

APPROVAL AND REVISION OF TAUGHT MODULES AND PROGRAMMES HANDBOOK

Chapter 4 - Academic Approval

4. Academic Approval

4.1 The Purpose of Academic Approval

4.1.1 Academic Approval is typically required for all new and significantly amended programmes. The purpose is to use internal and external expertise to evaluate and finalise the detail of the proposed programme (e.g. learning, teaching and assessment methods).

4.1.2 It is recognised that in some circumstances a programme cannot be given academic approval without the approval of a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) (e.g. Nursing & Midwifery Council). Faculties must ensure that the process followed satisfies the requirements of the PSRB to ensure that programme approval can be given.

4.2 The Process of Academic Approval

4.2.1 To begin, the Programme Director/Developer should draw together the [Programme Specification](#) and [Module Descriptors](#) for all new and existing compulsory modules. These should be circulated to the following parties for input/discussion:

- a. An External Assessor (see section 4.3).
- b. Current/recent students (e.g. via Student Voice Partnerships or a student-staff working party).

4.2.2 It is pertinent to allow at least one month for receiving responses from these parties.

4.2.3 Programme Specifications and Module Descriptors **must** be revised, as appropriate, according to the feedback received from the consulted parties, before being considered by the Faculty Education and Student Experience Committee (or its nominated body).

To enable a decision the following **should** be made available:

- a. [External Assessor Report Form](#), including Faculty response.
- b. [Current Programme Specification Template](#)
- c. [Current Module Descriptor Template](#) for all new modules and all existing compulsory modules.

- d. Evidence of engagement with current or recent students (e.g. minutes from Student Voice Partnerships/student-staff working party or the [Student Representative Form](#)).
- e. Faculty [AccessAbility Representative Form](#)
- f. The original [New Programme Approval Form](#), as submitted to the Programme Design and Quality Enhancement team (PDQE).

4.2.4 In approving the proposals the Faculty Education and Student Experience Committee (or its nominated body) confirms that it is satisfied with the following:

- a. The programme is consistent with the original proposal for which Business Approval was granted. Any substantial departure/s from the original proposal **must** be flagged to the PDQE team.
- b. The Programme Specification/Module Descriptors are clear and articulate the strengths of the programme.
- c. The intended learning outcomes (ILOs) are appropriate to the level of the programme and map onto any suitable reference points (e.g. [Quality Assurance Agency Subject Benchmark Statements](#); criteria from Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies).
- d. For undergraduate programmes, there is progression across stages in terms of intellectual challenge, and acquisition of skills and knowledge.
- e. The learning, teaching and assessment activities are effective, engaging, and sustainable given available resources.
- f. The assessment activities clearly demonstrate the achievement of the ILOs.
- g. The programme, and individual modules within it, are not under or over-assessed (any Faculty-specific assessment norms **should** be consulted).
- h. The assessment arrangements comply with the Assessment, Progression and Awarding: Taught Programmes Handbook.
- i. The curriculum reflects relevant research in the discipline and any prevailing occupational/professional requirements.
- j. The arrangements for student support, learning resources and IT provision are satisfactory.

4.2.5 Records **must** be collected, confirming all decisions made by the Faculty Education and Student Experience Committee (or its nominated body). These **must** be retained in Faculty for future reference, along with copies of the approved Programme Specification and/or Module Descriptor/s.

4.3 External Assessors

4.3.1 The lead Faculty **should** satisfy itself that candidates for the role of External Assessor meet criteria a) – h) under Section 4.3.2. The Faculty can then appoint individuals without the involvement of the PDQE team. In relation to criterion f), the lead Faculty may contact Human Resources. As a further safeguard, the [External Assessor Report Form](#) asks appointees to confirm that they meet criteria a) – h). Regarding criteria c), it is incumbent on the lead Faculty to identify the precise requirements of any relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and to communicate these to the candidate, so that they can confirm compliance.

4.3.2 External Assessors **must** confirm the following criteria in the External Assessor Report Form:

- a. The External Assessor holds academic/professional qualifications, appropriate in level and subject, to appraise the programme in hand. Typically, this will mean a PhD.
- b. The External Assessor has experience of at least one of the following: developing a new programme in a relevant area; directing an existing programme in a relevant area; acting as the External Assessor/Examiner for another programme in a relevant area.
- c. The External Assessor meets any criteria set out by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) who will be accrediting the programme.
- d. The External Assessor is not engaged in a current financial, familial or collaborative relationship with any individual who is involved in the development or delivery of the programme.
- e. The External Assessor is not registered for an award from the University of Exeter.
- f. The External Assessor has not been employed by the University of Exeter within the last five years (in this context service as an External Examiner on a different programme does not count as employment).
- g. The External Assessor has not undertaken any activities which would breach the Bribery Act 2010 or act in an anti-competitive manner in breach of competition laws in England and Wales.
- h. The External Assessor will not use or disclose to any person either during or at any time after engagement any confidential information (information which is not in the public domain) supplied by the University in relation to the proposed programme.

- 4.3.3 Where an External Assessor is found retrospectively not to comply with the criteria under 4.3.2, the PDQE team reserves the right to request a fresh review of the proposal by an alternative individual.
- 4.3.4 Normally, External Assessors **should not** subsequently become External Examiners for a programme (see the External Examining Handbook).
- 4.3.5 There **must not** be reciprocal external assessing arrangements between the Faculty/Department that is developing the programme and the institutional division to which the External Assessor belongs.
- 4.3.6 The External Assessor **must** use the External Assessor Report Form to appraise the proposed programme. On receiving the External Assessor's report the Programme Director/Developer **must** respond to the External Assessor's comments. Where there are grounds for not adopting particular recommendations, the Programme Director/Developer **should** take this opportunity to articulate them. Upon receipt of these responses, the External Assessor **must** be asked to confirm their final recommendation for approval (signing and dating the relevant section of the External Assessor Report Form).
- 4.3.7 If appropriate, the Faculty or partner institution **may** also consult an Internal Assessor (e.g. a member of academic staff from another Faculty).
- 4.3.8 Payments to External Assessors **may** be made at the discretion of the Faculty.
- 4.3.9 When required by any Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) accrediting the programme, external assessors may be required to attend programme approval meetings.

4.4 Timings

- 4.4.1 Unless alternative timeframes have been agreed with the PDQE team, the deadline for receipt of all Academic Approval documents is as follows:
Undergraduate and Postgraduate: 25 April in the academic year that precedes the start date of the programme.
- 4.4.2 Upon completion of all Academic Approval documents, the [Academic Approval Cover Form](#) **should** be completed and submitted, along with the following documents, to the PDQE Team.
- [External Assessor Report Form](#), including Faculty Response
 - Faculty [AccessAbility Representative Form](#)

- c. Evidence of engagement with current or recent students (e.g. minutes from Student Voice Partnerships, student-staff working party or the [Student Representative Form](#))
- d. Faculty Education and Student Experience Committee (or its nominated body) minutes confirming that they have seen and approved the Academic Approval documentation for this new programme
- e. [Programme Specification](#)
- f. [Module Descriptors](#) for all new modules and all existing compulsory modules
- g. Any additional documentation required by an accrediting Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB)

4.4.3 Where submissions have incomplete fields or missing signatures they will be returned to the lead Faculty prior to further processing.

4.4.4 Meeting the Academic Approval deadline ensures sufficient time for the PDQE team to check compliance with University regulations; request amendments as necessary. It applies to both undergraduate and postgraduate submissions.

4.5 Actions following submission of Academic Approval paperwork

4.4.5 Once all documentation has been submitted it will be considered by the PDQE team. The purpose is to check that the proposed programme complies with internal and external regulations.

4.4.6 Except in the circumstances outlined in 4.5.3 below, after considering the proposed programme, the PDQE team will recommend that the Dean for Taught Students or Associate Dean for Taught Students, or in the case of Professional Doctorates, the Dean of Postgraduate Research, take one of the following actions:

- a. Approve.
- b. Approve subject to revisions/clarification to the satisfaction of the appropriate Dean.
- c. Reject.

4.4.7 When required by an accrediting Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB), it may be necessary for a meeting to be held to facilitate conjoint approval. In this circumstance, the following should be considered:

- a. Additional documentation or verbal representation may be required.
- b. The Faculty should take all necessary steps to ensure that the PSRB is supplied with the information required for approval, whether through document submission or face-to-face meetings.

- c. The Dean for Taught Students or the Associate Dean for Taught Students, or Dean for Postgraduate Research Students (for Professional Doctorates) would normally Chair or co-chair the approval meeting, and would be expected to exercise their power to approve the programme on behalf of the University (as per 4.5.2 above) in accordance with the decision of the conjoint approval meeting.
- d. Final approval must not be given until the programme has met the requirements specified by both the PSRB and the University.
- e. In the event of PSRB approval subject to conditions, those conditions will also be conditions of University academic approval.

4.4.8 In exceptional cases the PDQE team **may** convene a meeting between the Programme Director/Developer and the appropriate Dean to discuss issues arising from the proposal.

4.4.9 Once the appropriate Dean has granted approval the PDQE team will notify the lead Faculty, as well as the relevant professional services. From the Faculty's perspective, the full approval process can now be considered complete.