

APPROVAL AND REVISION OF TAUGHT MODULES AND PROGRAMMES HANDBOOK

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1 Introduction

1.1 Approval and Amendment of Taught Programmes and Modules

1.1.1 To ensure that the expectations of Faculties, students and staff are clear the following verbs are adopted and highlighted in the text:

- a. **Must:** to indicate a regulation that **must** be adhered to in all circumstances. Exceptions to such regulations will only be granted by the Deans in exceptional circumstances. For example, “Students **must** receive feedback on all assessed work”.
- b. **Should:** to indicate a regulation that **should** be adhered to unless sound pedagogical reasons prevent this. For example, “Students **should** be provided with timetables at the start of each module indicating when coursework will be set, when it is to be submitted”.
- c. **May:** to indicate a regulation where action is discretionary, but Faculties are expected to demonstrate that taking the action has been considered. For example, “A standard template for student feedback may be developed to ensure consistency of feedback across all modules and assessment methods”. May is used both as an indication of good practice and also in the permissive sense.

1.1.2 This document describes the procedures and requirements for approving new taught programmes/modules and amending existing offerings. Its scope encompasses Professional Doctorates. The document applies to programmes/modules that are delivered directly by the University, as well as those operating in academic partnership with external institutions (i.e. jointly delivered programmes, or programmes that are validated by the University of Exeter for delivery by an external institution). In the case of academic partnerships, the lead Faculty within the University of Exeter **must** work with the partner/s to ensure that the programme/module in hand is approved in accordance with the procedures and requirements outlined.

1.1.3 The procedures and requirements outlined herein have two objectives. Firstly, they confirm that the University meets the expectations of the Quality Assurance Agency, regarding the development of academic programmes (i.e. documented institutional processes on programme development, involvement of students and external assessors

at key stages, independence of final approval decisions from parties involved in designing and/or delivering the programme). Secondly, they ensure that internal expertise is exploited to enhance the quality and sustainability of the University's programmes/modules (e.g. designated Strategic Market Partners, AccessAbility/Wellbeing Team).

- 1.1.4 This document refers to named positions (e.g. Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education, Strategic Market Partner), with the incumbents required to perform activities or provide authorisations. Where a department does not have the usual Faculty structure proxy positions **must** be identified, with comparable seniority and remit, such that all prescribed actions are fulfilled.
- 1.1.5 In each Faculty the Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education is responsible for ensuring that colleagues observe the procedures and requirements outlined.
- 1.1.6 For further guidance, colleagues **should** make early contact with the Programme Design and Quality Enhancement team (PDQE) and Strategic Market Partner in their Faculty.
- 1.1.7 Where a proposal involves an academic partnership with an external institution, the lead Faculty **should** simultaneously contact the PDQE team at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.1.8 The full approval process, which is typically required for all new and significantly amended programmes, comprises three phases:

Phase	Full Approval Process	Locus of Responsibility
1	Viability Assessment	Lead Faculty (Faculty Taught Portfolio group*)
2	Business Approval	Lead Department (Head of Department*) Lead Faculty (Chair of the Faculty Taught Portfolio Group*)
3	Academic Approval	Lead Faculty (Faculty Education and Student Experience Committee*), PDQE Team

		Dean for Taught Students and/or Associate Dean for Taught Students
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** Or its nominated body*

1.1.9 As described in this document, some phases are omitted when approving new modules and non-award programmes, or amending existing modules, programmes and non-award programmes.

1.1.10 Senate is wholly responsible for all matters of curriculum and academic content. Authority has been delegated by Senate to the Education Board and the PGR Board.

1.2 Programme Specifications and Module Descriptors

1.2.1 Each programme and module **must** be governed by a completed Programme Specification or Module Descriptor that is readily available to students and other stakeholders. Provision of information in this form is expected by the Office for Students (OfS). These documents also serve a host of functions, which are important both within and beyond the University. For example, they form the basis of the legal contract between the University and its students, they provide academic and professional colleagues with a more accessible record of programme/module details, as compared with a full programme/module handbook, they feed marketing materials and they serve as a repository for the Discover Uni (formerly Unistats) Record. The latter are data on teaching and assessment methods that the University is obliged to return to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), who in turn use it to populate the Discover Uni course comparison website. In addition, details about programmes, which may be gleaned from Programme Specifications and Module Descriptors, can be used by the Office for Students (OfS) to determine the University's funding allocation and compliance with the Conditions of Registration.

1.2.2 The provision of information to offer holders and current students is important as the University must adhere to the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) '[UK higher education providers - advice on consumer protection law](#)' to ensure that:

- a. We provide offer holders and current students with important information about our programmes and/or modules and any associated costs, at each stage of our dealings with them, including at the research and application, offer and enrolment stages.

- b. We provide offer holders and current students with the necessary information before they accept an offer of a place on a programme and/or module.
 - c. We ensure that information remains accurate and up to date, as any changes to it require the express consent of the offer holders and current students (see 5.8.5); and
 - d. We specifically flag to offer holders and current students any terms and conditions that are particularly noteworthy or otherwise important.
- 1.2.3 Colleagues who are completing and/or amending Programme Specifications or Module Descriptors **must** consult the [guidance](#). All documents **should** reflect this guidance and the examples of good practice within.
- 1.2.4 Colleagues **must** use the latest templates of the [Programme Specification](#) and [Module Descriptor](#). Older templates, which colleagues may hold on file, may not include all relevant fields.

1.3 Combined Honours

- 1.3.1 Some programmes **may** be jointly delivered by two or more Faculties (e.g. combined, major/minor, and triple honours programmes – see the Credit and Qualifications Framework. To avoid confusion and undue effort, milestones in the approvals process **should not** be duplicated (e.g. submission of documents to the PDQE team, engagement with an External Assessor, liaison with an AccessAbility Representative). Rather, the lead Faculty should direct activities. Nonetheless, at key stages, the partner Faculty/Faculties should confirm all decisions by providing signatures as directed on the relevant forms.

1.4 Professional Doctorates

- 1.4.1 For Professional Doctorate programmes, the equivalent PGR signatures **must** be added to the relevant forms. For example, where the Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education or Chair of the Faculty Taught Portfolio Group is listed for non-Professional Doctorate programmes, the Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Impact must also be added, and where a Head of Department or Director of Education and Student Experience is listed for non-Professional Doctorate programmes, the relevant Faculty Director of PGR **must** also be added.
- 1.4.2 At the point of Academic Approval, such programmes will be considered by the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Impact and the Dean of Postgraduate

Research, in accordance with the procedures below. Contact [Education Policy, Quality and Standards](#) for more information.

1.5 Variants

1.5.1 A variant is a new programme with very similar content to an existing programme. This can take two forms.

- a. The first (**variant A**) is where the core and optional modules remain the same as the original or 'parent' programme, and the new programme variant is offered part-time, or where an additional year or years are added in order for students to undertake a placement or work/study abroad. The exception to the academic content remaining the same will be in cases where academic content is amended in order to facilitate the aforementioned additional year(s) of study.
- b. The second (**variant B**) is where the academic content varies from the parent programme, but must include at least two-thirds of any compulsory credit from the parent programme, and/or any volume of optional credit. The parent programme in these terms refers to any programme that has been through the full Business and Academic Approval process. Variants provide a mechanism for expediting the creation of new programmes where much of the content has been scrutinised as part of an earlier approval process. Variants, and the parent programme on which they are based, **may** share a single Programme Specification.

1.5.2 The most common variants are treated as amendments to an existing programme (see table in section 5.3.1), with the requirements for approval stipulated in [Chapter 5 Amendments to Existing Programmes and Modules](#). The Faculty can approve these variants without intervention from the PDQE team. Once approved, however, Faculties **should** inform the PDQE team immediately, providing them with the appropriate sections completed and an up-to-date Programme Specification; and records from the Faculty Education and Student Experience Committee (or its nominated body) showing approval. The PDQE team will then work with Student Records to make appropriate amendments to SITS, the University's information management system, and will inform other professional services as appropriate (e.g. Strategic Planning, Admissions). Other proposals, beyond those listed in the table in [Chapter 5](#) section 5.3.1, may also be considered variants. In such cases, staff should

contact the PDQE Team at the earliest opportunity, for guidance on the appropriate procedures.

1.6 Pathways

- 1.6.1 Pathways are a particular type of variant. Within the confines of a programme a named pathway can be created, whereby students complete a prescribed collection of modules. This would lead to the award of the standard award and title, with the pathway in parentheses to reflect its specialist contents e.g. BSc Biological Sciences (Animal Biology). A pathway **must** include at least two thirds of any compulsory credit from the parent programme on which it is based. This requirement applies to the programme as a whole, with no stipulation regarding individual stages. Where there is less than two thirds commonality in compulsory credit, the proposal must be treated as a new and separate programme in its own right. The introduction or removal of named pathways is treated as a moderate amendment to an existing programme, with the requirements for approval stipulated in [Chapter 5 Amendments to Existing Programmes and Modules](#). Multiple pathways **may** be contained within a single Programme Specification.
- 1.6.2 Pathways can operate in one of two ways. Both will result in the standard award and title with the pathway in parentheses.
- a. Adjourned Pathways are those where students apply for and register on a generic programme. Each participant's eligibility for a pathway is then confirmed by the final Examination Board on the basis of the modules that have been completed. Local administrators can make the appropriate entry to each student's record in SITS, the University's information management system. Under this structure, students benefit from the opportunity to experience the programme and identify their preferred elements, before deciding the pathway specialism that will appear on their final certificate. The different pathways will not show up during searches of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and other course listings. Details of the available pathways can be articulated, however, in the text of the printed prospectus and webpages. Once they have been approved by the appropriate Faculty and reported to the PDQE team. With this type of pathway students **must** retain the choice to graduate with the standard award and title only (i.e. without a pathway in parentheses).

- b. Direct Entry Pathways require students to apply for and register on a specific pathway from the onset. It is anticipated that participants will remain on the pathway for the duration of their studies. Under this approach, each pathway has unique identifying codes (including UCAS codes in the case of undergraduate offerings). Consequently, the pathway will be identified when individuals conduct searches involving the specialism word(s). Potential marketing benefits **should**, however, be weighed against the more constraining structure. Furthermore, to ensure that Direct Entry Pathways are included in printed prospectuses and/or UCAS listings they **should** be approved in Faculty and reported to the PDQE team in accordance with the general deadlines given in section 3.3 Timings of [Chapter 3 Business Approval](#).

1.6.3 Proposals to create Adjourned or Direct Entry Pathways on an existing programme are categorised as a moderate amendment. The appropriate sections of the [Programme Moderate and Minor Amendment Form](#) should be completed and an up-to-date Programme Specification will need to be provided to the PDQE team. The PDQE team will then work with the necessary professional services teams (Student Records, Admissions etc.) to make the appropriate amendments to SITS, the University's student information management system.

1.6.4 For information about establishing programmes 'With Proficiency/ Advanced Proficiency in [named subject]', please refer to the [Credit and Qualifications Framework](#), Chapter 12 - Award of Undergraduate Degrees 'With Proficiency in/ Advanced Proficiency in' (see [Approval and Amendment of 'With Proficiency in'](#) form).

1.7 Exit and Interim Awards

1.7.1 For the overarching degree types in the table below the University automatically confers an 'exit award' to students who have successfully completed a defined portion of the programme but who are unwilling or unable to pursue it to completion. The full characteristics of these awards are outlined in the [Credit and Qualifications Framework](#)

	Possible exit awards in ascending order of credit value and RQF level →							
Degree types	CertHE	DipHE	Ordinary Degree	3yr BA, BSc etc.	4yr BA, BSc etc.	PGCert	PGDip	MA, MSc etc.

				with Honours	with Honours			
3yr Bachelor's Degree	Yes	Yes	Yes					
4yr Bachelor's Degree	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes				
Master's Degree						Yes	Yes	
4yr Integrate d Master's Degree	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes				
5yr Integrate d Master's Degree	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes			
Most Taught Doctorate s								Yes

1.7.2 During the process of developing a new programme Faculties do not need to request for exit awards to be set up; the Student Records Team do this automatically. In exceptional cases, Faculties **may** request that the standard exit awards relating to an overarching degree are not conferred to students e.g. in the case of professionally accredited programmes where completion of the entire programme is required to access relevant jobs. Such **proposals** should be made in the [New Programme Approval Form](#).

1.7.3 Exit awards at the level of BA, BSc etc. and higher **may** be made available for direct application by students. In such cases, the awards are referred to as 'interim awards'. Such proposals **should** be made in the New Programme Approval Form.

1.7.4 The title of exit/interim awards will be identical to the overarching degree, unless otherwise requested in the New Programme Approval Form.

1.8 New Types of Award

1.8.1 If a Faculty wishes to introduce a new programme which requires a new award/exit award that is not already listed within our Credit and Qualifications Framework and Ordinances, they must contact PDQE who will liaise with Education Policy, Quality and Standards (EPQS) to facilitate the inclusion of these.

1.8.2 New programmes cannot proceed to advertise/recruit without the full approval of these awards (including exit awards).

1.8.3 Appropriate paperwork must be sent to the Boards outlined in the table below, following full approval of the New Programme Approval Form (see [Business Approval, Chapter 3](#)). Contact [Education Policy, Quality and Standards](#) for more information. [Doctoral College Quality and Development team](#) should also be consulted in the case of Professional Doctorates.

1 ¹	Education Board/PGR Board	Credit and Qualifications Framework Regulations Governing Academic Programmes PGR Handbook (for Professional Doctorates)
2 ¹	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) (on behalf of the Education and Student Experience Executive Committee)	Credit and Qualifications Framework Regulations Governing Academic Programmes PGR Handbook (for Professional Doctorates)
3 ²	Senate (via Chair's Action)	Ordinances
4 ²	Council (via Chair's Action)	Ordinances

¹For 1 and 2, the paperwork from the Education Board/PGR Board is ratified by the Deputy Vice Chancellor Education and Student Experience. PGR Board is only required for Professional Doctorates (it is also sent to the Education Board for information).

²For 3 and 4, the paperwork must first be approved by Deputy Vice Chancellor (Global Engagement) (with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for the Faculty copied in). This is then provided to Senate/Council for Chair's Action approval by [Education Policy, Quality and Standards](#) / [Doctoral College Quality and Development](#).

1.9 Non-award Programmes:

- 1.9.1 These are contained programmes of study that do not result in any of the formal awards listed in the Credit and Qualifications Framework. They include Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs); International Summer Schools; one year/one semester programmes for the purposes of ERASMUS and other incoming students; and individual modules delivered to professional groups (e.g. National Health Service staff) for the purposes of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Where appropriate, the latter can be drawn from an existing conventional programme. Non-award programmes can be credit-bearing or non-credit-bearing. Where credit-bearing, they **should** comply with the requirements laid down in the Assessment, Progression and Awarding: Taught Programmes Handbook.
- 1.9.2 Faculties may wish to take an existing programme and deliver all or many of the constituent modules as non-award programmes, for the purposes of CPD. Where the modules are credit-bearing the intention may be that participants gradually accrue credit, which might be used ultimately to redeem an award. Any such proposals **should** follow the same procedures and requirements as for approving an individual non-award programme.
- 1.9.3 Amendments, changes of award/title and changes of status to non-award programmes **should** be managed by following the same processes and requirements as for existing programmes ([Chapter 5](#) and [6](#) of this Handbook).
- 1.9.4 It should be noted that non-award programmes are closely aligned to conventional programmes in several important ways (e.g. in typically requiring an external-facing admissions process). Nonetheless, owing to the condensed nature of non-award

programmes, the most suitable means of documenting their details is normally the Module Descriptor template.

1.10 Guiding Notes for Programme Development of online programmes:

- 1.10.1 Faculties **must** contact PDQE when developing Online Programmes to ensure the most appropriate programme/module approval (and/or amendment) process is undertaken.
- 1.10.2 In developing a programme or module, and unless the programme or Module Convenor / Lead has been responsible for developing an online module previously within the University, Faculties (or delegated Schools) **must** ensure that the programme or Module Convenor/Lead is given a briefing by the University's Learning Design Team on the possibilities of online learning before specific content development begins.
- 1.10.3 Faculties (or delegated Schools) **must** identify another Faculty (or delegated School) / Department academic member of staff who will be involved in the development of modules: by commenting on learning materials as they are developed, and meeting with the Module Convenor/Lead to review the process and progress of the module. This person(s) should have experience of developing or leading online learning/programmes. This will bring an element of peer scrutiny to module content, and also help to spread knowledge of the possibilities of online learning.
- 1.10.4 In relation to the learning materials for individual modules, a dual sign-off process will be implemented. One of the authorised signatories will be a person acting on the authority of the APVC-E (or nominee), providing the academic and pedagogical sign-off. The other will be a person as delegated to by the Director of Teaching Excellence and Enhancement/Director of Education Innovation – in the first instance, normally the Head / Manager within the Learning Design Team – providing the sign-off for the quality of the instructional design. A module will not be regarded as ready for delivery to students until both of these have agreed that it is ready.
- 1.10.5 Some forms of assessment do not lend themselves well to online delivery. As such, invigilated, timed written examinations (proctored examinations) **should** not normally be used as a method of assessment, unless appropriate to the assessment type/content.

- 1.10.6 Online programmes often differ from on-campus programmes in that the modules are taken sequentially/ on a module-by-module basis, rather than simultaneously, and so the end stage may be many months after the initial learning.
- 1.10.7 Online programmes can also be delivered in carousels (modules which are delivered in rotation). These do not need to be taken in any particular order; none must be a pre-requisite for any other module in the carousel. (They may be pre-requisite for modules offered later in the programme.) Whilst a carousel is not a “stage” of the programme, students are able to pause at the end of a module and re-join the programme at the next module. When the student restarts, they are not constrained by the time at which they restart – as they will be re-joining the programme between carousels, they will be able to take whichever is the next module to start. If a student pauses at the end of a module, they will need to pause again later in the programme when they reach a module they have already completed.

Please note, these guidance notes are non-exhaustive. Please contact the relevant [PDQE team](#) for further information.

1.11 "Just-in-Time" Approach:

- 1.11.1 The University has agreed a “just-in-time” approach for the approval and development of some academic programmes/modules for instances where it is appropriate to undertake approvals on a module-by-module basis as students will be undertaking modular study.
- 1.11.2 Any implementation of the “just-in-time” for programme/module approval and development approach requires consultation with PDQE ahead of use as this approach should only be used in appropriate circumstances.
- 1.11.3 In broad terms, the programme approval process for “just-in-time” mirrors standard approaches to developing and approving programmes/modules, with the Faculty (or delegated School) taking responsibility for securing peer and student scrutiny on the basis of standard documentation, and sign-off by the University (see [Chapter 3 Business Approval](#), and section 3.1.2 Viability Assessment, [Chapter 4 Academic Approval](#)).
- 1.11.4 The programme specification presented for approval before the programme enrolls its first students **must** be augmented by a number of additional pieces of evidence:

- a. A list of all modules which will form the programme, indicating the date on which the module is expected to be first offered to students, and when it will be ready for approval.
 - b. A summary description of the content of each module (i.e. the 100-word summary which is at the start of the module descriptor).
 - c. A statement including the teaching delivery model.
 - d. A statement of the range of assessments expected to be used across the modules, to help students understand what will be expected of them in the programme. An example of a component of such a statement could be as follows: 'A 15 credit module will typically be assessed by a 3,000-word coursework essay (counting for 70% of the module mark); an online multiple-choice assessment (counting for 20% of the module mark) and an assessment of participation in group discussions (counting for 10% of the module mark)'
 - e. A mapping of the individual module Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) to the programme ILOs. This will help to show the overall coherence of the programme, and also identify if elements of the programme ILOs depend on a small number of modules. As a minimum, there must be a mapping of modules onto programme ILOs (that is, which modules contribute to the achievement of which programme ILOs).
- 1.11.5 Faculties (or delegated Schools) **must** continue to involve External Assessors in the approval, as for on-campus programmes. Where a Faculty (or delegated School) has not had previous experience of offering wholly online programmes the Faculty (or delegated School) should either use an external who has both subject knowledge and experience in online delivery; or should use two external assessors, one with experience of the discipline and one with experience of online delivery.
- 1.11.6 In addition to the questions set out on the External Assessor Report Form (see Section 4.3 of [Chapter 4 Academic Approval](#)), External Assessors will be asked what additional information, if any, they would have found useful to be able to make their judgements about the initial programme approval; and what information was not necessary.
- 1.11.7 At least the first module description must be included in the documents to be approved at the initial programme approval.
- 1.11.8 Each module **must** be approved before it is offered to students.

- 1.11.9 Faculties (or delegated Schools) must involve students in programme approval (in accordance with the Academic Approval process), The feedback should be given by a student representative for a similar on-campus programme. Where possible, the Faculty (or delegated School) **should** seek views from students in the Faculty (or delegated School) who have studied some or all of their degree online, even if this is in a different discipline.
- 1.11.10 Where a module description is ready for approval after the programme specification has been approved, the process will be as follows:
- a. For modules which **are consistent** with the information in the initial programme approval (that is, ones which match the titles, content and ILOs initially set out, and use assessment combinations described in the programme specification), approval is within the Faculty (or delegated School).
 - b. For modules which **are not consistent** with the information in the initial programme approval (that is, their title, content or ILOs have changed, and/or they use assessment methods and combinations not anticipated in the programme specification), they will be treated as a Moderate revision, and require University-level approval in addition to approval within the Faculty (or delegated School). In this case, the documentation to be supplied to the PDQE Team should additionally include a description of how students have been consulted about the changes.
- 1.11.11 Faculties (or delegated Schools) with programmes approved in this way must include in their Annual Quality Review and Enhancement processes (TEAP/TEM) reports (see Quality Review and Enhancement Framework, [Chapter 2](#)), progress on their approval process which can identify lessons learned and good practice to be shared across the University. This should include commentary on learning from the mapping of ILOs. There should also be a light-touch audit process (perhaps one module per programme per year) to give confidence that appropriate judgements are being made about routes for late module approval.