

G2.3: The conduct of programme approval panels

Please read in conjunction with Quality & Standards Handbook chapter on [new programme approval](#)

Introduction

Panel chairs, secretaries and officers have a general responsibility for managing the conduct of the programme approval exercise, ensuring that all aspects of the proposal are fully and properly considered and that all participants (including, in particular, the external panel member/s) are afforded the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. Panels and programme teams must recognise that they have a shared responsibility for identifying and solving any problems with new proposals, and discussions must therefore be conducted in a collegial and inclusive way.

Programme approval panels are responsible for making a recommendation for approval to the Quality & Learning Infrastructure Committee (QLIC) and for agreeing any conditions and/or recommendations to which this approval may be subject. For this reason, the initial (agenda setting) and concluding (formulating conditions and recommendations) sessions of an approval event are usually held in private.

Membership of approval panels

Chair	Appropriately senior/experienced member of Brookes staff, independent of the proposing Faculty.
Internal Assessors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	Employed in another UK higher education institution, with experience of delivering similar provision to the proposal being considered. If needed, e.g. in order to bring additional subject or professional expertise, there may be a second External Assessor.
APQO link Quality Assurance Officer	To advise on the conduct of the approval event, and assist the panel in formulating their conclusions.
Panel Secretary	Usually a Faculty Quality Officer, but may also be a member of the relevant programme administration team within the Faculty.
Student Central link Curriculum & Student Information Manager	May be in attendance, to assist with queries about programme rules/regulations and other systems issues.
Professional body representative/s	May join the panel, where approval events are held conjointly with professional bodies.

Setting the agenda

In setting the agenda for discussions with the programme team should consider the following issues:

- The appropriateness of the standards set for students and the match with the title of award. The panel must ensure that the programme and the award/s to which it leads are consistently described in the documentation, and that it is consistent with the University Regulations, and the Framework for HE Qualifications (now contained within the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, A1).
- The range of internal and external consultation and benchmarking that has informed the development of the new programme. In discipline areas for which Subject Benchmark Statements have been published, the Panel must also be satisfied that the programme is consistent with these standards and, where relevant, with the requirements of professional bodies.
- The rationale for the proposal, the likely demand and student entry profiles.
- Criteria for admission to the programme, and how candidates will be assessed against them.
- The curriculum: its design, content, delivery and assessment. Panels must be satisfied that the proposed curriculum reflects current scholarship within the discipline/s concerned, will enable students to achieve the intended award, and is underpinned by

relevant research and scholarship within the teaching team. Panels should consider the intended learning outcomes of each (new) module making up the programme and ensure the appropriateness of the proposed assessment strategy for assessing the stated outcomes.

- The adequacy of the programme management structures including those concerned with academic and pastoral support for students. The Panel should satisfy themselves that the support provided is appropriate to the nature of the programme. They should also ensure that effective quality management arrangements will be put in place by the programme team, in particular for gaining feedback from students on the quality of their learning experience.
- Learning resources to support the programme delivery and ensure an excellent learning experience.

The criteria for approval are set out in the section below. The extent to which the Panel will need to explore individual areas will depend on the quality of the contextual information provided in the submission document. A template for a typical agenda for a programme approval event is available from the [APQO website](#) (T2.10), and this may be adopted and tailored to local needs, on the advice of the link QAO.

Programme approval criteria

The Office for Students expects all registered HE providers to ensure that all students receive a high quality academic experience, which is up to date, coherent, and effectively delivered; and provides educational challenge and enables students to develop relevant skills (condition B1 – see the ‘B’ [conditions of registration on the OfS website](#)). Panels should bear this in mind when considering whether the criteria for the approval of new (and re-validated) programmes have been met.

Consultation

The panel should establish that the Programme Development Team has taken full account of the outcomes of internal and external consultation, and engaged with an appropriate range of relevant reference points.

Curriculum

The Panel should satisfy themselves that the curriculum presented for approval:

- i. articulates an educational rationale, aims and intended learning outcomes which are appropriate to the level of the award, reflect the award title and show how the Brookes Attributes will be addressed. The intended learning outcomes for each substantive (i.e. target) exit award should also be articulated.
- ii. is designed so as to enable the students to meet the programme’s aims and learning outcomes, i.e. it can be shown how individual modules contribute to the achievement of the programme outcomes.
- iii. demonstrates coherence and intellectual integrity.
- iv. is designed to ensure depth, breadth and balance of subject, intellectual, practical and personal skills, including opportunities for students to acquire knowledge, skills and attributes that are valued by employers.
- v. is designed to ensure relevant progression in terms of the demands placed upon students as the programme advances.
- vi. demonstrates a commitment to inclusive practice, through meaningful engagement of the PDT with the [IDEAS model](#).

- vii. incorporates the requirements of relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) and complies with the University's regulatory framework.
- viii. is being taught by a team of staff with appropriate experience and expertise, and is enriched by student exposure to, and involvement in, scholarship, research and/or professional practice.
- ix. additional costs to the students are considered within the programme and made clear on marketing and programme materials

Recruitment and admissions

The Panel should assure themselves that the admissions criteria are consistent with the programme's aims, learning outcomes and level of the award, taking account of the target market and the requirements of any PSRB requirements or relevant legislation. They should also consider the means by which the programme team intends to assess applicants against the admissions criteria, including whether the programme is suitable for people under 18.

Learning, teaching and assessment

The Panel should satisfy themselves that the programme team's strategy for learning, teaching and assessment:

- i. provides effective stimulation, challenge and contact time that encourages students to engage and actively commit to their studies.
- ii. is consistent with the stated aims of the programme, and that appropriate learning opportunities will be provided to enable students to meet the learning outcomes.
- iii. validly and reliably assesses the achievement of all the programme's intended learning outcomes.
- iv. complies with University policies, and engages with OCSLD guidance, relating to learning, teaching and assessment, in particular the Assessment & Feedback policy, so that assessment and feedback is used effectively to support students' development, progression and attainment.
- v. reflects good practice in teaching and learning, with arrangements in place to assure and enhance the quality of teaching.
- vi. provides accessible opportunities for all students, including those with additional needs, to meet the learning outcomes.
- vii. demonstrates a commitment to the provision of an excellent learning experience, in line with relevant University strategies.

Programme management

The panel should be satisfied that the programme management structures, including those concerned with academic and pastoral support for students, will meet the needs of all groups of students, including the provision of support for students with disabilities. In the case of programmes delivered by two or more Faculties, the arrangements for programme management should be clearly articulated and understood by all involved in delivering the programme.

Learning resources

The panel should assure themselves that sufficient resources (including teaching staff with the appropriate expertise) are in place, or are planned, so that the programme team may provide learning opportunities which will enable students to achieve the programme learning outcomes. Systems should also be in place to provide reasonable adjustments for students with additional needs.

For programmes delivered by distance or e-learning

The panel must assure themselves that the proposal meets the expectations of the University in respect of: the security and reliability of the delivery and assessment systems; assuring the quality of study materials; the skills and expertise of the staff delivering on the programme; and the mechanisms for providing timely academic support and feedback.

Outcomes of the approval event

Panels must refer to the University's criteria for approval (above), as well as the evidence they have gathered from the documentation and discussions with the programme team, when making their decision on whether to approve the proposal. The options available to panels in respect of approval are:

- i. To **recommend approval** of the programme/s to the University's Quality & Learning Infrastructure Committee, with or without (essential) conditions and/or (advisable) recommendations. Most approval decisions are subject to a number of conditions and recommendations, which should reflect the panel's confidence in the proposing team. There is no hard and fast rule regarding the distinction between a condition and a recommendation (see the Quality & Standards Handbook for the outline definitions), but panels need to consider carefully the consequences of a concern not being addressed before students are admitted to the programme. Panels should also consider the strength of the evidence underpinning a potential condition or recommendation. In giving feedback to the proposing programme team, the panel chair should make it clear that the panel's decision is subject to the satisfactory fulfillment of any conditions, and to final approval by QLIC (through the Chair, having received assurance from the panel that the conditions have been met).
- 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 described in the Quality & Standards Handbook.

Approval panels should also consider and agree the proposed start date for the new programme, and, where it is replacing existing provision, they should also agree the arrangements necessary to effect the transition from the old to the new programme. The link Curriculum & Student Information Manager can advise on the options available.

The approval report and response to conditions

Immediately after the event, the secretary should agree the wording of the conditions and recommendations with the panel Chair and the link QAO, and these should be circulated to the PDT (copied to the Faculty ADESE and Head of QA&V). The full report of the panel's discussions and conclusions is subsequently prepared by the panel Secretary – where possible, within two weeks of the event - following the format set out in the approval report template (T2.11 for home programmes, T5.6 for collaborative provision, and 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 confirmed

report is then submitted to the Quality & Learning Infrastructure Committee, to provide assurance that the approval process has been properly conducted.

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; and any extensions to the re-submission deadline must be negotiated with the link QAO and ADSE/PLQA. The Programme Lead 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 – or (in the case of recommendations not yet considered) will be - addressed. 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. All re-submitted documentation must meet the University's documentary standards, whether or not any other specific conditions relating to student-facing documents have been set.

Collaborative provision

Panels convened to consider the approval of new collaborative arrangements, or the re-validation and renewal of existing partner provision, have additional responsibilities in order to assure the University that the partner is able to support the delivery of the programme/s under consideration and that mechanisms are in place to enable the University to meet the expectations of the relevant UK regulatory bodies (e.g. as articulated in the UK Quality Code and supporting guidance), and any other national regulatory frameworks that apply to the provision.

Programme approval panels must satisfy themselves that the teaching staff at the partner organisation are appropriately qualified - i.e. they have experience of teaching and assessing at the level of the qualification being approved - and have relevant subject expertise, and an understanding of:

- the nature, content, aims and learning outcomes of the programme/s;
- the learning, teaching and assessment strategies to be employed on the programme/s;
- the University's approach to learning outcomes, assessment, grading and moderation;
- the University's quality assurance policies and procedures.

Panels should also satisfy themselves that the overall staffing levels proposed are sufficient for successful delivery of the programme/s, and that there is a plan in place to maintain the approved level of staffing, as set out in the Operations Manual; and that appropriate arrangements are in place at Brookes to support the provision. They should also confirm that students have the appropriate access to Brookes learning resources, as agreed through the partnership negotiations.

Panels must undertake appropriate scrutiny of the Operations Manual as well as the Programme Specification and Handbook, to ensure there is consistency with the various documents that make up the contracts between the University, the partner organisation and the student.

Collaborative provision approval and review panels held at partner organisations overseas should also be alert to and respect any cultural norms in relation to courtesy (e.g. appropriate dress, etc).