



New Programmes and Modules Approval Procedure Collaborations

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The Collaborations Department can provide further guidance on the application of this policy and procedure as required.

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Version History

Version	Approved	Revisions made	Date
1	David Holliman	Chris Maskell	15/11/2023

1. Purpose

1.1 This procedure sets out the process for approval of new programmes and modules.

2. Scope

2.1 This procedure covers all module and programmes that lead to the award of academic credit and/or contribute to a higher education award at Level 4 or above in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). Proposers of provision set below Level 4 in the FHEQ, and/or not leading to the award of academic credit are still required to:

- Consider the guidance referenced in this procedure, along with any relevant national benchmarking criteria when designing the programme and to ensure good practice.
- Seek the comments of external advisors.
- Present the proposals, including any arrangements for resourcing to the Link Tutor and Faculty Dean for comment, scrutiny and approval, and to ensure the appropriate recording and sharing of decisions and documentation are reported to the Senate.

2.2 Link to 'Changes to Modules and Programme' Procedure

2.2.1 Where new modules are being introduced on existing programmes as a 'Major' change; and for existing programmes being redesigned, reapproved or replaced under the 'Review' category, this procedure should be read in conjunction with the 'Changes to Modules and Programmes' procedure. In particular, the requirements to consult and inform both prospective and current students should accord with the University's policy on making changes to programmes and modules.

2.3 Timing

2.3.1 Wherever possible, developments should normally take place within the annual planning cycle, i.e. in the case of a new Programme the process should start at least 12 months before the first planned intake. In the case of a new Module the process should start at least 6 months before. This is to ensure that there is sufficient time for consultation, development, external review, committee approval, marketing and timetabling activities to be undertaken before teaching commences.

2.4 Terminology

2.4.1 The University of Buckingham's educational provision is organised into Programmes and Modules.

2.4.2 A Programme is the prescribed combination of Modules (or other prescribed pattern of study) which, taken together, lead to a degree or other award of the University. Undergraduate Programmes are available through single, joint or combined honours or major/minor routes. Each requires its own Programme Specification and should be treated as a separate Programme.

2.4.3 A Module is the prescribed combination of study supported by lectures and tutorials, laboratory classes or other tuition, which normally constitutes the smallest element of separate assessment. Modules carry a weighting based on the principle of one unit for each 10 hours of notional learning time (i.e. the average time it takes a learner to acquire the specified learning outcomes). For



some international partners, Modules will carry a weighing based on the ECTS system and compares to the UK system in the following ways:

- 1 ECTS = 2 Units
- 1 ECTS = 25-30 notional learning hours

2.5 **Programme and Module Template Specifications**

2.5.1 All programmes and modules should be designed following the University's standard specification templates however collaborative partners are permitted to use their own existing templates providing they contain the adequate UK HE information contained on a Buckingham programme or module specification.

2.6 **External Reference Points**

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)

2.6.1 The FHEQ sets out qualification descriptors that set out the generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of individual qualifications. The fundamental premise of the FHEQ is that qualifications should be awarded on the basis of achievement of outcomes and attainment rather than years of study. When preparing or revising a module or programme, it is essential to ensure that all programmes and modules are aligned to the relevant qualification descriptor.

Subject Benchmark Statements

2.6.2 Subject benchmark statements set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject. Subject benchmark statements do not represent a national curriculum in a subject area. Rather, they allow for flexibility and innovation in programme design within an overall conceptual framework established by an academic subject community. They are intended to assist those involved in programme design, delivery and review and may also be of interest to prospective students and employers, seeking information about the nature and standards of awards in a subject area.

2.6.3 Subject benchmark statements are available for undergraduate degrees and master's degrees.

Characteristics Statements – Foundation, Masters and Doctoral

2.6.3 QAA also produce Characteristics Statements for Foundation, Masters, and Doctoral degrees. Where there is no subject specific Subject Benchmark Statement at Masters Level, reference should be made to the document. Programme proposers of provision set at these levels are required to ensure documentation reflects these external expectations.

UK Quality Code

2.6.4 The Quality Code sets out the formal expectations that all UK higher education providers are required to meet. It is the nationally agreed, definitive point of reference for all those involved in delivering higher education programmes that lead to an award from, or are validated by, a UK higher education awarding body (a provider entitled to



award degrees). All higher education providers reviewed by QAA must commit to meeting the Expectations that it sets out.

- 2.6.5 Although the University has prepared its procedures in line with the expectations of the UK Quality Code, staff should refer to certain pertinent chapters when designing their programmes or modules – for example, Part A (ensuring academic standards), and Chapters B6 (Assessment of students) and B4 (Student support).

Professional, Statutory, Regulatory Bodies (PSRB's)

- 2.6.6 PSRB's often regulate at the subject area, for example, the General Medical Council decides which bodies are entitled to award UK primary medical qualifications (PMQs), and the Solicitors Regulation Authority is the regulator responsible for the validation of Qualifying Law Degrees (QLDs). If the programme or module requires accreditation by a PSRB, then you must ensure in its design and any revisions to it, that the criteria of that body are met.
- 2.6.7 The University recognises that for some of its provision that is recognised by PSRBs, this approval procedure will be read in conjunction with any requirements from those bodies. Where the programme approval procedure of other regulating bodies affects the extent to which the University's procedure can be followed (for example, the 'external review' and 'outline approval' elements of this procedure are superseded by the regulations of the General Medical Council and General Dental Council), the Quality Assurance Office and the Chairman of the University Learning and Teaching Committee should be consulted to agree how such requirements should interlock with this procedure.

National Education Ministries and Other In-country Regulations

- 2.6.8 In some cases, a partner institution will need to conform to regulations and other stipulations related to their in-country activity. Where this occurs, the University will endeavour to accommodate these regulations where they do impinge on the quality standards set out by the above.

2.7 **Assessment Design**

- 2.7.1 The QAA have provided useful guidance on thinking about assessment design in their 'Understanding Assessment' publication and detail how to build assessment into the course design process, choose the methods of assessment, and agreeing the amount, timing, and weighting of assessment tasks.
- 2.7.2 SEEC's 'How to Use Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria' provides useful guidance when designing programmes.

2.8 **Disability Guidance**

- 2.8.1 The University has produced guidance on Implementing the Disability Policy - <https://www.buckingham.ac.uk/student-life/disability-and-access/>

2.9 **External Reviews**

Anonymous Subject Specialist Reviews



- 2.9.1 Higher education providers are expected to “ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards” (UK Quality Code for HE, Chapter A5). In relation to new programme approval, institutions should “make use of external participation at key stages...as independence and objectivity are essential to provide confidence that the standards and quality of the programmes are appropriate” (UK Quality Code for HE, Chapter B1).
- 2.9.2 All new programmes and modules must therefore undergo External Review (either by correspondence or through a validation event) before they are approved. To ensure independence and objectivity, formal External Reviews should not be sought from AAC Members, or external examiners currently working for Buckingham, or those who have been an external examiner at the University within the past five years.
- 2.9.3 The Collaborations Department holds a register of approved External Reviewers in some subject areas, and the Collaborations Manager or Link Tutor approves all reviewers. Programme and Module Directors are also encouraged to suggest suitable reviewers to the Collaborations Department. All candidates will be approached by the Collaborations Department.

2.10 **Business Case**

- 2.10.1 Proposers of new programmes are required to develop a Business Case for approval by the Executive Committee. This is to ensure that all new programmes are financially sustainable. The process is the same regardless of whether this is setting up a new collaborative partnership or adding new programmes to existing partnership where a signed agreement is in place.

2.11 **Undergraduate and Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas**

Subject-specific awards:

- 2.11.1 To be awarded a ‘Diploma/Certificate of Higher Education in (subject)’ or a ‘Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate in (subject)’ each award must:

- Be set at the correct level.
- Include the correct balance of credits at each level.
- Have learning outcomes in the curricula that reflect the correct level of the award.

- 2.11.2 These criteria must be reflected in a separate programme specification from any related full undergraduate or postgraduate award.

- 2.11.3 In establishing how each award might be given to satisfy these three criteria, Programme Directors may wish to consider using one of the following methods to select the module components:

1. **Core Module Group Only** - Specify exactly which modules must be taken and passed (i.e. specific modules from the full undergraduate bachelors or postgraduate masters award).
2. **Core Module Group Plus Optional Modules** - Specify a core group of modules that must be taken and passed AND specify an ‘optional bank’ of modules where a combination can be taken and passed.



3. **Optional Modules Only** - Specify modules where any combination must be taken and passed.

This would provide the most flexibility in making the award. However, it would be necessary to ensure that the choice of modules enabled the achievement of the intended learning outcomes to be demonstrated.

- 2.11.4 Module mapping is very helpful when writing intended learning outcomes for different awards as it clearly demonstrates how module learning outcomes at different levels contribute to programme learning outcomes. The Collaborations Department can provide help with module mapping.
- 2.11.5 All new programme specifications and regulations pertaining to the award of diplomas and certificates should be reviewed by at least one external reviewer and approved by a validation panel.
- 2.11.6 If Special Regulations are required, a Collaborations Manager should be consulted to ensure consistency with University Regulations.

3. New Programmes and Modules Approval Procedure

3.1 Initial Consultations – Between Buckingham and Partner Institution

- 3.1.1 Collaborative Partner - Consult a Collaborations Manager to ensure that the award is permitted under University Regulations, and that any proposed Special Regulations for the award are also consistent with University / Partner Regulations.
- 3.1.2 Collaborative Partner - Consult a Collaborations Manager regarding programme and module specification requirements, approval documentation, QAA guidance, potential external reviewers and timeline for approval.
- 3.1.3 Collaborative Partner - Obtain initial approval from the Head of Collaborations via Collaborations Manager.
- 3.1.4 Collaborative Partner - Consult colleagues and others internally with expertise in the area.
- 3.1.5 Collaborative Partner - Consult other Module and Programme Directors and Heads of Department (or equivalent) regarding implications for other provision including major/minors.
- 3.1.6 Collaborative Partner - Consult the relevant timetabling and quality support staff (or equivalent) regarding information on other courses and/or programmes which may be affected; seek advice on the practicality of the proposal in relation to teaching facilities, timetable and examination requirements.
- 3.1.7 *Collaborative Partner - Consult the Library and IT Department (or equivalent) regarding required resources.
- 3.1.8 *Collaborative Partner - Consult with the visa compliance officer (or equivalent) to establish whether the programme complies with visa requirements (mode of teaching and attendance requirements).
- 3.1.9 Collaborative Partner - Consult with the Head of HR to identify staffing needs.



3.1.10 Collaborative Partner - Consult Marketing and Admissions staff (or equivalent) regarding student demand and minimum numbers, marketing plan and viability.

3.1.11 Collaborative Partner - Consult with students and employers to establish demand. For the replacement of a programme of study with a new programme, or complete redesign and reapproval of a programme of study, students must be consulted in accordance with that procedure, where that new programme or module replaces relates to the programme structure they are currently studying.

*For franchise arrangements Buckingham may need to consult with internal departments within the university.

*For validation arrangements collaborative partners will need to consult with their own internal departments or equivalent.

3.2 Detailed Development

3.2.1 For new programmes and modules, a complete Business Case form should be completed – see Collaborations Handbook Section 2 Business Case Approval

3.2.2 Ensure that the business case takes account of the Disability Policy and any ethical implications of the proposal have been addressed. The Collaborations Department can provide assistance in this area by sign posting to relevant University Departments.

3.2.3 Resourcing Requirements:

Clarify availability of teaching staff (or develop a plan for recruiting them).

- Ensure the availability of a budget to meet the needs of the proposal.
- Clarify availability of library and IT resources (or develop a plan for providing them).
- Clarify availability of teaching and timetabling space.
- Clarify any examination or assessment requirements have been provided for.
- Clarify any Health and Safety requirements have been met.

3.2.4 Once approved by the Portfolio Group on behalf of the Executive Group, advertisement of the programme may take place pending full academic validation and this must be made clear on all advertisements which must be approved by the University before they are made live. Offers to students cannot be made and student fees cannot be collected until full academic validation has taken place.

3.3 Academic Validation and Documentation Requirements

3.3.1 Create the following documentation:

- Programme Specification
- Module Specifications
- Module Map of Learning Outcomes
- Assessment Matrix

Templates are available from the Collaborations Department, and this can be done in consultation with a Collaborations Manager and/or Link Tutor.

Ensure that the proposal reflects that you have taken account of:

- The QAA Framework for HE Qualifications (FHEQ)
- The relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statement(s)



- The relevant chapters from the UK Quality Code (notably Chapters B1 (Programme design and approval) B4 (Student Support) and B6 (Assessment of Students)).
- The requirements of any PSRB's

3.4 External Reviews/Validation Events

3.4.1 Collaboration Manager to recruit and ascertain the views of Independent External Subject Specialists/Reviewers. Partners may suggest possible names, but these individuals must meet the following criteria:

- A high degree of competence and experience in the fields covered by the programme of study, or parts thereof, and have a good understanding of the UK higher education sector.
- Experience in course design and student assessment at the level of the award.
- Academic experience and subject knowledge to assess standards in an effective manner, competent in identifying good practice and recommending enhancements to enable informed course development.
- Provide impartial judgement, wholly independent of the provider and its staff (including the governing body), and any relevant partners.
- Must not personally benefit from the Partner, nor have any connection to the management or governance of the Partner.
- Relevant variety of institutional or professional contexts and traditions in order that the programme benefits from wide- ranging external scrutiny.
- Comply with all relevant employment legislation, including safeguarding, as appropriate.
- Not be currently employed by the University or the Partner.

3.4.2 Reviewers are approved by the Collaborations Manager and Link Tutor.

3.4.3 In some instances, a review may be held via correspondence e.g. where a limited number of new modules are being considered however, best practice will call for a Validation Event especially where full programmes are being considered.

3.4.4 The Collaborations Department will ensure that External Reviewers receive a copy of the full programme/module documentation.

External Reviewers should also receive a Context Document / Programme Overview (Section 3 - 3.9 Programme and Modules Overview Document) which includes details such as rationale for the programme (found in Business Case), type of programme, mode of delivery, structure, special arrangements such as industry placements etc.

The above documents are also sent to the UALTC representative and the (proposed) Link Tutor.

External Reviewers should be given a reasonable timeframe to review documentation, ideally this will be a minimum of two weeks.

Within this timeframe, a pre-validation meeting should be held with the External Reviewer to discuss the documents provided and provide any additional information requested by the external before the Validation Event.

3.4.5 Major changes to programmes or modules cannot be made after External Review has been sought unless recommended and detailed by the External Reviewer or in Committee Stage.



3.4.6 A date for a Validation Event will be set and attended by:

- Head of Collaborations (Chair)
- Collaborations Manager / Coordinator (Secretary)
- Representatives from the Partner (CEO, Director, Rector, Programme Lead and any other relevant Academic or administrative staff)
- Link Tutor (or representative from University Faculty)
- Representative from University UALTC
- External Reviewer(s)

A Validation Event can be held in person or online.

3.4.7 The outcome of a Validation Event will usually be:

- Approved*
- Approved provided minor amendments are made.
- Return to stage 2 or 3.

3.4.8 Where Approved, full marketing may begin, offers to students may be made and student fees can be collected. All advertising must be reviewed by the University to comply with CMA guidelines - <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-wellbeing-and-protection/value-for-money-what-should-providers-do/consumer-protection/>

3.5 Final Revisions and Approval

3.5.1 Partner to amend documentation in the light of feedback from External Reviewer(s) and University. This is then reviewed by the relevant staff and a decision is then made:

- Approved
- Additional Amendments Required
- Rejected

3.6 Next Steps

3.6.1 The Collaboration Department will then work with the partner to collate the following documentation for the beginning of teaching. Please note this list is not exhaustive:

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Modern Slavery Statement
- Disability Policy
- Recruitment and Selection Policy
- Fitness to Study Policy and Procedure
- Applicant Appeals and Complaints Policy and Procedure
- Academic Regulations (progression, classification etc.)
- Academic Integrity Policy / Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure
- Non-Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedure
- Mitigating Circumstances Policy and Procedure
- Academic Appeals Policy and Procedure
- Attendance and Engagement Policy
- Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Student Complaints Policy and Procedure
- Drugs, Alcohol and Other Substances Abuse Policy



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- Social Media Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Suicide Prevention and Response Policy
- Mental Health Policy
- Guidance for Student Work and Field Placement
- Green Flag Marking Policy
- Use of University Computer and Data Networks