Programme Approval and Review: Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes

Definitions

Programme approval: is the process by which new research degree programmes are checked against academic quality and standards expectations. It applies to:

- New professional doctorates that require students to undertake a combination of taught compulsory and/or elective modules and to complete an individual and/or group project (e.g. the Doctorate of Clinical Psychology and the Doctorate of Educational Psychology).

- New Integrated PhD programmes that require students to follow a prescribed programme of modules in the early stages of the degree, with the remainder of candidature devoted to supervised research and preparation of a thesis. Integrated PhDs may sometimes be delivered through a doctoral training award (e.g. a doctoral focal or landscape award (previously known as a centre for doctoral training or a doctoral training partnership.

- New research degree programmes which are delivered through a doctoral training award and which place additional requirements (upon students beyond those expected of a student in candidature for a standard route PhD (e.g. completion of placement rotation(s), individual modules or similar). Such programmes may require exemptions, variations or additional requirements to the [Regulations for Research Degrees](#) and the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidature and Supervision](#).

- New research degree programmes including standard-route programmes, those in new discipline areas, or those that meet the definition of an education partnership under the [Education Partnerships Policy](#).

Programme review: is the quinquennial process of reflecting on existing research degree programme delivery and student experience and planning for the next cycle of programme enhancement. It applies to:

- Existing professional doctorates that require students to undertake a combination of taught compulsory and/or elective modules and to complete an individual and/or group project (e.g. the Doctorate of Clinical Psychology and the Doctorate of Educational Psychology).

- Existing Integrated PhD programmes that require students to follow a prescribed programme of modules in the early stages of the degree, with the remainder of candidature devoted to supervised research and preparation of a thesis. Integrated PhDs may sometimes be delivered through a doctoral training award (e.g. a doctoral focal or landscape award (previously known as a centre for doctoral training or a doctoral training partnership)).

- Existing research degree programmes which are delivered through a doctoral training award and which place additional requirements upon students beyond those expected of a student in candidature for a standard route PhD ((e.g. completion of placement rotation(s), individual modules or similar). Such programmes may require exemptions, variations or additional requirements to the [Regulations for Research Degrees](#) and the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidature and Supervision](#).

- The programme review process does not apply to existing standard-route PhD programmes. Such programmes are reviewed through the [Periodic Review of Postgraduate Research Degree Provision: Policy](#). Programmes that meet the definition of an education partnership under the [Education Partnerships Policy](#) will be subject to programme review.

Purpose

The University is committed to developing and delivering a transformative student experience, offering programmes which enable our students and alumni to thrive and setting them apart as: curious; engaged; articulate; ethical; culturally aware; enterprising; and socially and environmentally responsible.

The University's Senate must be able to give assurance to its governing Council that its programmes meet the conditions for registration as set by the Office for Students (OfS). These are defined in section B of the [Conditions of registration - Office for Students](#). Senate delegates responsibility for defining, managing, and monitoring programme quality assurance processes to its Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee (AQSS).

AQSS recognises that programme teams are best placed to specify and develop a high-quality student learning experience within their areas of expertise. This policy seeks to empower them to do so, within the framework of the University's education strategy, quality assurance processes and regulations and in compliance with national expectations of programme quality, drawing expertise and support as necessary from the professional services.

AQSS has tasked the Postgraduate Quality Monitoring and Enhancement (PGR QME) Subcommittee with making recommendations for defining, managing, and monitoring programme quality assurance processes for research degrees.

Associated processes

Strategic Approval

Programme Approval and Review links to the University's strategic approval process and will only begin after the programmes have completed the strategic business approval process.

Education Partnerships

Programmes delivered in partnership with other organisations must seek partnership approval under the appropriate [Education Partnerships Approval Procedure](#). Partnership approval ensures that the additional risks and benefits of delivering a programme in partnership are evaluated and understood by both institutions initiating such arrangements. Partners also undertake a mutual assurance to deliver academic standards and student experience equivalent to a standard University of Southampton award.

A legal agreement will also be required. Consult the Education Partnerships Policy for further information.

Where the partner is not based in the UK, there will be a need for additional strategic approval from the Vice President International or their advisers.

Annual Monitoring

Outcomes and actions arising from Programme Approval and Review are monitored through [Annual Monitoring](). Conversely, outcomes from Annual Monitoring may inform Programme Review.

Periodic Review

Programme approval and review is a separate and distinct process to periodic review. Periodic review evaluates the operation and performance of a Faculty's research degree provision in its entirety in accordance with a scheduled determined by the PGR QME Subcommittee. The aim and scope of periodic review is set out in the [Periodic Review of Postgraduate Research Degree Provision: Policy]().

Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRB)

The Programme Approval and Review process may be closely linked to professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) accreditation or registration. The points in the process where a PSRB may wish to be involved will vary and are a matter for discussion between the programme team, the Chair of the Approval or Review Panel and representatives of the PSRB.

Additional requirements for research degrees delivered through a doctoral training award

From time to time, external funders issue calls for bids for higher education institutions to operate doctoral training awards (e.g. doctoral focal or landscape awards). To streamline the internal processes that are required in advance of submitting such bids, a pre-submission academic approval process is required.

Not less than one month before the final bid submission date, the Principal Investigator must complete and submit a *Pre-submission scrutiny form* (and all relevant supporting documentation) to the Quality, Standards and Accreditation Team (QSAT).

A Pre-Submission Panel will be convened to assess the extent to which the proposal:

- complies with the regulations[1];

- requires approval of formal credit-bearing components or exemption, variation or additional requirement to the regulations that govern the University of Southampton's standard-route PhD[1];

- requires due diligence (for any external partner that is involved in training delivery);

- complies with models and examples of best practice at the University of Southampton (or elsewhere);

- can evidence that consultation with relevant parties has taken place and that the proposal is deliverable within the available resources. Relevant parties include the Doctoral College, Research and Innovation Services (RIS), the Quality, Standards and Accreditation Team (QSAT), and relevant Faculty-based teams (e.g. Faculty Finance and the Faculty Operating Services (FOS));

- does not give rise to any other concerns not listed above.

Membership of the Pre-Submission Panel will include the Director of the Doctoral College (the Chair), the Chair of the PGR QME Subcommittee and, if external partner(s) are involved in credit-bearing training delivery associated with student assessment and/or progression, the Chair of the Education Partnerships Subcommittee. The Pre-Submission Panel will scrutinise the bid proposal bid and will determine one of the following outcomes:

- the bid may be submitted in its current form; or

- the bid may be submitted in its current form but, if the grant is awarded, the proposed programme will be required to undergo Programme Approval and/or Collaborative Approval because it either contains formal credit-bearing components or requires exemption, variation or additional requirements to the regulations that govern the University of Southampton's standard-route PhD[1] or involves a partner institution; or

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[1] e.g. the Regulations for Research Degrees and the Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidature and Supervision

- the *pre-submission scrutiny form* must be revised and resubmitted to the Pre-Submission Panel not less than two weeks before the final bid submission date for further assessment; or

- the bid may not be submitted in its current form.

The Pre-Submission Panel will report its final decision to the Principal Investigator, to the PGR QME Subcommittee and the Doctoral College Committee and, where relevant, to the Education Partnerships Subcommittee. The Panel will also highlight aspects of best practice or concerns to RIS to aid future bidders.

Any bids that do not follow the above process will not be supported (financially or otherwise) by the University of Southampton and permission to submit the bid to the funding body will not be granted.

Any grant that is awarded that has not been previously assessed through the pre-submission approval process may not recruit students until the Programme Approval process has been completed and approval has been granted. However, it may be possible to promote the programme externally as "subject to approval."

Any additional costs associated with exemptions, variations, or additional requirements to the regulations[1] or to the proposed staffing resource requirements will be recovered from the doctoral training award or the lead Faculty aligned with the grant, following consultation with the Dean). If no such source of funds can be identified, then approval for the programme will not be granted.

Should the bid be successful, and within one month of the grant having been awarded, the Principal Investigator must notify the Pre-Submission Panel that:

- the programme will be delivered in accordance with the proposal detailed in the *pre-submission scrutiny form* that was previously approved by the Pre-Submission Panel; or

- revisions are required to the proposal that was detailed in the pre-submission scrutiny form that was previously approved by the Pre-Submission Panel. Details of each change required must be specified and supported with a clear rationale as to why they are now necessary.

The Pre-Submission Panel will consider the information received and will decide that:

- Programme Approval is not required and permission is granted to proceed to recruiting students to the research degree programme; <u>or</u>

- Programme Approval is required and recruiting students to the research degree programme may not yet proceed; or

- further clarification is required from before a decision can be made.

Programme approval

Strategic approval

Proposals for new programmes must be submitted to the University for consideration via the annual strategic approval process and Programme Approval cannot start until permission to proceed has been granted. In cases of strategic need, proposals for new programmes may be submitted at any time and all reasonable attempts will be made to support the approval process for programmes notified outside of the usual cycle.

Proposals are likely to require:

- a consideration of available management information and potential market size;

- a test of financial viability;

- an agreement about levels of new resource (staff, space, financial or legal expertise etc); and

- a check that proposed programmes do not overlap or adversely affect the legitimate interests of other Schools.

A new programme which has permission to proceed via the business planning process, may be advertised to applicants provided all documentation is clearly marked as 'subject to programme approval.'

Education Partnerships

It is not necessary to have achieved full partnership approval prior to starting Programme Approval, but at least stages one and two, the strategic business approval and initial partner due diligence, and full partner due diligence, should have been completed.

The [Overview of Programme and Partnership Approval Processes Flowchart](#) shows the typical sequence of events for the two processes. This will be agreed between the Chair of the Education Partnerships Subcommittee, the Chair of the Programme Approval Panel, taking into account the indictive risk level in each case. The Collaboration Approval Panel will be scheduled separately, unless the two Chairs agree that it would be feasible to combine the agendas. It should take place prior to programme development. There should be at least one common Panel member and the recommendations/conditions of the Collaborative Approval Panel should be incorporated and addressed into the Programme Approval meeting and roll-out action plan.

Timing

AQSS: To assist AQSS in planning its work, it is helpful for Schools to give notice of requests for approval of new programmes to the first AQSS meeting of each academic year. In cases of strategic need, new programme approval requests can, however, be notified to AQSS at any time and all reasonable attempts will be made to support the approval process for programmes notified outside the usual cycle.

Programme teams should be aware that very late entry into a recruitment and admissions cycle can result in a very small number of enrolments, which can in turn have an adverse effect on student experience. In such cases AQSS will ask programme teams to explain how the quality of student experience will be assured until cohort sizes grow sufficiently to create a sense of learning community among the students and close monitoring of student satisfaction will be required.

Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA):

The CMA works to promote competition for the benefit of consumers, both within and outside the UK, and has issued advice to help higher education providers understand their responsibilities under consumer protection law, when dealing with undergraduate students. The University recognises this advice as good practice and adopts it for programmes at all levels of study. The CMA publishes a [short guide](#) on a single page, which summarises the [consumer protection duties of universities](#).

Before a student applies for a programme, the University must be able to provide information on the course content and structure, the total cost including any costs in addition to the student fee, and a copy of any regulations relating to the

programme. These should be in close to final form before their first publication, and any material changes to the initial information must be notified to students prior to the time when they are formally offered a place to study the programme.

The Consumer Protection Advisory Group of the Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC) oversees conditions for compliance with CMA guidelines and defines a schedule for publishing information to applicants which must be adhered to for all new programmes. Advice on compliance with CMA expectations can be provided by the Academic Registrar via the Quality, Standards and Accreditation Team (QSAT).

Programme team

The programme team for the approval process is led by the Programme Lead and includes the key members of academic staff within the discipline who will develop and deliver the programme. The programme team must include:

- the Programme Lead;

- the Doctoral Programme Director;

- the Principal Investigator (if the degree is to be delivered through a doctoral training award);

- the Deputy Head of School (Education) (if the research degree programme includes taught modules).

The programme team, should also, wherever possible, include at least one representative student, ideally enrolled on an existing programme in a related discipline.

Programme Approval process

Approval panel

For each new programme AQSS, through the PGR QME Subcommittee, will appoint a Programme Approval Panel comprising:

- the Chair of the PGR QME Subcommittee or nominee (the Panel Chair);

- two members of academic staff from outside the proposing School, one of whom will normally be from outside the proposing Faculty;

- the Associate Dean (Education) or the Faculty Director of the Graduate School of the Faculty proposing the programme.

- The Director of the Doctoral College (for programmes delivered through a doctoral training award).

- The Chair of the Education Partnerships Subcommittee (for programmes delivered with a partner institution).

The Chair of the Panel may invite other members of academic or professional services staff to join the Panel or to advise.

The Curriculum and Quality Assurance (CQA) team will provide administrative support to the Panel.

Initial meeting

The initial meeting between the Programme Approval Panel and the programme team considers the outline plans for the programme based on:

- drafts of the programme specification (or Doctoral Programme Profile);

- assessment strategy (for Integrated PhD programmes and those with collaborative arrangements);

- copy of the funding bid, the feedback from the funding body reviewers and the successful funding grant offer letter (for programmes to be delivered via a doctoral training award);

- the delivery mode and delivery location;

- the need to meet any non-UK approval or compliance frameworks; and

- a risk assessment, developed by the programme team, which takes into account:

  o the programme team's experience of developing programmes of the kind proposed;

  o the scale and complexity of the programme and its associated resource needs; and

  o the timeline for development.

The Panel, in discussion with the programme team, will decide whether the programme should be developed on the *self-development track* or the *supported track*.

Self-development track: if the Panel identifies that the programme development team:

- has the necessary experience and expertise in developing programmes of the kind proposed;

- is confident to identify and request professional services support as needed;

- understands the governing quality framework and compliance constraints; and

- has allowed sufficient time to generate a high-quality programme design prior to enrolling the first cohort of students.

then the programme will be judged low risk in terms of academic quality and standards and allocated to the self-development track and programme teams may proceed to the next stage of the Programme Approval process without close oversight.

Supported track: If the Panel identifies that the ambition of the programme team exceeds their existing experience and expertise, or the programme is for other reasons deemed to present a higher risk in relation to assuring quality or setting standards, perhaps due to delivery location, level of resourcing, short development timescales etc, the programme will be allocated to the supported track. Defined expertise will be identified to support one or more aspects of programme development during the next stage of the Programme Approval process.

Programme development

Further development of the programme is supported by [toolkits](#) to assist with the aspects of design which are strategic or compliance priorities.

These include guidance on:

- aligning with national frameworks and benchmarks for HE qualifications;

- specific learning outcomes (required for programmes that include taught elements);

- assessment design;

- developing learning activities;

- race equality;

- accessibility for disabled students;

- embedding employability; and

- other matters of emphasis in the current education strategy.

Toolkits are divided into those through which it is compulsory to work to ensure legal, ethical, and regulatory requirements are met and those which programme teams may find useful based on the mode of delivery, the discipline, and characteristics of the students likely to enrol etc.

Members of the Centre for Higher Education Practice (CHEP) or QSAT should be consulted where further advice on programme development is needed.

The development of the programme should be informed by consultation with a representative group of current students and peer reviewed by at least one external adviser. The primary external adviser should be an academic staff member in the discipline, but from outside the University, with knowledge of the quality and standards expectations of UK higher education. They should complete the report template.

Additional advisers may also be involved who provide specialism in particular aspects of programme design or delivery. In addition, programme teams may need to consult the PSRBs of their discipline or representative groups of employers.

The output of the programme development phase will be:

- the programme specification (or Doctoral Programme Profile);

- a map showing where each programme learning outcome is assessed (required for programmes that include taught elements);

- a report from the external adviser(s) with a response from the programme team indicating how any recommendations have been incorporated into the programme design;

- a request for consideration of any amendment, variation, or exemption from the standard progression regulations, and

- a roll-out action plan indicating how further development, monitoring and enhancement will be enacted over the five-year period between programme approval and the first programme review. The roll-out plan should set a clear expectation for the timing (e.g. two years following programme approval) of an interim review to be conducted by Faculty Graduate School Subcommittee so as to provide opportunity for any identified short-term changes to be implemented.

- additionally, and for programmes delivered in partnership, a response from the programme team demonstrating that the Collaborative Approval Panel Report conditions have been met and indicating how any recommendations will be addressed within the roll-out action plan.

Approval meeting

The approval meeting between the Programme Approval Panel and the programme team considers the programme documentation, the reports from and responses to the external adviser(s), any requests for exemption, variation or additional requirements to the University's regulations and the roll-out action plan.

Where a programme has been developed on the supported track, the additional experts assigned to support the team may also be invited.

For programmes requiring partnership approval a member of the Collaborative Approval Panel should also be invited. The CQA team will provide administrative support to the Panel.

The outcome of the meeting may be:

- a decision to approve the programme, which may be subject to completion of a defined list of minor actions; or:

- a decision to defer approval pending the completion of more substantial additional programme development, in which case a further meeting of the Panel may be required for final sign-off.

Following a decision to approve, and for programmes developed on the supported track, a decision will be made about the level of continuing support necessary to implement the roll-out action plan.

At this stage, a programme may move to the self-supported track, or a timescale and conditions for such a move may be defined.

Completion and reporting

For programmes delivered in partnership, the partnership approval process is only complete once the Memorandum of Agreement has been signed by authorised personnel at the University and the partner.

The Programme Approval process is complete once the Programme Approval Panel has approved the programme and any minor actions have been reported as complete by the programme team. At this time, the Chair of the Panel will report the approval to the PGR QME Subcommittee which will, in turn, report the approval to AQSS and to the Doctoral College Committee.

The secretary of the PGR QME Subcommittee will inform the Directors of Professional Services that a new programme has been approved.

Approval of the new programme should be reported by QSAT to the Faculty Graduate School Subcommittee (via the Faculty Director of the Graduate School) and to the School Programmes Committee (via the Deputy Head of School (Education). These committees are responsible for monitoring quality and standards, progress against the roll-out action plan, and student satisfaction and reporting on these via the [Annual Monitoring](#) process.

The Faculty Graduate School Subcommittee is responsible for reporting the admission requirements for the programme (acceptable qualifications, offer level), including any requirements for qualification in English Language, to the Director of Global Recruitment and Admissions (a member of AQSS).

Liaising with the CQA Team and the Doctoral College (Faculty) Team, the Head of Doctoral College Administration is responsible for ensuring that all necessary actions are taken to create the programme and any associated modules within Banner; and for ensuring that the entry requirements for the programme are reported to the Global Recruitment and Admissions team. For programmes delivered in partnership, the Head of Doctoral College Administration is also responsible for ensuring that the partnership approval process is completed, including consultation

with Legal Services to arrange for a Memorandum of Agreement to be negotiated and signed by authorised personnel at the University and each partner.

The Communications and Marketing team, in conjunction with the programme team, is responsible for developing marketing materials and web pages to promote the programme.

Programme Review

Strategic approval

Programmes identified by faculties as consistently failing to recruit to target or with ambitious plans for revisions to delivery requiring significant extra resource will need to be referred to business planning and to receive approval to proceed prior to starting Programme Review.

Education partnerships

Programmes where aspects of the teaching, learning, assessment or student support are delivered in partnership with other organisations must seek simultaneous renewal of their partner approval through the partnerships approval process. There will also be a requirement for a legal agreement to be renewed. Where the partner is not based in the UK, there will be a need for renewal of strategic approval from the Vice President (International) or their advisers.

It is not necessary to have achieved full partnership approval prior to starting Programme Review, but at least stages one and two, the strategic business approval and initial partner due diligence, and full partner due diligence, should have been completed.

The [Overview of Programme and Partnership Approval Processes Flowchart](#) shows the typical sequence of events for the two processes. This will be agreed between the Chair of the Education Partnerships Subcommittee and the Chair of the Programme Review Panel, taking into account the indictive risk level in each case. The Collaboration Approval Panel will be scheduled separately, unless the two Chairs agree that it would be feasible to combine the agendas. It should take place prior to programme development. There should be at least one common Panel member and the recommendations/conditions of the Collaborative Approval Panel should be

incorporated and addressed in the Programme Review meeting and roll-out action plan.

Timing

AQSS: To assist AQSS in planning its work, Schools are asked to give notice of plans for the review of programmes to the first AQSS meeting of each academic year.

To assist with aligning programmes with doctoral training award renewals or where programmes are subject to a professional accreditation cycle, Schools may request permission from AQSS to defer the review of a programme for up to two years or may choose to review a programme sooner than required.

For programmes delivered in partnership, Schools should be mindful of the need to keep partnership and programme approval cycles in alignment and of the additional steps involved in renegotiating the Memorandum of Agreement.

Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA):

The CMA works to promote competition for the benefit of consumers, both within and outside the UK, and has issued advice to help higher education providers understand their responsibilities under consumer protection law when dealing with undergraduate students. The University recognises this advice as good practice and adopts it for programmes at all levels of study. The CMA publishes a [short guide](#) on a single page, which summarises the [consumer protection duties of universities](#).

Prior to making changes to a programme, [a proportionate level of consultation with and communication to applicants and current students](#) must be carried out, and the [schedule](#) for publishing information to applicants and current students must be adhered to. Advice on compliance with CMA expectations can be provided by the Academic Registrar via the Quality, Standards and Accreditation Team (QSAT).

An aim of Programme Review is to allow programme teams to make future enhancements to programmes based on pre-approved plans. However, programme teams still need to be mindful of CMA expectation for consultation and communication and are advised to work in partnership with current students as changes are implemented and evaluated, to ensure there are no unexpected and disadvantageous side-effects for the student experience.

Programme team

The programme team for the review process is led by the Programme Lead and includes the key members of academic staff within the discipline who will develop and deliver the programme. The programme team must include:

- the Programme Lead;

- the Doctoral Programme Director;

- the Principal Investigator (if the degree is to be delivered through a doctoral training award);

- the Deputy Head of School (Education) (if the degree includes taught modules).

The programme team should also, wherever possible, include at least one representative student, ideally enrolled on an existing programme in a related discipline.

Programme review process

Review panel

For each programme, AQSS, through the PGR QME Subcommittee, will appoint a Programme Review Panel comprising:

- the Chair of the PGR QME Subcommittee or nominee (the Panel Chair);

- two members of academic staff from outside the School that is responsible for delivering the programme, one of whom will normally be from outside of the Faculty;

- the Associate Dean (Education) or the Faculty Director of the Graduate School of the Faculty that is responsible for delivering the programme;

- the Director of the Doctoral College (for programmes delivered through a doctoral training award).

- the Chair of the Education Partnerships Subcommittee (for programmes delivered with a partner institution).

The Chair of the Panel may invite other members of academic or professional services staff to join the Panel or to advise.

The Curriculum and Quality Assurance (CQA) team will provide administrative support to the Panel.

SWOT analysis and first stage of toolkit

The programme team, assisted by guidance, examples and [toolkits](#), will consider the available data and information regarding the programme in the period since it was first approved or last reviewed, and assess its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). At a minimum programme teams must consider:

- performance against Office for Students (OfS) thresholds for the lowest available Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH) level which includes the programme and for the associated split metrics;

- summary information from all required assessments undertaken by students (i.e. progression reviews, compulsory modules);

- submission and completion times and rates, with account taken of any variations (e.g. relating to individual student circumstances, part-time programmes and the requirements of research councils, funders or other relevant bodies);

- pass, resubmission, referral (for research degree programmes with taught elements) and fail rates;

- withdrawal rates;

- data on academic appeals, student complaints and academic conduct cases;

- analysis of comments from examiners;

- recruitment profiles;

- data on equality and diversity;

- Subsequent employment destinations and career paths of research students who have achieved the qualification;

- PRES outcomes over the preceding 5 years;

- external examiner comments over the preceding 5 years;

- any requirements or recommendations made by a PSRB since approval/last review;

- minutes of staff-student liaison committees and any other formal feedback from students on their learning experience;

- other education strategic priorities of the University as specified from time to time.

Toolkits are divided into those through which it is compulsory to work to ensure legal, ethical, and regulatory requirements are met and those which programme teams may find useful based on the mode of delivery, the discipline, outcomes of the SWOT etc.

At this stage only the first section of each compulsory toolkit need be completed.

The programme team should make an initial ranking of its priorities for enhancement work.

Engagement with the Annual Monitoring process in the years preceding Programme Review should ensure that the programme data and information have been reviewed regularly and the SWOT analysis is, to a large extent, a process of summarising and consolidating what is known about the programme.

Initial meeting

The initial meeting between the Programme Review Panel and the programme team considers the SWOT analysis and the prioritisation of the areas for enhancement. In discussion with the programme team, the Panel will consider whether the prioritisation encompasses any aspects of the programme in need of urgent action to assure quality or standards; aligns appropriately with the University's strategic priorities; fits well to the experience and expertise of the programme team; and/or presents significant challenge in terms of scale, complexity, or resource management.

The Panel may propose different or additional priorities and will decide whether the programme should be enhanced on the *self-development track* or the *supported track*.

Self-development track: if the Programme Review Panel identifies that the programme team has the necessary experience and expertise to enhance the programme in the selected areas, is confident to identify and request professional services support as needed, understands the governing quality framework and compliance constraints and has identified any major weaknesses needing urgent remediation, then the programme will be judged low risk in terms of academic quality and standards and allocated to the self-development track and programme teams may proceed to the next stage of the Programme Review process without close oversight.

Supported track: If the Programme Review Panel identifies that the ambition of the programme team for enhancement exceeds their existing experience and expertise, or the programme is for other reasons deemed to present a higher risk in relation to assuring quality or setting standards, perhaps due to delivery location, level of resourcing, urgent need for remedial action etc, the programme will be allocated to the supported track. Defined expertise will be identified to support one or more aspects of programme development during the next stage of the Programme Review process.

Enhancement action plan development

Development of a 5-year enhancement action plan for the programme is supported by completion of the second stage of those toolkits which were selected as strategic enhancement, quality and standards or compliance priorities.

The development of the enhancement action plan should be informed by consultation with a representative group of current students and peer reviewed by at least one external adviser.

The primary external adviser should be a member of academic staff in the discipline, from outside the University, with knowledge of the quality and standards expectations of UK higher education and should complete the report template.

They may be supplemented by additional advisers experienced in specialist aspects of programme design or delivery. In addition, programme teams may need to consult the PSRB(s) of their discipline or representative groups of employers.

The output of this phase will be an [enhancement action plan](#) specifying proposed enhancement actions to be taken immediately or over the next five years, a report from the external adviser(s) on the enhancement action plan and a response from the programme team indicating how any recommendations have been incorporated into the plan. Additionally, for programmes delivered in partnership, the Collaborative Approval Panel Report conditions must have been met and any recommendations must be addressed within the action plan.

Approval meeting

The approval meeting between the Programme Review Panel and the programme team considers the enhancement action plan and the reports from and responses to the external adviser(s). Where a programme has been allocated to the supported track, the additional experts assigned to support the team may also be invited. For programmes requiring collaborative provision approval a member of the Education Partnerships Subcommittee may also be invited. The CQA team will provide administrative support to the Panel. The outcome of the meeting may be:

- a decision to approve the enhancement action plan, which may be subject to completion of a defined list of minor actions; or:

- a decision to defer approval pending the completion of more substantial additional planning, in which case a further meeting of the Panel may be required for final sign-off.

Following approval of the enhancement action plan, for programmes on the supported track, a decision will be made about the level of continuing support necessary to implement the enhancement action plan.

At this stage, a programme may move to the self-supported track, or a timescale and conditions for such a move may be defined.

Completion and reporting

The Programme Review process is complete once the Programme Review Panel has approved the enhancement action plan and any minor actions have been reported as complete by the programme team. At this time, the Chair of the Programme Review Panel will report the approval to the PGR QME Subcommittee which will, in turn, report the approval to AQSS and to the Doctoral College Committee.

- Approval of the programme should be reported by QSAT to the Faculty Graduate School Subcommittee (via the Faculty Director of the Graduate School) and to the School Programmes Committee (via the Deputy Head of School (Education)). These committees are responsible for monitoring quality and standards, progress against the roll-out plan, and student satisfaction and reporting on these via the [Annual Monitoring](link) process.

Liaising with the CQA Team and the Doctoral College (Faculty) Team, the Head of Doctoral College Administration is responsible for ensuring that all necessary changes to the programme and any associated modules are made within Banner; and that web pages are updated as required. For programmes delivered in partnership, that the Education Partnership Review Procedure is completed, including renewal of Memorandum of Agreement where required.

Document Information	
Author	Quality Standards and Accreditation Team
Owner (committee)	Academic Quality and Standards Subcommittee
Approved Date	November 2022
Last Revision	August 2024
Type of Document	Policy