Institute through the Annual Monitoring process.
- 4.14 The Subject Level Periodic Review Process is designed to be data-driven, light touch, and transparent, with a reliance on existing data and evidence. The process balances both quality assurance and quality enhancement, providing opportunities for good and best practice to be identified, built upon and shared.
- 4.15 All programmes and modules within the subject-group will be considered through a Subject Level Periodic Review Panel meeting, normally chaired by an independent Chair from the Standing Validation Panel and consisting of:
- A Standing Validation Panel Chair
  - The Director of AQD / Quality Assurance Manager from AQD (or nominee)
  - The Director of SAAS (or nominee)
  - One Internal Panel Members (drawn from the Standing Validation Panel but out with the proposing Subject Group)
  - A Student Reviewer (drawn from the SVP pool but out with the proposing team's Subject Group)
  - A minimum of one External Panel Member (there must be sufficient subject expertise to comment on all programmes under consideration)
- 4.16 Subject Level Periodic Review meeting dates can be set in both Semester 1 or 2 each year and the Subject Level Periodic Review Panel is supported by AQD. The remit of the Subject Level Periodic Review Panel is to reconfirm the continuing academic standards and the quality of the student experience, to identify any opportunities for enhancement, and potentially to approve any proposed changes/modifications to programmes and/or modules.
- 4.17 Programme teams will be required to produce minimal new documentation for the Subject Level Periodic Review Process. The following data and supporting documentation must be presented to the panel meeting:
- A Briefing Document/Executive Summary on the subject-group including SWOT analysis by programme, links to all online staff profiles within the subject-group, and an overview of any new minor changes or modifications requiring the approval of the subject level periodic review panel
  - Programme Specifications on the latest template (using track changes to show the intended changes)

- Module Descriptor Forms on the latest template (using track changes to show the desired changes)
- Programme Handbooks on the latest template (using track changes to show the desired changes)
- Placement / Work Based Learning Handbooks on the latest template (using track changes to show the desired changes)
- The last three years' Annual Monitoring Reports
- The last three years' External Examiner Reports and Programme Leader responses
- Evidence of student engagement in quality monitoring and evaluation (e.g. Staff Student Forum minutes, module evaluation reports, notes of focus groups, or details of student surveys)

All documents must be submitted to AQD at least 5 weeks before the Subject Level Periodic Review meeting. The AQD Validation Officer will undertake a QA documentary health check for all programmes under consideration which will inform the Subject Level Periodic Review agenda and focus.

- 4.18 AQD will also provide the Subject Level Periodic Review panel with a summary of Minor Changes or Minor Modifications since the last Validation and/or Periodic Review.
- 4.19 The Subject Level Periodic Review Panel will consider the data and supporting documentation using the University's Threshold Criteria for Validation and other relevant internal/external reference point including:
- University Strategic Plan and Annual Operating Plan
  - University Academic Regulations and Curriculum Design Framework
  - University Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Strategy
  - QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
  - QAA Characteristics Statements (if applicable)
  - QAA Subject Benchmark Statements (if applicable)
  - PSRB standards and/or competences (if applicable)
  - Sector Skills Council national occupational standards (if applicable)
- 4.20 The Subject Level Periodic Review Panel may also be tasked with looking at programme resources and taking a thematic approach to enhancement themes as defined by the University.
- 4.21 It is expected that the panel will have the opportunity to meet with a representative group of students (or recent graduates) from the subject-group. The proposing teams will liaise with the Validation Officer to secure appropriate representation. Depending on the type(s) of provision within the subject-group, the panel may also be expected to meet with employers, placement providers, and service users and carers. Where face-to-face meetings cannot be arranged, feedback from these groups may be gathered by correspondence.
- 4.22 In the case of relatively new programmes validated within the last 2 years, the Subject Level Periodic Review Panel will not be expected to re-scrutinise these as closely as there will be insufficient data on which to make any reliable assessment of quality, student satisfaction and/or student outcomes. Programme teams should also not be proposing changes so soon following initial validation. The ongoing approval of these programmes should therefore be noted as a formality only.

- 4.23 In making its decision, the potential outcomes open to the Subject Level Periodic Review Panel for each programme within the subject-group are:
- To confirm ongoing programme approval subject to satisfying minor conditions and responding to any enhancements. Where this is the case, documents must be resubmitted within 3 weeks of the event.
  - To confirm ongoing programme approval subject to satisfying major conditions and responding to any enhancements. Where this is the case, documents must be resubmitted within 6 weeks of the event.
  - To refer the programme for full revalidation where the programme team will be expected to have made further substantial changes based on the feedback of the Programme Review Panel. In such cases, the revalidation will normally be expected to take place in Semester 2 of the same academic year, prior to the start of the recruitment and application cycle.
  - To refer the programme to the Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic). This would typically be used where the Programme Review Panel identify serious quality concerns about a programme.
- 4.24 Following the meeting, the AQD Officer will produce notes of the Subject Level Periodic Review Panel. This describes the main points of discussion and outcomes including any conditions, enhancements, and good / best practice. This is circulated to the Subject Level Periodic Review Panel and the proposing programme teams.
- 4.25 Post- Subject Level Periodic Review Panel activity is undertaken between the Panel Chair, Validation Officer, and the proposing teams. Exceptionally, the External Examiners may also be involved.
- 4.26 Once the Subject Level Periodic Review Panel Chair is satisfied that the conditions have been met, that any enhancements have been responded to, and that appropriate avenues for dissemination of good and best practice have been identified, they will formally sign off the programmes for continuing approval. At that point, the updated Definitive Programme Documents (Programme Specifications and Module Descriptor Forms) are re-saved.
- 4.27 The AQD Validation Officer is responsible for notifying institutional stakeholders that programmes within the subject-group have been formally re-approved.

### **Post Revalidation, and Subject Level Periodic Review- Definitive Programme Documents**

- 4.28 Following revalidation or subject level periodic review, AQD is responsible for the storage and maintenance of the Programme Specifications and Module Descriptors Forms (which form the Definitive Programme Document - DPD) during the life of the programme.
- 4.29 Updated Programme Specifications should be uploaded onto programme webpages by the end of June, prior to the start of the recruitment and application cycle. Until revalidation or approval is confirmed, a placeholder is made available on the website to ensure that applicants understand that the Programme Specification on the University website is undergoing routine review and that some of the details may change.

## Section 5 – Minor Modification and Minor Awards

- 5.1 The Minor Modification and Minor Awards process provides a mechanism for the ongoing enhancement of programmes and modules within the validated period and for the approval of new academic awards of up to 60 credits.
- 5.2 Approval of Degree/Higher Level Apprenticeship programmes will not be permitted via the Minor Modification and Minor Awards process, regardless of the size of the award. The full validation process must instead be followed.
- 5.3 During the lifetime of a programme, the programme team may wish to make minor modifications to the programme or individual modules. These may be for a variety of reasons, but typically to:
- Ensure continuing currency of programmes in light of developments in the sector (such as industry practice and pedagogy).
  - Responding to feedback from staff, students or the external examiner.
  - Responding to changes in the external environment such as PSRB requirements or government policy changes.
- 5.4 Requests for minor modification are initiated within Academic Institutes and are considered according to the level of potential impact on the student experience and the programme aims and outcomes. The three available categories are:
- **Category 1 modification:** Low impact
  - **Category 2 modification:** Medium impact
  - **Category 3 modification:** High impact
- 5.5 Category 1 modifications require the approval of the Institute senior management. Category 2 modifications require the approval of the Institute senior management and the External Examiner. Category 1 and Category 2 modifications are presented to the Minor Modifications Panel for note only. Category 3 modifications must be considered by the University's Minor Modification and Awards Panel (MMAP).
- 5.6 The minor modification process represents a risk-based approach with a gradation of approval depending on the scale of changes being proposed. A summary table of permitted Minor Modifications in each category is detailed separately in the Guide to Minor Modification.
- 5.7 No more than 30% of a validated programme may be modified during each 6-yearly validation/review cycle. Should a programme reach this 30% limit, no further modifications will be permitted until programme revalidation or subject level periodic review has taken place in order to ensure that the curriculum continues to align with the programme aims and outcomes and that the University Threshold Criteria for Validation continue to be met. Changes that impact on the overall programme aims and outcomes may require more detailed revalidation activity.
- 5.8 Once a programme is validated, no changes should be proposed for Minor Modification within the first year of the programme validation period or before the affected module and/or level of study has run for the first time (with the exceptions of changes in PSRB requirements) unless approval has been obtained from the Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic). Discretion will be applied in the case of shared modules within adopting programmes.



- 5.9 In proposing a change, affected students must be consulted and their agreement to the proposal must be sought. More detail is provided in the Guide to Minor Modification.
- 5.10 AQD maintains a record of Minor Modifications.
- 5.11 The QA Team in AQD have responsibility for maintaining the Definitive Programme Documents and must be kept informed of all modifications required, including Housekeeping. The QA Team is responsible for the timely dissemination of Minor Modifications to relevant internal stakeholders.
- 5.12 Where new academic awards are approved through the Minor Modification process, they are considered against the Threshold Criteria for Validation.
- 5.13 The Membership and Terms of Reference for the MMAP are set out in the University's Committee Handbook.

### **Process for Approval of Minor Modifications**

- 5.14 Requests for a Minor Modification are submitted to the Quality Assurance Team. The Quality Assurance Team will determine the correct category of modification to be applied and the supporting evidence/documentation and approvals required.
- 5.15 All Category 3 modifications will be submitted to the University's Minor Modification and Awards Panel (MMAP) for approval.
- 5.16 For Category 3 proposals to be received at Minor Modification and Awards Panel, all approvals must be received into AQD at least 2 weeks prior to the meeting.
- 5.17 Requests for changes to existing provision for implementation in the following academic year must be provided to AQD by the published deadlines set out in the Guide to Minor Modification.
- 5.18 Programme teams are expected to engage students when making proposals for minor modifications, through consulting with students who will be affected by the proposed change, and communicating any outcomes to students and applicants through corporate communications mechanisms.
- 5.19 In making its decision, the potential outcomes open to the Minor Modification and Awards Panel are for Category 3 proposals are:
- To approve the proposal
  - To not approve the proposal
  - To approve the proposal with minor housekeeping conditions. Where housekeeping conditions are attached to the approval, it is the responsibility of the lead proposer to address these to the satisfaction of the Panel Secretary within 2 weeks of the Panel outcome being communicated. A Minor Modification proposal is only approved and implemented following confirmation from the QA Team that any conditions have been met. Where conditions are not met within this timeframe, the proposal will revert to the status of "not approved" and will be reported as such under Matters Arising at the next meeting.

- 5.20 Where a change to the Definitive Programme Documents is regarded as Housekeeping only, it can be made by Programme/Module Team in liaison with AQD, out with the Minor Modification and Awards Panel.
- 5.21 AQD is responsible for ensuring that approved Minor Modifications are reported to Professional Services. Where relevant, academic colleagues (i.e. normally the person making the proposal) are responsible for reporting Minor Modifications to students and applicants.
- 5.22 The Consumer Protection Regulations (2008) and Consumer Contracts Regulations (2013) protect the rights of students to study the programme the University contracted with them to deliver in accordance with an offer made and accepted based on information provided to the student which informed the student's choice. This has implications for making certain minor modifications. The Guide to Minor Modification provides detail of minor modifications that could have implications in relation to Consumer Protection Law.
- 5.23 The minor modification is not approved until it has been formally communicated to the lead proposer and all affected internal stakeholders by the Quality Assurance Team.

## **Section 6 – Programme Withdrawal**

- 6.1 The University operates a formal process for Programme Withdrawal.
- 6.2 Programme Withdrawal is defined as the complete withdrawal of a named programme. This could be within or at the end of its validation period.
- 6.3 The procedure for Programme Withdrawal is set out in the [Programme Withdrawal Processes](#).