Higher Education

Programme Approval, Periodic Review Process and Termination
of Validated Programmes

Owner	HE Office
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Contents

1   New Programmes and Revalidations

1.1   Introduction

New Programme Design refers to the creation and design of a new higher education award to be delivered by the College.

Periodic Programme Review refers to the re-design and development of an existing higher education award delivered by the College, once it has reached the end of its approval period.

Consultation is a key element in the design of programme approval and periodic review. The Higher Education Office (HEO) will provide support and advice throughout the process but as curriculum experts, it is the programme team that will be responsible for creating the award and its content.

Internally, every programme must:

- Reflect the key features of the Learning Teaching and Assessment Handbook.
- Utilise Generic Marking Criteria (see Assessment and Feedback Policy).
- Comply with other relevant policies (the HEO will provide guidance on relevant policies).

Externally, programmes must comply with:

- The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Quality Code.
- Incorporate relevant qualification characteristics and subject benchmarks.
- Satisfy any Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements.

1.2   The Approval/Revalidation Process

The flowchart shown in Figure 1 (page 4) depicts the steps and stages involved in the approval or review of an award. It is the responsibility of the College to plan and prepare all documentation for programme approval or periodic review up to the point of the approval/revalidation event. The authority to approve/reapprove the award rests with the validating partner.

Once the approval/revalidation schedule is agreed with the validating partner, the agreed deadlines must be adhered to. The events are scheduled to accommodate the availability of external panel members as well as College and validating partner institutional processes. Failure to meet the deadlines will result in an event being cancelled. The opportunity to re-schedule and event within the same academic year cannot be guaranteed, so the approval may be postponed to the following year.

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┌─────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────┐
│      NEW AWARDS         │        │    PERIODIC REVIEW      │
│                         │        │                         │
│  Proposals for potential│        │  HEO advises directorates│
│  programme development  │        │  of impending periodic  │
│  discussed between HEO  │        │  review and sets schedule│
│  & Directorates         │        │                         │
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New or amended title added to the approval schedule & HEO initiates meetings and support for development team

Programme team to research and present title for approval to PVC

Title not approved ← → Title approved

HEO to negotiate approval schedule with validating partner and advise marketing to ensure UCAS listing and promotion.

Programme Team to produce and submit approval documentation for internal approval before submission to validating partner.

Approval/Revalidation Event

Programme Team/College to address any conditions of approval set by the Approval Panel

Conditions Not Met ← → Conditions Met
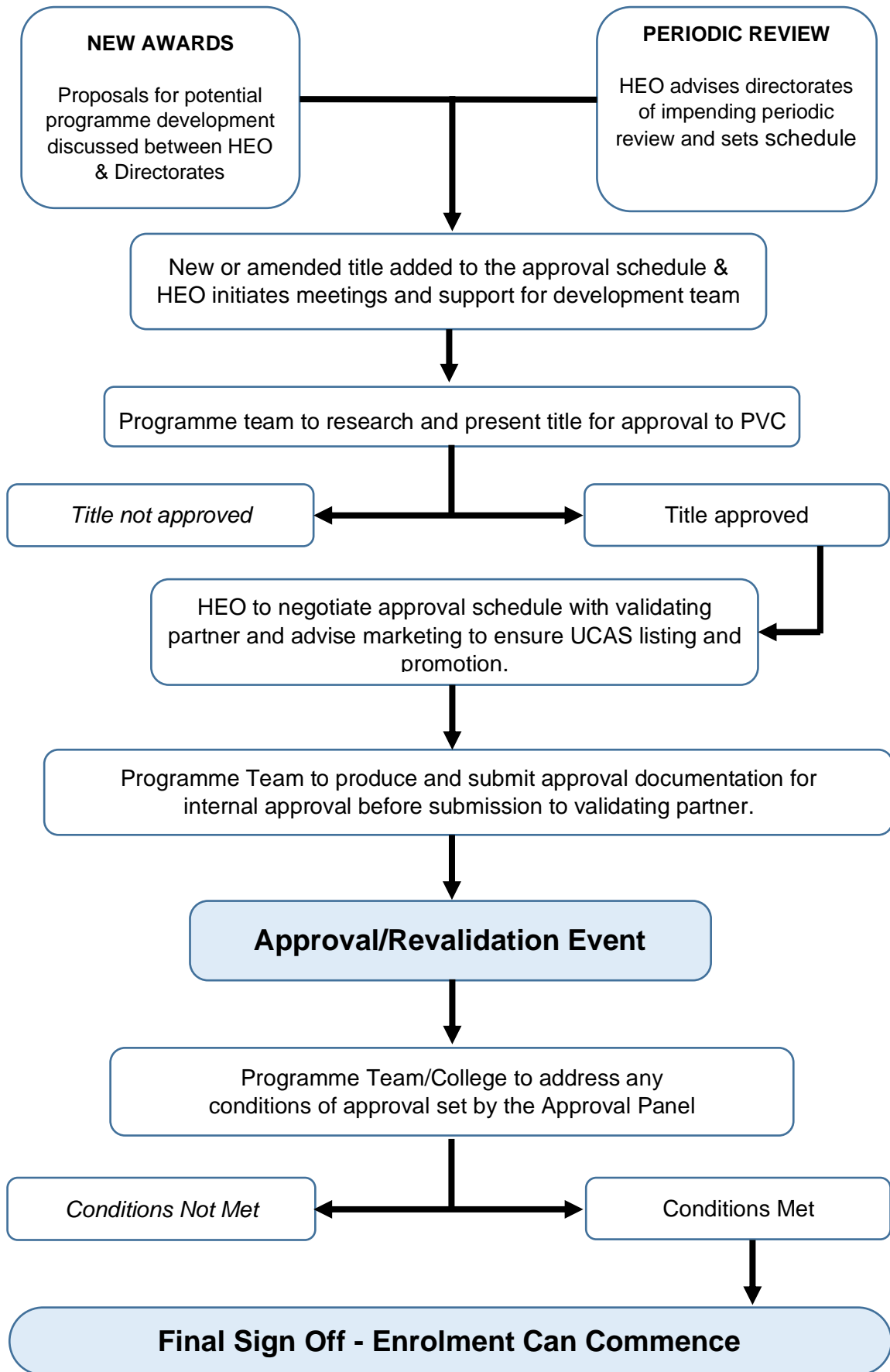
Final Sign Off - Enrolment Can Commence

Figure 1

1.3 Documentation Required for Approval/Revalidation

The documentation required for approval is provided by the validating partner. While the titles and structure may differ, they all follow broadly the same process and will include the following content and key documents (NB – different partners may allocate content differently to that depicted below):

1.3.1 Module Specifications

Key indicative content:

- Module title and description
- Module aims and learning outcomes
- Indicative content and delivery method
- Learning, teaching and assessment strategy
- Map of learning outcomes to assessments
- Key resources required for delivery (books, journals, e-resources, specialist equipment)

1.3.2 Programme Specification

Key indicative content:

- Programme title, description and unique features
- Programme aims, learning outcomes, level specific learning outcomes
- Programme learning, teaching and assessment strategy
- Map of programme outcomes to modules
- Programme structure and delivery model
- Programme resources, including staffing
- How students will be supported

1.3.3 Background/Critical Appraisal Document

Key indicative content:

- Rationale for the programme
- Key factors influencing demand and potential sources of recruitment
- Map of programme to external reference sources, including;
- The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
- The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code)
- Relevant subject benchmark statements
- Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements
- National Occupational Standard qualifications
- An analysis of existing provision, including the current award if already in approval
- College quality standards that will influence the programme

1.3.4 Draft Student Handbook

The content of the Student Handbook will be a combination of the above presented in a 'student-friendly' format. In addition, it will also provide students with direction to key

documentation or hyperlinks concerning academic regulations that govern their programme of study.

1.4 Internal Approval Process

Before the final set of documentation is submitted to the validating partner for formal review, all of the documents will be subject to internal scrutiny by the College. This process will be led by the HEO and will consist of regular review meetings with a member of the HEO team and a final approval process organised by the Higher Education Standards Committee. Depending upon demand, this may be carried out remotely with feedback provided to the team.

1.5 The Approval/Review Event

The purpose of the Approval/Review Event is to assure the validating partner that the programme meets the expectations of the Quality Code and consequently their own standards. Good practice guidelines are that this assurance is sought by a properly constituted Panel. The exact constitution of the Panel will be determined by the partner's own processes, but is likely to include:

- Panel Chair
- Academic librarian
- Subject experts, normally from the partner, although if the subject is an area in which they have no expertise, they may appoint an external consultant
- Independent panel member usually from a non-subject specialist area of the partner;
- Quality lead from the partner
- External subject expert – usually from another university
- Service user
- Student representative
- PSRB representative if required.

The process will follow good practice guidelines as set out in the Quality Code and involve the following key steps:

Desk based analysis of the documentation submitted in support of the validation/review. Meetings with:

- College managers and other appropriate staff
- The programme team (NB – it is important that as many of the team attend as possible to reassure that Panel that the expertise and support for the delivery of the award is in place)
- Students (if the award is being submitted for review)
- Panel consideration of the feedback received from the above meetings
- Feedback to the team including;
- The decision to recommend approval to the partner's academic board
- The rationale for the decision reached
- The period for which the approval is valid
- Any conditions which must be met before final approval is granted.

1.6   Final Sign-Off

Until all conditions of approval have been met to the satisfaction of the Chair and the panel, approval remains conditional. Once conditions have been met, formal approval will be sought from the partner's Academic Board. Only upon receipt of this approval, can students be enrolled to the programme of study.

2   Changes Between Scheduled Reviews

2.1   Module/Programme Modifications

The procedures for changes between scheduled reviews are designed to ensure that modifications to programmes are undertaken with due regard to externality and ensure that regular minor changes do not result in 'curriculum drift'.

It is important when considering modifications to modules and programmes that students are consulted, and a record is maintained, particularly in the instance of changes to options, teaching hours, etc. Deviation from the information published could result in the breach of the Consumer Rights Act, unless students are notified or consulted about changes.

2.2   Categories of Programme Modification

There are, essentially, two types of change: Minor changes and Major changes. The HE Office will determine the type of change by scrutinising a Module/Programme Modification Request form submitted by the Programme Leader.

Minor changes to programmes of study are those which do not change either singly or incrementally the basis on which the validation of the programme was made. They will usually not involve any significant change to the programme specification.

Some examples of minor changes are:

1. change of module title
2. replacement of a module in a pathway with another OU-approved module where this does not change the overall learning outcomes for the pathway
3. minor changes to teaching or delivery methods.

Major changes to programmes of study are those which change the basic nature of the programme or student experience such as significant changes to learning outcomes, regulations or assessment. Major changes will usually involve a revision to the programme specification. Some examples of major changes are:

1. introduction of new modules or pathways within a programme changes of syllabus content which significantly affect learning outcomes so that it becomes a new module or pathway
2. a change of programme title
3. a change of pathway title

4. a change to or addition of mode of study
5. significant changes to assessment or other programme regulations
6. adaptations to make the programme available to new student or client groups
7. significant changes to work-based or work-related learning components
8. new arrangements for collaborative provision
9. a change of level of a module.
10. Increase to the number of intakes in an academic year

2.3   Module/Programme Modification Request Form

The Module/Programme Modification Proposal form is included here as Appendix 1.

3   Termination of Validated Programmes

3.1   Managing the Student Experience and Progression of Students

This guidance applies to situations where the College ceases to offer an existing award to which students are actively enrolled, by a given date.

3.1.1   Principles

When ceasing to offer an existing award that students are enrolled on, consideration must be given to ensuring that existing students are appropriately informed and supported and that the academic standards of the award and learning opportunities offered continue to be sound.

Existing students should progress through the stages of the programme in a timely way to enable termination of the arrangement to be affected.

At an early stage, Directorates must contact the HEO to discuss how this arrangement will be managed along with the administrative process for notification of the programme(s) closure. The HEO will then inform the relevant validating partner of the plans for the programme(s) and agree a plan of action.

3.2   Guidance for Existing Students

3.2.1   Informing Students

A strategy should be developed to ensure that existing students are informed of the arrangements for terminating the arrangement/programme and the implications. This activity should be overseen by the HEO and reported into Academic Board. Any options and their implications (e.g. transferring to an award at another institution) should be clearly explained.

Students should be clearly informed about the date that their existing programme is due to finish according to the programme structure they were given at the start of the programme. They should be informed that they are expected to adhere to the timescale for completing modules. Completion of the programme on a part-time basis is not acceptable (unless they enrolled on an approved part-time route).

It should be emphasised that opportunities to take modules beyond the normal period of the programme are unlikely to be available and may result in withdrawal from the programme and a fall-back award being made. It should be emphasised that submission of assessments by the published deadline is crucial to ensure timely progression. Failure to do so may limit the opportunities available for students to complete their award.

3.2.2   Progression Issues

Where students, following reassessment (assuming compensation and stage credits have been applied, where available) fail to meet the requirements for progression or award within the relevant regulations, the awarding partner will be consulted to determine the next steps.

3.3 Guidance for New Students

3.3.1 <u>Informing Students</u>

Where it is known that the programme will cease to be offered by a given date, applicants should be informed prior to enrolment that failure to meet the requirements for progression will result in withdrawal from the programme with an appropriate fall-back award being made.

Students would be expected to meet the requirements for progression following reassessment (assuming compensation and stage credits have been applied where applicable). Progression & Award Boards could consider restudy opportunities if it is appropriate and feasible. Otherwise, students should be withdrawn from the programme and an appropriate fall-back award will be made.

Appendix One: Module/Programme Modification Proposal Form

Programme Leaders should complete this form if they are considering changes to approved programmes of study in between formal revalidation. The form should be submitted to the HE Office which will determine the type of modification (Major or Minor). The HE Office will determine whether to proceed with the change and in order to do so, may request more information from the Programme Leader. Note also that the HE Office expects modification proposals to emerge from the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation and in accordance with their commitment to continuous improvement.

Module/Programme Modification Proposal - Description	
Programme Title:	
Date of Validation or Last Review:	
Programme Leader:	
Reasons for Proposed Changes: Outline the main reasons informing your proposed changes and their Quality Assurance underpinning: (e.g. outcomes of monitoring, evaluation, etc.)	
Describe the intended changes: Outline the changes you propose explicitly noting any changes to the following: module title(s), replacement of a module with extant approved module, changes to teaching or delivery methods, introduction of new modules, changes of syllabus content, programme/pathway title, mode of study Assessment, programme regulations, module level, work-related learning.	

Revision History		
Version	**Date**	**Detail**
1.0	September 2017	
1.1	August 2018	Document edited for clarity and to homogenise presentation and implement URLs to College website HE Essential Information page.
1.2	August 2019	Added text outlining differences between major and minor modifications.
1.3	January 2022	Checked for accuracy.
1.4	October 2023	Added contact with validating partner on planning for termination of programme.