

APPROVAL AND REVISION OF TAUGHT MODULES AND PROGRAMMES HANDBOOK

Chapter 3 – Business Approval

3. Business Approval

3.1 The Purpose of Business Approval

- 3.1.1 **Business Approval:** Is typically required for all new and significantly amended programmes (including non-award programmes). The purpose is to demonstrate a compelling business case for the planned activity and to provide professional services with the technical information that they need to set up admissions; market the offering; arrange access to student finance; ensure compliance with legislation (e.g. immigration and consumer protection); and make statutory returns to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).
- 3.1.2 **Viability Assessment:** Prior to submitting a programme, a preliminary assessment of the strategic fit, market demand and required investment should be documented in the Viability Assessment section of the [New Programme Approval Form](#) to be considered by the Faculty. Discussions will usually take place at the Faculty Taught Portfolio Group or equivalent.
- 3.1.3 **The Viability Assessment must be endorsed by the Chair of the Faculty Taught Portfolio Group (or equivalent), verifying that the proposal should proceed to Business Approval.**

3.2 The Process of Business Approval

- 3.2.1 First, the Programme Director/Developer **must** consult the [Credit and Qualifications Framework](#) (CQF) to check the following:
- a. The proposed award (e.g. BA, MEng) must be listed in the CQF. Where there is an intention to introduce a new type of award(s) type (including a new type of exit award), which is not already documented in the CQF, please contact the Programme Design and Quality Enhancement team (PDQE) who will work with Education Policy, Quality and Standards (EPQS) to establish the approval requirements for the necessary amendments, for example, to the TQA, University Regulations Governing Academic Programmes and University Ordinances. In such cases, the Programme Director/Developer must liaise with the PDQE team in conjunction with completing the

[New Programme Approval Form](#). The New Programme Approval Form will need to be fully signed prior to requesting approval for the new type of award/exit award. Recruitment/advertising cannot begin until the new type of award/exit award(s) has been fully approved. See [Chapter 1](#), section 1.8 for more information.

- b. In the case of a combined, major/minor, or triple honours programme, the title (e.g. English and Drama; Mathematics with Economics) **must** follow the conventions set out in the CQF.
- c. The structure of the proposal **must** comply with the requirements stated in the CQF, with regard to the number of constituent credits and their RQF level.
- d. The academic demands of the proposal **must** be consistent with the descriptor for the relevant RQF level, which is provided in the CQF.
- e. Where there is a possibility that an exit/interim award might be conferred at a certain juncture (e.g. a Certificate of Higher Education after stage one of a Bachelor's degree), the programme up until that point **must** enable participants to meet the generic learning outcomes for the level of the exit/interim award, as defined in the CQF.
- f. Any pre-requisites in the constituent modules of a programme **must not** prevent the student from pursuing a coherent course of study. If in doubt, the Programme Director/Developer **should** contact the relevant module convenors to establish if pre-requisites will be applied within the context of the proposed programme.

3.2.2 Next, the Programme Director/Developer (or nominee) **must** complete the Business Approval sections of the [New Programme Approval Form](#).

3.2.3 Following completion of the Business Approval sections of the New Programme Approval Form, the proposal **must** go through a process of review by impacted stakeholders (e.g. Admissions, Student Immigration, PDQE and Global Opportunities) to consider operational delivery.

3.2.4 Business Approval **must** then be endorsed by the Head of Department and Chair of Faculty Taught Portfolio Group. In signing the New Programme Approval Form they authorise:

- a. That the proposal aligns with Department and Faculty Business Plans
- b. That a full business case has been developed to understand financial and market viability of the proposal
- c. Their commitment to deliver the proposal having considered the identified risks

3.2.5 Where the proposal is to be jointly delivered by two or more Faculties, the respective named role in each Faculty **should** sign.

3.2.6 Where the proposal involves an academic partnership, a relevant senior officer from each partner institution **must** also sign the New Programme Approval Form to indicate approval.

3.2.7 At this point, the following documents **must** be submitted to the PDQE team for final review and processing:

- a. A completed and signed New Programme Approval Form.
- b. A finalised Module Descriptor in the case of a non-award programme.

3.2.8 Where submissions have incomplete fields or missing signatures they will be returned to the lead Faculty for remedial action, prior to further processing.

3.3 Timings

3.3.1 In most instances, maximal exposure of the programme in University publicity materials will be important for recruitment. Therefore, unless alternative arrangements have been agreed with the PDQE team, documentation should be submitted in accordance with the following deadlines:

- a. Undergraduate: 25 November for offerings commencing 22 months hence, e.g. 25 November 2025 for an offering commencing in Autumn 2027.
- b. Postgraduate: 15 June for offerings commencing 15 months hence, e.g. 15 June 2026 for an offering commencing in Autumn 2027.

3.3.2 These dates ensure that the programme can be included in the appropriate printed prospectus and, for undergraduate offerings, the UCAS directory, which is finalised in early January for programmes commencing 21 months hence. It should be noted that in order to obtain all of the information required, work on some aspects of the Business Approval phase **should** be initiated well in advance of these deadlines (e.g. discussions between Strategic Marketing Partners and their colleagues in Marketing and Finance to establish the appropriate level of any non-standard fees).

3.3.3 Postgraduate programmes, which miss the 15 June deadline, will be included in the more frequently updated online prospectus, once Business Approval is completed.

3.3.4 In appropriate circumstances, the process of approving a new programme can depart from the timelines stated above and as outlined in [Chapter 4 Academic Approval](#), and be completed more quickly. For instance, where a programme has identified a ready-

made market (e.g. National Health Service professionals), inclusion in the University prospectus and/or UCAS listings may not be critical to successful recruitment. Where Faculties are handling a programme of this nature, they **should** seek guidance from the PDQE team at the earliest opportunity. In addition, they **should** use the [New Programme Approval Form](#) to articulate what alternative means will be used to ensure successful recruitment.

3.3.5 In all instances, Faculties **should** seek to finalise the start date of a programme by the following deadline:

Undergraduate and Postgraduate: 25 November in the preceding academic year.

3.3.6 Where the finalised start date differs from that specified on the original New Programme Approval Form, the lead Faculty should contact Student Records immediately. Amending the start date after the 25 November deadline can create problems for students, in terms of accessing student loans and gaining visas.

3.4 Actions Following Submission of Business Approval

3.4.1 Once the PDQE team receives the New Programme Approval Form they will liaise with Planning, Admissions, Student Records and Finance Services, for further processing. The University Education Board / PGR Board for Professional Doctorates will also be informed that the programme is scheduled for delivery.

3.4.2 At this point, Business Approval is considered complete. Faculties and professional services may proceed with detailed academic planning, advertising and recruitment. Partner institutions may proceed similarly, although any publicity materials **should** be approved by the University of Exeter prior to advertisement and/or recruitment. (Please also see section 3.2 regarding an exception for programmes where a new award type is required – full Business Approval is not secured until the award type has also been approved).

3.4.3 Completion of Business Approval signifies that the University is committed to offering the programme from the date indicated.

3.4.4 The process of recruitment normally places a contractual obligation on the Faculty/Faculties and University to run the programme. It is important to note, however, that until Academic Approval is complete applicants cannot register for the programme and **should not**, therefore, attend scheduled sessions or any placement.

- 3.4.5 Faculties **should** avoid altering the name of the programme between Business Approval and subsequent phases. This could negatively impact upon recruitment as the initial name may have been used in marketing activities.
- 3.4.6 Once complete, Business Approval is valid for 24 months. During this time the Full Approval Process **should** be completed. After 24 months fresh Business Approval **may** be requested, in recognition that the prevailing market and resources could have changed.
- 3.4.7 Where a New Programme Approval Form has already been submitted to the PDQE team and the lead Faculty becomes aware that corrections are needed, a new version **should not** be submitted. Rather, a summary of the deviations **must** be sent to the PDQE team, along with documentary evidence (e.g. an email) showing the approval of the Chair of the Faculty Taught Portfolio Group (or its nominated body) along with any other useful supporting documentation (this may include revised programme specifications, module descriptors etc. Please contact the PQDE team for further guidance). Where the changes are deemed to constitute a fundamental departure from the original proposal the PDQE team **may** request that a new version of the New Programme Approval Form be prepared.
- 3.4.8 On occasions, Faculties may need to change the title or status (interruption/withdrawal) of a programme that has been granted Business Approval but which is yet to receive Faculty and/or Academic Approval, or has not welcomed a first cohort of participants. In these instances, Faculties **should** follow the standard procedures laid down in [Chapter 6 Faculty Management of Programme and Module Information](#). Failure to do so could mean that the programme continues to be advertised and to accept applications on an inaccurate basis.