

University of Suffolk

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR COURSE RE-APPROVAL PANELS

Please use the guidance notes and checklist below to guide your consideration of the course. The notes draw upon guidance in the [QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#), relating to programme design, approval, monitoring and review.

Before the re-approval event

- Take time to read the documentation in advance and ask for any supplementary documentation or seek clarification on any points of ambiguity via the Validation and Exams team (validation@uos.ac.uk) before the event.

At the re-approval event

- Your role as a panel member is that of a 'critical friend' who is there to discuss the course in detail, identifying areas of good practice and making suggestions to the course team on how the course could be improved, arising from your scrutiny of the course re-approval documentation.
- Aim to foster an atmosphere of constructive critical dialogue with the team rather than one of confrontation, for example by avoiding aggressive questioning styles that put the course team on the defensive and by highlighting positive aspects of the course rather than focusing exclusively on areas of concern.
- Do not leave major concerns unvoiced - these cannot be considered if they are not documented at the event.
- If you are a panel member as a result of your subject expertise, please ensure that you are familiar with the appropriate QAA subject benchmark statement.
- **External academic panel members** should be prepared to challenge assumptions held by the course team or the University and offer a fresh critical but constructive perspective.
- **Industry professional or employer representatives** should offer a view on the continuing value and relevance of the course in relation to industry, the profession and/or employer needs, and give close consideration to any work placement, work-based learning or employment-related aspects of the course.
- **Student members** of course re-approval panels are full members of the panel and should offer a student perspective on the course under review, including thoughts on course content, learning, teaching and assessment methods, access to resources, student support mechanisms and the opportunities for students to provide feedback on

their learning experience. Further information is available in the accompanying guidance notes for students involved in course (re)approval processes.

- A meeting with students is arranged wherever possible, as this helps you to form a more holistic view of the provision and allows you to ask about course delivery arrangements and learning and teaching from a student's perspective. The student experience should be a key focus of the panel's considerations.

Outcomes of a course re-approval event

There are normally two possible outcomes from a course re-approval event, which will be summarised in a course re-approval report produced after the event:

1. Recommendation to re-approve the course(s) outright for a given period of time (normally five years) with no conditions, requirements or recommendations (in which case no further action by the course team is required)
2. Recommendation to re-approve the course(s) for a given period of time (normally five years) with conditions, requirements and/or recommendations, in which case the course team must provide evidence that the conditions and/or requirements have been met, and must respond to any recommendations, within the agreed timescales.
3. In exceptional circumstances, recommendation to not re-approve the course (in which case the course team will be required to either (i) undertake a major revision to the course within agreed timescales, for consideration under the course validation procedure, or (ii) phase out and withdraw the course).

Commendations allow the panel a chance to congratulate the course team on aspects of exemplary practice (i.e. practice that significantly exceeds normal expectations). A particular focus here should be on exemplary practice that has the potential to be transferable to other courses.

Conditions are those issues that must be addressed to the satisfaction of the panel before the start of the next academic year.

Requirements are those issues that must be addressed by an agreed date after the start of the next academic year to the satisfaction of the Quality Committee (note: requirements should only be used in exceptional circumstances where the issue cannot reasonably be addressed prior to the start of the next academic year)

Recommendations are those issues where action is desirable and should be considered with a response provided.

The course re-approval panel may not set further conditions and/or requirements after it has reported.

CHECKLIST: ASPECTS TO BE EXPLORED DURING COURSE RE-APPROVAL

Rationale and market demand
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does there continue to be adequate market demand for the course(s) under review, and are there adequate employment opportunities for students upon graduation, both locally and further afield?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do the skills and knowledge acquired during the course continue to be of use to students in their future careers?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Taking into consideration student performance data and feedback from students on their experiences, are student entry profiles appropriate?
Course design and curriculum content
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the course continue to provide an up-to-date and relevant learning experience for students, which will prepare them well for their future careers?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do learning outcomes continue to reflect published QAA subject benchmark statements, qualification characteristics statements (where appropriate), the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), national occupational standards and any relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body requirements? Are they clear and concise?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the curriculum content continue to be appropriate to each stage of the course, and to the level of the award? Is the course balanced, for example in terms of academic and practical elements and the breadth and depth of the curriculum?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the design of the curriculum enable academic and intellectual progression by imposing increasing demands on the learner in terms of the acquisition of knowledge and skills, the capacity for conceptualisation, and increasing autonomy in learning?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the design of the course continue to be inclusive of disabled students?
Delivery
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does there continue to be a suitable range and variety of learning and teaching methods to meet the needs of a diverse range of students, including those with disabilities?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are students satisfied with the quality of teaching on the course?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are levels of student retention and achievement satisfactory?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the virtual learning environment used to good effect to support the delivery of the course?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are students satisfied with arrangements for course management and organisation?

Assessment

- Do assessment methods continue to be appropriate, sufficiently varied and inclusive?
- Do assessment outcomes confirm that academic standards continue to be maintained?
- Are there adequate opportunities for formative assessment, in order to support the development of students' abilities?
- Are students provided with adequate and timely feedback on their work?

Employability

- Does the course team provide students with a clear, engaging vision of what 'employability' means on the course? Has the team's vision of employability been well founded on employer consultation, student and alumni conversations, and other relevant sources (including any professional standards)?
- Does the curriculum, and associated learning, teaching and assessment strategies, enable students to develop the knowledge, skills and attributes required to support their future employability, in line with this vision? Is this reflected in graduate outcomes?
- Is career guidance and management built into the course from an early stage?

Employer engagement

- How have employers been involved in the ongoing development and delivery of the course?
- Are employers involved in the assessment of students? If so, are there sound quality management processes in place?
- Are arrangements for placement or work-based learning operating well? Are Learning Agreements in place to define the specific outcomes intended for the workplace learning, the responsibilities of the employers, students, mentors and academic tutors?
- Does placement or work-based learning continue to contribute to the overall coherence and integrity of the course?

Student support

- Are students provided with an appropriate level of academic support?
- Are arrangements in place to ensure that any additional needs of students are identified and reasonable adjustments are put in place to meet them?
- Are arrangements for tutorial support clear and generally understood by staff and students?
- Are student and course handbooks and other information for students clear and complete?

Facilities and learning resources

- Do subject-specific learning resources continue to be appropriate to the course?
- Is adequate teaching and learning accommodation available?
- Are learners supported by appropriate and accessible library resources? Are reading lists up-to-date?
- Do students have access to adequate equipment (including ICT)?

Staffing

- Are staff teaching on the course appropriately qualified and experienced?
- Is appropriate technical and administrative support available?
- Are adequate staff development opportunities available to support the continuing professional development of the course team (including engagement in research and scholarly activity)?

For higher or degree apprenticeship courses

- Does the design of the course continue to align with the relevant apprenticeship standard and assessment plan? Has the course enabled students to develop the required knowledge, skills and behaviours?
- Do entry requirements continue to be aligned with the relevant apprenticeship standard? Have apprentices successfully attained Level 2 functional skills in English and Maths (if required) within appropriate timescales?
- Is work-based learning integral to the pedagogical approach? Do apprentices feel that on-the-job and off-the-job learning is sufficiently blended?
- Is the important role of employers in contributing to successful programme delivery clearly articulated? Have employers been actively involved in course design, delivery and evaluation?
- Is there adequate provision for training, briefing and/or supporting work-based mentors (or equivalent)? Do apprentices feel adequately supported within the workplace, and have they been provided with opportunities to reinforce their learning?
- Has course design and delivery enabled apprentices to meet the 20% off-the-job training requirement? Has this been successfully recorded and monitored for individual apprentices?
- Does the course team have a successful track record in terms of the conduct of regular tripartite reviews involving the apprentice, their employer and the University/College? Are these meetings valued by apprentices and their employers?
- Are arrangements for the conduct of End Point Assessment (EPA) appropriate and clear? Are students adequately prepared for EPA? Where EPA is integrated, has independence been ensured?

For courses with online delivery

- Are online learning, teaching and assessment strategies effective, robust and scalable?
- Have the course team's professional development requirements been met, and is any further development required?
- Are sufficient resources available to continue to develop and run the online programme?
- How effectively are students supported through the course? Are students able to access support and development opportunities from Learning Services, IT Services and Student Services?
- Is student facing documentation clear how policies and procedures (such as extenuating circumstances and academic appeals) are applied for the online learner?
- Does the course team have effective mechanisms in place for monitoring the level of student engagement? Are effective intervention strategies in place for students identified as at risk in terms of engagement, retention and/or performance?
- Are assessment methods (formative and summative) well suited to the particular needs of online learners? Does the course design incorporate effective and appropriate formative assessment opportunities? Is regular, extensive and timely feedback and guidance on performance provided to students?
- Are coursework and assignment strategies effectively managed in order to minimise copying or cheating by students and to ensure the security of assessment processes?