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1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

The term *academic development* refers to the processes by which the University’s curriculum is designed, approved and quality assured. This handbook describes these processes in detail and provides guidance on how to:

i. develop proposals for new courses and pathways (sections 3 and 4)
ii. propose new modules and changes to existing courses and modules (section 6)
iii. propose course and module withdrawals (section 6)

The handbook is of particular relevance to:

- Directors of Teaching and Learning
- Curriculum and Assessment Officers
- Members of validation panels
- Members of Portfolio Approval Committee
- Academic and Professional Services staff who support new course development

This handbook is maintained by the Academic Development and Quality Enhancement Office (ADQE) and is sponsored by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students). The guidance provided relates to taught courses. For information on the quality management of research degrees, please refer to the Research Student Administration Office.

1.2 Academic development committees

Decisions on academic development are the responsibility of University committees. The following table summarises the roles of each committee; full terms of reference are available on Sussex Direct:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio Approval Committee (PAC)</td>
<td>A committee of UEC with authority to approve new course titles for validation. Decisions are taken based on scrutiny of academic coherence, recruitment strategy and resource considerations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Education Committee (UEC)</td>
<td>A committee of Senate with responsibility for oversight of all validation and curriculum development activity. Responsible for the University’s Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, the assurance of academic standards and quality enhancement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Development and Approval Subcommittee (CDASC)</td>
<td>A committee of UEC which considers all new modules and major changes to courses and modules for approval, with reference to the norms and standards set out in the Academic Framework.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
School Teaching and Learning Committee (STLC)  
A committee of UEC with responsibility for oversight of academic development at School level, including initial scrutiny of proposals prior to submission to PAC and approval of all new modules and major and minor changes to courses and modules with reference to the norms and standards set out in the Academic Framework.

1.3 Key contacts

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| Directors of Teaching and Learning | Please consult Sussex Direct |
| Heads of Department and Heads of School | Please consult Sussex Direct |
| PAC Secretariat | Oliver Craig |
| UEC Secretariat | Claire Brennan |
2. Principles of academic development at the University of Sussex

2.1 The main purpose of academic development is to secure the quality and viability of the curriculum. Effective academic development supports the strategic objective set out in the Sussex 2025 Strategic Framework to ensure: “our students will receive a transformative, high quality education and learning experience that will allow them to realise the futures they want. […] Sussex students will develop the knowledge and skills to be critical thinkers, entrepreneurs, commentators, citizens and activists”.

The following diagram describes the University’s academic development cycle at a glance.

2.2 The following principles underpin academic development at the University of Sussex. The principles are informed by the expectations of the Quality Assurance Agency’s (QAA) Quality Code for Higher Education. In particular, the principles outlined below enable the University to meet the following expectation;

“The Provider [shall] review its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.”
“The Provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.”

Principle 1  Articulation with University strategy, policy and process

Compliance with the University’s Strategic Framework, Learn to Transform Strategy, Academic Framework, and Examination and Assessment Regulations, is an essential part of securing the standards of the academic provision of Schools.

The published processes provide for flexible, ongoing revision of the curriculum, but it is important that all parties utilise the system effectively so that an appropriate level of scrutiny can take place. Fundamentally, the University must be able to demonstrate with confidence that students are receiving the best learning experience possible, and specifically the one that has been published and advertised by the University. This enables the University to meet the Quality Code indicator that:

“The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.”

and that:

“The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.”

Principle 2  Peer review and externality

New courses are validated by academic peers both internal and external to the University. This academic expertise is supported with guidance from appropriate staff in the University’s Professional Services and, where appropriate, from external stakeholders. This meets the QAA’s expectation as stated in Quality Code:

“The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.”

The University’s use of external reference points and expertise is considered sound practice in both the development of new courses and the review of the existing curriculum. The former is achieved by the validation process. The latter is achieved when curriculum change and development proposals are the product of reflection that is cognisant of external examiner reports and School Periodic Review activities.
Principle 3  Alignment with HE Sector expectations and norms

The University’s academic development processes are benchmarked to sector reference points and norms including the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, the Qualifications and Credit Framework and the QAA Quality Code.

This approach enables the University to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit is linked to the achievement of learning outcomes.

Principle 4  Student Engagement

Students can make a high-quality and informed contribution to the academic development process. Validation of new courses takes place with student membership of the Panel as standard practice. This enables students to be confident that the courses have been approved with due consideration of the student voice. This process also occurs through the participation of students in the University’s Annual Course Review and School Periodic Review processes. Collectively, these processes ensure effective student engagement.

Staff involved with curriculum development and the design of new courses should also consult with students on courses that they are involved with to gain insight, both into what will improve the student experience and what will be attractive to students.

Principle 5  A collaborative approach

Faculties developing new curricula are able to draw on a range of relevant expertise located in the University’s Professional Services. ADQE offers guidance and support on process, academic standards and University and sector benchmarks. The Technology Enhanced Learning team supports faculty to develop strategies for teaching and learning with technology. Marketing and Finance provide management information to support decision-making about the viability of new course proposals. The Library works with Schools to identify appropriate learning resources.

Each of these services contributes to the academic development process with the aim of producing successful, high-quality proposals for courses that meet the strategic objectives of the University.

Principle 6  Planning and sustainability

The University must be able to plan its curriculum effectively in order to meet the emerging demands of the Higher Education sector, to ensure that the institutional Strategic Framework is implemented, and to make sure that suitable opportunities for attracting new cohorts are taken. Schools are therefore encouraged to consider the development of their academic portfolio in both the short and long-term, ensuring that new courses are formulated and publicised in good time.
The University's academic development processes have been designed to achieve this by encouraging forward planning and sustainability. The processes (new course approval, validation, curriculum development) are formed of various stages that ensure the viability of courses, alignment of the curriculum with institutional strategy, and the securing of academic standards in line with HE Sector standards.

Principle 7  Enhancement of teaching and learning

All of the University’s activities aimed at quality assurance have a concurrent function of quality enhancement. The processes described in this Handbook all contain opportunities by which the University’s community of academics can facilitate the identification and implementation of enhanced learning opportunities, as well as the identification and dissemination of best practice across a variety of themes.

Principle 8  Efficiency and effectiveness of processes

The processes described in this handbook have been designed to maximise efficiency and effectiveness. The processes achieve this by:

- Avoiding unnecessary delay by doing things once and doing them well;
- The restriction of documentation to that which is necessary;
- Designing documentation to be user-friendly;
- Staff having a clear understanding of what is expected of them;
- Having clearly defined goals;
- Adherence to publicised deadlines.

Principle 9  Accuracy of information

The University has an obligation to publish accurate information regarding the courses offered by its Schools. Academic development activities produce curriculum information that forms a fundamental part of the University’s published offer to current and potential students. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) have published consumer law advice to HE providers, setting out expectations with regard to the provision of information to students and applicants. The following extract is of particular relevance, with the CMA advising HE providers to:

“Give students the clear, accurate and timely information they need so they can make an informed decision about what and where to study” (CMA, March 2015)

The best way to ensure that the University is fully compliant with consumer law is for staff to adhere to the University’s academic development processes, Curriculum Management and Consumer Law Policy and to undertake changes only once the required approval has been secured.
3. New course approval process

3.1 Portfolio Approval Committee

The new course approval process is overseen by the Portfolio Approval Committee (PAC). PAC is the committee with responsibility for considering the approval of new course titles and for suspending or withdrawing courses based on academic, recruitment or resource considerations. PAC is the only Committee with authority to approve:

- New award titles
- New pathways
- Suspension or withdrawal of courses and pathways

The terms of reference, composition and membership of PAC are published on Sussex Direct.

3.2 Criteria for the approval of new course titles

PAC recognises the effort required to produce high-quality course proposals and has therefore committed itself to operating transparently and to providing colleagues with information about the criteria against which proposals will be reviewed. PAC may also invite senior members of staff to its meetings to join discussions where appropriate.

When reviewing proposals for new courses, PAC considers the following:

i. Whether the proposed course supports University and School strategic plans for growth;

ii. Whether admissions data and market information indicate that demand for the course is likely to lead to both growth in numbers and an academically viable student experience. PAC will also consider whether the market for the proposed course is entirely new, or whether the development is likely to draw students away from existing University provision;

iii. Whether the logistical implications of the proposed course structure, for example in relation to the timetabling of examinations and teaching, are manageable;

iv. Whether the proposal complies with the Academic Framework;

v. The level of resourcing required for the course and an assessment of the risk presented by the course’s introduction.
3.3 Sussex Choice: protocol for degree titles

Sussex Choice enables students to personalise their undergraduate degree courses by choosing to participate in free-standing electives, pathways, placements and study abroad. ADQE publishes separate frequently-asked-questions on their webpages.

The choices students make through Sussex Choice may be reflected in their final degree title, or on their degree certificate. The Academic Framework (section 1.1) sets out in detail which combinations of title are permitted. The following table provides a summary, and also clarifies the conditions under which an award title including a Sussex Choice element would be: a. advertised as an entry route, or b. selected by the student after entry and appearing on the degree certificate by means of a course transfer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sussex Choice element</th>
<th>Impact on degree title</th>
<th>Marketing protocol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60 credit pathway</td>
<td>• No change to the degree title</td>
<td>• Students select 60 credit pathways after admission to the University, so that they can benefit from advice and guidance in their choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Successful completion recognised on the degree certificate</td>
<td>• All 60 credit pathways are advertised, but particular combinations of 60 credit pathways and single honours courses are not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 credit pathway</td>
<td>• Successful completion of a 90 credit pathway alongside 270 credits of credits in the substantive subject leads to the award of a major/minor degree</td>
<td>• All major/minor degree titles require explicit approval from PAC, including instances where this arises from the extension of a 60 credit pathway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• PAC may also request that new major/minor combinations be established, based on its review of portfolio data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Major/minor degrees are advertised as named entry routes with a UCAS code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Upon successful completion of a 60 credit pathway, students may transfer to the corresponding major/minor degree, where such an award exists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated placement or study abroad year</td>
<td>• Leads to published degree title</td>
<td>• Degrees comprising an integrated placement of study abroad year are advertised as such, as a named award including reference to the placement or study abroad year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary placement or study abroad year</td>
<td>• Successful completion leads to the addition of ‘with a placement year’ or ‘with a study abroad year’ to the degree title</td>
<td>• Degree titles including a voluntary placement or study abroad year are not advertised on entry, as they are not guaranteed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The opportunity to apply for a voluntary placement or study abroad year is clearly promoted to all students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4 Approval stages

Portfolio Approval Committee operates a two-stage process for new course approval. The stages are designed to provide for iterative development of course proposals, and to provide colleagues proposing courses with an early indication of whether they are likely to receive approval, in order to avoid unnecessary development effort.

The following diagram illustrates the Portfolio Committee Approval process:

![Diagram of Portfolio Committee Approval process]

3.4.1 The initial idea

Schools should consider the following matters during the initial development of a course.

i. **Leadership**
   The school must appoint a course proposal lead (usually the intended convenor) who should take responsibility for overseeing the course approval and validation process. Where a proposal is for a joint course, there should exceptionally be two named convenors with the convenor of the first named School taking the lead.

ii. **Support from the School**
   The Head of School and Director of Teaching and Learning should be consulted at an early stage to ensure that the proposal will have the backing of the school. A course proposal cannot progress without the authorisation of these individuals.

iii. **Portfolio**
   Normally, course proposals from Schools should complement the existing portfolio of courses offered. It may be, for example, that other courses will need to be withdrawn to maximise the sustainability of the proposal or the content of existing courses adjusted to maintain the distinctiveness and diversity of the portfolio. Exceptionally, Schools may wish to propose an addition to the portfolio or to maintain a particular course for overriding strategic reasons.

iv. **Support from Professional Services**
   Although the School will retain ownership of the course proposal at every stage and is responsible for meeting required timescales, academic faculty should inform the ADQE office of any new course proposals at the earliest opportunity so that the required support from Professional Services may be arranged. The ADQE Curriculum Manager will coordinate the engagement between relevant faculty and representatives from the Market Research Team, Finance Team, and the Library. This will assist the School in producing compelling, coherent proposals.
v. **Timescale**

Schools need to forward plan effectively in order to ensure that courses can be proposed, developed and brought to market with a long enough lead time to ensure that recruitment is successful, whilst also meeting the various approval stage requirements. The ADQE Office will work with colleagues proposing courses to set a timescale for each proposed development, taking into account the committee calendar, the need for contributions from Professional Services, the publication schedule for the prospectus and the admissions and recruitment cycle.

### 3.4.2 Stage 1 new course proposal

A link to the stage 1 new course proposal form is included in this handbook at Appendix 1. The following checklist is provided to support Schools to complete the form correctly, in order to avoid the form being referred back for further development. Schools must ensure that:

- the form is completed in full, including the authorising signatures;
- the proposal has been considered by the School Teaching and Learning Committee;
- the sections on academic rationale, strategic context and resources are restricted to essential information (with greater detail being provided at stage 2 and at validation);
- The intended start date allows a realistic prospect of successful recruitment;
- The form indicates whether or not the proposed course is a progression route for the International Foundation Year, International Year One or Pre-Masters.

The committee meets both physically and virtually. Physical committee meetings are held three times per academic year and virtual committee meetings are held in-between. Normally, there will be no virtual committee on the same month, or the month before, a physical PAC. Business for virtual consideration will be batched into monthly folders by the secretary, and panel members informed if there are any proposals pending review on the 1st working day of each month. Panel members will be required to review and vote on proposals by the end of the month, and will also have the opportunity to note comments for other panel members and/or the course team. Course proposals will be considered by the next available meeting of PAC, either physical or virtual. The Chair has authority to take Chair’s action to approve stage 1 proposals where there is an urgent need to keep business moving between meetings.

The Secretary of PAC will inform the Head of School, Director of Teaching and Learning and the course proposer of the outcome within **five working days** of the physical Committee meeting or the deadline for virtual committee decisions.

Following the communication of the outcome, all stakeholders should be aware that there will be no addition of the course to the Curriculum Management System (the database) at this stage. This aspect of information management begins after the successful completion of Stage 2.

### 3.4.3 Stage 2 new course proposal

If the stage 1 new course proposal is approved by PAC, then the course may proceed to further development, culminating in the completion of the stage 2 new course approval form
for submission to PAC. Whereas stage 1 proposals enable the Committee to give an initial decision on the viability of a proposed course, stage 2 proposals provide for a fuller consideration of market research and financial information, provided by the Market Research and Finance teams.

Courses that receive stage 2 approval may proceed to validation and be advertised in the University prospectus with a ‘subject to validation’ caveat.

The following notes are provided for guidance on completing the form.

i. **School-level approval**

The Stage 2 Form will require the signatures of both the Head of School and Director of Teaching and Learning.

ii. **Contributions from Professional Services**

The ADQE Curriculum Manager will ensure that the School's proposal is complete before receipt by the Committee. This will be achieved if the proposing School has entered the course-related information required, obtained supporting reports from the Market Research and Finance Teams, and obtained any necessary comments from the Technology-Enhanced Learning Office, and the Library.

iii. **Requesting exemption from current academic policy**

There is an expectation that course proposals will comply with the University’s agreed academic policies and conform to the Academic Framework. Approval of new courses will be conditional on this. If the School has strong reasons for requesting exemption, these should be discussed with the ADQE Office, who will be able to provide advice on how the proposal may be taken forward.

iv. **Deadlines**

Course proposals will be considered by the next available meeting of PAC, either physical or virtual. The Secretary of PAC will inform the Head of School, Director of Teaching and Learning and the course proposer of the outcome within five working days of the physical Committee meeting or the deadline for virtual committee decisions. This process ensures the accuracy of the outcomes and actions following the Committee’s deliberations. The possible outcomes are:

1. Approval of a proposal subject to validation;
2. Referral of the proposal back to the School for further development.
3. Deferral to a physical committee meeting, where a virtual committee feel the proposal is too complex to be discussed virtually.
4. Rejection of the proposal.

Following confirmation that the course has been approved, the following actions will be completed:
• A new course will be entered on the database with ‘outline approval’ status, ready for the entry of further information at the appropriate time.

• The course will be advertised in the online version of the prospectus with a ‘subject to validation’ caveat. If the approval process has been completed following the recommended timescale, the course can also be advertised in the print version of the prospectus (the submission date for this is usually December for undergraduate courses and April for postgraduate courses).

• The ADQE Office will commence arrangements for the new course to undergo validation.

4.4.4 Brighton and Sussex Medical School proposals

Proposals for a new course from the Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS) follow a different process to that detailed above. New award titles proposed by BSMS are, in the first instance, considered by the Joint Approval and Review Board (JARB), a joint body of the University of Brighton and the University of Sussex. If JARB are satisfied that the course would be a suitable addition to the School’s portfolio, the School may propose the course to PAC for approval. The proposal will also require approval from the University of Brighton’s Portfolio Planning Group (PPG). Procedures governing submission of new course proposals to PPG are available from the University of Brighton’s Academic Services division.

BSMS staff involved with a new course proposal should follow the process outlined in 3.4.1-3.4.3, with the following variations accounting for the School’s unique status at the University.

i. The proposal should be submitted using a bespoke form, the link to which is included in this handbook at Appendix 1. Consideration of the proposal by PAC will take the form of one stage.

ii. There is no requirement to address the question of progression routes from the International Study Centre as students on these courses do not currently progress to BSMS.

iii. Courses that receive approval from both PAC and PPG may proceed to a conjoint validation event and may be advertised in the universities prospectuses with a ‘subject to validation’ caveat.
4. Sussex Choice: pathways

4.1 Introduction

The Academic Framework enables Schools to propose pathways, comprised of a coherent package of modules. Under Sussex Choice, students studying single honours degrees participating in the electives scheme can then take pathways alongside their main academic discipline.

The following table shows the pathway variants that are possible:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pathway Variant</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **60 credit pathway** | • Comprising 30 credits of elective modules at both stages 1 and 2 (15 credits in teaching block 1 and 15 credits in teaching block 2)  
• Successful completion recognised on the degree certificate, but no change to the formal award title  
• Always chosen after admission to the University  
• Cannot be subject to additional formal entry requirements, so clear guidance is provided for students when selecting pathways |
| **90 credit pathway** | • Comprising 30 credits of elective modules at stages 1, 2 and 3 (15 credits in teaching block 1 and 15 credits in teaching block 2)  
• leads to a major/minor degree on graduation, where the major/minor combination has been approved by the Portfolio Approval Committee  
• Normally selected at applicant stage as a named award, but may also be facilitated after completion of a 60 credit pathway using the course transfer process |
| **Type 1 pathway** | • Open to all students |
| **Type 2 pathway** | • Restricted to certain cohorts. For example, to prevent Geography students from taking a pathway in Geography.  
• Alternatively used to ensure that pathway entrants have attained a required level of academic competence. |

4.2 Pathway approval

The Portfolio Approval Committee has authority to approve new pathways and new major/minor degrees arising from the combination of 90 credit pathways with single honours courses. A new pathway approval form is included at Appendix 1. Schools proposing pathways are advised to consider the following matters:

i. **Leadership**
   The School must appoint a pathway proposal lead (normally the intended pathway convenor) who should take responsibility for navigating the pathway
approval process. Having a clear point of contact for a pathway proposal makes for a more efficient experience as all parties will have a common point of contact.

ii. **School approval**

The Head of School and Director of Teaching and Learning should be consulted at an early stage to ensure that any proposal will have the backing of the School. A pathway proposal cannot progress without the authorisation of these individuals, whose signatures will be needed for the Proposal Form. Any new proposal for a pathway must be approved by the School’s Teaching and Learning Committee.

iii. **Support from Professional Services**

Although the School will retain ownership of the pathway proposal at every stage and are responsible for meeting required timescales, academic faculty should inform the ADQE office of any new pathway proposals so that the necessary support from Professional Services may be arranged.

The ADQE Curriculum Manager will coordinate the engagement between relevant faculty and representatives from the Professional Service where necessary. This will not be as extensive as that required for a new course proposal as the pathway proposals in themselves do not require financial cases or market research in support. The concept of pathways has been centrally agreed by the University and therefore obtaining this supporting evidence is not necessary. Therefore, support will be mainly take the form of advice on the coherence of the pathway and its likely appeal to students.

iv. **Timescale**

The ADQE team will support Schools proposing pathways to set appropriate timescales to enable a proposed pathway to be approved, promoted and timetabled.

4.3 Completing the forms

The forms to be used to propose new 60 and 90 credit pathways can be broken down into two sections: the pathway itself and the modules that comprise it. The free text sections do not require extensive entries but should convey the academic coherence and rationale, how the pathway will aid employability, and any resourcing issues of note. The module sections require largely the same detail that a new module proposal requires and should be completed in full. New modules can be proposed via this route.

The form to be used for a new major/minor entry route requests details of the course which will form the major element, the pathway that will form the minor element, together with a rationale for why a specified entry title can be justified for the proposed combination. If the 90 credit pathway is being proposed at the same time as the major/minor degree, a copy of the pathway proposal should be appended to the major/minor pro forma.
4.4 Outcomes and next steps

The Secretary of PAC will inform the Head of School, Director of Teaching and Learning and proposer of the pathway as soon as the Chair of PAC has approved the outcomes of the meeting. Relevant Professional Services staff will also be notified of the outcome. Schools should expect this notification within five working days. This process ensures the accuracy of the outcomes and actions following the Committee’s deliberations. The possible outcomes are:

1. Approval of the pathway for introduction and advertisement;
2. Referral of the proposal back to School for further development
3. Rejection of the proposal.

Following confirmation that the pathway has been approved, several pieces of work will be undertaken by Professional Services Staff:

- A new pathway will be entered onto the database by ADQE. Following this, modules will be attached provided that they have been added to the database by the School.

- For new major/minor degrees, the ADQE Office will add the new course to the database with a status of ‘Confirmed’.

- The pathway will be advertised in the online version of the prospectus, as well as the next edition of the print prospectus.
5. Validation

5.1 Introduction

The validation process is the final step in the University's academic development process before a new course can begin. New course proposals that have received stage 2 approval may proceed to validation.

Validation enables the University to scrutinise the proposed course in greater detail, focusing on:

- The academic coherence of the course;
- The alignment of the course with national frameworks that govern standards in the Higher Education sector;
- The quality of the student experience;
- Opportunities for quality enhancement

The validation process involves contributions from external and internal academic peers, student representatives and professional services.

5.2 The validation process

Validation culminates with an event at which the course is scrutinised by a panel with the requisite expertise to consider all relevant areas. There are several steps to the validation process, as shown in the diagram below:

The validation process can be broken down into the following steps:

5.3 Preparing for validation

5.3.1 Support from ADQE

ADQE will appoint a manager to act as panel member for the validation and an officer to make the logistical arrangements and act as secretary to the panel. Both of these individuals will be available to the School as points of contact throughout the validation process.
5.3.2 Validation schedule

The validation will be organised according to the steps outlined in the table below. All participants should note key actions required at the various stages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Activity and Actions</th>
<th>People</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Proposal is approved for validation by PAC. School should identify course convenor and team at this point and ensure familiarity with validation process.</td>
<td>PAC Secretary, School</td>
<td>Start of validation process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Informal briefing meeting for Course Team and ADQE. Meeting to discuss potential dates of validation event, identify at least two suggested externals (and stakeholders if appropriate) and resolve any uncertainties</td>
<td>Validation Secretary, Course Team</td>
<td>Within one month of approval at PAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Agree dates for pre-meeting and validation event</td>
<td>Validation Secretary, Validation Chair</td>
<td>Within one month of approval at PAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Identify Chair from pool and other panel members, and agree participation</td>
<td>Validation Secretary, Validation Chair</td>
<td>Within one month of approval at PAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Course proposal documentation to be submitted to ADQE Office by School. ADQE may return to the School with issues to be resolved before submission to panel</td>
<td>Validation Secretary, Course Team</td>
<td>At least three weeks before validation event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Final course documentation sent to Panel members for their consideration, along with the validation agenda</td>
<td>Validation Secretary, Validation Panel</td>
<td>At least two weeks before validation event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Hold pre-meeting, with briefing matrix from ADQE brought to the meeting</td>
<td>Validation Panel</td>
<td>At least one week before the event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Course Team will receive agenda for the Validation Event and electronic version of documentation to be used at the event.</td>
<td>Validation Secretary, Course Team</td>
<td>At least one week before validation event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Hold validation event. Course Team should be well briefed on</td>
<td>Validation Panel, Course Team</td>
<td>In good time within the academic year preceding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Schools will find that referring to the Academic Framework, QAA Quality Code, QAA Master’s Degree Characteristics document, QAA Subject Benchmark Statements (where available), and the Framework of Higher Education Qualification will help to ensure that the submitted documentation complies with University and HE Sector standards. Schools may also refer to the ADQE Office’s website for guidance on the completion of validation documentation including how to write effective learning outcomes.

### 5.3.3 Key documents

The course team should be comprised of the School staff who will attend the validation event. The School are free to choose the composition of the team with the following provisos:

- The School team should have a maximum of six members;
- The Director of Teaching and Learning must be a member;
- The Course Convenor must be a member.

Other members of the course team may include the Head of School, the Head of Department, the Chair of the Board of Study, relevant module convenors, the School Administrator or Manager, or the Curriculum and Assessment Officer.

### 5.3.4 The School team

Following the principle of peer review and externality, the constitution of the validation panel includes both internal and external academics. The panel also takes into account the student perspective by including a Student Panel Member.
A validation panel will be comprised of the following members:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Eligibility</th>
<th>Description of role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panel Chair</td>
<td>A PVC, a Head of School or Director of Teaching and Learning, not from the owning School.</td>
<td>Will chair the validation event and ensure that all elements of the process have been adhered to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Sussex Academic</td>
<td>A senior academic from another School, preferably from a cognate area.</td>
<td>Will provide professional scrutiny and fulfil the peer review function, bringing the perspective of someone familiar with the University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Academic</td>
<td>An appropriately qualified academic from a peer institution.¹</td>
<td>Will provide both professional scrutiny and externality, ensuring that the Panel has objectivity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Stakeholder</td>
<td>Where appropriate an external stakeholder may be included on the panel to represent the needs of employer organisations or targeted recruitment groups.</td>
<td>Will provide commentary on the likely employability of students on the proposed course and will be invited to comment on other areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Panel Member</td>
<td>Usually a current elected student representative from a similar course.</td>
<td>Will provide feedback and comments from a student perspective on all areas under discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Services Panel Member</td>
<td>A representative from the Careers and Employability Centre, IT Services, Technology Enhanced Learning or the Library.</td>
<td>Will be able to provide commentary on the resource required and issues concerning the delivery of the course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADQE Panel Member</td>
<td>A manager from the ADQE Office.</td>
<td>Will ensure that the proposal is compliant with HE sector standard and University policy and regulations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>An officer from the ADQE Office</td>
<td>Will be responsible for the operation and organisation of the event.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Proposing departments will normally be invited to recommend a minimum of two possible academics. The independent academic will not normally be the same person as the external examiner for the course and will not have held a position in connection with the University of Sussex for the previous three academic years.
5.3.6 Documentation for submission

The proposing School will be required to produce the following documentation for the Panel to consider and discuss with the Course Team at the validation event:

- A course specification document comprising:
  - A narrative section covering the pedagogical vision for the course, the assessment and feedback strategy and the teaching and learning strategy for the course
  - Mapping of course learning outcomes to modules
  - Mapping of the course’s assessment
  - Mapping of the course’s teaching methods

  The mapping of learning outcomes helps to demonstrate the academic coherence of the course and how course learning outcomes are met by students undertaking the modules available to them.

  The mapping of the course’s assessment helps to demonstrate that the students are provided with a sufficiently distributed and diverse set of assessment. The map should also demonstrate how each module learning outcome is met by individual assessments.

  The mapping of teaching methods will allow the Panel to visualise the pace of teaching employed across the course and the demands made upon students. The map will also help the Panel understand the resource implications of the course, in particular the demand this will make upon General Teaching Space (GTS) and space available within the School.

- Specifications for new modules to be validated as part of the course
- Specifications for existing modules that will form part of the course undergoing validation (to be drawn from CMS as this is the definitive record of the currently approved modules)
- The intended course handbook for students

Web links to templates for the above documents can be found at Appendix 1.
5.3.7 Key issues for consideration
When preparing the documentation, the School should bear in mind the Panel will be considering a range of key issues when determining whether to validate the course. These include, but are not restricted to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key issue</th>
<th>Criteria to be considered by panel</th>
<th>Document</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic coherence</td>
<td>The panel will wish to see how the structure of the course develops from the point of entry to final outcomes, demonstrating coherence in curriculum design, the pattern of teaching, learning, and assessment. Where non-standard delivery is proposed, this should be signalled in the documentation and in the course team’s introduction at the event. The course team should also draw the panel’s attention to any operational issues identified.</td>
<td>Narrative document, course specification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency of course and module learning outcomes with FHEQ Qualification</td>
<td>The panel will wish to confirm that the course and module learning outcomes meet the FHEQ qualification descriptors (including Master’s level characteristics, where relevant), establishing the standard of student achievement. Where appropriate (undergraduate courses and some postgraduate courses), the panel will also wish to confirm that the relevant Subject Benchmarks Statements are reflected in the course design. The FHEQ descriptors, Master’s degree characteristics and Subject Benchmarks can be viewed on the QAA’s website.</td>
<td>Course specification, module specifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course regulations</td>
<td>The panel will wish to confirm that the course regulations for progression, exit awards, and final award/classification are consistent with the University’s Academic Framework. Requests for derogation(s) from the Framework or other University regulations must be highlighted in the documentation and in the course team’s introduction at the event.</td>
<td>Narrative document, course specification, module specifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching, learning and assessment strategy</td>
<td>The panel will pay close attention to the planned teaching and learning methods, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that the methods of delivery are inclusive and appropriate to the intended course and module learning outcomes, the intended student cohort and are appropriately informed by and reflective of the Sussex research culture. The panel will also consider whether technology-enhanced learning has been integrated. The panel will pay close attention to the choice of assessment modes, with particular emphasis on ensuring that the modes of assessment secure the course and module learning outcomes. The panel will expect to see an appropriate range of assessment modes and information on the timing of assessments, including opportunities for formative feedback.</td>
<td>Primarily course specification, module specifications. The narrative document may comment on the underlying philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student experience</td>
<td>The panel will need to be satisfied that the course as presented will provide students with a high-quality experience. The course documentation should address how the course will build a cohort identity, support student wellbeing and enhance the employability of students, the support that students will receive (particular to the course), and how the course will develop them as individuals, linked to graduate employment or further study.</td>
<td>Narrative document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Resource issues are addressed, primarily, during the new course approval process, which includes the submission of a finance report as part of the School’s proposal. Nonetheless, the panel will seek to verify that all resources required to deliver the course are available (or have been identified and planned). This includes academic and administrative staffing (where relevant); IT and other technical or specialist learning resources; library; space. Course 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.</td>
<td>Narrative document, course specification</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Schools should be mindful that the validation process does not replace the Annual Planning Round in any way and so bids for additional resources should only be made through the annual planning process.
5.3.8 Checklist for compiling documentation

Schools should ensure that they have submitted a complete set of documentation to the Validation Secretary three weeks prior to the validation event. The ADQE Office will then check the documentation and may come back to the Course Team with queries if there are substantial issues with the submission. The School has responsibility for meeting the deadline. The Validation Secretary will have determined the initial date during the briefing session with the School. If a School is unable to meet the timescale at any point during the process, the validation event will be rescheduled.

When compiling the documentation, Schools should make the following checks to ensure that they are ready to submit:

- The documentation has addressed all key areas for consideration by the Panel
- The documentation is fully completed
- The documentation is presented with clarity and in the format specified.
- The documentation accurately represents the School’s proposal. Schools should note that amendments will not be possible once the documentation has been received by the Validation Secretary as this will create delays in the process, hampering the Panel’s ability to consider the documentation.

When the School are satisfied that they have the final version of this documentation, this should be submitted electronically to the Validation Secretary.

5.3.9 The pre-meeting of the panel

Once the documentation has been submitted and any outstanding issues or omissions have been resolved, the Validation Panel will be provided with the submission at least two weeks before the event. The Validation Secretary will, at the same time of arranging the date of the Validation Event, have arranged a date for a pre-meeting of the Validation Panel.

The purpose of the pre-meeting is to enable the Panel to consider the documentation and identify any matters arising which will need discussion at the Event. The Chair will also take the opportunity to assign key issues to Panel members, for them to lead the discussion on that issue at the Event. Panel members will also be able to ask any process questions they may have, although this can also be facilitated by contacting the ADQE Office in advance or arranging a briefing. Student Panel Members will be offered a briefing as a matter of course.

The ADQE Panel Member will produce a briefing matrix based on a reading of the documentation, highlighting issues that the Panel may wish to raise with the Course Team. This matrix will be used to guide the discussion at the pre-meeting.

The pre-meeting will be attended by all members of the Validation Panel. The Independent Academic and Independent Stakeholder members will be invited to submit written comments if they are unable to attend.
5.4 The Validation Event

The event itself will normally last between two and four hours, depending on the number of proposed courses under consideration and the complexity of the issues that require discussion. The meeting will follow a standard format:

- Private meeting of Panel
- Course Team arrival and introductory remarks from Chair
- Introduction of the proposal from the Course Team
- Discussion of the proposal
- Panel discussion in private to determine outcome
- Communication of outcome to Course Team

The Validation Secretary will record the proceedings of the Event.

5.4.1 Private meeting

The Private meeting of the Validation Panel will last approximately 15 to 30 minutes. The Chair will remind Panel members of the agenda and the process to be followed. The Chair will also confirm the issues that Panel members will lead on.

The Course Team will then arrive at the venue. The Chair will make introductions and confirm the agenda with the Course Team.

5.4.2 Introduction of course proposal

The Course Team will be asked to give a brief verbal introduction of the course, ensuring that any deviations from standard University policy or process are highlighted for the Panel. This introduction should not take the form of a formal presentation as this will replicate the material present in the submitted documentation. This will leave more time for substantive discussion.

5.4.3 Discussion

The Panel will then ask the Course Team questions concerning, but not limited to, the categories previously indicated. This session will usually last between 60 and 90 minutes but may be longer depending on the nature of the proposal.

5.4.4 Deliberation

The Course Team will be asked to leave the room at this point to enable the Panel to undertake a private discussion of their findings and to determine an outcome. This discussion should take no longer than 30 minutes and the Course Team should be given a time to return to hear the panel's feedback.

The possible outcomes are as follows:
- Approval of the proposal without amendment (full validation)
- Approval of the proposal subject to specific conditions (conditional validation).
(Note: until the conditions set have been satisfied, students cannot be admitted to the course.)

- Rejection of the proposal with advice to the Course Team as to the reasons for doing so.

5.4.5 Communication of outcomes

The Course Team will be invited back into the room and will be informed by the Chair of the outcome of the Validation Event. The Chair will also inform the Course Team of:

- Any conditions that must be met before the granting of validation, including the dates by which they should be satisfied (normally within four weeks of the validation event).
- Any recommendations from the Panel that the School should consider in order to enhance the provision of the course
- Any commendations from the Panel arising from the identification of best practice.

Any items of best practice will be communicated to the Teaching and Learning Strategic Enhancement Sub-committee to ensure that this is captured and promulgated amongst the wider University community.

5.5 Completion of process

The Validation Secretary will produce a summary report, to be approved by the Chair, which will be distributed to all participants no later than one week following the Event. This report will confirm the outcome together with any conditions (with a timescale for the required response), recommendations or commendations.

The Validation Secretary will then produce a full report, also to be approved by the Chair, which will be distributed to all participants no later than three weeks following the Event. This report will provide further detail of the discussion that took place at the event.

The Chair of the panel will have the authority to approve the satisfactory response to the validation conditions and recommendations to enable the course to attain full validation status.

Each meeting of the University Education Committee will receive a standing report of courses validated.
6. Curriculum development processes

6.1 Introduction

The University’s course and module development processes enable changes to be made to validated provision in light of continuous reflection and enhancement of the curriculum.

School Teaching and Learning Committees (STLC) are the bodies with responsibility for the approval of curriculum changes. Approved changes are then formally reported to University Education Committee (UEC).

This section of the Handbook provides details on the curriculum change and development processes available to staff, the timescale governing when changes can be made, and the authorisation that must be obtained before changes may be implemented. The guidance in this section is presented as a series of tables, which show the process required for each type of change, at a glance.

The academic development cycle commences with the first meetings of Portfolio Approval Committee (PAC) and STLC in the Autumn Semester and concludes with the Summer Semester meeting of UEC.

Proposals made outside of the academic development cycle that impact upon the scheduling of teaching and assessment will not normally be considered.

Proposals that could result in the University not meeting its obligations under consumer law will not be considered (e.g. a proposed wholesale change to a course a matter of weeks before students are admitted).

Please note that the forms referred to in sections 6.2 to 6.7 can be obtained via the web links provided in Appendix 1 of this handbook.
## 6.2 Course-level changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of change</th>
<th>Approval authority</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Forms and documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Major revision of a    | PAC                | If a School wishes to change a course so substantially that all stages of the course are affected, then the School should submit the revised course to Portfolio Approval Committee as if it were a new course, starting from Stage 1 of the process. This applies even where the title of the award is itself unchanged. Schools intending to do this should ensure that such a change follows the timescale for new courses. Such changes will be treated as new courses and will normally only be introduced for new cohorts. Schools wishing to propose major course revisions should refer to Section 3 of this document for details of the process to be followed. | PAC Stage 1 proposal form  
PAC Stage 2 proposal form  
Course overview document  
Course specification  
New module specifications  
Existing module specifications  
Course handbook                                                                                               |
<p>| course                  |                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Change to a course title| PAC                | A request to change the title of a course is considered to be a major curriculum change. A title change impacts on the degree title that students receive and has implications for many of the business processes of the University. Schools are required to specify proposed timescales for course title changes and should note that changes are unlikely to be approved for implementation in the middle of a recruitment cycle, where there would be a disruptive impact on existing applicants. Schools should contact the Admissions Office to discuss the likely operational impact of any proposed title change. Approval should be obtained from the Autumn Semester meeting of STLC. Final approval will then be given by PAC for implementation at the next appropriate opportunity. | Major change to a course or pathway                                                                         |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of change</th>
<th>Approval authority</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Forms and documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changes to mode of study (full-time, part-time and distance learning)</td>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>A request to change the modes of study by which a course is offered to students is considered to be a major curriculum change. Removing modes of study may impact upon resourcing in the School and across the University, as well as the student experience, and thus requires approval from the Portfolio Approval Committee. Initial approval should be obtained from the Autumn Semester meeting of STLC. Where there is a proposal to offer a course by distance learning, then a validation event may be required.</td>
<td>Major change to a course or pathway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes to course structure or course-level learning outcomes</td>
<td>STLC</td>
<td>A revision to the structure of the course is considered to be a major change. This includes:</td>
<td>Major change to a course or pathway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Revising the credit weighting of a module;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Adding or removing an optional strand;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The removal or addition of core, optional or elective modules.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A revision of the course-level learning outcomes is also considered to be a major change. All of these changes are likely to substantially impact on the experience of students taking the course and so must be carefully managed so as to maintain standards. Approval should be obtained from the Autumn Semester meetings of STLC.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.3 Changes to pathways

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of change</th>
<th>Approval authority</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Forms and documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changes to pathway structure or learning outcomes</td>
<td>STLC</td>
<td>A revision to the structure of a pathway is considered to be a major change. This includes:</td>
<td>Major change to a course or pathway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Revising which modules comprise the pathway;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Revision to the pathway’s learning outcomes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>All of these changes are likely to substantially impact on the experience of students taking the pathway and so must be carefully managed so as to maintain standards. Approval should be obtained from the Autumn Semester meetings of STLC.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.4 Course and pathway suspensions and withdrawals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of change</th>
<th>Approval authority</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Forms and documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal of a course or pathway</td>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>A request to withdraw a course or pathway should, in the first instance, be made to the first possible meeting of STLC. Schools may consult the Admissions Office to discuss the likely impact of any proposal to withdraw or suspend a course. Once approval from STLC has been gained, the School should submit the proposal form to PAC. PAC will determine whether the withdrawal is in the University’s interests. This will enable the removal of a course or pathway in good time for the following admissions cycle. It is important that Schools appreciate that withdrawal of an undergraduate course in the middle of an applications cycle is not permissible. Therefore, Schools should propose withdrawals for the first appropriate year unaffected by the current applications cycle.</td>
<td>Proposal to withdraw/suspend a course/pathway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension of a course or pathway</td>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>Suspension in this instance means the temporary withdrawal of a course or pathway from being offered to new students for admission. Suspension is for a time-limited period of up to two years, and the inclusive dates of the suspension must be recorded on CMS. If, following the initial two years of suspension, the School makes a further request to suspend the course or pathway then this will be treated as a withdrawal. A request to suspend a course or pathway should, in the first instance be made to the first possible meeting of STLC. Once approval has been gained, the School should submit the proposal form to the next appropriate meeting of PAC, which will determine whether the suspension is in the University’s interests. This will enable the removal of a course or pathway in good time for the following academic year.</td>
<td>Proposal to withdraw/suspend a course/pathway</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 6.5 New modules, module suspensions and withdrawals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of change</th>
<th>Approval authority</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Forms and documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New modules</td>
<td>STLC</td>
<td>Approval of a new undergraduate or postgraduate module, in addition to those considered as part of a validation event, is considered to be major curriculum change. This is because new modules substantively change the courses for which they are core or optional, with important implications for the experience of students taking them. Approval should be obtained from the Autumn Semester meetings of STLC.</td>
<td>Proposal for a new module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal of a module</td>
<td>STLC</td>
<td>Withdrawal of a module is considered to be a major curriculum change, given the potential impact on a particular course or even a number of courses. This is because the module may be core, or is an option so that withdrawal results in a more limited choice for students. Staff should be mindful of the effect that the withdrawal will have, consulting relevant course convenors as appropriate. Evidence of this consultation will be expected as part of the submitted proposal. Approval should be obtained from the Autumn Semester meetings of STLC. This process should be followed regardless of whether the module is core, optional or an elective.</td>
<td>Proposal for withdrawal or suspension of a module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of change</td>
<td>Approval authority</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Forms and documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension of a module</td>
<td>STLC</td>
<td>Suspension in this instance means the temporary withdrawal of a module from being offered to students. Despite the temporary nature of the suspension, this constitutes a major curriculum change given the reduction in student choice and subsequent implication for the student experience. 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. If, following the initial two years of suspension, the School makes a further request to suspend the module, this will be treated as a withdrawal. A request to suspend a module should, in the first instance be made to the Autumn meetings of STLC. This process should be followed regardless of whether the module is core, optional or an elective.</td>
<td>Proposal for withdrawal or suspension of a module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacement of a module on a course</td>
<td>STLC</td>
<td>This curriculum development change can be achieved through a combination of submitting concurrent new module and withdrawal proposal forms. The respective processes should be followed in each case, with both forms noting the interdependence of the proposed change.</td>
<td>Form: Proposal for withdrawal or suspension of a module Form: Proposal for a new module</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.6 Module-level changes

Module-level changes are defined as either major or minor, and are approved by STLCs. The following table sets out the categories of change that are possible and the approving authority.

It is essential that any module changes relating to outlines, assessment modes or syllabus rules are made only at the autumn meeting of STLC, in order that the changes remain compliant with the University’s Curriculum Management and Consumer Law Policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of change</th>
<th>Major or minor</th>
<th>Approval authority</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Forms and documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Module title</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>STLC</td>
<td>These changes are classed as major owing to their significant impact upon the experience of students taking the affected courses.</td>
<td>Major change to a module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning outcomes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assessment modes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Assessment weightings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Module content</td>
<td>Minor</td>
<td>STLC</td>
<td>These changes are classed as minor owing to their moderate impact upon the experience of students taking the affected modules. Even after proposals for minor changes have been approved, the learning outcomes of the module will remain constant, ensuring that students successfully completing the module will still be able to reach the same end point.</td>
<td>Minor changes need only be recorded in the minutes of the STLC meeting that approves them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reading lists</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Assessment schedule</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Assessment length</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Teaching methods</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
6.7 Variation of study

Variation of study takes place where students vary their modules from those published as part of the validated course. Variation of study of up to 30 credits is permitted at level 7 only, to facilitate interdisciplinarity, but only where timetabling permits.

Approval for this type of change must be obtained from the module convenor, course convenor, and Director of Teaching and Learning. Variations of study that are approved will then be noted at UEC. Applications for a variation of study may be rejected based on academic judgement regarding the proposed variation and/or the academic performance of the student. The Director of Teaching and Learning must ensure that the learning outcomes of any core modules missed can be met and that the level and credit volume of study is academically appropriate.

Variation of study is not permitted at levels 3 - 6, since students are provided with extensive choice through Sussex Choice. There are three, exceptional circumstances in which undergraduate students can apply to vary their study:

i. To accommodate a study abroad semester

ii. To enable a student who has successfully completed a 60 credit pathway at stages 1 and 2, to transfer to the corresponding major/minor degree title, where one exists.

iii. To enable students to replace a failed 15 credit module with the mark of a module taken from the International Summer School portfolio, at the appropriate level.
7. Curriculum information management

7.1. Introduction

The purpose of this section is to clarify where responsibility for the management of course data resides and to detail the protocol that underpins this. Staff should adhere to the protocol below to ensure that course data is recorded accurately and is compliant with the University’s quality assurance processes. This protocol allows the University to have confidence that the educational provision offered by Schools is of an appropriate quality, is aligned to its strategy and policies, and can be delivered as effectively as possible with respect to available resources.

The quality of curriculum data is also critical to ensuring the University’s compliance with consumer law. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) have issued clear guidance that HE institutions should provide to students “the clear, accurate and timely information they need so they can make an informed decision about what and where to study.” (CMA, March 2015). It is therefore clear that all staff involved in curriculum development have a duty to ensure that the University meets this obligation. The following protocol will provide guidance on how to achieve this.

Overall responsibility for the management of curriculum data resides with the Academic Development and Quality Enhancement (ADQE) Office. If academic or Professional Services staff have any questions regarding this protocol, these may be referred to the ADQE Curriculum Team. Responsibility for the accurate completion of proposal forms resides with the School.

7.2. New courses and pathways

7.2.1. Portfolio Approval Committee

The first instance of course data being recorded in the Course Management System (CMS) occurs following approval of a new course (Stage 2 approval) or pathway title at Portfolio Approval Committee (PAC). Following approval, the PAC Secretary informs the School(s) of the approval and at the same time informs relevant contacts in Professional Services that a new course or pathway title has been agreed. These Professional Services contacts are:

- The Prospectus Editor, who will need to know that new content will be required for the online and print prospectuses. New course pages in the prospectus will need to incorporate a ‘subject to validation’ caveat at this stage, so as not to give the appearance to applicants that the course has been approved to admit students. However, recruitment activities are permitted at this stage. New pathways will also need to be added to relevant publications in both online and print formats.

- The ADQE Curriculum Team, who will need to create a new course or pathway record in CMS. New course records will be given a status of ‘OUTLINE’. The Team will

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2 In all circumstances, outcomes of PAC should be communicated to the Head of School (HoS) and Director of Teaching and Learning (DTL), copying in the Curriculum and Assessment Officer (CAO) where this is appropriate.
then also ensure that a Validation Secretary is appointed to take forward the University’s quality assurance process.

- The **Admissions Team**, who will need to set up a UCAS code (UG only) and will need to be in a position to advise applicants regarding the course.

- The **Finance Team**, who will need to factor the new course or pathway into their business systems.

No module records should be created at this stage in respect of new courses as only the title and general course concept will have been approved. Therefore, the Curriculum and Assessment Officer (CAO) in the School should not take any action at this time with respect to course data.

With regard to new pathways, the **CAO** will create the relevant new module records and inform the Student Systems Team that these have been created. The **ADQE Curriculum Team** will then attach these modules to the pathway record in CMS.

### 7.2.2. Validation

The **Validation Secretary**, following validation of a new course, will inform the School of this fact. The Secretary will also inform the ADQE Curriculum Team and the Student Systems Team that a course has been validated, with the entire process having reached completion.

The **ADQE Curriculum Team** will then carry out the following actions:

- The course record on CMS is updated so that the course’s status changes to ‘CONFIRMED’

- Following this, the Team will contact the relevant CAO to inform them that they can begin to populate the course record with module and syllabus data.

- The Team will contact the Prospectus Editor to confirm that the ‘subject to validation’ caveat can be removed.

- The Team will contact the Student Systems Team, who will note that the course is now confirmed to start and will factor this into their timetabling and space planning.

The **CAO** will then create new module records and attach these to the course record, ensuring that these are in place prior to the beginning of the timetabling process for the following academic year. The **CAO** will also create the attendant syllabus rules for the course.

The addition of module and syllabus information concludes the data management process for the addition of new courses and pathways. **Figures 1 and 2** illustrate this process with further contextual information.
Figure 1: Portfolio Approval Committee (PAC) – business flow for new courses and pathways

1. **School discusses and agrees new course/pathway proposal (informal development/STLC)**
2. **School submits Stage 1 proposal to PAC Secretary by deadline**
3. **PAC considers Stage 1 proposal and Secretary informs School of outcome (approval/further work/rejection) within 5 working days**
4. **PAC considers Stage 2 proposal and Secretary informs School of outcome (approval/further work/rejection)**
5. **School submits Stage 2 proposal to PAC Secretary by deadline (or Stage 1 if resubmitting)**
6. **If Stage 1 approved then School develops proposal further in concert with Finance and Market Research teams**
7. **PAC Secretary informs Professional Services of outcome**
8. **ADQE Curriculum Team add course title to CMS with 'outline' approval status**
9. **Course may proceed to validation. School and ADQE Office commence arrangements.**
Figure 2: Course validation – business flow

Secretary to validation panel arranges meeting with School to discuss process, logistics and paperwork

School prepares documentation; Secretary arranges validation event

School submits documentation to validation Secretary three weeks in advance of event

If necessary, School resubmits documentation and course is either approved or rejected.

Course is either validated or School undertakes further course development.

Validation event takes place. Secretary produces summary report of outcomes including actions for School.

Once validated, the Secretary notifies the Prospectus Editor that the course is no longer subject to validation. ADQE updates course status on CMS to ‘confirmed’

The Curriculum and Assessment Officer (CAO) creates the approved modules in CMS and attaches these to the course along with any existing modules.

The CAO creates the Syllabus Rules for the course.
7.3. New modules

New modules are added to CMS as an outcome of one of three processes: approval by a School Teaching and Learning Committee (STLC); approval of a new pathway by PAC; validation of a new course.

7.3.1. Approval by STLC

Following approval from STLC, the CAO will add new modules, attaching them to a course or courses in CMS as appropriate. If the module forms part of a pathway, the CAO should contact the ADQE Curriculum Team to ensure that these modules are attached to the pathway record in CMS.

7.3.2. Approval of a new pathway by PAC

Please refer to the protocol governing the new pathway approval process, as detailed previously.

7.3.3. Validation

Please refer to the protocol governing the validation process, as detailed previously.

7.4. Major changes to course structures and modules

Major changes to course structures and modules can occur as a result of one of three processes: approval by STLC; School Periodic Review; validation.

7.4.1. Approval by STLC

Following approval by STLC of a major change, the CAO will then enact the change in CMS as appropriate. Figure 3 illustrates this process with further contextual information.

7.4.2. School Periodic Review

During the School Periodic Review process, the Panel will review the current educational provision of the School. It is possible that, following this consideration, the Panel will recommend changes to the curriculum in order to enhance the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and/or the wider student experience.

Following approval of any major changes by the Panel, which is chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education and Students), the Review Panel Secretary will contact the relevant DTL and CAO with details of the changes.

The CAO will then proceed to enact the change in CMS as appropriate.

7.4.3. Validation

Please refer to the protocol governing the validation process, as detailed previously.
7.5. Minor changes

Minor changes to modules can occur as a result of one of three processes: Approval by School Teaching and Learning Committee (STLC); School Periodic Review; validation

7.5.1. Approval by STLC

Following approval of minor changes by STLC, the CAO should implement these changes immediately. Figure 3 illustrates this process with further contextual information.

7.5.2. School Periodic Review and Validation

It is conceivable that minor changes to the curriculum could be required following either a School Periodic Review or a validation event. The CAO should follow the same procedure as for the implementation of a major change.
Figure 3: Curriculum development – business flow

School holds development meetings to determine appropriate changes

School ensures that changes impacting upon the course structure or assessment are submitted no later than the Semester 1 meeting of STLC

STLC determines whether to approve changes

STLC Secretary informs Convenors of outcomes

Proposals are approved, rejected or revert back to the Convenor for further development

CAOs update database in line with approved outcomes
7.6. Suspensions and withdrawals of courses or pathways

The suspension or withdrawal of a course or pathway is undertaken following approval by PAC, either following a proposal from the School or as a determination of deliberations held at a PAC meeting.

Following approval of the suspension of a course or pathway by PAC, the PAC Secretary informs the School of the outcome and at the same time informs relevant contacts in Professional Services that a course or pathway has been suspended or withdrawn. These Professional Services contacts are:

- The Prospectus Editor will need to know that the course or pathway should be removed from online and, if possible, print resources, so that students do not erroneously apply for a course that is unavailable.

- The ADQE Curriculum Team will need to amend the course or pathway record in CMS so that it is given a status of ‘SUSPENDED’ or ‘WITHDRAWN’. For suspensions, the Team will then also ensure that at the point the course is due to be reinstated, that the status of the course for the forthcoming academic year is ‘CONFIRMED’.

- The Admissions Team, who will need to be in a position to advise applicants correctly as to the current and future availability of the course or pathway.

- The Finance Team, who will need to factor the suspension into their business systems.

It is current policy that, following suspension of a course or pathway for a maximum of two academic years, a proposal for a further suspension will trigger an automatic withdrawal. The ADQE Curriculum Team will consult with the School and, if necessary inform the PAC Secretary that withdrawal of a course is required.

It is also conceivable that a suspension or withdrawal of a course or pathway could be required following a School Periodic Review. The Review Panel Secretary should ensure that confirmation of this is sent to the School, the PAC Secretary, and the ADQE Curriculum Team who can then implement this change using the process detailed above.

Figure 4 illustrates this process with further contextual information.
Figure 4: Portfolio Approval Committee (PAC) – business flow for course and pathway withdrawals or suspensions

School holds internal discussion regarding potential withdrawal or suspension

STLC determines whether to recommend withdrawal/suspension of course or pathway

Withdrawal/suspension pro forma submitted to PAC Secretary by stated deadline

PAC Secretary informs School and relevant Professional Services of outcomes

Alternatively, PAC decides to withdraw course or pathway as part of their deliberations

PAC approves or rejects proposals submitted by School

ADQE Curriculum Manager changes status of course or pathway on CMS to withdrawn/suspended from relevant academic year
7.7. Module suspensions or withdrawals

The suspension or withdrawal of a module is undertaken following approval by STLC.

Following approval of the suspension or withdrawal of a module by STLC, the CAO will then proceed to enact the change in CMS as appropriate.

It is also conceivable that a module suspension or withdrawal could be required following a School Periodic Review. The Review Panel Secretary should ensure that confirmation of this is sent to the School, including the CAO, who can then implement this change using the process detailed above.
Appendix 1: List of academic development forms and associated web links

The following documents relating to new course proposals and validations can be found at this website: [http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/curriculum/newcourseapproval](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/curriculum/newcourseapproval)

**New course proposals**
- BSMS Postgraduate Course Proposal
- New Major/Minor course proposal
- New Pathway Proposal – 60 credits
- New Pathway Proposal – 90 credits
- Stage 1 Undergraduate Course Proposal for PAC
- Stage 1 Postgraduate Course Proposal for PAC
- Stage 2 Undergraduate Course Proposal for PAC
- Stage 2 Postgraduate Course Proposal for PAC
- Proposal to suspend/withdraw a course/pathway

**Validations**
- Course Overview Document
- New Foundation/Undergraduate Course Specification
- New Postgraduate Course Specification
- New Module Template

The following documents relating to curriculum development can be found at this website: [http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/curriculum/curriculumdevelopment](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/curriculum/curriculumdevelopment)

**New Module Template**
- Proposal for a Major Change to a Course or Pathway
- Proposal for a Major Change to a Module
- Proposal to Withdraw or Suspend a Module
- STLC Curriculum Development Report
- Request for a variation of study

Documents relating to variations of study can be found at this website [http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/curriculum/variation-of-study](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/curriculum/variation-of-study)
### Appendix 2: Reference documents for academic development

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<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Published by</th>
<th>Relevance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Development Handbook</td>
<td>ADQE, University of Sussex</td>
<td>This handbook provides detail on how new course and pathway approval, validation of new courses, and curriculum development operate at the University.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Framework</td>
<td>ADQE, University of Sussex</td>
<td>Staff can refer to the Framework to understand the approved structures for courses at the University.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examinations and Assessment Handbook</td>
<td>ADQE, University of Sussex</td>
<td>This handbook provides details on how assessment should operate at the University. Proposed development should conform to the principles and regulations contained within this document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modes of assessment</td>
<td>ADQE, University of Sussex</td>
<td>Provides a list of the approved modes of assessment that can be offered to students as part of a course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn to Transform Strategy</td>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>Explains the University’s intentions with regard to the provision of courses, pathways and modules to students. Proposed developments should adhere to the Strategy.</td>
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The above documents can be located at the following webpage:

http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/documents

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<tr>
<td>School Learn to Transform Strategy</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Explains how the University Teaching and Learning Strategy will be delivered at a School level. Proposed developments should also reflect this local Strategy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framework of Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)</td>
<td>QAA</td>
<td>Courses at the University must adhere to this framework. This will be ensured in practice by developing courses in line with the University’s Academic Framework. This document is aligned with the FHEQ, ensuring that the University’s awards commensurate with UK standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree Characteristics</td>
<td>QAA</td>
<td>Provides specific guidance relevant to the design of taught postgraduate provision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Benchmarks</td>
<td>QAA</td>
<td>Provides detailed statements on the expected outcomes for degree qualifications in particular subjects. Courses should be able to demonstrate an appropriate relationship to the relevant benchmark, where this is available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK Quality Code for Higher Education</td>
<td>QAA</td>
<td>Contains guidance on the expectations that the QAA has of HE institutions, in order that they and the general public can be assured of the quality of their academic provision. This is a higher level document but contains useful principles that should inform all academic development.</td>
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