UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

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

Introduction:

The current approval process was approved by the University Teaching and Learning Committee in November 2011. This document outlines the process and should be read alongside the approval process flow diagram. In the 2016-17 academic year Academic Development and Partnerships Committee (ADPC) approved the principle that henceforth it would require demonstration of a clear link between Faculty Plans and proposals coming forward for programme development. Where this linkage was not apparent, ADPC would expect proposals to have been discussed with the DVC (International and Planning) prior to them being put to the Committee.

Both the University Teaching and Learning Committee and ADPC furthermore noted that “Consumer legislation” now required prospective students/applicants to be provided with “all material information” they needed to be able to make an informed decision about whether or not to make an application for a University programme. A list of this information is at Annex 1 of this document.

- **Implications for programme approval:**
  - In order to finalise the "material information" and hence comply fully with consumer legislation, programme approval must be completed (i.e. all conditions fulfilled) no later than **12 months before the programme is due to commence.** ([ie September 2018 for a September 2019 start]
  - Offers can be made to prospective students only when a programme has been fully approved (i.e. when all conditions have been fulfilled and all "material information" is available). Promotional activity may take place prior to final approval, but “holding” information must make the status of the course clear.
  - There will be specific circumstances where the above approval timeline cannot apply (e.g. when the University has the opportunity to bid for external funding for specific provision, or where it is approached by an external body to run bespoke programmes). In such cases, the reasons for an exception to the normal timeline must be considered and agreed by ADPC as part of the business case for the proposal.
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.

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)
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. Programme planning forms must be emailed to the Committee Administrator at least two weeks in advance of the meetings and must include electronic signatures. It is important that the SAQ is copied into this email

- ADPC will consider the proformas, focussing 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) Not approved. Following the ADPC meeting the outcome will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting; additionally the original planning forms will be authorised and published on the committee community. The Faculty SAQ will be notified when the authorised forms are available. ADPC minutes are circulated to members of the Committee and SAQs.

- Once approval to proceed has been given a Notification of Programme details form – Unit-e must be submitted to Student Records (Academic Registry).

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). 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 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

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4 For programmes with professional body requirements the SAQ will be able to confirm any revised timescales

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*Approved by University Teaching, Learning and Quality Committee – June 2014*

Minor adjustments July 2015. Substantial revisions in July 2017 (highlighted in red)
Approval Procedure 2017-18
(Highlights in blue indicate where forms/templates are available on web page)

- 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 Student Records (Academic Registry)). The SAQ will also ensure that the new programme approval will be reported to Faculty Executive / ADPC/ 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.
Annex 1

**Material information to be made available to all prospective applicants, as defined by the Competition and Markets Authority**

a) *“Course Information*, including:

   (i) course title;
   (ii) entry requirements/criteria (both academic and non-academic), and an indication of the standard/typical offer level criteria;
   (iii) core modules for the course and an indication of likely optional modules, including whether there are any optional modules that are generally provided each year;
   (iv) information about the composition of the course and how it will be delivered, and the balance between the various elements, such as the number and type of contact hours that students can expect (for example, lectures, seminars, work placements, feedback on assignments), the expected workload of students (for example the expected self-study time), and details about the general level of experience or status of the staff involved in delivering the different elements of the course;
   (v) the overall method(s) of assessment for the course, for example by exams, coursework or practical assessments, etc (or a combination of these);
   (vi) the award to be received on successful completion of the course and, if relevant, the awarding body or institution;
   (vii) location of study or possible locations, which should also include the likely or possible location of any work placements to be undertaken (where known);
   (viii) length of the course;
   (ix) whether the course and provider are regulated and by whom, for example, where an institution is regulated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England or the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales or has a specific course designation;
   (x) whether the course is accredited, for example by a professional, statutory or regulatory body, and by whom; and
   (xi) additionally, any particular terms, such as those in the HE provider’s rules and regulations, that apply to the course that students may find particularly surprising (such as, for example, a term explaining that the body awarding the degree is different to the HE provider running the course) or are otherwise important (such as, for example, any rules or regulations whose contravention might prevent a student from completing their course).*

(b) *“Total course costs*, including:

   (i) tuition fees – this should include, if applicable, whether fees in future years will increase and by how much (for example, in line with inflation). If increases will apply to only a certain group (such as international students) or in respect of a particular course, this should be made clear. If the future fee is not known, you should indicate clearly the criteria for any future changes and how these will be calculated. Any possible fee increases should be restricted to limited circumstances where the HE provider has valid reasons for making the change; and
   (ii) other extra costs students are likely to incur, for example for field trips, equipment, materials, bench fees or studio hire. You should indicate how much these extra costs are or are likely to be. Where they are unknown or uncertain, you should set out how they will be calculated and whether they are optional or mandatory for undertaking or passing the course. It is particularly important that
you highlight any course costs that are likely to have a direct impact on the outcome of students’ academic success, such as a field trip on which a piece of work will be based. You should also set out when and how fees and any extra costs are payable and when the student will become liable for payment.”

(c) Information on complaints procedures.
(d) Any other non course-related information relevant to the applicant’s choice (such as accommodation and funding).