

University of Suffolk

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR COURSE VALIDATION PANELS

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

Before the validation 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 validation event

- Your role as a panel member is that of a 'critical friend' who is there to discuss the proposal in detail and offer helpful suggestions to the course team, as well as pointing out potential pitfalls and problems arising from your scrutiny of the validation 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 proposal 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 and/or the University and offer a fresh critical but constructive perspective.
- **Industry professional or employer representatives** should offer a view on the value and relevance of the proposed 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 proposed course.
- **Student members** of validation panels are full members of the panel and should offer a student perspective on the proposed course, 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 validation event

There are three possible outcomes to a validation event, which will be summarised in a validation report produced after the event:

- 1) Recommendation to validate the proposed course 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 validate the proposed course 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) Rejection of the proposed course, in which case no further action is required.

In exceptional circumstances the panel may recommend suspension of the validation process whilst the course team undertakes a major revision to the proposal.

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 validation panel before the course commences.

Requirements are those issues that must be addressed by an agreed date after course commencement 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 course commencement).

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

The validation panel may not set further conditions and/or requirements after it has reported.

CHECKLIST: ASPECTS TO BE EXPLORED DURING VALIDATION

Rationale and market demand
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the proposed course compatible with the strategic mission of the University or the relevant partner institution?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has adequate research been undertaken into likely student demand and employment prospects upon graduation, both locally and further afield?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is it clear how the skills and knowledge acquired during the course will be of use to students in their future careers?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are student entry profiles appropriate and arrangements for recognition of prior learning clear?
Course design
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is/Are the proposed award title(s) appropriate?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are the aims and objectives of the course clearly defined?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are there clear and concise learning outcomes that appropriately 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 (PSRB) requirements?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the design of the course include assessment of the extent to which the course is inclusive of disabled students?
Curriculum
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is each learning outcome (subject-specific or skills-related) supported by appropriate elements within the curriculum?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the curriculum content appropriate to each stage of the course, and to the level of the award?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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?
Delivery
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are the modes of delivery proposed appropriate to the course?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is there a suitable range and variety of learning and teaching methods to meet the needs of a diverse range of students, including those with disabilities?

- Is the virtual learning environment used to good effect to support the delivery of the course?

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 career guidance and management built into the course from an early stage?

Employer engagement

- How have employers been involved in course design? What arrangements are in place for their continuing involvement in course development and delivery?

- Are employers involved in the assessment of students? If so, are there sound quality management processes in place?

- Are any arrangements for the management and supervision of placements or work-based learning systematic and clear? Are there systems in place for the continuous briefing of employers/placement providers? 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 work-based learning contribute to the overall coherence and integrity of the course?

Assessment

- Is assessment effectively designed to measure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes?

- Are the assessment methods appropriate, sufficiently varied and inclusive?

- Are individual assessments appropriately weighted?

- Are there adequate opportunities for formative assessment, in order to support the development of students' abilities?

- Are there arrangements in place to ensure that students receive high quality, timely feedback on their work?

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 course handbooks and other information for students clear and complete?

Facilities and learning resources

• Are subject-specific learning resources appropriate to the proposed course?

• Is adequate teaching and learning accommodation available?

• Are learners supported by appropriate and accessible library resources?

• Do students have access to adequate equipment (including ICT)?

Staffing

• Are existing staff proposed for teaching on the course appropriately qualified and experienced?

• Is appropriate technical and administrative support available?

• Are any additional staff appointments required to enable the course to be delivered effectively?

• Are any staff development arrangements proposed to support existing staff in acquiring particular new expertise?

• Do the overall staffing arrangements suggest that sufficient expertise will be available for the effective delivery of the intended curriculum, for the overall teaching, learning and assessment strategy, and for the achievement of the learning outcomes?

For higher or degree apprenticeship courses

• Does the design of the course align with the relevant apprenticeship standard and assessment plan? Does the course enable students to develop the required knowledge, skills and behaviours?

• Are entry requirements aligned with the relevant apprenticeship standard? Are arrangements in place for apprentices to attain Level 2 functional skills in English and Maths (if required), where this is not set as an entry requirement?

• Is work-based learning integral to the pedagogical approach? Is on-the-job and off-the-job learning sufficiently blended?

• Is the important role of employers in contributing to successful programme delivery clearly articulated? Have employers been actively involved in course design? Are employers provided with guidance on what they can do to support apprentices and reinforce their learning within the workplace?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there adequate provision for training, briefing and/or supporting work-based mentors (or equivalent)?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does course design and delivery enable apprentices to meet the 20% off-the-job training requirement? Are adequate arrangements in place to record and monitor off-the-job training hours for individual apprentices?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are suitable arrangements in place for regular tripartite reviews involving the apprentice, their employer and the University or college?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are arrangements for the conduct of End Point Assessment (EPA) appropriate and clear? Is there adequate preparation for EPA built into the course? Where EPA is integrated, is it clear how independence will be guaranteed?
<p>For courses with online delivery</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the proposed online learning, teaching and assessment strategies robust and scalable?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the course team accurately identified their development requirements?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are sufficient resources available to develop and run the online programme?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the timeframes within the development and delivery action plans realistic?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the course team monitor developments to ensure timely actions have been undertaken?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are the students going to be supported through the course? Can the course team describe their scenario planning around how students access support and development opportunities from Learning Services, IT Services and Student Services?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the team understood and communicated through student facing documentation how policies and procedures (such as extenuating circumstances and academic appeals) will be applied for the online learner?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the course team put in place mechanisms for monitoring the level of student engagement? Are effective intervention strategies described for students identified as at risk in terms of engagement, retention and/or performance?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the proposed 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, and will regular, extensive and timely feedback and guidance on performance be provided?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will coursework and assignment strategies be managed to minimise copying or cheating by students and to ensure the security of assessment processes?