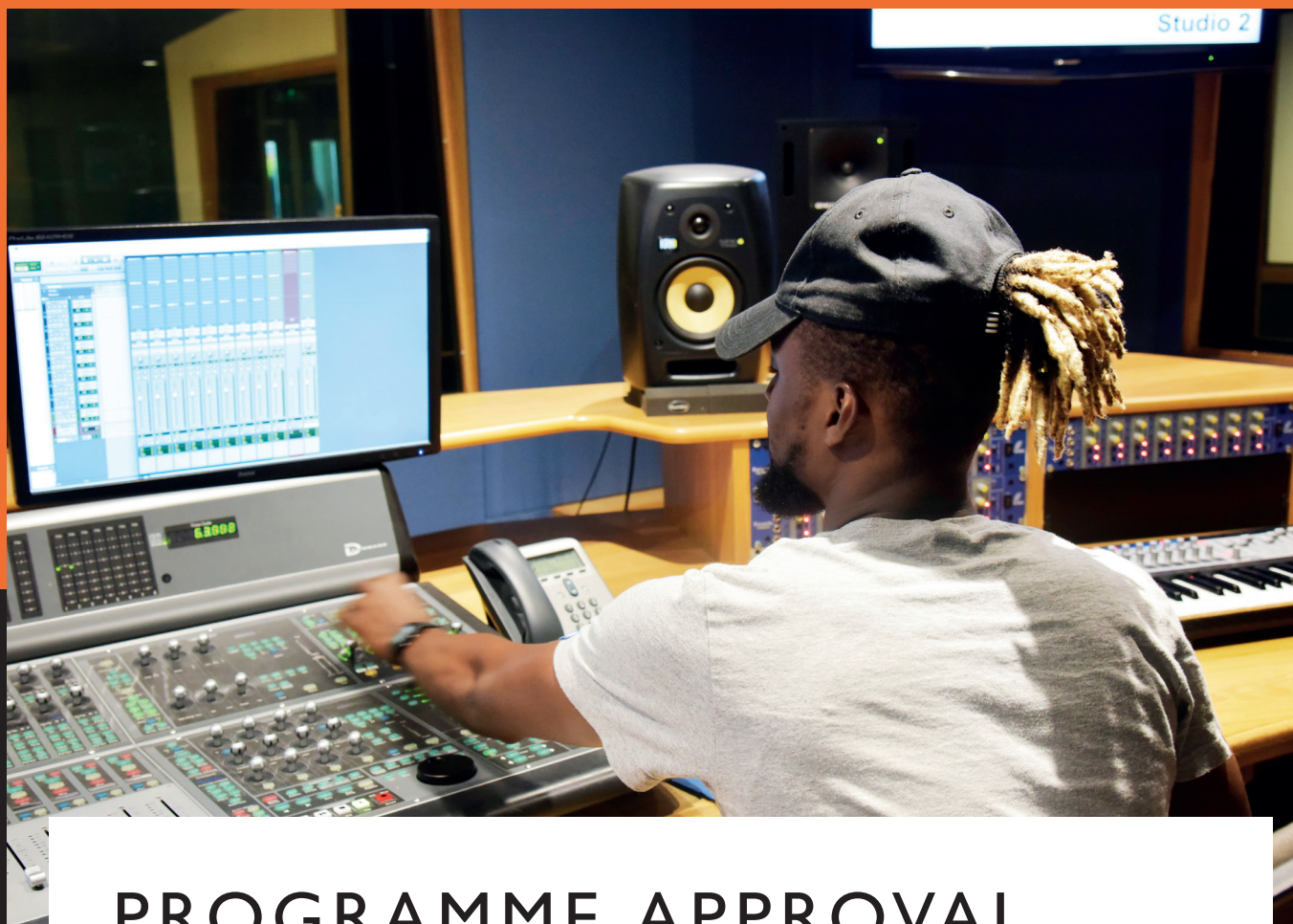




BUCKINGHAMSHIRE
NEW UNIVERSITY

EST. 1891



PROGRAMME APPROVAL AND AMENDMENT

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Note: Hyperlinks have been provided for ease of reference. For other documents (referred to in italics) please see the Policies page on the main University website (<http://bucks.ac.uk/about-us/governance-and-policies/policies>).

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This document has been designed to be accessible for readers. However, should you require the document in an alternative format please contact the Academic Registry.

Background

- 1 This policy supports the University's requirement under the UK Quality Code to meet its responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities of the programmes it offers.
- 2 The policy should be read alongside both the *Academic Qualifications Framework* and the *Academic Assessment Regulations* which set out respectively the academic requirements for awards offered by the University and the regulations by which they are assessed.

Purpose and scope

- 3 This policy sets out the framework for approving programmes of study, and for amending existing programmes of study:
 - The purpose of **programme approval** is to ensure that new programmes of study meet the academic, financial and strategic needs of the University; and that such provision is well-designed and will provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enabling their achievement to be reliably assessed.
 - The purpose of **programme amendment** is to facilitate continuous improvement of existing programmes of study while being proportionate to the level of risk involved.
- 4 The policy applies to all undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, including short courses, to be awarded and delivered by Bucks New University, or to be delivered by an approved collaborative partner and awarded by Bucks New University.
- 5 Where a programme is accredited by a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB), the University will seek wherever possible to conduct (re)approval events alongside PSRB accreditation or re-accreditation.
- 6 Further information and guidance for staff on all aspects of programme approval and amendment, including access to related documentation such as forms and templates and detailed process guides, can be accessed via the University Intranet.

Definitions

- 7 The term '**programme**' is used to describe any stand-alone curriculum of study followed by a student, which contributes to a qualification of Bucks New University or otherwise carries academic credit awarded by the University.
- 8 The term '**short course**' refers to any short learning programme which does not lead to an award of the University as defined in its *Academic Qualifications Framework*. A

short course may consist of a single module and will either be credit-bearing or non-credit-bearing.

- A **credit-bearing** short course is a short learning programme that will not normally exceed 60 credits in size. Credits may be drawn from Levels 4-7 of the FHEQ.
 - A **non-credit-bearing** short course is a short learning programme for which no credits are awarded.
- 9 The *Academic Qualifications Framework* provides further information on features of academic programmes at the University.

Guiding principles

- 10 The University's processes for programme approval and amendment are guided by the following core principles:
- **High quality academic experience:** All programmes should be well-designed, of a high-quality, relevant and market-attractive and be supported by appropriately qualified and skilled staff.
 - **Proportionate:** Processes employed will be flexible to the scale, complexity and risk of the programme or amendment proposed, while maintaining rigorous, robust review mechanisms. Decisions taken will be timely, ensuring a rapid turnaround for the benefit of the University community.
 - **Evidence-based:** Decisions will be based on analysis of centrally available data and other internal and external sources of information such as feedback from professional services, external examiners, students and employers. This will take into account the diversity of the protected characteristics and the prior educational experience of students to promote inclusive practices.
 - **Internally and externally referenced:** Processes will be underpinned by internal guidance and the use of agreed external reference points, including national frameworks, relevant subject benchmark statements, and any applicable sector standards such as those published by PSRBs. Processes will be led by academic staff underpinned by external academic and professional peer review to ensure programmes align to sector best practice.
 - **Definitive:** All processes will lead to the development and maintenance of definitive programme documentation which provides an accurate and clear description of the programme (or its constituent parts), the intended learning outcomes and how they will be assessed, and the availability of learning opportunities and support mechanisms.
- 11 Senate will have overall responsibility for the standards of awards – including their approval – and the quality of the academic experience. Monitoring of the operational aspects of this process will be delegated to the appropriate sub-committee.

Programme approval

- 12 The University operates a three-stage process for approval of new programmes; each stage will be completed sequentially and is a trigger for various sub-processes. A process diagram is available at **Appendix 1**.

Stage One: New programme proposal

- 13 All proposals must receive approval in principle at University level via Academic Planning Committee (APC). APC will set appropriate timescales for consideration which will be informed by Marketing & Student Recruitment requirements.
- 14 Membership of APC is drawn from across the Academic School and Directorate structure to ensure broad consideration of programmes from a variety of stakeholder perspectives; this will help reduce the necessity for liaison prior to presentation of proposals.
- 15 APC approval will normally be secured by consideration of a formal proposal (with accompanying supporting documentation). The proposal is intended to enable APC to determine whether the programme:
- Has a sound academic rationale and a unique selling point that is sufficiently distinct from other provision in the subject area
 - Has identified a viable and sustainable market for recruitment when current competition is taken into consideration
 - Is financially viable when all delivery costs have been taken into account
 - Can be resourced from current resources and, if not, what major new investment (human and/or physical) might be required should it be approved
 - Aligns to the University's strategy, vision and mission and any School Plans

In addition, the proposal should be appropriately informed by relevant industry and / or partnership links, e.g. to confirm the market and title.

- 16 The proposal will also contain sufficient 'material information' about the proposed programme – as defined by consumer protection legislation – to enable it to be marketed accurately following sign-off and for applicants to make an informed decision. 'Material information' to be provided at this stage will include:
- Programme title, including the award to be received on successful completion and its academic level
 - Location(s) of study
 - Programme duration and initial start date
 - Information about the composition of the programme and its main characteristics, including how it will be delivered and its outline structure
 - Programme Fee or Fee Band assigned
 - Details of any Professional Body accreditation(s) to be sought

The precise format of the proposal and supporting documentation requirements will be regularly reviewed by APC to ensure that it is fit for purpose. APC will also determine and review when documentation should be presented.

- 17 Once APC has approved the proposal in principle, the programme will be marketed as 'subject to approval' using the 'material information' provided above.

- 18 No changes to 'material information' should be made once a programme has been marketed to applicants. Accordingly, Schools should ensure that submission of proposals follows appropriate consultation with the relevant central services, including Marketing, Finance and Academic Registry. APC will monitor recruitment to new programmes.
- 19 Academic Registry will ensure that any conditions or recommendations on such approval made by APC are drawn to the attention of the relevant Approval Panel.

Approval in principle of short courses

- 20 Short courses are more limited in scope and so proposals will not need to be presented to APC for approval in principle.
- 21 Instead, responsibility is delegated to the relevant School Leadership Team to confirm that resourcing and marketing considerations have been taken into account, the programme is financially viable, and that development has been appropriately informed.

Stage Two: Curriculum development

- 22 Following completion of Stage One, development of the full curriculum should commence.
- 23 The Lead Academic Sponsor will be provided with a Programme Specification pre-populated with the material information agreed at Stage One. Module Descriptor templates will also be provided and module codes allocated for new provision. A lead officer from Academic Registry will support the curriculum development team and provide detailed guidance on documentary requirements.
- 24 Curriculum Development Teams are expected to liaise with a wide range of professional service staff through this stage, including:
- Governance & Quality, based in the Academic Registry, for advice on quality assurance, process, setup requirements, and assessment regulations
 - Student & Course Administration, based in the Academic Registry, for advice on delivery and support arrangements
 - The Centre for Learning and Teaching Excellence, for advice on learning, teaching and assessment methodologies, embedding employability, and for guidance on programmes with an online or distance learning focus
 - Library & Learning Resources, to review library and e-learning provision / requirements
 - The Apprenticeship Hub, in relation to apprenticeship programme requirements
- 25 Teams are responsible for ensuring that new programmes are appropriately benchmarked to national framework (FHEQ) and subject benchmark standards, including consideration of apprenticeship standards where appropriate. It is also the team's responsibility to liaise with any PSRBs to identify their requirements and any standards of proficiency expected and to ensure these are also taken into consideration and addressed during curriculum development.
- 26 During Stage Two, teams will complete the programme specification comprising the programme aims; learning outcomes; learning, teaching and assessment strategies; and modules which will constitute the curriculum. They will also prepare descriptors for

all new modules as well as supporting information required for set up of the programme on the University's Student Management System. Teams are expected to undertake curriculum development in a timely manner, ensuring that sufficient time has been allowed for external and internal scrutiny of the proposal – and in accordance with any deadlines set by APC and / or Senate.

- 27 As curriculum development nears completion, documentation should be submitted for external scrutiny by external reviewers who are appropriately independent of the programme under consideration.
- a A minimum of one external academic with relevant subject expertise at the level of the qualification should be appointed.
 - b An external industry professional should also be appointed where there is no alternative mechanism for obtaining industry input.

Note: Alternative mechanisms are likely to include the existence of a School Industry Board to advise on industry requirements; where this may be covered via another PSRB requirement such as a formal panel member appointment; or where there is evidence of extensive industry consultation such as is required for the development of degree apprenticeship standards. The mechanism should be made clear at the formal approval event.

- 28 External reviewers will be asked to complete a short report template on the proposal and should receive a small fee for their services payable by the School. Schools should then formally consider and respond to reviewers' comments and build in any changes to the documentation as are agreeable.

Note: Where external reviewers are required to attend a formal panel event in person, e.g. for the purposes of PSRB accreditation, the report requirement will be waived as feedback can be provided directly.

- 29 Following receipt of external review reports and updating of documentation, Schools are responsible for considering the documentation internally and confirming via an appropriate internal audit process that documentation is complete, and is of the required standard to proceed to formal panel approval. This decision should be taken by a senior academic within the School, normally a member of the School Leadership Team with experience of the programme approval process.

Curriculum development of short courses

- 30 Development of short courses will be as outlined above. However, they will not normally require the separate appointment of an external reviewer. Instead, Schools should make use of existing mechanisms, e.g. external examiners.

Stage Three: Formal approval

- 31 Formal consideration and final approval of a programme is undertaken by a formally constituted Approval Panel, convened and serviced on behalf of the University by Academic Registry. For full terms of reference please see **Appendix 2**.
- 32 The panel meeting will normally commence with a short presentation from the Lead Academic Sponsor outlining the main features of the programme under consideration as well as an overview of the curriculum development process itself and key decisions made.

- 33 The panel will consider the programme in detail, seeking assurance from the team that the programme has been developed following appropriate consultation and that the programme and documentation meets the University's and applicable sector standards, including any specific initiatives that may have been introduced.
- 34 At the conclusion of the meeting, the panel will determine whether or not to approve the programme. Conditions on approval may also be specified by the Panel and should be achievable within a specified period, normally twenty working days. Fulfilment of conditions will be determined by the Chair. In all cases the Panel may make recommendations and require minor corrections.
- 35 Where there are a large number of areas of concern or where conditions are not achievable within the time available, the Panel may refer the proposal back to the Curriculum Development Stage for further development work and subsequent resubmission. Resubmission should normally only be required in exceptional cases.
- 36 A formal record of the meeting will be prepared by the Secretary detailing the decision and any conditions and / or recommendations made. A summary record of panel decisions will be submitted to each meeting of Senate.
- 37 Following approval of the programme – including where necessary satisfactory completion of conditions – the Programme Specification and Module Descriptors will be locked as definitive versions and the programme will be fully set up on the University's Student Management System.
- 38 No programme may admit students until it has been formally approved and set up.

Approval of short courses

- 39 The Amendment Panel (below) will normally be responsible for formal consideration and final approval of credit bearing short courses. Non-credit bearing short courses can be approved directly by Schools with approved documentation submitted directly to Academic Registry.
- 40 Short courses requiring PSRB approval may need a separate approval process and / or additional documentation to be provided. The appropriate process to be followed should be discussed with Academic Registry.

Programme amendment

- 41 Amendments to an approved programme of study fall into the following three categories which are guided by consumer protection legislation requirements:
 - **Material amendments** are changes to core curriculum content which change the nature of the programme as advertised to students.
 - **Non-material amendments** represent changes to curriculum content that have no consumer protection implications.
 - **Editorial and administrative amendments** are largely typographical or clerical amendments.

Amendments can be made at both programme and module level.

- 42 Programme Leaders are responsible for ensuring the continuing coherence and adherence to national frameworks and subject benchmark requirements of provision following all amendments. Care should be taken by programme teams to ensure that the latest version of definitive documentation is used to make any amendment; this must be obtained via the Academic Registry.
- 43 Programme Leaders should exercise caution over the cumulative impact and significance of changes to a programme, including in particular widespread changes to learning outcomes, assessment regime and / or the nature of the student experience. Where such changes are required, the School should instead consider re-approval of the programme in question.
- 44 All consultation and approval of changes in principle must have been undertaken by the School prior to submission of documentation for approval. This will include:
- **internal consultation** within the School and with stakeholders across the University;
 - consultation with **students** past and present where possible or appropriate;
 - external consultation with an **external examiner** or as relevant with an **accrediting PSRB**; and,
 - consultation with all **partners** impacted by the change (where a programme is franchised).

Assurance that this process has taken place will be provided by a senior academic within the School.

Material amendments

- 45 Material amendments may only be made following prior consideration by an External Examiner and require the express consent of existing applicants and any current students who will be affected by the change. They also require formal committee approval via the Amendment Panel, terms of reference for which can be found at **Appendix 2**.
- 46 Examples of material amendments include:
- Changes to the programme title and / or qualification(s) to be awarded
 - Changes to the overall programme structure, such as the standard length of the programme
 - Changes to the regime of delivery, e.g. from attendance to flexible and distributed learning
 - Changes to core module titles, volume of credit, or major changes to content
 - Changes to the overall assessment method(s) for a module, e.g. from coursework to exam or vice-versa
 - Changes to the expected workload of a student, i.e. number of contact hours
 - New additional costs to be incurred by a student, i.e. on top of those already specified, e.g. introduction of a materials fee or mandatory study trip
- 47 Wherever possible, programme teams should avoid making material amendments that impact current students – except in exceptional circumstances, e.g. to meet the requirements of an accrediting body. As such, material amendments should normally only be applied to the next full intake of the programme.

- 48 Where an exception is required, the programme team should clearly outline the changes that are being made and set a deadline by which comments and / or objections may be raised.
- 49 Following approval of a material amendment, written notification of the amendment must be provided in a timely fashion by the School to all students and current applicants affected by the change.

Non-material amendments

- 50 Non-material amendments require prior scrutiny by an External Examiner. They also require formal committee approval via the Amendment Panel.
- 51 Examples of non-material amendments include:
- Minor changes to programme and / or module learning outcomes
 - Minor changes to content of core modules
 - Introduction of a new pathway of delivery
 - Introduction of a new mode of study, e.g. an additional part-time mode, or introduction of a sandwich year
 - Approval of new option modules
 - Removal of existing option modules
 - Changes within an assessment type, e.g. from an essay to a report

Editorial and administrative amendments

- 52 Editorial and administrative amendments, being primarily clerical in nature, will be approved via Chair's Action and reported formally at the subsequent panel. This will enable committee oversight.
- 53 Examples of editorial and administrative amendments include:
- Typographical corrections and clarifications
 - Updating of factual information
 - Updates to key text / learning resource requirements to maintain currency
 - Changes to assessment descriptions and hand-in weeks (older template forms only)
 - Changes to semester of delivery (older template forms only)
 - Minor changes to indicative content / brief descriptions that do not affect learning outcomes
 - Introduction of a 'top-up' programme (following appropriate APL approval)
- 54 Following approval of all types of amendment, programme teams must ensure that programme handbooks and other sources of information are updated accordingly.

The Amendment Panel

- 55 The Amendment Panel will normally consider material and non-material amendments to provision, but the nature of some amendments (such as any change to an approved title) will require further approval by Senate. The panel will also consider stand-alone short courses as well as new modules to be approved for incorporation into an existing programme.
- 56 The panel will be chaired by a senior member of academic staff with a learning and teaching remit. Membership will include academic staff drawn from across the

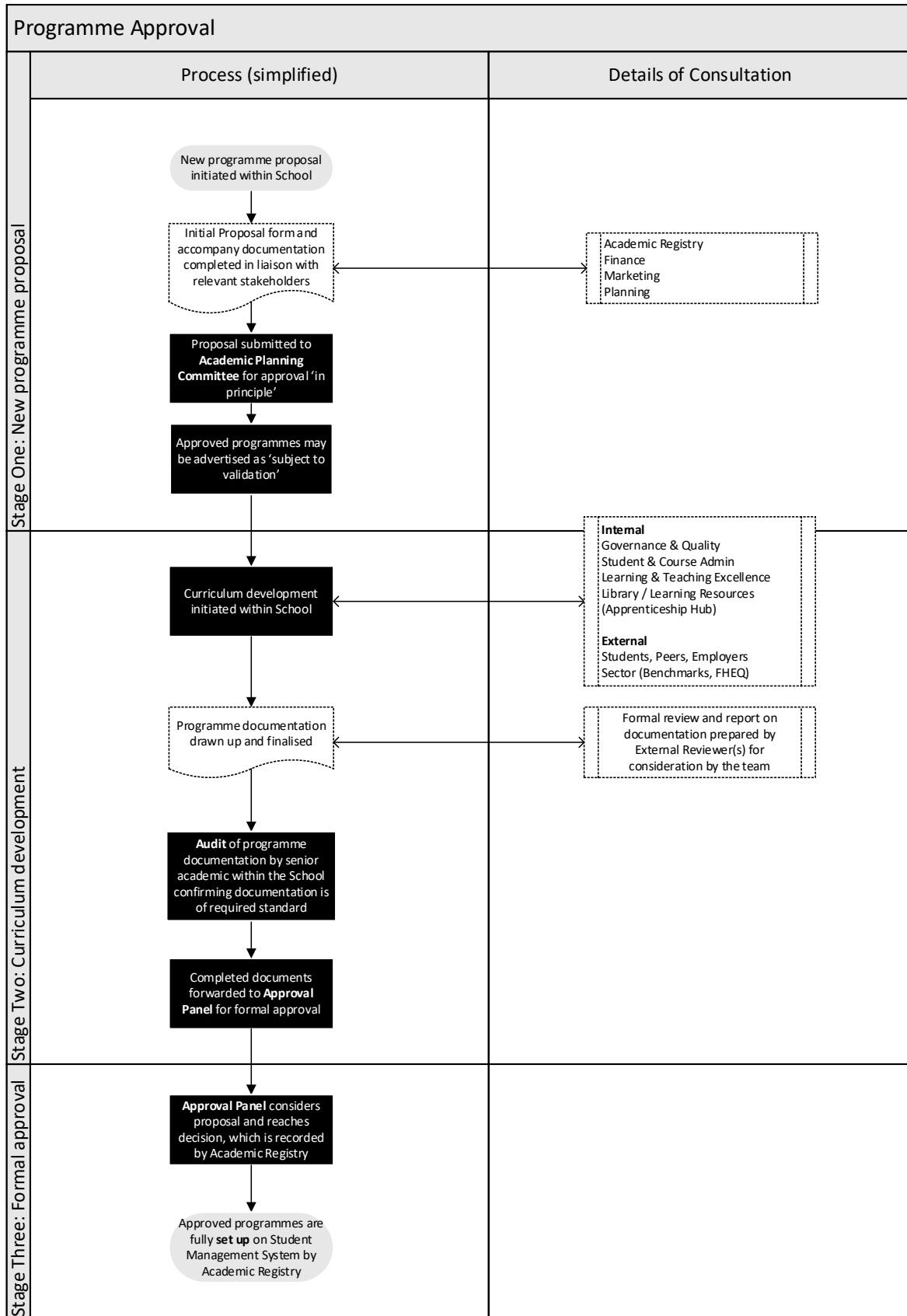
University, as well as representatives from Governance & Quality to advise on regulatory requirements and Marketing & Student Recruitment to advise on consumer protection compliance.

- 57 Where there is concern about the cumulative impact of successive changes to a programme, the panel may instead recommend that re-approval of the programme should be sought instead via a formal approval event as noted above. This will be at the discretion of the Chair and is expected to be applied exceptionally.
- 58 Where multiple changes are being made to a particular programme, the Chair – in consultation with Academic Registry – may agree alternative means of their approval taking into account the guiding principles noted above. This may include a specially convened meeting of all or part of the panel's membership to consider documentation in greater detail.
- 59 Secretarial support to the panel will be provided by Academic Registry who will process all amendments following confirmation of approval where required. Meetings of the panel will be scheduled regularly through the academic year.

Programme approval periods and review processes

- 60 The period of approval of a programme of study will normally be open-ended and formal re-approval will not be required.
- 61 Exceptions will be made for externally accredited provision where the relevant PSRB specifies a particular period of approval; any subsequent changes to such an approval period (i.e. an extension) will require formal approval of the PSRB which should be communicated to Senate.
- 62 All requests to suspend or withdraw an approved programme of study must be undertaken in accordance with the *Programme Suspension and / or Closure Policy*.
- 63 Content of all programmes will be reviewed in accordance with the *Periodic Review Procedure*. Reviews will be scheduled at regular 4-6 yearly intervals at subject level and will ensure content remains current and reflects any recent developments within the discipline.

Appendix 1: Programme Approval Process Diagram



Appendix 2: Panel terms of reference

Approval Panel

Committee:	Approval Panel
Reports to:	Senate (Non-standing Committee) – via a summary report
Standing Committees:	None
Non-Standing Committees:	None
Minutes:	Approval Panel Report per programme considered. Not published
Executive summary required:	Yes – via summary report to Senate
Frequency of meetings	<i>Ad hoc</i>
Updated/reviewed	September 2019

Membership:

Chair	Senior member of University staff who is impartial
Secretary	Appointed by Academic Registry – normally the lead officer from Governance & Quality supporting the programme’s development
Members	Two academic representatives from outside the School from which the proposal originates One other member of staff from an internal professional service area with a curriculum development or delivery remit A student representative appointed by the Students’ Union
Other Members	Other members may be appointed to the Panel as required for other purposes, e.g. external accreditation
Others in attendance:	Others may be invited to attend and advise the Panel in relation to any specialist programme requirements, e.g. apprenticeship provision

Terms of Reference:

- a. To consider and as necessary approve, on behalf of Senate, new academic programmes submitted for approval, as articulated in the Programme Specification, Module Descriptors, and drawing on all other supporting documentation provided.

- b. Specifically, in relation to each programme presented, to:
 - i. Consider its structure and progression opportunities in relation to the intended learning outcomes, ensuring that these are appropriate to its academic level and title
 - ii. Ensure that the stated teaching, learning and assessment strategy will support achievement of learning outcomes and is inclusive, providing all students the opportunity to demonstrate their learning
 - iii. Consider how aspects such as work-based learning, employability, globalisation, sustainability and other University initiatives are embedded within the curriculum
 - iv. Confirm that University policies and regulations have been adhered to, including the programme approval process itself, and, where necessary to consider the appropriateness and necessity of any additional regulations proposed
 - v. Ensure the clarity and robust nature of definitive programme documentation as appropriate for publication
- c. To advise Senate, through the appropriate sub-committee, of any quality assurance matters concerning the approval process that may arise
- d. To prepare a report on all approval decisions reached as a formal record of proceedings.

Notes:

- 1 For efficiency purposes, a Panel may consider more than one programme. It is expected that a single panel will not consider more than three programmes at a single meeting.
- 2 A schedule of Approval Panels will be published and maintained by Academic Registry.
- 3 Observers may attend with the prior approval of the Chair.

Amendment Panel

Committee:	Amendment Panel
Reports to:	Academic Planning Committee (Standing Committee) – via a summary report
Standing Committees:	None
Non-Standing Committees:	None
Minutes:	Minutes. Not published
Executive summary required:	Yes – via summary report to APC
Frequency of meetings	Six-weekly throughout the academic year
Updated/reviewed	September 2019

Membership:

Chair	Director of Student Success or nominee
Secretary	Appointed by Academic Registry
Members	Two academic representatives per School One Academic Registry representative from the Governance and Quality Team One Marketing and Student Recruitment representative A representative from the Students' Union
Others in attendance:	The Chair may invite additional members to attend and advise the meeting as appropriate. This might include representatives from Student and Course Administration or the Apprenticeship Hub.

Terms of Reference:

- a. To consider and as necessary approve, on behalf of Senate, programme and module amendments to existing programmes (including new module approvals) submitted for approval in accordance with policy guidelines and relevant processes.
- b. Specifically, in relation to each amendment presented, to:
 - i. Consider the rationale for the amendment, its impact on the intended learning outcomes, the programme learning, teaching and assessment strategy, and any subject benchmark or PSRB implications
 - ii. Consider how the amendment aligns to relevant University strategies for learning and teaching
 - iii. Seek assurance that resourcing implications have been considered and as necessary addressed

- iv. Review how relevant consumer protection legislation has informed consideration of the amendment, including its impact on applicants and current students
 - v. Review how the impact of the amendment on other affected programmes has been considered, including any educational partners who offer the same provision
 - vi. Ensure that programme documentation has been appropriately and accurately updated to maintain a definitive record.
- c. To consider and, as necessary approve on behalf of Senate, any credit-bearing and / or non-credit-bearing short courses submitted for approval.
 - d. To advise Senate, through the appropriate sub-committee, of any quality assurance matters concerning the amendment process that may arise
 - e. To maintain a record of all amendment decisions reached as a formal record of proceedings.

Notes:

- 1 A schedule of Amendment Panels will be published and maintained by Academic Registry.
- 2 For quoracy purposes the Chair must be present in addition to the Secretary, the Academic Registry representative and academic representatives from two different Schools.
- 3 Observers may attend with the prior approval of the Chair.