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Curriculum Development and Approval

Academic Office
Student and Academic Services

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Curriculum Development and Approval – a handbook

Section 1 – Outline of procedures

1.1 Introduction

This handbook sets out the procedures for curriculum approval with effect from October 2007. The process was recommended by Academic Policy and Standards Committee and approved by Senate (June 2007).

The handbook is aimed at all those engaged in the curriculum approval process, but it is of particular importance to Directors of Taught Programmes and the School Administrators (Curriculum). Other key readers include Heads of Department, programme convenors, and those engaged in the design of courses and programmes

Professional support for the development of new programmes will be co-ordinated by the **Academic Office** and will engage academic and professional colleagues from relevant units across the University.

The procedures in this handbook relate to **all** taught provision, both undergraduate and postgraduate.

1.2 Academic planning

The programme development and approval process aims to enhance the sustainability of the teaching portfolio by improving alignment with University strategic priorities and by providing better

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- In certain cases the curriculum may be varied for an individual student. The Director of

Section 2 – Key Documents and Resources

The development of a new programme requires a complex set of interactions, from understanding the recruitment needs of prospective students, the design of teaching and assessment methods appropriate to the students who are recruited, and securing programme outcomes of an appropriate standard and relevant to student need (including subsequent employment). The following table sets out the main published information available:

2.1 Printed guidance

Title	Function	Publisher	Guidance
Academic Framework of the University of Sussex	Sets out the structural requirements for the design of programmes leading to awards of the University. All taught ug and pg programmes must comply with this.	Academic Office	Academic Office Will provide expert advice to optimize programme structures and ensure alignment with university regulations. Able to advise on future framework developments including European integration.
Teaching and Learning Strategy	Sets out plans for the development and enhancement of the Sussex academic portfolio. It also sets out the “Characteristics and attributes of the Sussex graduate” and new programmes will need to demonstrate how these characteristics and attributes will be addressed. School Teaching and Learning Strategies set out how the university strategy will be delivered at the more		

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Modes of Assessment	Consolidated list of approved modes of assessment and descriptions	Academic Office	TLDU Will advise on selecting modes of assessment appropriate to test particular skills and learning to ensure an appropriate spread of assessment method.
Higher Education Academy (HEA)	A peer-group network supported nationally and providing a range of best practice guidance and resources on learning and teaching according to subject areas	HEA	TLDU Academic Office Departmental HEA Representative Will assist programme developers in identifying appropriate resources .

3 New Programme Approval – Outline Approval Process

All new provision (programmes) and significant or major change (programme revision) will be required to follow the following procedure:

3.1 Outline approval step guide

Step 1 (commence June)	Idea for new programme/major revision identified	Department (minimal documentation)
Step 2	Idea endorsed by School	School (minimal documentation)
Step 3 (October)	Professional Services provide detailed market/cost/strategic report on proposal for consideration by School	Professional Services (significant research and report)
Step 4 (November)	School considers Professional Service Report and recommend to proceed and include in Annual Plan or to halt/postpone/revise the development	School (management/strategic level)
Step 5 (December)	Planning process approves/rejects proposals in line with University strategic targets – if approved new programme can appear in prospectus at this point	Sub-group of Strategy and Resources Committee (DVC and PVCs)
Step 6 (to be completed Spring term before delivery)	Full approval and external endorsement event	Department (documentation) School (event organization) Professional Services (support/guidance)

indicative timeline for new programme proposals

3.2 Step 1 – initial idea

The initial idea for a new programme can emerge from various sources, but most commonly from within departments as the continual process of academic enquiry leads to the development of new ideas and new discipline strands and combinations. Other drivers may include market intelligence obtained on recruitment patterns, employer demand (especially for postgraduate CPD developments), or national educational and employment strategy. In all cases, however, departments will need to align the proposal to their academic plan as part of the overall management of their activity, taking into account recruitment needs, resources, links with research and related activity.

The documentation required at **Step 1** is minimal, and intended to initiate broader institutional discussion about the merits of the proposal. It is recommended that programme developers produce a short document outlining the following:

- Working title of programme
- Intended recruitment market
- Key academic features
- Fit with corporate, school and departmental strategic plan
- Outline business case
- Other significant features
- Lead programme developer

The document is unlikely to extend over more than two sides of A4 and does not require extensive evidence. It is intended simply to give an indication of the nature of the development as the basis for discussion and to outline the main reasons why the department believes it will be successful.

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Approved proposals will also be reported to Senate by the University Teaching and Learning Committee.

Approval will normally be granted by the end of December for undergraduate programmes following the preferred cycle. This enables prospectus and UCAS cycles to be met. Approvals are possible outside this cycle where recruitment is less dependent on the UCAS process.

3.7 Step 6 – Validation

On notification of outline approval, the Academic Office will co-ordinate planning for full validation in consultation with the School and Department. The TLDU will work with academic departments on programme design methods.

The Validation itself is established under the auspices of the School and will normally be chaired by the Director of Taught Programmes. Administrative support for the validation will be appointed by the Head of Academic Office.

The principal purposes of the full approval process are to secure a strong academic programme which:

- meets the needs of students and will recruit well
- is sustainable over time
- is consistent with corporate and School teaching and learning strategies
- is consistent with institutional frameworks
- is consistent with standards set in the *Framework for Higher Education Quality Assurance*
- is informed by the relevant *Subject Benchmark Statements*
- takes account of national expectations of good practice identified in the *QAA Code of Practice*
- takes account of national and international good practice in curriculum design and delivery
- enhances the national and international standing of academic provision at Sussex

In delivering the above, it is important that the process of scrutiny and consideration of the proposal is secure, effective, meets external requirements for objectivity, and optimizes the use of and benefits to the internal academic community. A validation panel will therefore be convened for considering each new programme approval, as follows:

Panel

Panel Chair
Cognate Academic

Director of Studies from the owning School¹.
A Head of Department (or nominee) from a department within the owning School.

Teaching and Learning
Committee representative

A member of academic staff from a school other than the owning school appointed on behalf of the Teaching and Learning Committee².

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External Academic

An appropriately qualified academic from a peer institution appointed by the Teaching and Learning Committee³.

- Programme template and full set of course templates for the programme.
- Minutes of meetings where the development has been considered (e.g. university, school, departmental levels).

Administrative support for producing documentation will be provided by the School (for local documentation) and the Academic Office (for centrally sourced material). The Academic Office will advise on the overall document requirements which may include material additional to the basic information detailed above.

Issues for Consideration

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4 New Course approval (undergraduate and postgraduate)

4.1 New course approval

A new course is developed either as a part of a new programme proposal, as an independent course designed to enhance existing programmes, as a replacement for an existing course contributing to a programme, or as stand-alone course available as an elective choice but not formally part of a programme structure.

New courses will be approved by the relevant **School Teaching and Learning Committee** with the exception of those directly linked to a new programme proposal.

4.2 New courses developed as part of a new programme will be approved by the programme validation event.

4.3 All new courses must be proposed using the **Course Approval Template**.

4.4 Where a course is being developed for an existing programme, or as a stand-alone course, the following procedure should be used:

Stage 1

- a) Course developed at Departmental Level
- b) Endorsed by Departmental Meeting / Teaching Committee

Stage 2

Course **approved** by School Teaching and Learning Committee

Section 5 – Programme and Course revision (undergraduate and postgraduate)

5.1 Why it is important

The University approves programmes, and the approved version forms part of our contract with students. We are therefore under a contractual obligation to deliver programmes as advertised, be it over the web, in the prospectus or by other means. Failure to deliver programmes as advertised can lead to expensive litigation, and there are cases elsewhere in the sector where the courts have awarded substantial damages to students who have successfully demonstrated that the programme advertised differed from that delivered.

In all cases, it is required that substantive changes to provision are approved through appropriate procedures and properly recorded; and that any accompanying documentation (e.g. Programme or Course Handbooks, Programme Specification, etc) is updated.

5.2 Good planning should reduce the need for successive course and programme revisions, but there will continue to be good reason for making changes: to reflect new discipline knowledge; to improve the student learning experience; to improve assessment strategy.

Changes to programmes may encompass:

- change to programme title
- changes to learning outcomes at programme level
- changes to the range of courses offered
- changes to credit structures
- addition/deletion of courses or course options
- changes to the assessment pattern
- changes to accreditation
- changes to programme-specific progression rules

This list is not definitive and there may be other changes that impact on the programme and therefore need to be approved via the School Teaching and Learning Committee. The essential point to note is that:

Changes to programmes which impact on the student experience are subject to formal approvals processes.

5.3 Timetable for making changes (minor and routine changes)

Minor or routine changes may be made once the students have started the programme but approval **must** be obtained before students embark on the year or stage of study affected. Good planning enables such changes to be made in the year preceding that in which the changes are to take effect. In the case of undergraduate programmes, this should normally be by the end of the **Spring Term** in order to allow:

- sufficient notice to students to permit informed course choices to be made for the following year;
- adequate time for preparation of course and programme handbooks;
- sufficient time for the necessary teaching to be convened;
- preparation of the teaching timetable for the following academic year.

Normal modifications and updating of teaching materials which do not affect the mode of delivery, assessment modes, learning outcomes or other technical aspects of courses are a matter for faculty to determine as part of the normal process of course preparation and

do not require committee approval. Where such modifications of teaching material impact on library provision it is **essential** that the library is consulted at an early stage on the acquisition of relevant reading materials.

Exception to above: Changes to the published structure or content of given year or stage of programme may be made once students have commenced that year or stage of study **only** if the **written** consent of each student affected is obtained. One objection nullifies the proposals.

5.4 Timetable for making changes (major changes affecting programmes)

Where an existing programme is completely revised (e.g. all three years of an undergraduate programme) then the timetable and **procedure for new programmes**

Where changes to the content of a course as reflected in the published course outline/description do not impact on the overall aims and learning outcomes of a course, the change is **likely** to be considered “minor”. It is a matter of professional judgment on the part of the course convenor (in consultation with any appropriate departmental group) to ensure that the revised description continues to correspond with the aims and learning outcomes of the course, and that the fundamental student experience is not affected. Such changes should be reported to the School Teaching and Learning Committee.

Minor changes to course content may be approved at Departmental level by the local Teaching Committee or other appropriate departmental body and reported to the School Teaching and Learning Committee.

5.6.3 Changing teaching methods (minor or major)

a) In many cases changes to teaching methodology will be considered as a minor change in that they do not affect the academic aims or learning objectives of the module or unit. Such changes might include a moderate alteration to the mix of teaching modes used (for example, the introduction of a new method alongside existing methods, or a slight readjustment in the balance between methods, including minor adjustments to the mix of lectures and seminars within a course, or the number of lab sessions).

Minor changes to teaching methods may be approved at Departmental level by the local Teaching Committee or other appropriate departmental body and reported to the School Teaching and Learning Committee.

b) Where the proposed change in teaching method will impact significantly on a course, for example by moving away from lecture-only delivery to a seminar-based approach, the change is considered to be “major” as it will significantly alter the experience of the student and may have broader impacts for the balance of learning and teaching experiences for a programme as a whole. There may also be implications for teaching loads, timetabling and University or School resources.

Major changes to teaching method must be approved by the School Teaching and Learning Committee.

- 5.6.4 Successive “minor” changes may result in a course no longer reflecting its stated aims and learning outcomes, or in significant discrepancies emerging between the course description and the student experience. When considering whether a change is major or minor, course convenors and Teaching Committees should reflect not only on the extent of the immediate change, but on the overall balance of the programmes to which the course contributes. Where there have been several successive changes (more than 3 would normally warrant close scrutiny) the course should be treated as requiring formal re-approval by the School Teaching and Learning Committee.

Successive minor changes will be monitored through the Periodic Review process

5.6.5 Changing assessment strategy or modes of assessment

Changes to assessment strategy or modes of assessment are necessarily considered to be major as they impact significantly on the student experience.

Changes to assessment must be approved by the School Teaching and Learning Committee.

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programs in which circumstances the course may continue to be taught to students on other programs as a new section or

School Administrators (Curriculum) must ensure that all course withdrawals are properly recorded on university data systems, including detailing the date from which a change becomes effective and the mechanism

5.8.6 Major revisions (programmes)

Where a major revision to a programme is proposed such that the revised programme is in effect a new programme with significant changes to structure, content, and intended learning outcomes, the procedures for the approval of new programmes must be followed, including the initial planning phase for outline approval. This applies even where the title of the award is itself unchanged.

5.9 Withdrawal of a course from a programme

- 5.9.1 The withdrawal of a course from a programme may have significant impact on a programme (see 6.4 above). Where the withdrawal of a course from a programme removes a core course, significantly limits student choice, or similarly or otherwise affects a number of programmes, the procedure for approving withdrawal must take into account all the programmes concerned. The process should focus on the programme level, rather than treating the course in isolation. Approval for the

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Further information can be obtained from the Academic Office, Academic and Student Services, Sussex House.

Key contacts:

Paul Cecil	Head of Academic Office	p.l.cecil@sussex.ac.uk	x7755
Sam Riordan	Academic Information Manager	s.y.riordan@sussex.ac.uk	x7468

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