

# NEW PROGRAMME APPROVAL

This section covers the processes for the approval of new programmes, including those delivered through collaborative arrangements. The new programme approval process is also applied to the revalidation of existing home or collaborative programmes – please refer to the chapter on [Changes and Revalidation](#).

## 1 INITIAL DEVELOPMENT APPROVAL

### Programmes to be delivered at OBU

- 1.1 All new home programme proposals - including proposals for apprenticeship programmes where Oxford Brookes is the main provider - must be approved for further development through the New Programme Development Process. Through this process, a business case will be developed, in partnership with the Faculty Planning Partner (FPP), prior to sign-off by the Faculty Executive Group. The business case will then be assessed by a sub-group of the Recruitment & Admissions Group (RAG-NPG) – new programmes may not proceed to validation until RAG approval has been given.
- 1.2 For details of how to contact your FPP, and the stages and timescales involved in the process of developing a new programme proposal, please refer to [New Programme Development](#)
- 1.3 Once the business case has been signed off by the Faculty Executive and approved by RAG-NPG, the PDT should be established, and the new programme will be added to the APQO and Faculty validation schedule. New programmes may, at this stage, be advertised as “*subject to validation*”. Programme teams will normally be expected to complete the validation process within six months from this point to support optimum recruitment for the first year of delivery.
- 1.4 At this stage, a preliminary meeting should be held between the PDT Chair, the link QAO, Faculty Quality Officer, and Associate Dean Education & Student Experience (ADESE) or Faculty Head of Quality Assurance & Validations (FHQAV), to agree on a timescale for the completion of the validation process – with advice from the FPP - and set a date for the panel approval event. The Faculty’s OCAED link Educational Consultant should also be approached at this point to agree on an appropriate programme of engagement with the [IDEAS model](#) for the PDT.
- 1.5 Programme teams are not obliged to go through the RAG business case process for revalidations, but it may be useful to do so in order to ensure there is robust consideration of the market for a re-designed programme. Advice on whether this is required should be sought from the Faculty ADESE and the Faculty Planning Partner.
- 1.6 Short courses (sometimes referred to as CPD courses) lead to the award of up to 60 credits, at any level from level 4 to level 7, but *do not* lead to a formal qualification as defined in the University regulations (section 2). They are most commonly developed in response to a specific market or individual employer demand, but existing modules already approved within a Brookes programme may also be approved for marketing as individual short courses. Students should also be able to use credit from short/CPD courses towards a substantive award, which should preferably be specified at the time of approval. Initial development approval must be given by the Faculty Executive Group, as it is important that such provision is carefully costed in order to set appropriate tuition fees; and advice should be sought from the FPP on whether a proposed short course needs to be considered through the RAG process above. Students who complete a short course will be issued with a transcript showing the credit awarded; however, for collaborative arrangements, it may be considered appropriate to issue a certificate in conjunction with the transcript, and the Academic Registrar should be consulted on the appropriate format for such certificates.

## Programmes delivered through collaborative partnerships

- 1.7 Collaborative provision is defined as defined as any arrangement in which Oxford Brookes awards a qualification or credit, on the basis of education provided by, with or at another organisation, either in the UK or elsewhere in the world – see the guidance note on common models of collaborative arrangements in place at Oxford Brookes (G5.1). The business case for new collaborative programmes (including short courses delivered in partnership with another organisation) is considered by the Learning Partnerships Advisory Group (LPAG), through the process set out in the Quality & Standards Handbook chapter on collaborative partnerships. The programme may not proceed to academic approval (as described in this chapter) until the partnership arrangements have been approved by LPAG.
- 1.8 For advice on setting up a collaborative research degree arrangement, please contact the Head of the Research Degrees Team (Tracy Barber [tracy.barber@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:tracy.barber@brookes.ac.uk) )
- 1.9 For advice on setting up a progression agreement with an international organisation, please contact the Deputy Head of Global Partnerships (Daniela Cobiltean: [dcobiltean@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:dcobiltean@brookes.ac.uk) ) as you will need to draw up a Progression Agreement Contract.

## 2 THE PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT TEAM (PDT)

***\*\*If you are a PDT chair, please read guidance note G2.1\*\****

- 2.1 The role of the PDT is to provide a forum through which the design of a new programme (or the delivery of an OBU programme by a partner organisation) may be informed by a range of expertise from within and – crucially - external to the University, so as to meet sector expectations and the University's criteria for approval. The PDT is responsible for ensuring that appropriate consultation takes place, and for the preparation of the programme documentation to an appropriate standard for submission to an approval panel
- 2.2 The PDT must work with relevant colleagues in the Faculty and Directorates to ensure that the new programme:
  - is consistent with sector-recognised standards, relevant subject benchmark statements, any professional body standards, and the appropriate national qualifications frameworks;
  - meets the expectations of University frameworks for promoting inclusive practice in teaching, learning and assessment, including ongoing engagement with the [IDEAS model](#);
  - complies with the relevant University Regulations;
  - provides students with high quality teaching and learning support, including learning resources and specialist teaching facilities;
  - takes into account the views of a wide range of stakeholders, as appropriate to the provision and the context in which it is to be delivered.
- 2.3 In order to ensure that these tasks are effectively completed, the overall PDT membership should include:
  - Chair (usually the Programme Lead/Subject Coordinator or Liaison Manager – for new cross-Faculty partnerships, subject-level PDTs will be coordinated by the Brookes Global Partnerships team);
  - Academic staff (especially the leaders of all compulsory modules) who will be involved in the delivery of the programme, including (for collaborative arrangements) members of staff from partner organisations;
  - External Adviser/s;
  - Faculty Head of Finance & Planning (for collaborative arrangements);
  - Academic Liaison Librarian (for collaborative partnerships Library advice should be sought on student access to Brookes resources);
  - OCEAD link Educational Development Consultant (in particular, for home programmes);
  - APQO link Quality Assurance Officer;
  - Student Central link Curriculum & Student Information Manager;
  - Secretary;
  - Students and other stakeholders should also be invited to join the PDT, as appropriate;

- the Timetabling Team should be consulted on timetabling options (for on-campus programmes), and advice should be sought from the Faculty Marketing Manager on the effective marketing and promotion of the programme.
- 2.4 In order to avoid excessive pressure on staff workloads, it is not necessary for all members to attend every meeting of the PDT. However, members must attend meetings at which their expertise is required in order to progress the business of the PDT - the agenda of each meeting must therefore be provided to all members in sufficient time to enable the appropriate personnel to make arrangements to attend.
- 2.5 The FHQAV and/or the ADESE may also wish to attend PDT meetings in order to assure themselves that the PDT is adhering to agreed deadlines for consultation and development, and that the documentation is being prepared to an appropriate standard. They should, as a minimum, be treated as members of the PDT in respect of circulation of documents, agendas and action points, but may choose to maintain an overview of progress via regular updates from the PDT Chair rather than attendance at meetings.

### 3 PROGRAMME APPROVAL PROCESS

#### Documentation for approval panels

- 3.1 The PDT must prepare the following documentation for submission to the programme approval panel:
- i. Submission document (use template T2.6) – *for short courses*, complete Part 1 of template T6.1;
  - ii. Programme specification (use template T2.7, in conjunction with guidance G2.2);
  - iii. Module descriptors (use template T2.8);
  - iv. Programme handbook (use either the handbook template issued by FHQAVs, or refer to guidance in T2.11A, as appropriate); for apprenticeships, use the student handbook template T2.11B and also provide an employer handbook using template T2.11C;
  - v. Any additional documentation required by a professional or (*for collaborative provision*) national accreditation body;
  - vi. *For collaborative provision*, Operations Manual (use template T5.5a or T5.5b) and summary staff CVs (template T5.9 may be used);
  - vii. *For collaborative provision*, a site visit report should be provided for all delivery sites not visited during the approval event (use template T5.14);
  - viii. *For programmes which are to be delivered, in whole or substantial part, by distance or e-learning*, a selection of teaching materials must be provided, and a demonstration of the VLE included in the programme for the approval meeting. The specific requirements for demonstrations at individual events should be agreed in advance by the panel Chair and Officer with the Programme Lead, so that the panel is able to make a judgement on the learning experience that will be provided through the proposed mode of study;
  - ix. *For new programmes which include existing modules*, a Change Request form must be completed for any existing modules being amended for use in the new programme (use template T2.13);
  - x. Closure forms for any existing programmes being replaced by the new provision.
- 3.2 The Panel should also be provided with links to any websites containing contextual information relevant to the proposal (e.g. PSRB websites, subject/qualification benchmark statements, apprenticeship standards, etc); and with guidance note G2.3 on the conduct of approval panels.

#### The programme approval panel

**\*\*Please also read guidance note G2.3\*\***

- 3.3 All proposals for new (or re-validated) programmes of study are considered by a programme approval panel, acting on the principle of peer review. Programme teams and approval panels should note that they have a shared responsibility for identifying and solving any issues with a proposal, in order to achieve a successful outcome for the approval process.

### 3.4 Programme approval panels should be constituted as follows\*:

- **Chair**  
Independent of the proposing Faculty. They should have appropriate seniority within the University, e.g. ADESE, Head of Department, Programme Lead, Subject Coordinator, Senior or Principal Lecturer; and experience of programme approval panel membership, within Brookes and/or at other higher education institutions. For collaborative partnership proposals, the Chair should have experience of managing or delivering collaborative provision.
- **Internal Assessors** (see 3.6 below)
  - One academic staff member from each Faculty involved in the delivery of the proposal, but from outside the School/Department/s presenting the proposal.
  - One academic staff member from a Faculty not involved in the delivery of the proposed programme.
- **External Assessor/s** (see 3.5 below)  
At least one external panel member, employed in another UK higher education institution
- **APQO link Quality Assurance Officer**  
To advise on the conduct of the approval event, and assist the panel in formulating their conclusions.
- **Panel Secretary**  
For home programmes, this is usually a Faculty Quality Officer; for collaborative provision, the link QAO takes this role.

**\*For short courses**, approval decisions are devolved to panels operating on behalf of the Faculty QLIC/AESC; however, in the case of short courses delivered in partnership with another organisation, the panel should be chaired by an appropriate member of University staff from outside the proposing Faculty.

### 3.5 \*External Assessors should have had no previous involvement with the development of the programme, nor should they have been an external examiner within the Department in the last five years. They must have:

- the ability to form an expert and objective opinion of the overall standards of the programme/s and the comparability of those standards within the UK HE sector;
- academic qualifications at least to the level of the proposed programme and expertise relevant to the subject area under consideration;
- familiarity with current developments in the field of study concerned;
- knowledge and experience of current practice and developments in teaching, learning and assessment in higher education;
- for programmes with professional elements, awareness of the educational requirements for the profession (it may be necessary to secure an additional external assessor in order to fulfill this criterion);
- for collaborative partnership proposals, they should have some experience of managing or operating collaborative arrangements, preferably in the context of the territory involved (specific requirements for externality on the panel may differ according to the type of delivery arrangements involved, and advice on this should be sought from APQO).

### 3.6 \*\*Internal panel members must have experience of delivering and assessing at the level of the award under consideration, and a good understanding of the University's quality assurance requirements –. An APQO/OCSLD workshop is available for staff wishing to take part in approval panels – particularly aimed at those who wish to become chairs. Other considerations for the selection of internal panel members include:

- Where a programme is to be delivered by distance or e-learning, at least one member of the panel must have expertise in this mode of delivery.
- In the case of complex validation events held conjointly with one or more professional bodies, the panel must be constituted so that it contains the knowledge and expertise to deal with the potential issues involved. This may have particular implications for the selection of the panel member from within the Faculty.
- For collaborative partnership proposals, it is helpful for at least one internal panel member to have some experience of collaborative provision.

- The link Curriculum & Student Information Manager may also be in attendance at the panel event, in order to provide advice on technical/regulatory matters, changes to existing modules, and transition arrangements to enable the introduction of the new provision.
- 3.7 The membership of individual panels will be negotiated between the PDT and the link QAO, who will approve the final constitution of the panel. In particular, the details of proposed External Assessors must be presented separately to the link QAO, for approval against the criteria below, using the External Assessor nomination form (T2.5). In the case of a conjoint approval event with a professional body, the panel should also include a representative of the PSRB – this representative is normally nominated by the PSRB and notified to the University, and they should also be listed in the panel nomination form, for information.

## **Conduct of approval events**

***\*\*Please also read guidance note G2.3 Conduct of programme approval panels\*\****

- 3.8 Administrative arrangements for the panel meeting are the responsibility of the panel Secretary, who should ensure that the documentation for the approval panel event is circulated to all members of the panel at least two working weeks prior to the approval meeting. The documentation should, ideally, be circulated electronically (either by email, or made available to all panel members via Google or Moodle sites). The date of the approval event and deadline for submission of documentation should be agreed when the PDT is established, and the link QAO and the Faculty Head of QA & Validations should be notified if the PDT wishes to re-negotiate the submission deadline at a later stage.
- 3.9 Advice on the formulation of the agenda for the event should be sought from the link QAO. An outline agenda is available in template T2.10, which should be tailored to the event so that the scheduled meetings enable the panel to meet with an appropriate range of staff, students and other stakeholders to explore:
- i. the appropriateness of the standards set (i.e. the programme learning outcomes) and the match with the title of award;
  - ii. the range of internal and external consultation that has informed the development of the new programme;
  - iii. the rationale for the proposal, the likely demand and student entry profiles;
  - iv. criteria for admission to the programme, and how candidates will be assessed against them;
  - v. the curriculum: its design, content, delivery and assessment, and how it promotes learning and enables students to meet the requirements of the target award;
  - vi. the adequacy of the programme management structures, including those concerned with academic and pastoral support for students;
  - vii. the suitability of the staffing, physical learning environment, and other learning resources to support the provision;
  - viii. For collaborative arrangements, partner staff have a good understanding of the University's regulations, approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, and quality assurance requirements, as set out in the programme documentation and Operations Manual.
- 3.10 If possible - particularly for complex events, e.g. involving collaborative partners or professional bodies - a meeting should be held between the panel Chair, the link QAO and the PDT chair in advance of event, to confirm that the panel is properly constituted, the programme documentation is complete, members of the programme team are ready to meet with the panel, and, if necessary, identify any additional requirements for the event. It is also good practice for the Chair and link QAO to request all panel members to indicate, in advance of the event, the key areas they would like to explore during the panel meetings with staff and students – this will assist the panel in agenda-setting on the day of the event, facilitate the programme team's preparation for meeting with the panel, and promote the transparency and collegiality of the process.
- 3.11 Before they may confer an approval decision, programme approval panels must gain evidence - from the documentation submitted and from discussions with the programme delivery team (and students and other stakeholders, as appropriate) - that the University's programme approval criteria have been met; or that they are likely to be met within a reasonable period from the panel event, such that conditional approval may be given.

## **Outcomes of approval meetings**

- 3.12 A panel event will result in one of the following three outcomes:
- i. To recommend approval of the programme/s to the University's Quality & Learning Infrastructure Committee, with or without conditions and/or recommendations (see 7.2 and 7.3 below);
  - ii. To refer the proposal for further work where there are a number of significant issues to be addressed. This will allow time for the programme development team to consult more widely and further develop the proposal to address the panel's concerns. The revised submission should be considered by a re-convened panel;
  - iii. To reject the proposal because a range of substantive issues affecting several aspects of delivery and assessment need to be addressed. This decision requires the proposal to be re-submitted for development approval from the start of the approval process.
- 3.13 Conditions are set where essential action is required to address an issue that has the potential to put academic standards or quality of delivery at risk, or where action is required in order to meet the University's procedural or regulatory requirements. This action must be carried out before the programme may recruit students (and legal agreements may be finalised for collaborative arrangements). All re-submitted documentation must meet the University's documentary standards, whether or not any other specific conditions relating to student-facing documents are set. The panel should agree the deadline for meeting any conditions with the chair of the PDT, bearing in mind the recruitment cycle for the programme. Any extensions to the re-submission deadline must be negotiated with the link QAO and ADESE/FHQAV.
- 3.14 Recommendations are more advisory in nature and refer to action that the panel consider would enhance the student learning experience, but where no threat is posed to academic standards or quality of delivery. Action taken in response to recommendations should be recorded in the first annual programme review report following approval. Commendations for innovative practice may be made where the panel considers that the approach being taken by a programme team represents excellent practice in teaching and learning, and is likely to have a particularly positive impact on outcomes for all their students.
- 3.15 A programme of study (including those delivered through collaborative partnerships) is normally granted approval for a period of five years - subject to continuing to meet the requirements of the University's quality monitoring processes – and is expected to go through revalidation (previously periodic review) by the end of this period. However, in circumstances where an approval panel believes that - although the criteria for programme approval have been met - the proposing team may have limited capacity or resources for continuing to deliver the programme, they may consider defining a period of approval of less than five years. At the end of a reduced approval period, the programme must be reviewed by another panel to determine whether the panel's concerns have been addressed and the programme may continue.

## **Panel reports**

- 3.16 The report of the panel's discussions and conclusions will be prepared by the panel Secretary, following the format set out in the approval report template (T2.11; or Part 2 of T6.1 for short courses) and guidance (G2.4). The report should be approved by the panel Chair, agreed as an accurate record by all other panel members; and forwarded to the programme team, to inform the action being taken in response to the conditions and recommendations. The PDT chair should return the revised documentation to the panel Chair and link QAO, via the panel Secretary, together with a completed response to conditions and recommendations form (T2.12), indicating how the issues raised by the panel have been addressed and confirming that the ADESE is satisfied with the Team's responses. In some cases, the panel Chair may choose to consult with other panel members to confirm whether or not the conditions have been satisfactorily addressed.
- 3.17 Once confirmed, the panel report will be scrutinised by the Quality & Learning Infrastructure Committee, in order to:
- i. confirm that the report provides evidence that the panel was properly constituted, that the process was properly conducted, and that appropriate conditions have been set by the panel;
  - ii. confirm that the report refers to the role of appropriate external reference points in defining academic standards, and to the University's criteria for approval;
  - iii. agree on responses to any recommendations for institutional action that have been made by the panel;

- iv. note any innovative practice that has been identified, and consider how it might be more widely disseminated;
- v. QLIC may also request further information, or action, from panels or Faculties if they identify any areas for concern within the report, or any themes arising across a number of reports.

### **Sign-off and monitoring recommendations**

- 3.18 The report is also received by the Faculty AESC/QLIC, in order to enable the committee to monitor the completion of conditions and recommendations, identify any themes arising from approval events across the Faculty, and respond to any matters raised by the panel for action at local level, for example, the appointment of an external examiner. Approval for delivery of the programme is not dependent on the programme team's response to recommendations, but the Faculty AESC/QLIC may ask programme teams to consider and act upon certain recommendations sooner than the first annual review of the programme if they consider that an early response will benefit students on the programme. Faculty AESC/QLICs should also recognise any commendations for good practice, and consider how this can be disseminated to other PDTs.
- 3.19 When the Panel Chair and ADESE are satisfied with the action taken by the PDT and have signed off the response to conditions form, the documentation will be forwarded to the Chair of QLIC (the PVC Student & Staff Experience) for final approval on behalf of QLIC and the Vice-Chancellor's Group. Following this approval, the link QAO will notify colleagues in Marketing and Communications, Strategic Change & Planning, Admissions, Registry, and colleagues in the Faculty (and, for collaborative provision, the Legal Services and Brookes Global or UK Partnerships teams). The '*subject to validation*' tag will be removed from the programme marketing materials and prospectus, and the programme will be allocated a UCAS code to enable students to enrol - for collaborative arrangements, the APQO will enter the new arrangements onto the University's register of collaborative provision. The Student Records & Curriculum Management Team will be provided with a full set of the definitive programme information, in order it can be set up on the course records system, and the programme specification will be published on the APQO website.