

Programme Validation Policy and Procedure

This is a defined Policy and Procedure that all Faculties are required to follow.

1. Introduction

1.1 This document relates to the process of validating **new** programmes of study and covers;

- Any taught undergraduate and postgraduate programme leading to a University of Southampton award;
- Research degrees with a taught component (e.g. Engineering Doctorate);
- Programmes developed with Partner Institutions are subject to the partner approval procedures detailed in the Collaborative Provision Policy.

2. Principles

Length of Validation

- 2.1 New programmes must be validated to ensure they meet the exacting standards of the University and that they will provide a high quality experience for the students. Programmes are validated for a defined period only (normally a maximum of five years).
- 2.2 After first validation, programmes may be validated either individually or as cognate groups of programmes. Where programmes are validated as a cognate group, separate programme specifications must be created.

Academic rigour

- 2.3 The programme validation policy and procedures seek to ensure that the education provision of the University is well-designed, academically coherent and intellectually challenging, and that programmes of study are informed by research and capable of enriching the student experience.
- 2.4 Proposers of new programmes are responsible for making sure that proposals are drawn up with due reference to the external and internal reference points as detailed in section 4 below.
- 2.5 AQSC monitors new programmes. However, the strategic decision with regards to which programmes should be created lies with each Faculty.

Peer Review

- 2.6 Programme Validation is underpinned by academic and professional peer review by internal colleagues and external subject specialists, representatives from professional bodies and potential employers. This promotes confidence in the quality and standards of the programme.
- 2.7 In all cases external advisors must be able to report on the proposed new programme's alignment with external reference points and the coherence of the curriculum. The report from the external advisor and the programme proposer's response will be considered at Academic Scrutiny stage.

3. Advice and Assistance

- 3.1 Programme Leads (PL)¹ should consult their Faculty Academic Registrar (FAR) for advice on validation arrangements, the timescales to be followed and the support available.
- 3.2 Further advice relating to the programme validation policy and procedure should be directed to the Quality Standards and Accreditation Team (QSAT).

¹ This role may be undertaken by the Programme Lead or the Director of Programmes where the structure of programmes/Faculties makes this more suitable.

4. Reference Points and Constraints

4.1 All new programmes must be validated with reference to:

- The national [Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#);
- Relevant [subject benchmark statements](#);
- The requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (where relevant);
- [Quality Assurance Agency \(QAA\)'s UK Quality Code, Part B, Chapter B1: Programme design and approval](#);
- [Quality Assurance Agency \(QAA\)'s UK Quality Code, Part B, Chapter B8 Programme Monitoring and Review](#);
- [QAA Master's Degree Characteristics](#);
- [QAA Doctoral Degree Characteristics](#);
- The University requirements set out in the Calendar and the Quality Handbook, including:
 - the [Guidelines for first degree programmes](#) OR
 - the [Guidelines for Master's degree programmes](#);
 - the [Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme](#) ;
 - the [Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision](#);
 - the [Collaborative Provision Policy and Procedure](#);
 - the procedures set out in this document, including the timeline for development.

5. Timing

5.1 The actual length of the lead in time is impacted by both internal and external drivers relating to publication of information for students and applicants.

5.2 The table below sets out the standard timescales for the validation of new undergraduate programmes where a Key Information Set (KIS) record is required². The KIS is an external driver which is audited by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Requirement	Timing
KIS information ready for submission	Entry minus 14 months
KIS information published	Entry minus 12 months
First Entry	September

5.3 No undergraduate programme can be advertised through UCAS without a complete KIS.

5.4 The table below sets out the standard timescales for the validation of new undergraduate and postgraduate programmes where it is critical that it features in the printed prospectus.

Requirement	Undergraduate Programme	Postgraduate Programme
Approval by FPC for Prospectus deadline	Entry minus 32 months	Entry minus 20 months
KIS information ready for submission	Entry minus 14 months	N/A
KIS information published	Entry minus 12 months	N/A
First Entry	September	September

5.5 Internally, the publication of the prospectus is an important deadline. However, there are alternative methods of promoting programmes and, while resorting to such options may have a deleterious effect on recruitment, the opportunity will be taken to expedite programmes where this effect can be avoided.

5.6 The timeline for developing new programmes involving educational collaborations (particularly high-risk international partnerships) will take longer, for example where full due diligence and a collaboration approval event is required. Please see the [University Collaborative Provision Policy](#) for more information and discuss with the Collaborative Provision Adviser in QSAT.

² Required for all undergraduate programmes full-time and part-time and integrated masters.

- 5.7 At the first meeting of AQSC each academic year Faculties will submit their programme validation plans for the coming academic year. Once received, this will be disseminated by the Secretary of AQSC to Directors of Professional Services in the spirit of improved communication and planning.

6. STAGE 0 – INITIAL DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of Stage 0 is to consider any programme ideas with respect to certain characteristics; namely their alignment with University and Faculty strategies, their potential market, their connectedness to institutional research expertise, their potential to enhance graduate employability, their global reach, and the potential for module sharing and interdisciplinary connections.

- 6.1 The Programme Proposer will meet with the Associate Dean (ESE) to consider the proposal in light of its fit with the Faculty and University's strategic aims and current portfolio, the resources required for effective delivery and their potential domestic and international markets. Additionally, the financial viability of the programme will have to be assured.
- 6.2 The Programme Proposer may be advised to consult with principle stakeholders prior to this informal discussion to inform these discussions. The ADE may also wish to consult with the FPC or other members of the Faculty.
- 6.3 If, as a result of these discussions, it appears that the new programme is likely to be viable, the Programme Proposer should proceed to develop the proposal. **(Stage 1)** The ADE will notify the FAR for information.

7. STAGE 1 – PROGRAMME PROPOSAL

The purpose of Stage 1 is to collect the information to confirm the strategic fit of a proposed programme, including consideration of market demand and resources.

Completion of the programme proposal stage ensures that the underlying building blocks for the programme are created, and that Faculty Executive Group (FEG) has the information available to decide whether the programme proposal should proceed.

- 7.1 The Programme Proposer will complete the Programme Proposal form in partnership with the Faculty Marketing Manager ^{3,4} Faculty Finance Manager and the International Recruitment Office (where appropriate) (known as principal internal stakeholders) and any other Faculties involved in the delivery of the programme (via the FAR) to enable FEG to reach a decision about whether to approve a programme proposal.

Documentation

- 7.2 The following documentation is required for this stage;
- Programme Proposal Form
 - Draft programme structure to include a list of all modules required for delivery of the proposed programme.
- 7.3 The documentation (including initial feedback from principle internal stakeholders and the programme proposer response) will be reviewed by the ADE who will present the proposal and make recommendations to FEG.
- 7.4 If the programme is being developed with a new collaborative partner institution, Stage 1 of the partner approval process must be completed and the documentation as set out in the [Collaborative Provision Policy](#) must also be submitted to the FEG for consideration.

³ Marketing will coordinate the collection of information from the international office where there are considered to be new/potential international markets.

⁴ Much of the information provided by Marketing will be obtained from the Qlikview app developed by Institutional Research.

Role of FEG

7.5 FEG will use the programme information provided to it to consider whether:

- there is a good academic rationale for the programme;
- the programme is consistent with the Faculty and University research and education strategies;
- there is a realistic estimate of (continued) student numbers and evidence of sustainable market demand
- the University has the appropriate resources to support the delivery of the programme and to provide a high quality student experience;
- the proposal is likely to secure the support of all groups within the Faculty and outside which will contribute to the delivery of the programme;
- where applicable, any other Faculties involved in the programme are supportive of the proposal.

Outcomes

7.6 FEG will make one of the following decisions:

- Approve the proposal to move to programme development (stage 2)
- Approve the proposal to move to programme development (stage 2) with conditions and resubmit to FEG
- Reject proposal

7.7 Where conditions have been set, FEG should receive confirmation about how these have been met before the programme is approved by FPC.

7.8 Approval from FEG means that the programme can be promoted externally as 'subject to validation'. Approval for a new programme to be created is granted for one academic year; proposals not completed within this period must be reconsidered by FEG.

7.9 The programme then proceeds to **stage 2** - programme development. If a programme involves a new collaborative partner institution, the proposal should also move to Stage 2 of the partner approval process as set out in the [University's Collaborative Provision Policy](#).

7.10 The Secretary to FEG will inform the FAR and Secretary to AQSC about FEG's decision. They will also inform the Programme Proposer and Faculty CQA team.

7.11 For all new programmes proposals that are supported by FEG, the [Secretary to Academic Standards and Quality Committee](#) (AQSC) will arrange for the basic programme information to be circulated to the Committee.

7.12 If members of AQSC wish to raise concerns about the proposal, they should discuss these with the relevant Associate Dean (ESE) in the first instance. If any significant concerns are raised, the Vice-President (Education) will bring together the relevant parties for discussion, and will have the final decision.

7.13 Following each AQSC meeting, the Secretary will inform members of Professional Services of the new programme developments that have been reported.

8. STAGE 2 - PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

The purpose of Stage 2 is to facilitate the development of the programme specification and module profiles. This stage also collects feedback from stakeholders.

- 8.1 Following programme proposal approval by FEG, the Programme Proposer should continue to develop the programme.

Documentation

- 8.2 The following documentation is required for this stage;

- Programme Proposal Form
- Draft Programme Specification
- Draft module profiles for all new modules
- Module profiles for all core and compulsory modules that have already been approved.

- 8.3 The stakeholder consultation stage engages staff from outside of the Faculty to comment on the programme proposal. Once the programme information is available, the Programme Proposer should request input from stakeholders. The list of stakeholders to be consulted will vary according to the nature of the programme. The decision about which stakeholders to consult will be made by the ADE.

Appointment of External Advisor

- 8.4 The Programme Proposer, in consultation with relevant academic colleagues, should nominate an External Advisor to participate in the validation of the programme(s).
- 8.5 The nomination must be submitted to the ADE for approval. The [External Advisor Policy](#), including the criteria for nomination and [nomination form](#) is available from the Quality Handbook.
- 8.6 Where a single External Advisor would be unable to comment in an expert manner on all the disciplines involved in the programme, it is expected that additional external advisors should be appointed. Similarly, for joint honours or multi-disciplinary programmes there may be a requirement for more than one External Advisor so that the necessary expertise in all major disciplines is covered.

Input from Internal Stakeholders

- 8.7 During programme development, relevant internal stakeholders from Professional Services should be consulted with regards to wider educational resource, policy, pedagogy, teaching, learning and assessment methods, regulatory and external requirements. The list below suggests the minimum stakeholder list, but exceptions can be made as determined by the ADE relevant to the needs of the Faculty and discipline and/or programme.
- Students (via appropriate Faculty forum)
 - Marketing
 - [Careers and Employability](#)
 - FAR (or nominee) of Faculty
 - FAR (or nominee) of partner Faculty (compulsory for joint programmes)
 - Appropriate staff from the partner institution (for collaborative provision arrangements)
- 8.8 Consultation should not repeat previous investigations that may have taken place at Programme Creation (Stage 1). However, it may also be necessary to re-engage with principle stakeholders if greater detail is requested by the FEG or ADE.
- 8.9 Consultation will cover the resource requirements for the programme(s), highlight any specific issues and needs, confirm whether resource provision is likely to be (at least)

adequate and, if this is not the case, what actions will be adopted to provide adequate resource.

8.10 Stakeholders will be given access to all relevant programme information. Stakeholders will review the programme information and will return their comments to the Programme Proposer. Stakeholders should expect to receive a response to any concerns that are raised.

8.11 In addition, the following stakeholders should be notified of the programme proposal and have the opportunity to respond if there are any concerns identified.

- iSolutions
- Library
- Institutional Research
- Strategy, Planning and Analytics
- Student Services, (including Enabling Services and First Support)
- Student and Academic Administration (timetabling/visas)
- Assistant Director SAA (Head of University Admissions).

8.12 Feedback from the internal stakeholders cannot prevent the programme from progressing to academic scrutiny. However the Faculty Scrutiny Group (FSG) is expected to consider their comments and the response by the Programme Proposer.

8.13 Faculties should consider opportunities for obtaining the views of students during programme development. Consideration of programme proposals at SSLCs is an example of a good opportunity.

Validation Preparation

8.14 In consultation with the Programme Proposer, the FAR should agree the timeline for the academic scrutiny of the programme proposal, and the meeting of FSG.

8.15 If the programme is being developed with a new collaborative partner institution, the meeting of FSG and the Collaboration Approval Panel (Stage 3 of the Partner Approval Process) may meet at the proposed partner. It may be possible to run a combined panel for some arrangements depending on the expertise of individual panel members, however, the two processes should remain distinct and result in two separate reports, one focussed on the programme and one focussed on the partner.

Academic Scrutiny

8.16 Validation is underpinned by academic and professional peer review by internal colleagues and external subject specialists. This takes the form of the Faculty Scrutiny Group. FSG will undertake in-depth academic scrutiny of the programme proposal, to enable a recommendation to be made to Faculty Programmes Committee (FPC) as to whether the programme(s) should be validated. FSG may attach conditions or recommendations to its consideration of proposed programmes.

8.17 FSG will meet with members of the proposed programme team. The composition of the programme team should be such that there would be suitable representation from subjects included in the proposed programme. Attention should be paid to appropriate subject representation for joint programmes across disciplines or Faculties. It is recommended that representation should be a minimum of 3 members of the proposed programme team in addition to the Programme Proposer (e.g. Module Leads, Year Coordinators, Admissions Tutor, Specialisation representatives). A greater number of members of the programme team would be appropriate for proposed joint programmes.

Documentation

8.18 The following documentation is required for Academic Scrutiny;

- Programme Proposal Form
- Programme Specification
- Module profiles for all modules

- External Advisor report and response
- Internal Stakeholder reports and responses

FSG constitution

8.19 The membership of a FSG must include as a minimum:

- Associate Dean (ESE) or nominee (Chair)
- AQSC representative (a member of academic staff external to the Faculty nominated by the Faculty and approved by AQSC).
- Student representative (normally from the same Faculty as the location of the programme, but may be a representative from the Students' Union where necessary)
- FAR or nominee
- External Advisor
- Member staff with requisite expertise (compulsory for on-line programmes)
- Member of FPC (only if a member is not already present)

8.20 Other members of staff with relevant expertise may be invited to join the FSG as required, including those from professional services and the partner institution (for collaborative arrangements).

8.21 As a member of FSG, if a student is not able to attend the meeting of the FSG, s/he should be encouraged to give views on the programme through alternative means.

8.22 The member of FPC is a full member of the FSG but will also be asked to confirm to FPC that the appropriate level of scrutiny has been given to the programme proposal.

8.23 The AQSC representative is asked to confirm on behalf of AQSC that the programme validation procedure has been followed appropriately.

8.24 Where appropriate, representatives from PSRBs may also be invited to participate in the FSG, to enable both PSRB and University validation to take place simultaneously. In such cases, there may be requirements for additional documentation and/or for engagement with the programme team as part of the process.

Role

8.25 The role of FSG, on behalf of FPC is to confirm;

- that the proposal meets threshold academic standards
- that all stages of the approval process have been completed appropriately
- that any conditions set and/or amendments required by FEG have been met
- that the comments of the External Adviser have been considered and addressed.

Outcomes

8.26 If FSG is satisfied with the academic case for a proposal and that the resources required for its delivery are sufficient to ensure the quality of the provision, it will make one of the following decisions:

- Endorse the programme proposal and recommend approval by FPC.
- Endorse the programme proposal and recommend approval by FPC with conditions.
- Require further work to revise documentation and resubmit to FSG.
- Reject proposal.

8.27 If further work is required, the Programme Proposer will undertake as necessary and revise the documentation to address any issues raised by FSG. If required (see above), s/he will submit this for further scrutiny or sign off by FSG.

8.28 Once finalised, FSG will agree the outcome of the academic scrutiny and make a recommendation to the FPC.

8.29 FSG will draw general conclusions, set conditions, and make recommendations and/or commendations. Confirmation and evidence that these conditions have been met will be

monitored by the FPC. FSG will identify, where applicable, any general issues emerging from the discussion, including examples of good practice, which should be drawn to the attention of FPC.

- 8.30 A written report of FSG including any recommendations/commendations/conditions should be completed and submitted to FPC.

9. STAGE 3 – PROGRAMME APPROVAL

The purpose of Stage 3 is to record the approval of the programme by FPC and to manage the administrative elements of programme set-up and communication post approval. FPC receives the recommendation of FSG.

Validation

- 9.1 The FPC will receive a written report of the Scrutiny meeting and the recommendation of FSG.
- 9.2 The member of FPC who was on FSG will confirm that an appropriate level of scrutiny was given to the proposal.

Outcomes

- 9.3 If FPC is satisfied with the scrutiny undertaken by FSG it will make one of the following decisions:
- Accept the recommendation of FSG
 - Reject the recommendation of FSG

Post Approval

- 9.4 The validation stage of the system is completed after FPC has accepted the recommendation of FSG.
- 9.5 Once the Faculty decision has been taken and, where applicable, it is confirmed that any conditions have been fulfilled, the Secretary to FPC will notify the Programme Proposer and the Secretary of AQSC.
- 9.6 The Faculty CQA team is responsible for ensuring that all necessary action is taken to create programme(s) and associated modules within Banner.
- 9.7 The Curriculum and Timetabling Team (CTT) is responsible for the creation of programme and module codes.
- 9.8 The FAR, in conjunction with Faculty and Registry SAA Teams, will ensure that the programme has an accurate KIS.
- 9.9 The FAR, in conjunction with Faculty and Registry SAA Teams, will ensure that any new exemptions or variations to University Regulations are submitted for inclusion in the University Calendar.
- 9.10 The ADE will ensure that any actions arising from programme validations are included in the Faculty Action Plan and monitored via FPC.
- 9.11 The Secretary to AQSC will note the decision of FPC and will notify;
- Head of Faculty Finance
 - Communications and Marketing (faculty and central)
 - Institutional Research
 - Library
 - iSolutions
 - Student Services
 - Recruitment and Admissions Team (SAA)

- Curriculum and Timetabling Team (SAA)
- Head of Admissions
- AQSC

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Stage 0 - Initial Discussion

- Documentation
- None

- Decision Maker
- ADE

- Outcome
- Proceed
- Do not proceed

Stage 1 - Programme Proposal

- Documentation
- Programme Proposal Form
- Draft Programme Spec

- Decision Maker
- FEG

- Outcome
- Approve
- Approve with conditions
- Reject

Stage 2 - Programme Development and Academic Scrutiny

- Documentation
- Programme Proposal Form
- Programme Specification
- Module profiles for all new modules and core and compulsory modules already approved.
- External advisor report and response

- Decision Maker
- FSG

- Outcome
- Endorse the programme proposal and recommend approval by FPC.
- Endorse the programme proposal and recommend approval by FPC with conditions.
- Require further work to revise documentation and resubmit to FSG.
- Reject proposal

Stage 3 - Programme Validation

- Documentation
- Written report from FSG

- Decision Maker
- FPC

- Outcome
- Accept recommendation of FSG
- Reject recommendation of FSG