

University of Suffolk

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR STUDENTS ON COURSE VALIDATION AND RE-APPROVAL PANELS

These guidance notes are intended to provide information for students who are interested in getting involved in course approval and re-approval panels at the University of Suffolk.

There are two forms of course approval: 'validation' for proposed new courses and 're-approval' for existing courses. Courses are normally reviewed and re-approved at least once every five years.

The (re)approval processes are used to ensure:

- ✓ that courses provide students with a high quality learning experience, comparable to similar courses at other universities
- ✓ that there is a sound rationale for offering the course, for example in terms of student and employer demand
- ✓ that the course is designed and delivered in a way that supports equality and diversity
- ✓ that the course is described to students and other stakeholders in a clear, accurate and complete manner (for example via course handbooks)
- ✓ that there are sufficient resources (including staff) to effectively deliver the course
- ✓ that the course complies with the University's academic regulations
- ✓ that the course meets national expectations, including those set by the Quality Assurance Agency and any professional bodies.

Why is student involvement important?

We are keen to capture students' views on our courses and the way in which we support your learning and development. This is so that we can make sure you have the best possible experience here at the University of Suffolk. We value students' opinions and want to ensure that students are able to take an active role in developing and improving our courses.

What happens at a course (re)approval event?

In the months leading up to the course validation or re-approval event, the course team will undertake a lot of preparatory work and will prepare documentation that describes their proposed new or existing course. This documentation will include information on the content of the course, how it is delivered and assessed, and what resources are required to run the course (including staff resources). In addition, for re-approval events the course team will produce a self-evaluation document that reflects on how well the course has operated over the last few years and how they see the course developing in the future.

A panel is formed to consider the course under review. There are typically around 7-8 members of the panel, including teaching staff from other areas, administrative staff, students and external representatives (typically an academic within the same subject area from another university and an employer representative). There is also a panel secretary, who will be happy to answer any queries you have either leading up to the event or on the day.

Two or three weeks before the event, panel members are sent a pack which contains details on arrangements for the event and the course documentation (usually in hard copy with supporting information available electronically). This gives panel members a chance to find out more about the course before the event and to identify any things that they would like to discuss on the day.

The panel meets at the University or, for partner institutions within the Learning Network, at the relevant partner college. The event typically starts at around 9:30am and finishes by 3.30pm, with lunch provided. During the event, the panel gets a chance to view facilities, meet with students and discuss the course with the course team. At the end of the event, the panel reaches a decision about whether the course should be approved or re-approved. The panel also has the opportunity to commend positive aspects of the course and/or identify areas where there is room for improvement. These conclusions are recorded in a written report which is produced by the secretary.

The course team is expected to revise the course in light of any recommendations by the panel, and this is overseen centrally by the University.

What is my role on the panel?

You are a full and equal member of the panel and your views will be valued by other panel members. Please participate honestly and constructively, and don't be afraid to ask questions, make suggestions or tell the panel and the course team what you believe students might feel about their experiences on the course.

Although the experience may initially seem daunting, please rest assured that your thoughts and suggestions are incredibly valuable and the panel will be keen to make you feel welcome and to hear your views.

You do not need to be familiar with the subject area to be on a panel. We are keen to hear your views on the student experience more broadly, and not necessarily on detailed course content. Some of the things you might want to consider are:

- Will the course meet students' needs and expectations?
- Are teaching methods appropriate?
- Do you believe that timetables and workloads will be manageable for students?
- Will students have adequate access to the necessary resources (e.g. labs, computers, the library)?
- Do you feel that the course will prepare students well for future employment or future study?

- Is information for students (for example in course handbooks) clear and accessible?
- Are you clear about how work will be assessed? Will students get useful and timely feedback on their work from members of the course team?
- Do you feel that there is sufficient support (both academic and personal) to help students during their time at the University?
- Will the course team seek students' views on the course on a regular basis?
- (For course re-approvals) Do students feel that their views are listened to? Are there matters that students have previously raised with the course team that you feel need to be addressed further?
- What do you like most about the course?
- Is there anything that could be improved?

If the rest of the panel does not ask questions about something that you feel is important, do not be afraid to bring it to their attention as you have a unique and valuable perspective on the quality of the course. If there is anything that you do not understand, please feel free to ask any member of the panel for clarification.

What's in it for me?

Firstly, you will be helping to make sure that our courses are fit-for-purpose and meet student needs. You get to have your views listened to and taken seriously, and you will have a real input into decisions that are made that will affect the courses we offer at the University of Suffolk.

You will get to meet new people, and it will also provide an opportunity to gain new skills and enhance your CV. It's a real chance to put your communication skills into action, and to demonstrate your teamwork, time management, negotiation and presentation/meeting skills. As one former student panel member noted about the role, "this was truly an experience I am glad I participated in" and "I would actively encourage other students in the future to be involved".

Where can I go to for further advice?

If you would like further information or advice on taking part in a course (re)approval event, please get in touch with the University of Suffolk Students' Union, who will be happy to advise you or point you in the right direction of someone who can help. Their contact details are available at www.uosunion.org.

Further information on course (re)approval processes is available from the University's Quality Assurance and Enhancement team. If you would like a member of the team to give you a briefing; if you would like clarification on your role or on how the processes work; or if you simply want an opportunity to chat about how you can best contribute to the processes, please feel free to contact the Head of Quality Enhancement, Mark Lyne (email m.lyne@uos.ac.uk).