

Approval process for new and revised units and programmes: clarification of the arrangements approved by the Senate at its meeting on 20 June 2011

Background

The arrangements approved by the Senate in June 2011:

1. Make Faculty Education Directors responsible for faculty-level processes associated with the approval of new and modifications to existing programmes and units
2. Require Faculty Education Directors to approve proposals before they are considered by the Programme Approval Group and the Education Committee
3. Specify that Faculty Education Directors should not be members of the Programme Approval Group, and
4. Define the circumstances under which proposals require approval by Education Committee.

The idea of local decision-making embodied in the new arrangements has merit, but the operational implications need careful consideration. The Pro Vice Chancellor (Education and Students) has established a small working group to look into these in more detail. In the meantime, this document describes an interim arrangement, which will ensure adequate scrutiny of proposals and effective reporting.

Programme Approval Group

1. The membership and terms of reference of the Programme Approval Group shall be those agreed at the meeting of the Education Committee on 23 November 2011 (Annex 2)

Minor modifications to existing programmes (introduction of new and withdrawal of existing optional units; minor changes to mandatory units)

2. The Education Committee shall delegate authority to the relevant faculty committee(s) to approve minor changes to relevant programmes and units (and the definition of a minor change shall be as specified in annex 1)
3. All such changes shall be reported to the Programme Approval Group

New programmes and major modifications to existing programmes

4. New programmes and major modifications to existing programmes shall continue to require the approval of Education Committee and are therefore subject to scrutiny by the Programme Approval Group
5. The relevant faculty representative and one other member of the Programme Approval Group (nominated by the Chair) shall be responsible for the detailed scrutiny of each proposal and for making recommendations to the Group
6. Where necessary/desirable, the programme director may be invited to attend the Programme Approval Group

This interim arrangement was approved by the Chair of Education Committee on 20 December 2011. It shall remain in force until new policies and procedures for the approval of new and modification of existing programmes and units have been finalised.

Annex 1: minor changes to programmes and units

The following constitute minor changes to programmes and units, which may be approved by Faculty Education Directors and *reported* to Programme Approval Group:

1. The addition or withdrawal of new or existing optional units in a future year for the current cohort of students, where this does not affect the overall learning outcomes defined in the programme specification and does not lead to significant reduction in optionality (subject to consultation with students)
2. The addition or withdrawal of new or existing optional units for a future cohort of students, where this does not affect the overall learning outcomes defined in the programme specification and does not lead to significant reduction in optionality
3. Changes *within* mandatory or optional units (eg. to reflect a different emphasis brought to the module by a new or different member of teaching staff), where these do not affect the overall intended learning outcomes as defined in the programme specification
4. Changes to the mode of delivery or assessment of units, where these do not affect the summary statement of teaching, learning and assessment methods within the programme specification
5. Changes to, or the addition of, accreditation by a professional or statutory body or other external accrediting body

All other changes to programmes and units shall normally be considered by the Programme Approval Group.

Annex 2: membership and terms of reference of the Programme Approval Group

Membership

1. Chair, appointed by the Pro Vice Chancellor (Education)
2. One representative from each Faculty, who shall normally be a member of Education Committee or their designate
3. The Academic Registrar

In attendance:

4. A representative of the Education Support Unit, who shall serve as Secretary

Terms of Reference

1. To make recommendations to the Education Committee with regard to proposals for:
 - a. new programmes
 - b. the withdrawal of programmes
 - c. changes to ordinances and regulations

(NB. In considering these proposals, the Group shall take into account the need to maintain and enhance academic standards and quality of learning opportunities, University and faculty policies and strategies and external reference points such as the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and national subject benchmark statements.)

2. To advise Programme Directors, Schools and Faculties on matters of compliance and enhancement with regard to proposals for new and revised programmes and provide feedback.
3. To make decisions on behalf of the Education Committee with regard to proposals for:
 - a. major changes to existing programmes
 - b. new mandatory units and changes to existing mandatory units*
 - c. new open units and changes to existing open units*
 - d. changes in programme titles
4. To advise the Education Committee upon the University's alignment with relevant sections of the QAA's code of practice, specifically Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning) and Section 7: Programme design, approval, monitoring and review.
5. To review, annually, the operation of the processes for approval of new and revised programmes and units and make appropriate recommendations to Education Committee.

*These responsibilities are delegated to the relevant faculty committees.

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