8 PROGRAMME APPROVAL

INTRODUCTION

8.1 Approval is the process which ensures that proposed programmes meet curricular and quality requirements. New programmes are approved for delivery for a defined period, normally four years, and are then subject to re-approval. Thereafter, re-approval is required only in specific circumstances, and at the request of the Faculty.

8.2 Unless noted otherwise, throughout this section of regulations, the term 'approval' refers to both new and existing programmes. The term 'validation' is used for programmes where the awarding body is not the university.

OBJECTIVES

8.3 The objectives of the approval process are:
   i. to ensure that programmes offered by the university meet its curricular and quality requirements. This is achieved by:
      a. ensuring that programmes satisfy its academic standards and quality criteria
      b. ensuring that programmes meet SCQF guidelines, are in line with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, and are mapped against QAA subject benchmarks appropriately
      c. ensuring that the academic standards of programmes are comparable with those of similar programmes across the UK higher education sector
   ii. to provide opportunities for enhancing the quality of programmes through peer review.

8.4 Approval ensures that:
   a. the aims and intended learning outcomes of the programme are clearly defined
   b. the strategies for learning and teaching are clearly defined
   c. clear mechanisms for programme management and student support are in place in each academic partner and the integration of these systems, if appropriate, has been achieved
   d. an appropriate assessment strategy is in place, including mechanisms for co-ordination of assignment and assessment scheduling by the responsible academic partner to ensure that no students are advantaged or disadvantaged
   e. appropriate learning resources, guidance and access to facilities, scheduled and unscheduled, will be provided in all Home Academic Partners
   f. sufficient and appropriately qualified and experienced staff are available
   g. the overall academic integrity of a programme involving network delivery can be assured
   h. the programme structure and design demonstrates considered and appropriate implementation of relevant institutional policies and strategies.

8.5 Approval of programmes comprises three stages:
   a. planning approval (Faculty Board of Study and Academic Council)
   b. Advisory Group and faculty approval (chair of Advisory Group and Dean of Faculty)
   c. approval event (approval panel).

PLANNING APPROVAL

8.6   Proposals for new programmes must be approved by the relevant Faculty Board of Study before being presented to Partnership Planning Forum for planning approval.

8.7   Partnership Planning Forum, taking into consideration the recommendation of the Faculty Board of Study, may decide:
   a. to grant planning approval for the proposed programme
   b. to grant planning approval for the proposed programme with recommendations for consideration by the programme development team
   c. not to grant planning approval for the proposed programme.

ADVISORY GROUP AND FACULTY APPROVAL

8.8   Membership of the Advisory Group will be confirmed by the chair of the Advisory Group in accordance with the guidance in Section 7.

8.9   The programme leader is responsible for submitting final draft documentation to the chair of the Advisory Group and to the chair of the responsible academic partner's quality committee in accordance with the agreed timescale.

8.10   The chair of the Advisory Group is responsible for providing written confirmation to the Academic Registrar and the Dean of Faculty that:
   a. the programme is at a sufficient stage of development to go forward to an approval event, and
   b. the required documentation is ready, complete and appropriate for consideration by the approval panel.

8.11   The Dean of Faculty will decide whether:
   a. the programme may go forward to an approval event with no revisions/changes to the documentation, or
   b. the programme should not go forward without a significant re-write and reconsideration by the Advisory Group. Specific comments about the omissions/weaknesses of the documentation must be given.

8.12   If the dean indicates that the programme cannot go forward, they will convene a meeting with the Chair of the Advisory Group, programme leader designate and chair of the responsible academic partner's quality committee to discuss their comments and resolve any outstanding issues.

8.13   For required documentation to be submitted, see Sections 8.29 and 8.31.

APPROVAL PANEL

8.14   Membership of the panel will be established by the Academic Registrar (or nominee), in discussion with the relevant dean and chair of the responsible academic partner quality committee, and the programme leader.

8.15   Each panel must include an appropriate balance in its membership. Members shall include:

a. chair of the panel
b. at least one external member with subject expertise
c. at least one internal member with appropriate experience, who is not involved with the provision being developed
d. officer(s): appointed by the Academic Registrar, and where appropriate by the awarding body.

8.16 Observers may also be in attendance, with the permission of the chair of the panel.

8.17 Where appropriate, additional member(s) for the panel can be drawn from any of the following: industry, commerce, relevant employer group, or professional body.

8.18 Panel members must be independent of the programme being considered for approval. No member shall have had a close association with the programme (as external examiner, programme adviser or through involvement in the management of the programme) during the five years prior to the approval event.

APPROVAL EVENT

8.19 The date for the approval event will be established by the Academic Registrar (or nominee), in discussion with the relevant principal and chair of the responsible academic partner quality committee, and the programme leader.

8.20 Members of the approval panel must receive the documentation for the proposed programme no later than two weeks before the date of the approval event.

8.21 The schedule for the approval event will normally include the following:
a. private panel meetings - to allow the panel to discuss the documentation received and information gathered through meetings with staff and students, and agree the final outcomes
b. a meeting with senior management representatives of academic partners and the dean to ascertain whether the infrastructure for learning will be fully supported and there will be close strategic fit with other aspects of curriculum provision
c. one or more meetings with the programme team to explore various aspects of the proposed programme
d. a tour of facilities
e. a meeting with students where applicable, or potential students if possible (eg HN provision leading to degree provision)
f. final meeting with programme team and senior managers to provide informal feedback on likely outcomes of the approval event. These outcomes will be confirmed in writing, normally within five working days.

8.22 A draft report of the approval event will be circulated by the officer within three weeks of the event for comments and amendments by the panel. The chair of the panel will approve the report on behalf of the panel. The report will then be sent to the programme leader to comment on factual accuracy. Any modifications to the report will be approved by the chair on behalf of the panel. The report will be circulated to the programme leader, the relevant dean, the relevant principal(s) and academic partner quality manager, and relevant subject network leader.

8.23   For required documentation to be provided to the panel, see Sections 8.29 and 8.31.

APPROVAL OUTCOMES

8.24   The approval panel may recommend to the Faculty Board of Study that the:
   a. programme be approved, for a specified period up to a maximum of four years
   b. programme be approved, for a specified period up to a maximum of four years, subject to meeting conditions and considering recommendations
   c. programme should not be approved.

8.24a **Approved unconditionally** - at its discretion, the panel may recommend that a programme be approved for a period of less than four years. In all cases, the programme will need to be re-approved before the end of the period specified.

8.24b **Approved with conditions** - approval may be made conditional upon fulfilment of certain requirements by a specified date. In all cases, the responsibility for ensuring that such conditions are fulfilled lies with the programme leader, the relevant dean, and chair of the relevant academic partner quality committee.

8.24c **Not approved** – in the event that the approval panel does not approve a programme, it is the responsibility of the Dean of Faculty to convene a meeting with the Chair of the approval panel, programme leader designate and chair of the responsible academic partner's quality committee to decide how to proceed.

SIGNING OFF APPROVAL CONDITIONS

8.25   Normally, all conditions must have a date by which they must be met, which should be no more than twelve months after the approval event. Where a longer timescale is appropriate, approval should be given for less than four years.

8.26   The programme leader is responsible for providing written evidence that the conditions have been met to the officer, who will liaise with the chair of the panel. Both the chair of the panel and the officer(s) must agree they have been met.

8.27   The programme team and the panel will be informed in writing when the conditions have been met; or if deemed unmet, why the conditions are outstanding.

8.28   All conditions and recommendations, and action taken in response to them, must be included in annual programme monitoring reports.

DOCUMENTATION FOR APPROVAL

8.29   For approval of a new programme the following documentation must be submitted by the programme team:
   a. Scheme document (CUR01) (where relevant)
   b. programme specification (CUR02/CUR04) (which when finalised after the approval event will become the definitive programme document)
   c. module descriptors (CUR03)

    d. library resource reading lists (see Section 8.35)

    e. draft student handbook

The approval panel will also be sent:

    f. confirmation from the chair of the Advisory Group and from the dean that they are satisfied that the programme is ready to go forward to approval

    g. guidance for approval panels

    h. external panel members will also have access to *Academic Standards and Quality Regulations* and general information about the university.

8.30 For re-approval of an existing programme the following documentation must be submitted by the programme team:

    a. critical review of the programme since its last approval

    b. revised programme specification (CUR02/CUR04) and, where appropriate, module descriptors (CUR03)

    c. library resource reading list (see Section 8.35)

    d. draft student handbook

The approval panel will also be sent:

    e. report from previous approval event

    f. guidance for approval panels

    g. external panel members will also have access to *Academic Standards and Quality Regulations* and general information about the university.

8.31 Re-approval may be undertaken as an element within subject review. The self-evaluation document (SED) produced for subject review will include a critical appraisal of each programme to be re-approved, drawing upon stakeholder feedback, reports from monitoring and review activity, and statistical quality indicators, eg enrolment, retention and progression.

8.32 Within one month of approval, an electronic version of the definitive programme document must be lodged with Academic Registry.

LEARNING RESOURCES

8.33 During development, programme teams will identify an appropriate threshold level of resource required to be provided by Home Academic Partners.

8.34 Levels of resource must be defined for adequate and appropriate learning resources and facilities, including specialist equipment where appropriate. This will depend on the subject area of the programme and the mode of delivery.

8.35 Programme teams must supply specific information on resources for the following areas in their documentation:

Library resources reading list:

    a. all core and recommended texts or journal subscriptions

    b. electronic resources, including on-line journals, access to databases, CD-roms, etc

    c. availability of these resources.

Specialist facilities and equipment (within CUR04/CUR03):

    a. all specialist facilities and equipment, including software and other resources used by students

    b. availability of these facilities and equipment.

8.36 The chair of the quality committee at each Home Academic Partner and the university Librarian (or delegate as approved by Academic Council) must sign off the library resource document before approval.

8.37 The approval panel will endorse or modify the levels of resource that each Home Academic Partner must provide.

8.38 During the approval event, the approval panel may undertake a tour of the academic and support facilities at the responsible academic partner. The approval panel may, as a condition of approval, require site visit(s) to be undertaken at some or all of the Home Academic Partners.

8.39 When students will be studying on a programme or module as 'distant students' (ie not in the same location as the lecturer delivering the module), the approval panel will look in detail at the co-ordination of programme management, student support and learning and assessment opportunities to ensure that no students are advantaged or disadvantaged.

8.40 A clear plan and description of how learning resources will be made available must be provided for **all** modules scheduled for offer to distant students. This plan should include detail of how learning activities will be structured (eg using VC, post, or VLE), information about how assessment will be managed, and details of alternative arrangements should electronic means fail.

8.41 The approval panel must be confident that distant learning students will have adequate support to achieve the intended learning outcomes and have reliable communication and feedback channels, and that these arrangements are appropriate with respect to the UK Quality Code.