PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY

APPROVAL PROCESS (INCORPORATING ALL FOUR STAGES OF INITIATION, BUSINESS CASE, PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRAMME APPROVAL)

Introduction:
The current approval process was approved by the Teaching and Learning Committee in November 2011. This document outlines the process and should be read alongside the approval process flow diagram.

Initiation stage

- The initial idea for a new programme within any faculty will be discussed at an early stage in a meeting between the programme proposer, the Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) (ADTL) and the Head of School (HoS). It is important that the Senior Administrator (Quality) (SAQ) is fully informed of initial developments and the approximate schedule discussed and agreed with him/her. If the programme lead (for the purposes of approval) is to be different to the programme proposer then that person should also be confirmed at the time of the initial discussion. The main agenda items for the initial discussion will be the feasibility and 'University level' risk associated with the proposal. Consideration should be given to reputational and ethical risks as well as the impact on resources. A list of guidance questions has been developed. (Based on risk assessment)
- Once risk has been defined then consideration of the appropriate approval route can take place (Route A – for High risk programmes or Route B – for Low risk programmes). It is envisaged that the proposed route and an approximate schedule will also be decided during the initial discussion meeting.
- A decision will be made by the HoS to proceed to further planning and it is the responsibility of the HoS to also communicate this decision to the Faculty Executive and ensure that the SAQ is fully informed.

1 The process presupposes that approval arrangements might also need to be agreed in liaison with appropriate professional bodies (where applicable)
Business Case

- A proposal team must be established within the faculty and further consultation should take place with internal and external stakeholders (to include students).
- The SAQ/Faculty Quality will schedule all proposed approval dates, offering support to the programme lead, with the ADTL, regarding panel membership. It is the responsibility of the programme lead to nominate suitable external advisors.
- New programme proformas must then be completed by the proposal team: - there are two documents New programme proforma (Summary sheet/Business Case/Risk Assessment) and Resource Planning Form/programme costing form. (please see Academic Development & Partnerships Committee (ADPC) internal community for latest forms) The latter form together with the risk assessment must be agreed within the faculty by HoS, Faculty Business Manager (FBM), programme lead, SAQ and relevant faculty finance representative.
- The ADTL checks final programme proformas and confirms approval Route A or B, prior to sending to Faculty Executive (FE) for sign off (the Dean, as chair of FE would hence be confirming his/her approval of the Business Case) The originally proposed approval dates are now confirmed by SAQ/Faculty Quality.
- Following FE sign-off the HoS is responsible for emailing the Academic Development & Partnerships Committee (ADPC) with decision/route and proformas. This email confirms faculty agreement and ownership of risk and finances. It is important that the SAQ is copied into this email.
- ADPC will consider the proformas, focusing on the Business Case and Risk Assessment sections for Route A proposals. Proformas for Route B (Light touch) proposals will also be sent to ADPC for information (as starred items). Decision making criteria for ADPC will be limited to Rationale/Market Research/Resources and financial viability/Risk Assessment.
- There are three possible outcomes of an ADPC meeting:- 1) Approved to proceed to programme approval stage; 2) Referred back to Faculty for reworking prior to programme approval stage. ADPC may possibly ask to see reworked documentation; 3) Rejected.
- Once approval to proceed has been given a Notification of Programme details form – Unit-e must be submitted to Gateway Services Data Support.

2 The SAQ would also consult with professional bodies (where applicable)
Programme Development

- Detailed programme documentation will now be developed, comprising the following – Approval Documentation, Programme Specification, Operational Specification and Module Records. Guidance and requisite templates are provided in a separate section within the QA Handbook.
- An important statement to be included within the Approval documentation but which also comprises a mandatory activity within the programme development stage is confirmation (or otherwise) from the ADTL that the business case remains unchanged from earlier in the process.
- The ADTL will sign off documentation prior to distribution by the SAQ/Faculty Quality to the full approval panel (normally three weeks in advance of approval event)\(^3\). It is important that panel members have sufficient time to scrutinise the documentation fully prior to the approval event. In the event of documentation not being available for sign off/distribution by the appropriate date, the approval event will normally be cancelled and rescheduled for the following academic year.

Programme Approval

- Formal approval events will be scheduled by the faculty SAQ and will follow the composition for either Route A or Route B as given below:-
- **Route A (High Risk) approval** - Panel membership will comprise **as a core**: Chair (senior academic from different faculty), 1 other senior academic (usually proposing faculty ADTL, except where that person has an interest/involvement in the proposal) and 2 external advisers (one academic and one professional), 1 student representative (from different faculty) and the SAQ who will service the meeting and prepare minutes and actions.
- **Route B (Low Risk) approval** – Panel membership will comprise **as a core**: Chair (faculty ADTL (or nominee), except where that person has an interest/involvement in the proposal), at least one academic representative from another faculty and at least one external (preferably academic). It is expected that a conversation is completed with the external at the approval event, normally this will be by attendance, but where this is not possible a conference call/skype interchange/video conference is recommended.
- Faculties may wish to consider using attendance at approval events as a development opportunity for other staff (such individuals would not be members of the approval panel, but would receive documentation prior to the approval event and a copy of the final report)
- The approval event will focus on discussion with the programme team. The emphasis of these discussions should be on learning outcomes and

\(^3\) For programmes with professional body requirements the SAQ will be able to confirm any revised timescales
curriculum; teaching, learning and assessment strategies, research, scholarly activity and staff development which underpin the proposed programme and study support, regulations, exceptions to regulations (please see aide-memoire for approvals). Please note that resource issues are approved at the planning stage and are not the subject of further discussion at approval. It is expected that all resource implications will be considered for both route A and route B proposals.

- At the end of the event the Chair will summarise the outcomes of the panel and inform the proposal team. The programme may be:
  - Approved without conditions;
  - Approved subject to conditions to be fulfilled by specified dates and/or
  - Approved with recommendations which the proposal team is asked to address;
  - Not approved

- Report (or minutes/actions) will be prepared by the SAQ and will detail the outcomes (as given above), a summary of the approval event’s discussions and the date by which revised documentation must be submitted to SAQ. The report (minutes/actions), which must be approved by the Chair and panel and team members, should follow the report template.

- There must be evidence that all conditions of approval have been fulfilled and recommendations appropriately considered before a programme can commence; this will normally include amendments to programme document. This may take the form of a brief response to the conditions and recommendations by the programme lead; approval will be sought from and confirmed by the Chair of the panel. Final documentation must be signed-off by the faculty Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning); a Student Handbook must be produced and signed-off following approval.

A new award title form must be completed by the SQA, ensuring that all relevant units are advised of appropriate details, together with an updated Notification of Programme details form – Unit-e (to Gateway Services Data Support). The SAQ will also ensure that the new programme approval will be reported to Faculty Executive / ADC/ University Teaching and Learning Committee.

- Any review of the process will take place within the faculty between the SAQ, ADTL and the programme lead and feedback comments referred to Central Quality Office.

Review of existing programmes:

It is expected that each programme will be updated regularly and programme teams can trigger a re-approval as required.
All existing programmes will be included in subject periodic review every 5-6 years. Following this it is required that programmes will be updated to reflect the outcomes of the review. The periodic review may also determine the process to be followed for this update, eg, whether route A or B approval should be followed.