

Final Draft



University of Sussex

# Curriculum Development and Approval

Academic Office  
Student and Academic Services

October 2007

## Contents

<b>Section 1</b>	<b>Outline of procedures</b>	<b>3</b>
	1.1 Introduction	
	1.2 Academic Planning	
	1.3 The purpose of curriculum approval	4
	1.4 What is covered by the Curriculum approval process	5
	1.5 Revisions to existing programmes	
	1.6 Adhering to the approved curriculum	
<b>Section 2</b>	<b>Key Documents and Resources</b>	
	2.1 Printed guidance	7
	2.2 Support – new programmes	10
	2.3 Support – programme change / new courses	
	2.4 Record keeping	
<b>Section 3</b>	<b>New Programme Approval</b>	
	3.1 Outline approval step guide	11
	3.2 Step 1 – initial idea	
	3.3 Step 2 – School endorsement	12
	3.4 Step 3 – Professional Services report	
	3.5 Step 4 – School Planning Approval	13
	3.6 Step 5 – Planning approval	
	3.7 Step 6 – Validation	14
<b>Section 4</b>	<b>New Course approval</b>	
	4.1-4.6 New course approval	18
<b>Section 5</b>	<b>Programme and Course revision</b>	
	5.1 Why it is important	19
	5.2	
	5.3 Timetable for making changes (minor changes)	
	5.4 Timetable for making changes (major changes)	20
	5.5 Major and minor changes	
	5.6 Course changes	
	5.7 Withdrawing courses	22
	5.8 Changes to Programmes	23
	5.9 Withdrawal of a course from a programme	25
	5.10 Replacement of a course	

## Curriculum Development and Approval – a handbook

### Section 1 – Outline of procedures

#### 1.1 Introduction

This handbook sets out the procedures for curriculum approval with effect from October 2007. The process was recommended by Academic Policy and Standards Committee and approved by Senate (June 2007).

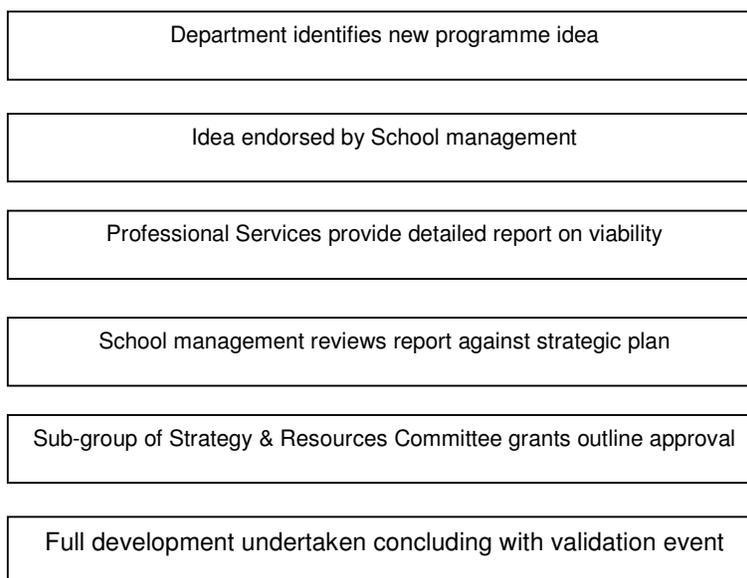
The handbook is aimed at all those engaged in the curriculum approval process, but it is of particular importance to Directors of Taught Programmes and the School Administrators (Curriculum). Other key readers include Heads of Department, programme convenors, and those engaged in the design of courses and programmes

Professional support for the development of new programmes will be co-ordinated by the **Academic Office** and will engage academic and professional colleagues from relevant units across the University.

The procedures in this handbook relate to **all** taught provision, both undergraduate and postgraduate.

#### 1.2 Academic planning

The programme development and approval process aims to enhance the sustainability of the teaching portfolio by improving alignment with University strategic priorities and by providing better planning and marketing advice to Schools and Departments. By decoupling outline approval from the committee cycle, it allows for speedy decisions to the outline approval stage (which allows inclusion of the new programme in publicity material, the prospectus and UCAS directories.



*Stages in approval process*

A more detailed timeline is outlined in section 3.

The aim of the outline approval stage is to consider the business case for the proposed programme and to ensure alignment with the corporate strategy. The link to planning, which is necessary to secure strategic academic development, means that not all proposed programmes will successfully navigate the outline approval process. Those that do, however, will be more able to recruit, and more sustainable over the medium and long term.

The purpose of the final validation event which grants full approval is to secure academic standards, to ensure appropriate alignment with the national Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and to deliver excellence in the student experience. The full approval process takes the form of a validation event and is based on the principle of enhanced peer evaluation. That is, the curriculum is approved by other practitioners from within the University, supported by professionally-oriented guidance from specialist units within the University (primarily the Teaching and Learning Development Unit (TLDU) and the Academic Office). In addition, new programme proposals will receive external input from academic peers and, where appropriate, external stakeholders. This also meets a major expectation of *Section 7 of the QAA Code of Practice: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review* in that it includes robust external involvement in programme approval.

The process as a whole is designed to develop the most appropriate portfolio of programmes for Sussex, linking to research interests and strengths but focusing on delivering an effective and sustainable curriculum. The curriculum must be able to provide the highest quality of education to Sussex students whilst reflecting research and other strategic needs. It is therefore important that curriculum developments are closely linked to and embedded in clear and well constructed academic plans. The curriculum approval process therefore is closely linked to the institutional planning process.

The procedures operate on an expectation of forward planning, with new undergraduate degrees perhaps taking three years to move from initial idea to delivery. Fast-track development is also possible, particularly in CPD and postgraduate areas where the need to respond effectively to external market requirements is pressing. In practice, fast-tracking will allow programmes to be proposed and approved within an academic session. Outline approval via the sub-group of the Strategy and Resources Committee will still be required. As in all new proposals the Academic Office will establish a provisional timetable of activity capable of meeting approval requirements in time for the intended start date (including ensuring that reports from the professional services are available for outline and full approval as required).

### 1.3 The purpose of curriculum approval

Curriculum approval is one of the cornerstones of the University's quality assurance procedures along with annual monitoring and periodic review. Its purpose is to secure the **quality and viability** of the curriculum delivered to students, by which is meant:

- strategic fit with the School and University mission and corporate strategy
- delivery of both the University-level and School-level Teaching and Learning Strategies
- the relative demand for recruitment purposes
- the resource implications of delivering the new programme
- the academic coherence of the programme as a whole
- the standard of intended student achievement
- the appropriateness of the stated learning outcomes
- the links between learning outcomes, teaching method and assessment modes
- compliance with University regulations for awards
- compliance with external requirements for accreditation
- consistency with the academic standards referred to in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)

- due cognisance at discipline level of the expectations for Honours (and specific others) degrees set out in the QAA Subject Benchmark Statements
- compliance with national expectations of good practice described in the Quality Assurance Agency's Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education

## 1.4 What is covered by the Curriculum approval process

### 1.4.1 New programmes

New programmes are required to go through the complete procedure for programme approval, including obtaining outline approval. The process will be supported by the Academic Office which will provide advice and co-ordinate the development of the initial report from the Professional Services required for outline approval. The Academic Office will liaise with relevant offices and consult with the School administration and department about timeframes. Subsequent to outline approval the Academic Office will support the process of programme validation, including co-ordinating the validation panel in consultation with the School. A representative of the Academic Office will attend the validation event.

### 1.4.2 Substantial revisions to existing programmes

Where there is a substantial revision proposed to an existing programme, the proposal will be required to go through the complete procedure for programme approval, including obtaining outline approval. Substantial revisions may be broadly considered as those changes to programmes which alter significantly the content, structure or mode of delivery of a programme and will therefore have a major impact on the student experience, recruitment and/or resources. For further guidance see section 3.

## 1.5 Revisions to existing programmes

Revisions to existing programmes (other than substantial revisions, see 1.4 above) will be approved by the School under the procedures set out in section 5 below. Changes managed wholly at School level include moderate curriculum changes (addition/alteration of individual courses, modification of some assessments, minor changes to the programme structure).

## 1.6 Adhering to the approved curriculum

Once approved, the curriculum must be followed as approved by those delivering it. There are effective mechanisms for reviewing and changing the curriculum in a timely and managed way. The curriculum will develop and change over time, but it is important that any changes are considered via appropriate scrutiny and approval procedures before being implemented. As well as ensuring that students receive the curriculum as published to them, the following points may be noted:

- the approvals process is designed to deliver a **coherent** programme in terms of **content, teaching methods and assessment**. If these are changed there is a risk that students receive a poorly balanced programme in terms of learning experience or assessment.
- Individual courses often contribute to a number of different programmes (in different Schools). Changing a course locally may have a significant impact on another programme using that course.

- In certain cases the curriculum may be varied for an individual student. The Director of Taught Programmes will be responsible for approving any such variations, which will be reported to the School Teaching and Learning Committee. Variation of the curriculum **cannot** be undertaken for a group of students (either collectively or successively) since such action would in effect circumvent the formal curriculum approvals process.
- The curriculum as approved is published, and forms part of our contract with our students. If we change it outside agreed procedures (including assessments, teaching methods, or course content) we may be subject to legal challenge.

## Section 2 – Key Documents and Resources

The development of a new programme requires a complex set of interactions, from understanding the recruitment needs of prospective students, the design of teaching and assessment methods appropriate to the students who are recruited, and securing programme outcomes of an appropriate standard and relevant to student need (including subsequent employment). The following table sets out the main published information available:

### 2.1 Printed guidance

Title	Function	Publisher	Guidance
Academic Framework of the University of Sussex	Sets out the structural requirements for the design of programmes leading to awards of the University. All taught <b>ug and pg</b> programmes must comply with this.	Academic Office	Academic Office  Will provide expert advice to optimize programme structures and ensure alignment with university regulations. Able to advise on future framework developments including European integration.
Teaching and Learning Strategy	Sets out plans for the development and enhancement of the Sussex academic portfolio. It also sets out the “Characteristics and attributes of the Sussex graduate” and new programmes will need to demonstrate how these characteristics and attributes will be addressed.  School Teaching and Learning Strategies set out how the university strategy will be delivered at the more local level.	UTLC and Senate  School	Academic Office  Will coordinate advice and guidance in conjunction with the TLDU, CDEC and other relevant services.
QAA Subject Benchmark Statements for [named subject]	The QAA publishes a series of <i>Subject Benchmark Statements</i> . These are detailed statements on the expected outcomes for degree qualifications in particular subjects (produced by those subject communities). These have been produced for typical and threshold standards in Honours degrees, and have been produced for other levels (eg MEng), where there is significant taught provision in a subject.	Quality Assurance Agency	TLDU Academic Office  Will provide relevant advice on aligning proposed programmes to relevant benchmark statements, including mapping required or recommended programme outcomes against the curriculum.

	All undergraduate degrees, and a smaller number at postgraduate level, should be able to demonstrate an appropriate relationship to the relevant benchmark.		
National Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in EWNI	<p>This is the national framework for all UK University qualifications. The fundamental premise of <i>the Framework</i> is that qualifications should be awarded on the basis of outcomes and attainment rather than years of study. Qualifications descriptors are key to this and set out the generic outcomes and attributes expected for each qualification level. The Framework contains five levels of qualifications and the University has to make public, for each of its awards, with which of the FHEQ levels the programme and award is aligned. We also need to ensure that programme outcomes are consistent with the expectations of the qualifications descriptors in the FHEQ</p> <p>The University' academic framework reflects the requirements of the national FHEQ</p>	Quality Assurance Agency	<p>Academic Office</p> <p>Will provide professional advice on compliance with national framework requirements, including ensuring that programmes meet UK and European requirements for higher education awards.</p>
QAA Code of Practice	A series of codes covering national expectations of good practice on all aspects of student experience and the delivery of programmes. Of particular relevance are the sections dealing with assessment, partners and collaborations, or placement learning.	Quality Assurance Agency	<p>Academic Office Partnership Office</p> <p>Will provide professional advice on aligning with the codes, especially in the area of placement or partnership delivery. Will advise on developing appropriate procedures for ensuring excellence in the student experience for students based outside the university.</p>

NICATS level descriptors	<p>The summary Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (NICATS) level descriptors have been recommended as a reference point in the final report of the Burgess Group (Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England,2006).</p> <p>Levels descriptors describe the relative demand expected of a learner and relate to a series of levels in progression. They are related to, but different from, qualifications descriptors. These are useful reference points which can be used in pitching individual courses (and their learning outcomes) at the appropriate level in the programme.</p>	Burgess report; and to be incorporated into the national credit Framework and Guidelines being drawn up by the national Credit Issues and Development Group (CIDG) following the final report of the Burgess Group	<p>TLDU Academic Office</p> <p>Will provide advice on using the descriptors to define learning outcomes at course and programme level, and in aligning appropriate assessment modes to demonstrate the achievement of those outcomes,</p>
Guidance on Course and Programme Design	Web pages providing guidance on how to design academic courses and programmes. This includes notes on aligning learning outcomes with assessment and matching programme outcomes , course outcomes and assessment.	TLDU	<p>TLDU</p> <p>Will advise on how to identify the elements needed for a successful programme.</p>
Principles of Assessment	This sets out the University's approach to the principles of assessment which it expects should inform the design and development of all taught programmes	Academic Office	<p>Academic Office TLDU</p> <p>Will advise on identifying appropriate patterns of assessment to meet the core principles approved by the University.</p>

Modes of Assessment	Consolidated list of approved modes of assessment and descriptions	Academic Office	TLDU Will advise on selecting modes of assessment appropriate to test particular skills and learning to ensure an appropriate spread of assessment method.
Higher Education Academy (HEA)	A peer-group network supported nationally and providing a range of best practice guidance and resources on learning and teaching according to subject areas	HEA	TLDU Academic Office Departmental HEA Representative Will assist programme developers in identifying appropriate resources .

## 2.2 Support – new programmes

Under the procedures approved by Senate support for programme development has been reorganized in order to provide more effective specialist knowledge. New programme development will be supported primarily by the Academic Office which for outline approval will obtain/commission a report on market intelligence, cost and resource requirements, and strategic fit. Where programmes are given outline approval for full development, the Academic Office will work closely with schools and departments to identify and deliver relevant and focused documentation necessary for formal validation. The validation event will be run under the auspices of the owning School. The Academic Office will identify and administrative support for the validation event in consultation with the School administration.

*Key contact: Paul Cecil, Head of Academic Office*

## 2.3 Support – programme change / new courses

The support for changes to existing programmes, and the development of new courses, will be provided primarily by the School Administrator (Curriculum) who will advise on local committee timetables and documentation requirements. Standard forms are accessible on the Academic Office website. In addition to School-based support, the TLDU can provide guidance and advice on innovative course design and delivery, including assessment methods and the development and mapping of learning outcomes. The Academic Office can provide technical information on credit structures, cross-listing and multi-leveilling.

*Key contact: School Administrator (Curriculum)*

## 2.4 Record keeping

Curriculum information is used for a wide range of purposes, from timetabling to recruitment, and informing prospective and current students about their pattern of study. Curriculum information is maintained on a central database which publishes to the web and to students via Sussex Direct. All changes to the curriculum must therefore be properly recorded (with full audit trails of approvals) so that relevant database changes can be made. New programme information is added and maintained by the Academic Office. Course and assessment information, including patterns of study, faculty contacts and related information is maintained locally at School and Department level.

*Key contact: Sam Riordan (Academic Office) / School Administrator Curriculum (Schools)*

### 3 New Programme Approval – Outline Approval Process

All new provision (programmes) and significant or major change (programme revision) will be required to follow the following procedure:

#### 3.1 Outline approval step guide

<b>Step 1</b> (commence June)	Idea for new programme/major revision identified	Department (minimal documentation)
<b>Step 2</b>	Idea endorsed by School	School (minimal documentation)
<b>Step 3</b> (October)	Professional Services provide detailed market/cost/strategic report on proposal for consideration by School	Professional Services (significant research and report)
<b>Step 4</b> (November)	School considers Professional Service Report and recommend to proceed and include in Annual Plan or to halt/postpone/revise the development	School (management/strategic level)
<b>Step 5</b> (December)	Planning process approves/rejects proposals in line with University strategic targets – if approved new programme can appear in prospectus at this point	Sub-group of Strategy and Resources Committee (DVC and PVCs)
<b>Step 6</b> (to be completed Spring term before delivery)	Full approval and external endorsement event	Department (documentation) School (event organization) Professional Services (support/guidance)

*Indicative time line for new programme proposals*

#### 3.2 Step 1 – initial idea

The initial idea for a new programme can emerge from various sources, but most commonly from within departments as the continual process of academic enquiry leads to the development of new ideas and new discipline strands and combinations. Other drivers may include market intelligence obtained on recruitment patterns, employer demand (especially for postgraduate CPD developments), or national educational and employment strategy. In all cases, however, departments will need to align the proposal to their academic plan as part of the overall management of their activity, taking into account recruitment needs, resources, links with research and related activity.

The documentation required at **Step 1** is minimal, and intended to initiate broader institutional discussion about the merits of the proposal. It is recommended that programme developers produce a short document outlining the following:

- Working title of programme
- Intended recruitment market
- Key academic features
- Fit with corporate, school and departmental strategic plan
- Outline business case
- Other significant features
- Lead programme developer

The document is unlikely to extend over more than two sides of A4 and does not require extensive evidence. It is intended simply to give an indication of the nature of the development as the basis for discussion and to outline the main reasons why the department believes it will be successful.

The proposal should be discussed with the Head of Department and put forward for endorsement by the Department either via the Departmental Meeting or via the local departmental management team.

If the initial idea meets with support at departmental level it may be put forward for endorsement by the School.

**Initial ideas may be brought forward at any time in the year, but the preferred timeframe to meet university planning cycles is for proposals to be brought forward early in the academic year having been initiated in the preceding summer term.**

### 3.3 Step 2 – School endorsement

Initial programme proposals will need to align with School strategy, and the proposal should be put to the School Management Group for initial consideration (alternatively Schools may wish to seek an initial view from the School Teaching and Learning Committee). At this stage the School is simply indicating whether the proposal is worth further exploration. It is not making a final decision.

If the School determines that the proposal has merit it should forward it to the Academic Office for the preparation of marketing/costing/strategy reports. The Academic Office will also prepare a project schedule setting out the approval time-line.

**Initial ideas may be brought forward at any time in the year, but the preferred timeframe to meet university planning cycles is for proposals to be brought forward early in the academic year (early autumn term).**

### 3.4 Step 3 – Professional Services report

On receipt of the initial proposal from the School the Academic Office will co-ordinate the compilation of a report covering marketing, resources, the business plan and strategic alignment. The Office will also identify any other key indicators relating to the proposal (for example, accreditation requirements, partnership issues, academic structure if the proposal indicates innovative delivery patterns).

Information will be provided to the Academic Office by Student Recruitment Services, Finance Division, Strategy Planning and Governance, and where appropriate Estates, Library and ITS. As part of this process the Academic Office will consult closely with the Programme development team in the department to ensure that the report accurately reflects the intended academic programme and that key discipline and subject expertise is effectively and appropriately reflected.

The Academic Office will prepare a report summarizing the information from Professional Services, indicating strengths and weaknesses in the proposal, and identifying areas where particular attention might be needed. The report, together with a project schedule, will be produced within 4 weeks of receiving the request, and copies will be sent to the following:

Dean  
SAM  
Director of Taught Programmes  
Head of Department

**The Academic Office will produce the Professional Services report within 4 weeks of request.**

### 3.5 Step 4 – School Planning Approval

The School management group will consider the Professional Services report, normally as part of the School's annual planning cycle. The report will enable the School management to identify which proposals from which departments should be included in the plan and will therefore go forward to the University for outline approval.

The purpose of this stage is to enable Schools to focus resources on those programmes which best deliver the strategic needs of the School and its departments. It is likely that Schools will need to prioritize academic developments, with some proposals being deferred or rejected, while others are incorporated within the current School plan. It is important to note that inclusion in the School plan does not guarantee that the proposal will be accepted at University level, where a further review of all developments across the University will be undertaken. Schools are therefore asked to provide a brief statement in support of proposals it wishes to send forward for outline approval. This will normally focus on the alignment with strategic goals and the business case.

Where a proposal is supported by the School the statement of support should be sent to the Academic Office which will prepare the following documents for consideration by the sub-group of the Strategy and Resources Committee:

- Initial proposal document
- Professional Services Report
- School statement of support
- Business plan

### 3.6 Step 5 – Planning approval

The sub-group of Strategy and Resources Committee (DVC and PVCs) will review all proposals and determine which new programmes may go forward for full development. The sub-group may place conditions on the development which will be reviewed at validation, including revisions to the proposed year of commencement. Approval by the sub-group indicates institutional strategic support for the development and enables the following to take place:

- inclusion in university prospectuses and provision of marketing and recruitment support
- provision of programme development support from relevant professional services planning for full validation

Details of the approval decision will be sent by the Strategy and Resources Committee sub-group to:

Dean  
SAM  
Director of Taught Programmes  
Head of Department  
Academic Office  
TLDU

The Academic Office will advise relevant professional services of the outline approval and report the approval to the University Teaching and Learning Committee. The SRC sub-group will report its decisions to the full Strategy and Resources Committee for information.

Approved proposals will also be reported to Senate by the University Teaching and Learning Committee.

**Approval will normally be granted by the end of December for undergraduate programmes following the preferred cycle. This enables prospectus and UCAS cycles to be met. Approvals are possible outside this cycle where recruitment is less dependent on the UCAS process.**

### 3.7 Step 6 – Validation

On notification of outline approval, the Academic Office will co-ordinate planning for full validation in consultation with the School and Department. The TLDU will work with academic departments on programme design methods.

The Validation itself is established under the auspices of the School and will normally be chaired by the Director of Taught Programmes. Administrative support for the validation will be appointed by the Head of Academic Office.

The principal purposes of the full approval process are to secure a strong academic programme which:

- meets the needs of students and will recruit well
- is sustainable over time
- is consistent with corporate and School teaching and learning strategies
- is consistent with institutional frameworks
- is consistent with standards set in the *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications*
- is informed by the relevant *Subject Benchmark Statements*
- takes account of national expectations of good practice identified in the *QAA Code of Practice*
- takes account of national and international good practice in curriculum design and delivery
- enhances the national and international standing of academic provision at Sussex

In delivering the above, it is important that the process of scrutiny and consideration of the proposal is secure, effective, meets external requirements for objectivity, and optimizes the use of and benefits to the internal academic community. A validation panel will therefore be convened for considering each new programme approval, as follows:

#### Panel

Panel Chair	Director of Studies from the owning School <sup>1</sup> .
Cognate Academic	A Head of Department (or nominee) from a department within the owning School.
Teaching and Learning Committee representative	A member of academic staff from a school other than the owning school appointed on behalf of the Teaching and Learning Committee <sup>2</sup> .

<sup>1</sup> The panel will normally be chaired by the Director of Taught Programmes, but the Strategy and Resources Committee sub-group is empowered to direct an alternate chair where appropriate, normally either a Dean or PVC.

<sup>2</sup> The selected member is appointed on behalf of the committee (by its chair on the nomination of the Director of Studies but need not be a member of the committee)

External Academic	An appropriately qualified academic from a peer institution appointed by the Teaching and Learning Committee <sup>3</sup> .
External Stakeholder	(Optional) Where appropriate an external stakeholder may be included on the panel to represent the needs of employer organisations or targeted recruitment groups.
Secretary	The Head of Academic Office, in consultation with the School, will appoint a Secretary to support the approval event.
Observers	Observers may be invited to attend the event, for example a representative from a department preparing for its own programme approval.

*External members of the panel (other than those attending on behalf of external accrediting bodies) will receive a fee, which will be centrally funded and administered by the Academic Office.*

### **Programme Team**

The programme team will be expected to attend the event in order to present the programme and to engage in discussion with the panel. There is flexibility in who should attend on behalf of the programme, but there is an expectation that attendance will include:

- programme convenor
- Chair of Department Teaching Committee (or equivalent)
- Members of core faculty involved in delivering the programme
- Administrative or technical support where complex student arrangements are involved (e.g. placements, on-line learning)
- A departmental student representative

### **Structure of event**

The approvals event will commonly last between 2 and 3 hours, and will follow a generic format:

Outline of the event (Panel Chair)  
Presentation of the programme (Programme Convenor)  
Scrutiny of documentation (Panel and programme team)  
Discussion of key issues (Panel and programme team)  
Decision (Panel in private meeting)  
Feedback (Panel and programme team)

### **Documentation**

A significant proportion of the documentation required for approval will have been developed during earlier stages of the process. Specifically, programme teams will be expected to produce:

- an overview document setting out the rationale for the new programme covering academic/discipline issues, target audience and recruitment strategy, employment or post-qualifying opportunities. A section should cover resource needs. The majority of this information will have been developed during the planning process (stages 1-5) and should be evidence based.

---

<sup>3</sup> Proposing departments will normally be invited to recommend an external panel member. The external will not normally be the same person as the external examiner for the programme and three years must have elapsed since they held an appointment (if any) at Sussex.

- Programme template and full set of course templates for the programme.
- Minutes of meetings where the development has been considered (e.g. university, school, departmental levels).

Administrative support for producing documentation will be provided by the School (for local documentation) and the Academic Office (for centrally sourced material). The Academic Office will advise on the overall document requirements which may include material additional to the basic information detailed above.

### Issues for Consideration

The validating panel will consider a range of issues in determining whether to approve the programme. While some areas for discussion will emerge from the documentation there are a number of key issues which will form the core focus for each validation. In preparing documentation the programme team should therefore pay particular attention to the following areas:

Key Issue	Criteria
Academic coherence	<p>The panel will wish to see how the structure of the programme develops from the initial point to final outcomes, showing coherence in curriculum content, the pattern of learning, and assessment.</p> <p>The core information will be included in the programme and course templates (which must be complete and provided for all courses), and may be enhanced by a short narrative in the covering document explaining how the programme structure meets student learning needs.</p>
Programme regulations	<p>The panel will wish to confirm that the programme regulations for progression, exit awards, and final award/classification are clearly stated in the documentation and are consistent with the University's academic framework.</p> <p>The core information will be included in the programme template. Unusual programme regulations should be signalled in the covering document.</p>
Consistency of programme outcomes with FHEQ Qualification Descriptors	<p>The panel will wish to confirm that the outcomes of the programme meet the FHEQ qualification descriptors, establishing the standard of student achievement.</p> <p>The core information will be included in the programme template (as programme learning outcomes). The descriptors will be available to the validating panel.</p>
Subject Benchmark Statements	<p>Where appropriate (undergraduate programmes, and some postgraduate programmes) the panel will wish to confirm that the relevant Subject Benchmarks Statements are reflected in the programme design.</p> <p>The core information will be included in the programme template.</p>
Teaching and Learning methods	<p>The panel will pay close attention to the teaching and learning methods, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that the methods of delivery are appropriate to the intended programme and course learning outcomes, and are appropriately informed by and reflective of a research culture.</p> <p>The core information will be included in the programme and course templates, but may benefit from a brief narrative in the covering document explaining how the selected methods deliver appropriate learning opportunities, including any key skills.</p>

Assessment strategy	<p>The panel will pay close attention to the choice of assessment modes, with particular emphasis on ensuring that the modes of assessment are appropriate to the course learning outcomes; and overall, that programme learning outcomes are secure.</p> <p>The core information will be included in the programme and course templates, but may benefit from a brief narrative in the covering document explaining how the selected methods deliver an appropriate range of targeted assessment.</p>
Resources	<p>The panel will seek to verify that all resources required to deliver the programme are available (or have been identified and planned). This includes, <i>inter alia</i>, academic and administrative staffing (where relevant); IT and other technical learning resources; library; space (e.g. labs).</p> <p>Some information is likely to be included in the professional services report and programme documentation. Programme teams will need to take particular note of any resource issues that were identified during the development process and should address these directly in the covering document.</p>
Sustainability	<p>The panel will wish to assure itself that the programme is likely to succeed, and to be sustainable over an appropriate period of time relative to the investment. In considering sustainability the panel will take account of projected recruitment, the integration of the programme with other provision, and resource requirements.</p> <p>The core information – and any risks - will have been identified during the initial development and may also be indicated in the professional services report. The programme team may wish to address any such concerns in the covering document.</p>
Impact	<p>The panel will wish to assure itself that the design and delivery of the programme contribute positively to the development of the characteristics of a Sussex graduate as set out in the Teaching and Learning Strategy.</p>

## Decision

The Validating Panel may determine:

- (i) that the proposal should be approved without amendment, or
- (ii) that the proposal should be approved subject to specific conditions, including the dates by which they should be satisfied. (Note: until the conditions set have been satisfied students cannot be admitted to the programme), or
- (iii) that the proposal should be approved under either (i) or (ii) above, with a recommendation that the programme team consider certain matters on which a report back would be required; or
- (iv) reject the proposal with advice to its originators as to the reasons for doing so.

*Guidance in preparing for the validation will be provided by the Academic Office. Additional support in programme design methods, development of new modes of delivery and assessment strategies is available from the TLDU.*

#### **4 New Course approval (undergraduate and postgraduate)**

##### 4.1 New course approval

A new course is developed either as a part of a new programme proposal, as an independent course designed to enhance existing programmes, as a replacement for an existing course contributing to a programme, or as stand-alone course available as an elective choice but not formally part of a programme structure.

New courses will be approved by the relevant **School Teaching and Learning Committee** with the exception of those directly linked to a new programme proposal.

4.2 New courses developed as part of a new programme will be approved by the programme validation event.

4.3 All new courses must be proposed using the **Course Approval Template**.

4.4 Where a course is being developed for an existing programme, or as a stand-alone course, the following procedure should be used:

##### **Stage 1**

- a) Course developed at Departmental Level
- b) Endorsed by Departmental Meeting / Teaching Committee

##### **Stage 2**

Course **approved** by School Teaching and Learning Committee

4.5 Following approval by the School, the introduction of the new course must be reported by the School Administrator (Curriculum) to the Secretary of the UTLC. The report should include:

- the name and code for the new course
- the number of credits and level applicable
- the date from which the new course will be delivered
- where the course replaces another course, the report should indicate the programmes to which the change applies and the date from which the change is effective.
- if an old course is being withdrawn, the report should indicate the date from which the old course will formally be withdrawn (see below for details on withdrawing courses).
- the meeting of the STLC at which approval took place.

Confirmation should also be sent by the School to the Department responsible for the course.

**4.6** Where the course is being offered as part of an existing programme, the **programme revision** procedure will need to be followed to ensure that programme-level documentation is updated.

## Section 5 – Programme and Course revision (undergraduate and postgraduate)

### 5.1 Why it is important

The University approves programmes, and the approved version forms part of our contract with students. We are therefore under a contractual obligation to deliver programmes as advertised, be it over the web, in the prospectus or by other means. Failure to deliver programmes as advertised can lead to expensive litigation, and there are cases elsewhere in the sector where the courts have awarded substantial damages to students who have successfully demonstrated that the programme advertised differed from that delivered.

In all cases, it is required that substantive changes to provision are approved through appropriate procedures and properly recorded; and that any accompanying documentation (e.g. Programme or Course Handbooks, Programme Specification, etc) is updated.

### 5.2 Good planning should reduce the need for successive course and programme revisions, but there will continue to be good reason for making changes: to reflect new discipline knowledge; to improve the student learning experience; to improve assessment strategy.

Changes to programmes may encompass:

- change to programme title
- changes to learning outcomes at programme level
- changes to the range of courses offered
- changes to credit structures
- addition/deletion of courses or course options
- changes to the assessment pattern
- changes to accreditation
- changes to programme-specific progression rules

This list is not definitive and there may be other changes that impact on the programme and therefore need to be approved via the School Teaching and Learning Committee. The essential point to note is that:

**Changes to programmes which impact on the student experience are subject to formal approvals processes.**

### 5.3 Timetable for making changes (minor and routine changes)

Minor or routine changes may be made once the students have started the programme but approval **must** be obtained before students embark on the year or stage of study affected. Good planning enables such changes to be made in the year preceding that in which the changes are to take effect. In the case of undergraduate programmes, this should normally be by the end of the **Spring Term** in order to allow:

- sufficient notice to students to permit informed course choices to be made for the following year;
- adequate time for preparation of course and programme handbooks;
- sufficient time for the necessary teaching to be convened;
- preparation of the teaching timetable for the following academic year.

Normal modifications and updating of teaching materials which do not affect the mode of delivery, assessment modes, learning outcomes or other technical aspects of courses are a matter for faculty to determine as part of the normal process of course preparation and

do not require committee approval. Where such modifications of teaching material impact on library provision it is **essential** that the library is consulted at an early stage on the acquisition of relevant reading materials.

**Exception to above:** *Changes to the published structure or content of a given year or stage of a programme may be made once students have commenced that year or stage of study **only** if the **written** consent of each student affected is obtained. One objection and the proposal falls.*

#### **5.4 Timetable for making changes (major changes affecting programmes)**

Where an existing programme is completely revised (e.g. all three years of an undergraduate programme) then the timetable and **procedure for new programmes** should be adopted in order that the revised programme can be considered within the context of the planning process and – if approved - appropriately reflected in the prospectus. Major structural changes should be treated as new programmes and will normally only be introduced for new cohorts.

Advice on major changes of this order should be sought from the Academic Office who will advise on the approvals needed to undertake substantial programme revisions.

#### **5.5 Major and minor changes**

- 5.5.1 Programmes and their constituent elements and courses are all subject to change over time. Some of these changes are minor (reflecting perhaps the publication of a new key text which can be incorporated into the learning process), whilst others are major (for example, a fundamental redesign of some or all the courses contributing to a programme).
- 5.5.2 Changes to programmes and courses are managed and approved at a local (i.e. School) level. The following notes are designed to offer guidance to those seeking to make changes and to indicate which procedure is likely to be followed.

#### **5.6 Course changes**

*In all cases of major changes to courses, a consultation process must be followed to ensure that all those likely to be affected by the change are able to contribute to the decision. Proposed changes to a course shared by several programmes may have a wider impact than first envisaged. All convenors of programmes affected by the change should be consulted (including those programmes where the course is offered as an option or elective, and irrespective of whether the department is in the same school as the course provider).*

##### **5.6.1 Learning Outcomes (major)**

Any substantive change to the aims or learning outcomes of a course is considered “major”, as the intention and effect is to alter the nature of the provision being offered.

**Substantive changes to learning outcomes must be approved by the School Teaching and Learning Committee**

*Presentational changes to Learning Outcomes which do not affect their meaning or function may be approved by the School’s Director of Taught Programmes.*

##### **5.6.2 Course content (minor)**

Where changes to the content of a course as reflected in the published course outline/description do not impact on the overall aims and learning outcomes of a course, the change is **likely** to be considered “minor”. It is a matter of professional judgment on the part of the course convenor (in consultation with any appropriate departmental group) to ensure that the revised description continues to correspond with the aims and learning outcomes of the course, and that the fundamental student experience is not affected. Such changes should be reported to the School Teaching and Learning Committee.

**Minor changes to course content may be approved at Departmental level by the local Teaching Committee or other appropriate departmental body and reported to the School Teaching and Learning Committee.**

### 5.6.3 Changing teaching methods (minor or major)

a) In many cases changes to teaching methodology will be considered as a minor change in that they do not affect the academic aims or learning objectives of the module or unit. Such changes might include a moderate alteration to the mix of teaching modes used (for example, the introduction of a new method alongside existing methods, or a slight readjustment in the balance between methods, including minor adjustments to the mix of lectures and seminars within a course, or the number of lab sessions).

**Minor changes to teaching methods may be approved at Departmental level by the local Teaching Committee or other appropriate departmental body and reported to the School Teaching and Learning Committee.**

b) Where the proposed change in teaching method will impact significantly on a course, for example by moving away from lecture-only delivery to a seminar-based approach, the change is considered to be “major” as it will significantly alter the experience of the student and may have broader impacts for the balance of learning and teaching experiences for a programme as a whole. There may also be implications for teaching loads, timetabling and University or School resources.

**Major changes to teaching method must be approved by the School Teaching and Learning Committee.**

- 5.6.4 Successive “minor” changes may result in a course no longer reflecting its stated aims and learning outcomes, or in significant discrepancies emerging between the course description and the student experience. When considering whether a change is major or minor, course convenors and Teaching Committees should reflect not only on the extent of the immediate change, but on the overall balance of the programmes to which the course contributes. Where there have been several successive changes (more than 3 would normally warrant close scrutiny) the course should be treated as requiring formal re-approval by the School Teaching and Learning Committee.

*Successive curriculum changes will be monitored through the Periodic Subject Review process.*

### 5.6.5 Changing assessment strategy or modes of assessment

Changes to assessment strategy or modes of assessment are necessarily considered to be major as they impact significantly on the student experience.

**Changes to assessment must be approved by the School Teaching and Learning Committee.**

*Note: Changes to formal regulations for awards are subject to central University approval via the Student Regulations and Progress Committee.*

#### 5.6.6 **Changing assessment weightings within courses (sub-units of assessment)**

As part of regular curriculum monitoring procedures, the relative weighting of sub-units of assessment is sometimes subject to modification (for example: “Essay 30% Unseen 70%” being changed to “Essay 40% Unseen 60%”). Changes of this order are considered minor and may be approved at Departmental level. They **must**, however, be reported to the School Teaching and Learning Committee for implementation.

**Changes to the balance of sub-units of assessment can be approved at Departmental level but must be reported to the School Teaching and Learning Committee.**

#### 5.6.7 **Tracking curriculum changes**

In all the above cases it is a requirement that the approved changes are recorded on the central Programme and Course database system. This provides the definitive record of the approved curriculum and is published to students via the web and Sussex Direct.

**School Administrators (Curriculum) must ensure that all changes, whether approved at Departmental or School level are properly recorded on university data systems, including detailing the date from which a change becomes effective and the mechanism by which approval was granted (name of committee or officer, and date of decision).**

### 5.7 **Withdrawing courses**

5.7.1 Many courses contribute to a number of different programmes, either as core elements or specified options, both within the home School and across the University. Particular care must be taken when proposing to withdraw a course that all programme convenors likely to be affected are fully consulted.

5.7.2 Where the withdrawal of a course has no significant impact on existing programmes (i.e. the course is neither required by any programme, nor does it reduce a range of options such that no optionality is available to students; or equivalent and adequate provision to meet student expectations is accessible and available elsewhere within the University) then withdrawal may be approved at School level on the recommendation of the Department. The School Administrator (Curriculum) will be responsible for ensuring that all appropriate consultations and notifications take place with all affected units across the University. Approval may be delegated by the STLC to the Chair.

5.7.3 Where the withdrawal of a course is likely to impact significantly on a programme to which it contributes (e.g. by restricting student choice, or by removing a required element of study with an associated impact on learning outcomes), the withdrawal of the course will constitute a major change to an existing programme. In such cases, full consideration must be given to the proposal in accordance with the guidelines for programme change, and steps must be taken to ensure that the programme is properly reviewed and revised to ensure that students continue to receive a coherent and appropriate programme of study. This may entail formal programme revision (see 6.5.6 below).

*Note: The withdrawal of a course is used in this section in the sense of no longer delivering the course to students. This is not the same as withdrawing a course from a specific*

*programme (in which circumstances the course may continue to be taught to students on other programmes). See section 6.6 below.*

**School Administrators (Curriculum) must ensure that all course withdrawals are properly recorded on university data systems, including detailing the date from which a change becomes effective and the mechanism by which approval was granted (name of committee or officer, and date of decision).**

#### 5.7.4 **Suspension of a course**

The suspension of a course is its temporary withdrawal from admitting new students to that course. Any suspension of a course must be approved at School level. The School Administrator (Curriculum) will be responsible for ensuring that all appropriate consultations and notifications take place with all affected units across the University. Suspension is for a time-limited period of up to two years, and the inclusive dates of the suspension must be recorded on central data systems. Approval may be delegated by the STLC to the Chair.

#### 5.7.5 **Other types of changes not otherwise listed**

Any proposal for a change which is likely, in the professional judgment of the course convenor, to affect significantly the student experience should be referred to the Director of Taught Programmes for consideration. The Director will decide whether the change should be considered minor (and thus appropriate for approval at Departmental level), or whether it is major (and must thus be approved by the School). The Academic Office is able to offer further advice and, if appropriate, obtain definitive rulings from the University Teaching and Learning Committee.

### 5.8 **Changes to Programmes**

#### 5.8.1 **Amendment to the title of a programme**

Any intended change to an existing, approved programme title may impact on a range of University systems, and will impact in particular on recruitment-related teams. Departments wishing to change programme titles are therefore **required** to refer the proposal to the Academic Office which will co-ordinate views from central services. A change in the title of a programme is not permissible within its first three years without the approval of the Strategy and Resources Committee Sub-Group. Formal approval of a change in title after the three year period is the responsibility of the School Teaching and Learning Committee, which may delegate responsibility to its Chair. Changes must be reported to the University Teaching and Learning Committee.

#### 5.8.2 **Withdrawal of a programme**

Withdrawal of a programme or award is a matter for decision at School level and should reflect strategic planning needs of the school and department(s) concerned. Formal proposals should be considered at Departmental level and Schools may wish to review such proposals via School Management teams.

All programme withdrawals for the next prospectus should be approved during the **Autumn term** meeting of the STLC (for the **undergraduate** prospectus dealing with entry 21 months ahead) and during the **Spring term** for the **postgraduate** prospectus dealing with entry some 18 months ahead. Responsibility for approving withdrawal of programmes rests with the STLC, which may delegate responsibility to the Chair.

All programme withdrawals must be reported to the University Teaching and Learning Committee via the Academic Office to enable appropriate data and system changes to be made.

*Where it proves necessary to withdraw a programme after publication in the prospectus it is **essential** that discussions are held with the Academic Office which will co-ordinate consultations with the Admissions Office before any decision is made. In the first instance the SAC should contact the Academic Office.*

### 5.8.3 Suspension of a programme

The suspension of a programme is its temporary withdrawal from admitting new students to the programme. Formal proposals should be considered at Departmental level, and Schools may wish to review such proposals via School Management teams. Responsibility for approving suspension of programmes rests with the STLC, which may delegate responsibility to the Chair.

All programme withdrawals must be reported to the University Teaching and Learning Committee via the Academic Office to enable appropriate data and system changes to be made.

### 5.8.4 Modes of study (full-time or part-time)

Changes in mode of study (e.g. the addition or removal of part-time or full-time routes, accelerated routes, etc) may have a significant impact on resources, both for the programme in question and for others. Advice may be obtained from the Academic Office which will co-ordinate central responses. Changes in mode of study will normally be treated as a modification of an existing programme with responsibility for approval resting with the STLC. The proposal will require clear programme templates to be developed, setting out the planned structure of the programme in the revised mode, and indicating how any operational issues will be managed.

All changes in mode of study must be approved by the School Teaching and Learning Committee and reported to the University Teaching and Learning Committee via the Academic Office to enable appropriate data and system changes to be made.

### 5.8.5 Changes to the programme structure

Any change that affects the structure of the programme must be considered “major”. Structural changes are likely to include such things as:

- increasing or reducing the status of a course (e.g. by making a 12 credit course into a 24 credit course);
- adding or removing an optional strand;
- introducing a new element that may affect the final assessment.

Changes to the programme structure must be approved by the **School Teaching and Learning Committee**.

All changes in programme structure must be reported to the University Teaching and Learning Committee via the Academic Office to enable appropriate data and system changes to be made.

### 5.8.6 Major revisions (programmes)

Where a major revision to a programme is proposed such that the revised programme is in effect a new programme with significant changes to structure, content, and intended learning outcomes, the procedures for the approval of new programmes must be followed, including the initial planning phase for outline approval. This applies even where the title of the award is itself unchanged.

## 5.9 Withdrawal of a course from a programme

- 5.9.1 The withdrawal of a course from a programme may have significant impact on a programme (see 6.4 above). Where the withdrawal of a course from a programme removes a core course, significantly limits student choice, or similarly or otherwise affects a number of programmes, the procedure for approving withdrawal must take into account all the programmes concerned. The process should focus on the programme level, rather than treating the course in isolation. Approval for the withdrawal of a course rests with the **School Teaching and Learning Committee** owning the course. The Committee will ensure that appropriate steps have been taken to secure the overall balance of affected programmes (including programme-level learning outcomes). This includes taking account of affected programmes outside the School (a process which will require the Committee to receive reports from the relevant other Schools).
- 5.9.2 The School Teaching and Learning Committee may **not** approve the withdrawal of a course from a programme if to do so would significantly affect the aims and objectives of a programme, or mean that a core course becomes unavailable, or that a significant optional route is removed from a programme. In such circumstances appropriate steps must be taken to ensure the integrity of the affected programme(s) before further consideration can be given to the withdrawal of the course or unit concerned.

*Note: The withdrawal of a course from a programme is **not** necessarily the same as the withdrawal of a course. A course may be withdrawn from a programme but may continue to be offered to students on other programmes.*

## 5.10 Replacement of a course

The replacement of a course may affect the overall balance or intended outcomes of a programme and should therefore be treated as a two-stage process of:

- the withdrawal of a course from a programme (or withdrawal of a course)
- the introduction of a new course to the programme (or introduction of a new course)

In each case, approval is via the School Teaching and Learning Committee. The School Administrator (Curriculum) will be responsible for ensuring that all appropriate consultations and notifications take place with all affected units across the University.

All changes in programme course structure must be reported to the University Teaching and Learning Committee via the Academic Office to enable appropriate data and system changes to be made.

Further information can be obtained from the Academic Office, Academic and Student Services, Sussex House.

Key contacts:

Paul Cecil	Head of Academic Office	<a href="mailto:p.l.cecil@sussex.ac.uk">p.l.cecil@sussex.ac.uk</a>	x7755
Sam Riordan	Academic Information Manager	<a href="mailto:s.y.riordan@sussex.ac.uk">s.y.riordan@sussex.ac.uk</a>	x7468

