



New Programme Approval and Validation

PROCEDURE AND GUIDANCE NOTES

Version Number:	Version 2
Document Owner	Deputy Head of Academic Services (Quality)
Document Status:	Approved
Date Approved:	Autumn 2025
Approved By:	Senate
Review Period:	Biennial
Review Date:	Autumn 2027



Contents

Section One: Introduction, Purpose and Scope

1. Introduction	3
2. Purpose	3
3. Scope.....	3
4. Internal Reference Points	3
5. External Reference Points.....	3
a. Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).....	3
b. Subject Benchmark Statements	4
c. Characteristics Statements – Foundation, Masters and Doctoral.....	4
d. UK Quality Code.....	4
e. Office for Students (OfS).....	4
f. Professional, Statutory, Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs).....	4

Section 2: Approvals..... 5

1. Portfolio Development Group (PDG)	5
2. New Taught Course Approvals.....	5
3. New Research Course Approvals	5
4. New Apprenticeship Courses	6
5. New Collaboration Courses.....	6
6. Re-activated Courses	6
7. Part Validation - New Replacement Module Approvals	6
8. Changing Award Title	6

Section Three: Validation Panels

1. Terms of Reference.....	8
3. Membership.....	8
4. Documentation	10
5. Terms of Business (ToB) (Agenda)	11
6. Validation Panel Outcomes.....	11
7. External Reviewer (ER).....	12
8. Conflict of Interest	13

Section 4: Administration

1. Reporting	14
2. Communication of New Course Approvals	14
3. Document Retention.....	14
4. Roles and Responsibilities.....	14



Section One: Introduction, Purpose and Scope

1. Introduction

The guidance notes and procedure have been prepared to ensure consistency with the Office for Students (OfS) Conditions of Registration, UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Consumer Protection Law, and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

The aim is to ensure that the University of Buckingham sets and maintains approval systems that are high-quality leading to valued qualifications, with explicit positive learning outcomes for our students.

The central Quality Team can provide further guidance on the application of this procedure and guidance documents as required. Any minor deviation from the agreed procedure would require agreement from the Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer, and any major changes to the procedure require approval from Senate.

2. Purpose

Validation is the process through which the University establishes that a course is academically viable, that academic standards have been appropriately defined and that it will offer students the best opportunity to learn. It is about assuring quality through internal and external peer review and adds value by enhancing the quality of the proposal.

The use of a Validation Panel will enable the University to approve courses on a more flexible and responsive basis and in a manner more akin to the wider sector while reducing burden for the University Assessment, Learning and Teaching Committee (UALTC).

Note: In lieu of validation, all research courses need to be approved by their respective Faculty Research Committee (FRC) followed by final approval of University Research Committee (URC), having first gone through the Portfolio Development Group (PDG) and recommendation to the Executive Group.

All new courses and change requests will be reported to UALTC and URC respectively each term. New Collaborations provisions also need to be reported to the University Collaborations Committee (UCC).

3. Scope

The Validation Panel is applicable to all university faculties and schools, including courses which are delivered as part of the University's Collaborations provision. However, in terms of the intended membership of the Panel, for collaborative partner institutions, membership should be made up of those in equivalent roles within their institution.

4. Internal Reference Points

The design of courses in this procedure should be done in alignment with the University's Academic and Assessment Framework, as well as the general regulations for first and higher degrees. The central Quality Team or the Faculty Quality Manager (FQM) should be consulted if you are unsure whether other internal regulations are applicable to course design.

All of the requisite documentation which needs to be completed, as well as samples of previous course business cases and course and module specifications are available on the Quality Assurance SharePoint site.

5. External Reference Points

All University of Buckingham courses must be in alignment with the following external reference points:

a. Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)

The FHEQ sets out qualification descriptors for generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of individual qualifications. The fundamental premise of the FHEQ is that qualifications should be awarded based on achievement of outcomes and attainment rather than years of study.



b. Subject Benchmark Statements

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) publishes Subject Benchmark Statements, setting 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 course design within an overall conceptual framework established by an academic subject community. They are intended to assist those involved in course 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.

c. Characteristics Statements – Foundation, Masters and Doctoral

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

d. UK Quality Code

The UK 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 courses 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 the QAA must commit to meeting the expectations that it sets out.

e. Office for Students (OfS)

All course creation and validation should be done in alignment with the OfS expectations and its conditions of registration. All courses need to be designed in alignment with Condition B3 of registration.

f. Professional, Statutory, Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)

PSRBs 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 course 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.



Section 2: Approvals

1. Portfolio Development Group (PDG)

The Portfolio Development Group (PDG) is the first stage of endorsement for all new university courses. The Group comprises senior staff whose remit is to evaluate new course business cases against market and financial indicators pre-development.

The PDG will be convened on a termly basis in alignment with the University's academic calendar.

The PDG members will consider the impact of the new provision, whether it aligns with the University's strategy and market demand, as well as identify any potential risks to the University and key stakeholders and assist with their mitigation prior to making recommendation for approval to the Executive Group. The PDG is the first point of review for the course proposal and Business Case.

The PDG does not have approval powers; however, it is responsible for making initial recommendations to the Executive Group regarding course provisions.

2. New Taught Course Approvals

All new taught courses will all need to first go through the PDG for the Business Case stage. Following this, the course will then go to the Executive Group for consent. This includes all new taught non-credit bearing provisions which are to be advertised as part of the University's academic portfolio. Finally, all new taught, credit-bearing courses will be subject to approval by a Validation Panel. In cases where a new course is made up of less than 25% new modules, the validation can be conducted by correspondence. This procedure provides the information, documentation and timescales required to achieve course approval.

3. New Research Course Approvals

Options and Definitions:

1. Opening an entry point for a research student
 - a. For the creation of an entry point
2. PhD by Published Works
 - a. available to existing members of the University of some years' standing
 - b. for one year with a nominal fee
 - c. only applicable where "standard" PhDs are already offered in the proposed area of the award
3. New Course (named award) including New MA/MSc by Research, or PhD Course
 - a. *for students following a designated, organised research course requiring appointment of a Course Director and/or seminars, visits etc.*

Approval route for Option 1

- Paper submission of proposal to Faculty Executive Committee (FEC)
- Validation and pre-approval by FRC
- Final approval by URC

Approval route for Option 2:

- Wholly covered by the Research Degrees Handbook and requires no additional form of validation other than ensuring that all the steps laid out in the Research Degrees Handbook are followed

Approval route for Option 3:

- Proposal discussion and recommendations by FRC
- Business Case and Financial supporting sheet for proposed new research course to be completed and submitted to the PDG



In instances in which a research course has any form of taught component which is being offered as a credit bearing portion of the research provision the taught component / any assessment which is being offered outside the main credit of the course is to be validated separately in line with the validation procedure.

4. New Apprenticeship Courses

The Apprenticeship Manager should be consulted at the concept stage to ensure compliance with funding rules before submission to the PDG and subsequent Validation Panel. The following documents must be included before a Validation Panel is convened:

- Approved Assessment Plan and Funding Band
- Approved End Point Assessment Organisation (EPAO)
- Delivery Schedule
- ESFA Funding Rules Criteria
- Financial Viability (costings) Criteria

The Apprenticeship Manager will support in the creation of these specific documents.

Considerations for the proposal of all apprenticeship provisions should be reviewed in line with the documentation available here: [2.4 Apprenticeship Business Case and Validation Guidance .docx](#)

5. New Collaboration Courses

Where the course is a Collaboration, this will follow the current New Course Approval procedure; however, to align with other jurisdictions, and meet the scrutiny requirements, there is additional documentation which needs to be incorporated as part of the validation process.

In the makeup of the Validation Panel, membership needs to accommodate the staff of partner institutions, and the roles within the Collaboration's team.

6. Re-activated Courses

Where a course has previously been de-activated or suspended, the following rules will apply regarding course re-activation and approval:

- More than two years: full re-validation of course
- Less than two years (with no changes): no re-validation required
- Less than two years (with changes): follow the current Changes to Provision procedure
- PhDs: no re-validation required.

All courses to be re-activated will first need to go through the PDG to justify why they need re-activation, to review if they still align with the University's strategy and academic portfolio.

7. Part Validation - New Replacement Module Approvals

A part-validation event will be held for the following specific change requests:

- New or replacement modules (up to and including 25% of the course credit value)
 - ***New or replacement module changes greater than 25% of a course credit value will require a full Validation Panel.***
- Where 25% or less of a course credit value will be changed and/or replaced as new, this request can be approved by correspondence.

8. Changing Award title

In instances where the title of an existing award is being changed, or a new award is being created compiled from pre-existing academic content, a Validation Panel needs to be conducted via correspondence. If all members are



happy the course can be validated; if issues or concerns are raised from the content, then the course will need to go through a full Validation Panel to address those issues and any concerns raised.



Section Three: Validation Panels

1. Terms of Reference

Approval to convene a Validation Panel will be confirmed by the Dean once the FQM receives notification that the course has been endorsed by the Executive Group.

It will be usual that the new course would have been discussed with several of the validation panel members throughout the design and build process, so this approval element should be more of a final check as opposed to a brand-new sighting for the members.

Validation Panel members are asked to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed new course; this will include consideration of:

- The rationale for the new course, including sustainability
- The overall philosophy, aims and objectives of the course and how they have been developed in line with the University's pedagogical principles
- The curriculum, considering its content, design, level, delivery and assessment journey
- Appropriateness of any blended and/or online learning environments and materials
- The course takes regard for equality and accessibility for all learners
- The relevance of the course, with reference to the appropriate QAA Subject Benchmark Statement where available and the requirements of any Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)
- Teaching and learning strategies, including the student experience offered and the opportunities for employment and/or further study it may bring

It is expected that because of the membership including external parties, Validation Panels will be convened remotely using Microsoft Teams.

It is expected that all elements and stages of the current New Course Procedure (Section 2 of the Quality Handbook) will have been completed before a Validation Panel is convened and that appropriate reading and reflective time is allocated following receipt of all documentation. [Quality Handbook | University of Buckingham.](#)

The FQM will support the Chair in the co-ordination of the Validation Panel, which will be serviced by the FQM's nominee. If the requisite paperwork and supporting documents are not in place or the Chair feels that the paperwork is sub-standard then, on agreement with the FQM, the Validation Panel shall be postponed.

Validation Panels can be called at any time within a term at the convenience of membership diaries and will operate under delegated authority from UALTC. UALTC has the final delegated powers regarding course approvals.

The Validation Panel can approve more than one new course (or large module change) in a sitting, as long as the membership reflects the expertise needed for all new courses to be approved.

PSRB timelines and requirements must be adopted throughout, recognising that these may supersede any university policies or procedures.

3. Membership

Validation Panel Meetings

Core membership of any Validation Panel must include the following:

- School/course representative (Course Director)
 - of the school where the course will be managed
- Chair and Internal Reviewer (IR)
 - Minimum of Course Director/Dean/Dean of School from another faculty
- External Reviewer (ER)



- This may be an external examiner, industry expert appropriate to the proposed course or another person with the required skills, expertise and experience to carry out the role
- Representative of UALTC
 - This can either be the Chair or the Vice-chair of UALTC. If neither one is available, then this can be the Chair's nominee from the UALTC members. The UALTC nominee cannot be the Dean/Dean of School in which the course is being delivered.
- FQM
 - The FQM represents quality assurance issues relating to the course, including alignment with any relevant PSRB and regulatory requirements, as well as internal regulators. If the FQM is unavailable, the Deputy Head of Academic Services (Quality) should be invited in their absence.

Servicing Officer:

- FQM's nominee

Attendees (as required):

- Finance Business Partner (FBP)
- A member of the Careers and Employability Team
- Additional academic representation
- Student representation
- Apprenticeships Manager
- PSRB representative
- Collaborations Manager and/or Academic Link Tutor
- Library Manager and/or other learning services representatives
- Faculty Administration Manager
- Faculty Registrar

In instances where an attendee is unavailable, but their input is required, then it is suggested that they should be asked to provide some brief feedback by correspondence, to be included and circulated with the Validation Panel papers in advance.

Validation Panels by Correspondence

For those examples listed above, in which a full validation is not required, it might instead be required that a validation be conducted by correspondence. In these instances, panel members should be given two weeks to read all the provided paperwork and make any decisions. The following people need to be included in a validation by correspondence:

- School/course representative (Course Director)
- Two additional academic representatives (Course Director or above) from the discipline or a related subject discipline
- External Reviewer
- FQM
- Faculty Registrar
- UALTC Representative
- Dean/Dean of School

Required attendees should also be incorporated into validations by correspondence.

Should comment from academic staff not be received within the two-week window for validation by correspondence, tacit approval should be assumed. The only member who is required under all circumstances to give express approval is the External Reviewer.



Validation Panel for Collaborations Courses

- Chair and Internal Reviewer (IR)
 - This is an academic colleague, minimum of Course Director/Dean/Dean of School from another faculty
- School/course representative
 - Academic Link Tutor for the course, or in their absence the minimum of a Course Director/Senior lecturer from the area.
- Director of Collaborations and Business Development
- Representatives from the Partner (CEO, Director, Rector, Course Lead and any other relevant Academic or administrative staff)
- Representative from UALTC
- FQM or Deputy Head of Academic Services (Quality)
- External Reviewer(s)
- Dean of School – should they be unavailable then they need to nominate a representative

Servicing Officer:

- Collaborations Manager/Co-ordinator (also a panel member)

Attendees from the University of Buckingham (as required):

- Finance Business Partner (FBP)
- Additional academic representation
- Faculty Administration Manager
- Faculty Registrar

Due to the additional associated risk of Collaborations courses, those which fall outside the standard change's procedure cannot be validated by correspondence.

In instances where there are collaborations partners who follow alternative practices to the University of Buckingham, but their practices are already established, consideration should be made for the partners reasoning for maintaining their practices in relation to course management.

4. Documentation

To do their job effectively, panel members need time to read the documentation thoroughly and to seek clarification in advance (as mentioned within the Memberships section). Therefore, the documentation pack should be circulated to all members a minimum of three weeks prior to the Validation Panel meeting, or two weeks for review for validations by correspondence.

Members will be expected to submit any initial concerns to the Chair of the Validation Panel within a week of receipt. It is expected that there will be dialogue between the members, with a view to clarifying as many issues as possible in advance of the Validation Panel event to allow the process to be as effective as possible.

The FQM ensures that the panel members receive a copy of the full documentation and a statement of any proposed variation or departure from QAA guidelines as required from the Course Director. Where a significant shortfall is identified upon receipt of the documentation pack, this should be brought to the attention of the Chair and/or FQM.

The full documentation pack is as follows:

- Consultation Form
- Course Specification(s)
- Module Specification(s)
- Module Mapping Template
- Assessment Matrix Template
- Calendar Entry Grid (Diet)



- Copies of applicable Subject Benchmark Statements
- Professional Skills Mapping Matrix
- Statement of verification from the proposer that any relevant PSRB requirements are satisfied
- Dean/Executive Group provisional approval report
- Validation Panel Checklist
- In instances in which the External Reviewer is unable to attend in person, then the External Reviewer's written feedback should be submitted to the Validation Panel event.

In instances where it is felt that the paperwork provided is sub-standard or has been provided too close to the Validation Panel, the Validation Panel will be cancelled and re-convened on receipt of completed paperwork.

NOTE: Business Cases and financial spreadsheets should not be circulated to all panel members as they may include financially sensitive information. These documents will have already been seen by the Executive Group to allow the new course to proceed. For completeness they can be circulated to internal stakeholders but should not as standard be sent externally as part of the review.

5. Terms of Business (ToB) (Agenda)

Below is the proposed core ToB, with additional items added that may be specific to the course being reviewed by the Chair as required. Should multiple courses be being reviewed within one validation event, then these ToB should be followed from point 2. onwards for each course.

1. Welcome and Declarations of Interest
2. Overview of the Course (by the proposing Course Director)
3. Curricula
 - a. Structure and appropriateness of the curriculum
 - b. Development in line with the University's pedagogical principles
 - c. Overall coherence of the course
 - d. Alignment with national benchmarking
 - e. Alignment with PSRB
 - f. Other regulatory considerations
4. Learning, Teaching and Assessment
 - a. Positive learning outcomes for learners
 - b. Appropriateness of any blended and/or online learning environments and materials
 - c. Innovation, creativity and distinctiveness
 - d. Balance of assessment methods
5. Student
 - a. Preparing students for intended purpose
 - b. The course takes regard for equality and accessibility for all learners
 - c. Routes for employment and/or further study
6. Resources
 - a. Course management and administration
 - b. Staffing and staff development
 - c. University resource impact:
 - i. Library
 - ii. Professional Services
 - iii. IT provision
 - iv. Physical space/room availability

6. Validation Panel Outcomes

There are three possible outcomes from a Validation Panel:

- Approved



- with or without conditions or recommendations, with or without an end date. The decision is to approve the course (or changes to modules).
- Not Approved
 - an invitation to re-submit (based on conditions, recommendations or observations given by the panel)
- Not Approved
 - recommendation that the proposal be withdrawn

The Chair will approve a draft of the records taken by the Servicing Officer and the subsequent recommendations and/or decisions taken. This report should be sent to the Dean of the faculty submitting the new course for final approval and sign-off.

Where a course requires follow-up to any of the conditions, the Course Director is responsible for co-ordinating the activity and evidence to submit to the panel members by correspondence that the appropriate changes have been made. All approvals following the initial panel can be made by correspondence.

NOTE: An agreement for approval is defined as four core Validation Panel members agreeing, of which one must be the External Reviewer. Where agreement is not reached, moderation will be managed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor and Provost and/or Chair of UALTC. They will also be responsible for final decisions in instances in which approvals have been made in full by a validation panel, but the Dean has concerns regarding the approvals, the decision should then be delegated to the Pro Vice Chancellor or the Chair UALTC for final consideration.

7. External Reviewer (ER)

An ER can be a non-academic, such as an industry leader or expert. The recruitment of an ER to a Validation Panel will be based on criteria of qualifications and experience depending on the course level and unit value of the new course to be approved.

It is expected that a University academic will recommend a relevant, experienced ER (or Academic Services will support) and set out the criteria of experience, qualifications etc. required. It is anticipated that the recruitment process of an ER can be carried out by the FQM based on this set of criteria.

The criteria for the ER will be taken from the current External Examiner Code of Practice and adapted to the wider employment types to be used (e.g. academic, employer or PSRB).

Approval of an ER will be with the Chair of UALTC for taught provision or Chair of URC for research provision. In either case of absence, the Pro Vice-Chancellor and Provost will approve the ER.

Nomination forms will be adapted using the current External Examiner Code of Practice. As appropriate an existing External Examiner can be used as an ER, provided there is no conflict with their duties.

In alignment with QAA External Examiner expectations, the ER needs to be suited to the subject they are reviewing and cannot have had a previous relationship with the University in the past five years (unless they are still in post as an External Examiner, or it has historically just been as an ER).

Fees

The External Reviewer should be compensated for their contribution as follows:

Type	Fee
Foundation/Undergraduate programme	£100 per programme
Taught Postgraduate programme	£75 per programme
Postgraduate Research	£50 per programme



8. Conflict of Interest

Where a University of Buckingham colleague is also an External Examiner or ER for the ER's institution, a declaration of the potential conflict of interest will be made to the Chair of the Validation Panel. The Chair of the Validation Panel will decide whether the ER or colleague can attend, or a new ER must be found.



Section 4: Administration

1. Reporting

All associated forms and documentation will be recorded and processed via the FQM, with completion being done by the Course Director or the Academic Link Tutor. A record of all new course approvals will be reported monthly to the Deans and termly to UALTC and URC via the central Quality Team.

2. Communication of New Course Approvals

A summary communication named 'Curriculum Bulletin' containing all new course approvals across the University will be made available to all academic staff and staff and students at the end of each term .

3. Document Retention

All documentation associated with a Validation Panel will be kept in a secure folder held within the Quality Assurance SharePoint site. Access to this folder will be restricted to the Academic Compliance team members and FQMs. Documentation will be held for seven years. This will ensure that all documentation held is the latest version. Versions of documentation which are held on personal drives will not be accepted as evidence from the Validation Panel.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibility	Role
Creation and collation of all new course documentation as per the University's New Course Procedure (Quality Handbook section 2)	Course Director
Business Case approval	Executive Group
Nomination of External Reviewer	Course Director
Appointment of Validation Panel Chair	Faculty Quality Manager
Approval of External Reviewer appointment	Chair of UALTC or URC Pro Vice-Chancellor Academic and Provost
Selection and appointment of Validation Panel members	Chair of Validation Panel/Faculty Quality Manager
Arrangement of the Validation Panel event	Faculty Quality Manager
Creation and submission of Validation Panel event documentation	Course Director
Collation and distribution of Validation Panel event documentation	Faculty Quality Manager
Servicing of the Validation Panel event	Faculty Quality Manager's nominee
Validation Panel document retention (SharePoint)	Faculty Quality Manager