

Walbrook Code of Practice for Quality Assurance (Higher Education)

Chapter 13: programme development, approval, monitoring, and review

13.1 Introduction

- 13.1.1 Our requirements for programme development, approval, monitoring, and review are implemented in line with the principles established within our Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, Quality Assurance Strategy and Enhancement Strategy.
- 13.1.2 Development, approval, monitoring, and review is led at a programme level, however, the principles apply equally to both programmes and modules.
- 13.1.3 We define the following terms
- i. **validation;** refers to the formal process used to scrutinise new programmes before approval to deliver the programme is sought from Academic Board
 - ii. **periodic programme review;** refers to the formal process used to scrutinise existing programmes before approval to continue delivering the programme is sought from the Academic Board
 - iii. **withdrawal;** refers to the formal process used to seek approval from Academic Board to temporarily suspend or permanently discontinue a programme.
- 13.1.4 The requirements in this chapter may be varied in the case of programmes delivered collaboratively with a partner. Where such a case exists, the requirements will be explicitly stated within a legally binding agreement.
- 13.1.5 To inform future and ongoing programme development, approval, monitoring, and review, the processes, as outlined in this chapter, are regularly reviewed with ultimate oversight and approval by the Academic Board.

13.2 Reference points

- 13.2.1 The following reference points have been used to inform development of this chapter and must be referred to by programme teams in all aspects of programme development, approval, monitoring, and review.

Internal

- General and Academic Regulations for Students (incorporating the credit framework)
- [Code of Practice for Quality Assurance](#)
- [Student Protection Plan](#)

- [Access and Participation Plan](#)

External

- The Quality Assurance Agency: The UK Quality Code for Higher Education, with particular reference to the advice and guidance sections on monitoring and evaluation, course design and evaluation, and external expertise.
- The Frameworks for HE Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies
- Office for Students: Securing student success: Regulatory framework for higher education in England
- Competition and Markets Authority: [UK higher education providers – advice on consumer protection law: Helping you comply with your obligations](#)

13.3 Principles

13.3.1 The following overarching principles apply to all our higher education programmes and must be satisfied by any new programme development. All programmes must

- i. be designed to have clear and explicit links to our strategy
- ii. be supported by market research and be financially viable
- iii. have a clearly defined structure with learning outcomes articulated at programme and module level, supported by relevant curriculum and appropriate assessment arrangements
- iv. be sufficiently supported in terms of financial, human, and physical resources to ensure effective delivery
- v. be designed to be accessible and fair to all students, regardless of background or disability
- vi. take into account the internal and external reference points defined within this chapter
- vii. be clearly marked as ‘subject to validation’ in any published materials used prior to validation being confirmed by the Academic Board.

13.3.2 We endeavour to reflect the student voice in all aspects of programme development, approval, monitoring, and review. We’ve established procedures in respect of student feedback and representation to provide opportunities for students to engage in the assurance and enhancement of programmes. Further information on student engagement can be found in Code of Practice chapter 11: student engagement.

13.3.3 We have a duty to ensure that the award achieved by the student is of value, and that the standard meets the level as determined by the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) so that it’ll be recognised as such by employers, professional bodies, and other organisations.

- 13.3.4 We ensure there are effective reporting structures to enable the business case and academic case for a new programme to be considered separately to each other.
- 13.3.5 Annual monitoring is a mechanism used to ensure the standards of our programmes are maintained, that their quality is assured, and that opportunities for enhancement are identified and implemented.

13.4 Roles and Responsibilities

- 13.4.1 The Academic Board has ultimate authority for the approval of programmes. Detailed scrutiny of new programmes will take place by a validation panel and at the subsequent conditions review stage, at which point a recommendation will be made to the Academic Board whether or not a programme should be approved. Please see annex 1 for a visual overview of the validation / review process.
- a. The Academic Board grants approval to programmes indefinitely, but requires that a periodic programme review is undertaken at least once every five years from the date it was approved for delivery. This period may be extended by the Academic Board in exceptional circumstance. It delegates the process of review to a specially convened Review Panel which will recommend to it whether or not a programme should continue to be approved, and if it should be subject to conditions that must be met.
 - b. Quality, policy, and regulation (QPR) oversees the nomination of panel members. QPR coordinates the nomination of a chair who's independent of the programme under review. The final panel is approved by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee against criteria set by the Academic Board.
 - c. QPR is responsible for ensuring all panel members, including external representatives and student representatives, receive training and guidance as appropriate to enable their effective engagement with the validation / review process. This may include observing other validation / review meetings, participating in pre-event briefings and post-event update meetings, and provision of panel guidance documentation.
 - d. A conditions review stage takes place before Academic Board to monitor and approve the resolution of any conditions for approval placed on a programme. In this case, it'll have granted 'conditional approval.' The programme is considered 'approved for delivery' when any such conditions have been resolved at the conditions review stage, or by the Academic Board. The Academic Board has authority to overturn or amend any condition.

- e. The Academic Board delegates authority to the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee to maintain oversight of programmes for validation and review via a schedule / register.

13.5 Programme development

- 13.5.1 The development of a new programme will typically take between six-12 months from presentation of the initial proposal to being 'approved for delivery.' Programme teams must factor the appropriate timescales into their anticipated entry point for the first cohort.
- 13.5.2 Business heads agree the strategic direction for new programme development. An initial proposal is considered by the business heads, which is intended to ensure alignment with strategy, review operational considerations, and approve resource allocations for development.
- 13.5.3 The programme team takes responsibility for ensuring that programmes are developed in full prior to going to the validation event.
- 13.5.4 During the development of a programme, internal and external input will be sought to ensure a wide range of input into the programme outside of the programme team. Examples of the internal and external input may include
 - academic services
 - students (e.g., via focus groups)
 - external examiners
 - advisory panel
 - employers
 - external consultants (which may include subject area practitioners)
 - faculty members.
- 13.5.5 We use a specific template for both programme and module specification which must be used by programme teams when developing a programme. All programme specifications set out the programme title, the purpose and aims, the intended learning outcomes, the assessment strategy, and the structure of the programme, with clear identification of the FHEQ level, credit rating, and status (compulsory / optional) of each module.
- 13.5.6 The Academic Board delegates authority to consider module development to the Faculty Board.

13.6 Programme approval and review

- 13.6.1 Approval is the term we use to refer to the validation of new programmes and the periodic review of existing programmes.
- 13.6.2 The programme team leader will assume responsibility for preparation of documentation and presentation to the Validation / Review Panel. The approval of programmes of study may involve the validation of new modules and the approval of modifications to existing modules. Modifications to existing modules should be identified via tracked changes

within the module specification, and the rationale presented in the self-evaluation document. The rationale should include implications of the module changes within other degree programmes.

13.6.3 Periodic programme review will consider the way in which evidence drawn from annual monitoring and other sources (including feedback from external examiners, students, and employers) has been used to improve and enhance the programme. Review may embrace the addition or deletion of core / option modules, consider changes to programme and / or module specifications, including learning outcomes, and generally, reflect on the continued purpose of the programme.

13.6.4 In reviewing the quality of the student learning opportunities, the Review Panel will normally expect to receive feedback from students. This may be in the form of feedback survey results or meeting with a representative group of students.

13.6.5 Validation / review panels should be made up of the following

- **chair** - a senior person with appropriate experience and knowledge, who is independent of the programme under consideration
- **panel members** - QPR selects the panel members from among those proposed by the programme team. Panel members will be selected from our faculty, and staff will be independent from the programme and will have experience of delivering programmes within the context of our policies and regulations. In addition, the panel will include at least one person who is external to our organisation. External panel members will be an academic or, where appropriate, an external practitioner with experience in the financial services sector
- **a student representative**
- **a QPR representative** - acts as secretary to the panel.

13.6.6 In reaching an outcome, the panel is authorised to recommend one of the following decisions

- **approve unconditionally** the programme and any new or amended modules submitted for approval
- **approve the programme and any new or amended modules with condition(s)** that must be met before the programme is considered approved for delivery
- **decline to approve the programme**, with recommendation as to whether it should be re-submitted for validation on a future occasion following further development.

13.6.7 The panel discussions and the agreed outcomes of the validation / review event will be captured in a report produced by the secretary to the panel. In presenting the outcomes, the panel may include the following within the report

- **commendations** –where an area of good practice is identified

- **observations** – on areas of interest that don't warrant any recommended action but may be useful for programme teams and / or committees to consider. These will normally be addressed within annual monitoring for the programme
- **affirmations** – actions that the programme team have already identified, as required and appropriate
- **recommendations** – for further action where they believe the programme and / or student learning experience may be enhanced. Recommendations are not binding, however, the programme team will be required to demonstrate via the action plan that each recommendation has been given due consideration
- **conditions** – the panel may attach conditions which must be met prior to the programme being approved for delivery. Conditions normally relate to substantive issues, such as academic content, that need to be addressed in the programme documentation.

13.6.7 The validation report prepared by the secretary, together with the action plan produced by the programme team responding to the outcomes of the validation / review event, are presented at the conditions review stage for a detailed scrutiny of the programmes team's responses. This will normally take place via circulation.

13.6.8 Those participating in the conditions review stage will include nominated subject matter experts from the validation panel.

13.6.9 Recommendation on programme approval at the conditions review stage is provided to Academic Board for a final decision.

13.6.9 Following programme approval, action plans are monitored by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee, and updated via the annual monitoring report for the programme.

13.6.10 Once a programme is 'approved for delivery,' the programme specification becomes the definitive record. All approved versions of programme and module specifications are held by QPR.

13.7 Programme monitoring (annual)

13.7.1 Annual monitoring takes into account a wide range of activities that we undertake, including review, management procedures, use of external examiners, staff development, and moderation processes. Monitoring does not take place at one point in time but is a continuous process of evaluation and action so that matters are addressed and subsequently noted in each annual monitoring report.

13.7.2 Monitoring should be evaluative and reflective rather than descriptive. The process of monitoring involves using qualitative and quantitative data to check and evaluate the way in which programmes are operating in relation to their aims and outcomes. The purpose of monitoring is to

- ensure the programme remains relevant and valid, and continues to meet the needs of students and employers
- consider the ongoing effectiveness of the learning and teaching provision, the assessment regime, and student support mechanisms for the programme
- consider the appropriateness of the structure and design of the programme in supporting student retention, achievement, and progression
- monitor trends in student, module, and provider performance for the programme over time
- identify opportunities and make recommendations for enhancement within the programme, and
- share good practice within and across programmes.

13.7.3 All programmes and their associated modules are subject to monitoring at the Faculty Board on a semi-annual basis. The timing of the annual monitoring cycle may differ between programmes, however, all programmes at the same level within the FHEQ will normally follow the same cycle.

13.7.4 The annual monitoring cycle for each programme ends with formal consideration of a range of feedback. This relates to the delivery of the programme over the previous year's sessions from the following sources

- external examiners - via annual reports and assessment board meetings
- lecturers - via questionnaires and workshops
- students - via questionnaires, workshops, student representatives, forums, and focus groups
- employers - from employers' forums and meetings
- collaborative partners – via an annual report on their activities and visits from us
- module performance data, statistics, and trends
- programme performance data, statistics, and trends
- student achievement, retention and progression information, and trends
- provider (collaborative partners / employer) performance data, statistics, and trends
- recommendations made at validation / review events (where relevant).

13.7.5 At the end of the annual monitoring period for each programme, we'll

- prepare an annual monitoring report for stakeholders
- present the annual monitoring report to the staff student liaison committee for comment from students and to incorporate any feedback
- identify issues for immediate action, further investigation, and ongoing monitoring via the development and completion of an action plan arising from the monitoring report, and
- submit the annual monitoring report with accompanying action plan to the Faculty Board (where appropriate, annual monitoring reports for different, but closely related, programmes may be combined).

13.7.6 The Academic Dean is responsible for ensuring that the necessary information and outcomes from annual monitoring is presented to Faculty Board.

13.8 Programme and module modifications

13.8.1 Modifications to programme and module specifications are determined by three categories, major, minor, and administrative.

a. Major modifications

- the title of an award, programme or module
- the structure of the programme, including credit tariff and level
- the addition, deletion or substitution of compulsory modules within a programme
- the aims and / or learning outcomes of a programme
- the addition or removal of study abroad options or placements
- the delivery mode of a programme (e.g., face-to-face, blended, distance)
- the mode of study (e.g., full-time, part-time)
- the addition, deletion or substitution of individual option modules within a programme
- changes to the learning outcomes of a module
- entry requirements/criteria
- changes to the assessment weightings of a module
- changes to the type of assessment
- changes to module codes
- length of course
- total course costs.

b. Minor modifications

- correction of omissions
- changes in wording to improve the clarity of the specification
- syllabus updates with no effect on learning outcomes
- readings updates.

c. Administrative modifications

- correction of typographical errors
- formatting adjustments
- book edition updates

d. All proposed modifications to specifications should be considered in the light of the following points

- a. the impact of the proposed change/s on students
- b. the impact on the programme / other modules / other programmes
- c. CMA implications
- d. the timeline to approve and implement changes successfully

- e. the cohorts that will be affected by a change
- f. whether a periodic programme review will be required.

13.8.2 Proposed modifications that are to be presented to the committees should be supported with a report that includes

- a summary of the key amendments proposed
- whether changes will be applied to all cohorts or just specific cohorts
- details of other programmes that may be affected by the change (and what impact the changes will have on these programmes)
- measures for implementation
- assessment of the impact on students
- when the changes will come into effect.

13.8.3 Modification process

- i. Requests for administrative modifications to specifications may be sent to the Quality Coordinator, QPR, who will update the master document accordingly and report changes to Faculty Board for minuting.
- ii. Both major and minor modifications to specifications resulting from stakeholder feedback must be presented to Faculty Board.
- iii. Faculty Board may approve major and minor changes to module specifications that do not impact on a programme.
- iv. All other changes to programme specifications, module changes or the accumulative effect of module changes that may impact on a programme, should be reviewed and endorsed by Faculty Board before being forwarded to the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee for final for consideration. Following consideration, and in reference to changes defined as major and minor, the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee may agree to
 - approve accumulated changes to modules that impact on a programme
 - approve changes to programme specifications
 - request that an early periodic programme review is undertaken if the result of proposed changes would mean the programme is substantially different from that originally approved.
- v. Amended specifications should be returned to the Quality Coordinator, QPR for publication and will come into effect on the approved date.

13.9 Programme and module withdrawal

13.9.1 Programmes and modules may be withdrawn either by being temporarily suspended or being permanently discontinued.

- 13.9.2 A programme may be temporarily suspended for a defined period of time where there is the intention to offer future delivery, but where
- there's an insufficient number of potential students to form a viable cohort
 - financial and / or resource implications make delivery untenable
 - any other matter determined by the Chief Executive to warrant suspension of the programme.
- 13.9.3 Discontinuation of a programme normally means that there'll be no further recruitment to that programme. However, students enrolled on it may progress to completion within the normal timescale or transfer to another programme should that option be available. Any decision to discontinue a programme will put the interests of students first and ensure appropriate consultation on managing any phase-out period with appropriate support and guidance provided.
- 13.9.4 Our student protection plan has been developed in partnership with student representatives to provide assurance that we've considered a wide range of risks that could impact students' ability to successfully complete their studies, and that we've got plans in place to eliminate, mitigate or manage these risks. We also acknowledge that individual students may be affected in different ways and as such may require additional support, advice or guidance. Our Code of Practice chapter 14: collaborative provision details procedures for students of our collaborative partners.
- 13.9.5 A request by the Provost to suspend or discontinue a programme must be approved by the Academic Board and a request to suspend or discontinue a module must be approved by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee and then reported to the Academic Board.

Annex 1

Overview of the validation / review process

