

POLICY FOR THE APPROVAL, MODIFICATION AND CLOSURE OF ACADEMIC PROVISION

Updated December 2020

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Policy for the Approval, Modification and Closure of Academic Provision			
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External queries relating to the document to be referred in the first instance to the Corporate Governance team: email address corporate-governance@port.ac.uk.

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The latest version of this document is always to be found at:

<http://policies.docstore.port.ac.uk/policy-092.pdf>

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Summary

What is this document about?

This document sets out the University's Policy for the formal approval, modification and closure of award-bearing academic provision. It details the staff and departments responsible for managing the course approval process, and provides information on course maintenance. Associated documents and information can be found at:

- Course Approval Webpages¹
- Assessment and Regulations²
- Collaborative Partnerships³
- Annual Monitoring and Academic Review⁴

A separate document, Flexible Curriculum Framework⁵, sets out the University's policy for the approval of Short Courses.

Who is this document for?

This document will be of most interest to University staff involved in designing, developing and managing courses delivered at the University and at/with partner institutions. It will also be of interest to the Office for Students (OfS), the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the wider public.

How does the University check this Document is followed?

The University has various formal ways it checks that the Approval, Modification and Closure of Academic Provision Policy is working effectively. This includes regular review of course records by Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships and of the processes by Associate Deans (Academic) and Quality Assurance Committee.

Who should I contact if I have any queries about this Document?

If you are external to the University, please contact Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships at **asqp@port.ac.uk**.

If you are internal to the University, please contact your Associate Dean (Academic) and/or your Academic Standards and Quality Adviser in the first instance. Alternatively, enquiries may be directed to Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships at **asqp@port.ac.uk**.

¹ port.ac.uk/courseapproval

² Staff.port.ac.uk/departments/services/academicregistry/qmd/assessmentandregulations/

³ Staff.port.ac.uk/departments/services/academicregistry/qmd/CollaborativePartnerships/

⁴ Staff.port.ac.uk/departments/services/academicregistry/qmd/reviewcycle/

⁵ port.ac.uk/about-us/structure-and-governance/policies-and-standards

1. Principles

The formal approval of award-bearing academic provision offered by the University is an essential part of the University's quality assurance framework. This document relates to both home and collaborative provision.

The procedures for the approval, modification and closure of courses at the University are designed to ensure that:

- proposals and developments are compatible with the University's strategic aims;
- appropriate resource planning is undertaken;
- external requirements are met appropriately;
- market and employer demand has been researched and considered; and
- there is no conflict with existing provision within the University.

This approval policy should be followed for all award-bearing courses irrespective of academic level, funding source or accrediting body. The procedures have a common framework but differences will be recognised by those with the responsibility for considering applications to meet the particular nature of the proposed course. The approval processes are devolved to an appropriate level of the University. They require no more administration than is necessary to fulfil the principles above.

The approval procedure for Short Courses within the Flexible Curriculum Framework is available separately⁶. The University defines a short course as a planned and structured learning experience of 550 or less notional learning hours, which may include tutor-supported distance learning and guided independent learning. A short course may be designed for delivery to a specific group of learners, organisations or employers, or it can be offered to the public⁷.

The formal approval, modification and closure processes also enable the University to be confident that it maintains appropriate records regarding all of its academic provision. These are required for a wide variety of audiences including potential, existing and past students, existing and newly appointed staff and a wide range of external agencies.

2. Awarding Powers

The University is empowered by Articles of Government to give academic awards of a generic nature, for example, DipHE, BSc, BA (Hons), MEng, MPhil and PhD. The University of Portsmouth's Academic Council has the statutory responsibility for the approval of those awards. The list of academic awards that Academic Council currently approves is contained in the Awards of the University of Portsmouth⁸

⁶ [Staff.port.ac.uk/departments/services/academicregistry/qmd/courseapproval/flexiblecurriculum/](http://staff.port.ac.uk/departments/services/academicregistry/qmd/courseapproval/flexiblecurriculum/)

⁷ For more information on Credit Bearing Short Courses see the Flexible Curriculum Framework (<http://policies.docstore.port.ac.uk/policy-185.pdf>)

⁸ <http://policies.docstore.port.ac.uk/policy-110.pdf>

document. University policy is to add to that list only when it is clearly inappropriate to use an existing approved award – see separate Award Approval process⁹.

The generic academic awards of the University are, with certain exceptions, entitled to indicate the particular discipline, area of study or profession to which they relate; for example, BA (Hons) French Studies, BSc (Hons) Biology, MSc Business and Management. The University refers to the generic award plus the specific title as a named award, a term that is sometimes used to include the curriculum of the award. Academic Council is responsible for the approval of courses leading to awards but delegates that responsibility to University Education and Student Experience Committee (UESEC), Course and Partnership Strategic Approval (CaPSA), Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and Faculty Executive Committees (FECs). The exception is where awards are achieved solely through research activity at the University of Portsmouth when responsibility is shared with University Research Degrees Committee (URDC).

Course files, including all paperwork supporting the approval process, are held electronically at Departmental and Faculty level in accordance with the University Retention Schedules.

Usually new titles are required for new courses but may also be required to reflect changes in the curriculum of existing courses or to increase their attractiveness to prospective students or the employability of graduates. UESEC is responsible for consideration of all applications of new course titles and QAC is responsible for consideration of all applications for modified titles. **Please refer to Annex 1 at the end of this policy for more information.**

In addition to courses through which students can obtain a University of Portsmouth named award, the University offers courses through which students can obtain awards of external bodies, both academic and professional. The University also permits other academic institutions/organisations to offer courses in its name.

The University's relationships with external bodies are diverse. They include:

- licenses to offer the awards of external bodies – for example, from Pearson to offer BTEC Higher National courses
- accreditation by professional bodies to recognise holders of University awards as being eligible to apply for professional membership - for example from the Royal Institute of British Architects recognises the BA (Hons) Architecture for Part 1 of its professional examinations and the Master of Architecture for Part 2.

3. Terminology and scope

An award-bearing course consists of an award, a title and a curriculum. Approval relates to the following matters:

⁹ Staff.port.ac.uk/departments/services/academicregistry/qmd/courseapproval/AwardApproval/

- new award-bearing academic provision, which includes the award, title and the curriculum leading to new named awards;
- modifications to academic provision, which may include approving new titles for existing named awards, or changes in the specified curriculum for named awards and awards of external bodies;
- closure of academic provision;
- suspension of academic provision¹⁰; and
- new academic awards.

Approval of awards of external bodies will follow this process as far as it is compatible with the requirements of the relevant awarding body.

This document does **not** cover:

- short courses of the University of Portsmouth¹¹;
- awards by external accrediting bodies made in accordance with a contract, license or agreement; or
- research degrees (excluding Prof Docs).

3.1 Titles for courses

The academic awards of the University of Portsmouth will normally have specific titles indicating the particular discipline, area of study or profession to which they relate. The award together with the title and the curriculum constitute a course.

The same or very similar title should not be used to represent substantially different course curricula or courses located in different departments, managed by different Boards of Studies or taught by mutually exclusive course teams. The named award title should always communicate accurately to potential students, prospective employers and the public, the focus and content of the course curriculum.

The University should not externally advertise new course titles until they have been formally approved by the relevant Faculty Executive Committee. Any subsequent advertising must make it clear that the course is subject to final approval being given.

Course titles can be withdrawn either because of a lapse in the approval, the closure of a curriculum leading to the award or because of a modification. The withdrawal must be approved by Quality Assurance Committee (QAC).

If there are two fields of study connected by 'and' in the title then it would be expected that the two fields of study will be given approximately equal weighting; and if they are connected by 'with' the expectation would be that the first part of the title will be given more weighting than the second. However, care should

¹⁰ Suspension of Academic Provision is a planned suspension of a course for up to one year – preferably prior to the application cycle in which the course is to be suspended. Suspension of recruitment activity during an application cycle due to e.g. restrictions on capacity, the course being full or there being too few applications to run the course should follow the Planning Department (<https://staff.port.ac.uk/intranet/planning/>) Recruitment Suspension Request Process.

¹¹ For short courses, see Flexible Curriculum Approval Process (staff.port.ac.uk/departments/services/academicregistry/qualitymanagementdivision/courseapproval/flexiblecurriculum/)

be taken to ensure judicious use of 'and' or 'with'; the more succinct the course title, the stronger the likelihood that it will be returned more favourably in applicant search results (for example, on search engines or via UCAS).

Normally QAC shall approve titles that consist of full words but may wish to determine and communicate new policies relating to titles from time to time (e.g. the use of brackets or abbreviations, which are only recommended for use when there is a requirement from a professional or academic external body).

Please refer to Annex A at the end of this policy for more information on set-up of course records, including course nomenclature.

3.2 Provision delivered with others

Approval of courses which will be delivered under any form of partnership arrangement also fall within the provisions of this document but additional elements required by the collaborative nature of the arrangement are covered by the Academic Partnerships Policy¹² document which must be read in conjunction with this document.

3.3 Design and development

Course teams can access centrally provided guidelines and resources on designing new courses via the Course Approval¹³ web pages. These include advice on designing course level aims and learning outcomes, choosing appropriate learning and teaching strategies (including research-informed teaching), and designing assessments. Advice is also available on involving students, alumni and other stakeholders in the course design process. These guidelines are supplemented by staff development sessions on various aspects of course design. Course designers are also advised to seek advice from their Associate Dean (Academic).

The University expects curricula to conform to appropriate institutional policies, for example all award-bearing courses must meet the requirements of the Curriculum Framework¹⁴ document. Course documents are checked through the approval process to consider the proposed course structure, compliance with, or the need for exemptions from, appropriate University policies and/ or regulations. If exemptions are required, approval must be sought by the proposers through the Curriculum Framework and Assessment Regulation Exemption Process¹⁵.

¹² <http://policies.docstore.port.ac.uk/policy-021.pdf>

¹³ [Staff.port.ac.uk/departments/services/academicregistry/qualitymanagementdivision/courseapproval](http://staff.port.ac.uk/departments/services/academicregistry/qualitymanagementdivision/courseapproval)

¹⁴ <http://policies.docstore.port.ac.uk/policy-121.pdf>

¹⁵ [Staff.port.ac.uk/departments/services/academicregistry/qmd/courseapproval/Exmptn%20Prcess/](http://staff.port.ac.uk/departments/services/academicregistry/qmd/courseapproval/Exmptn%20Prcess/)

4. Course approval process

4.1 Overview

The University operates a formal course approval process that consists of distinct phases. The Course and Partnership Strategic Approval (CaPSA) committee, a subgroup of the University Education and Student Experience Committee (UESEC), must first give strategic approval for the proposal to be initiated.

Once CaPSA has granted strategic approval, the full proposal must then gain Faculty Executive Committee (FEC) approval. If the proposal requires significant institutional investment, the Dean will also refer the proposal (with a full business case) to the University Executive Board (UEB) and then to the University Executive Planning Group (EPG) as detailed in the Strategic and Financial Planning guidance¹⁶.

The Head of the Department in which the proposed new named award is located is responsible for ensuring that no new course is advertised before FEC approval is given.

All new courses are required to receive approval from the relevant FEC. This is followed by approval from an Approval Panel and a final sign-off. Finally, QAC determines whether to give assent to the commencement of the course.

In summary:

- CaPSA considers the strategic and policy issues, along with the case for potential market demand (competitor activities, employer demands) and the title.
- Faculty Executive Committee considers the strategic, resource, financial and policy issues, the potential market demand for the proposal along with the title. The procedures for the subsequent Approval Panel are also determined.
- The Approval Panel, in most cases, considers the totality of the curriculum including admissions and induction arrangements, teaching, learning and assessment strategies, arrangements for academic guidance, tutorial support, employability and the development of transferable skills as well as the specific syllabus content, delivery and assessment as set out in the course specification and module descriptions. For courses that lead to an award from an external body, this phase will involve the formal application to that external body. The Approval Panel reports its recommendations to QAC.
- Final sign-off – Certification by the relevant Associate Dean (Academic) that the conditions have been met and that the associated documentation is of an appropriate standard for the course to begin. In the case of a collaborative proposal, the Head of Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships must also certify that financial and agreement arrangements have been completed.

Further details of each stage are set out in sections 4.2 to 4.7.

¹⁶ <https://staff.port.ac.uk/intranet/planning/>

4.2 Course and Partnership Strategic Approval (CaPSA)

Initial strategic approval is required from the Course and Partnership Strategic Approval (CaPSA) committee, a subgroup of the University Education and Student Experience Committee (UESEC), before proceeding with a new course proposal.

CaPSA will require the following information about the new proposal via SITS Curriculum Manager¹⁷, in order to consider the proposal:

- the proposed course name and mode(s) of study, start date, type(s) of delivery, and any Faculties involved – together with its relationship to existing provision and external reference points;
- a rationale for the proposal, providing an explanation of how the proposed course is aligned with the [overall strategic plan](#) of the University as a whole; and
- a brief outline of the key benefits of the course, the financial considerations and the market opportunities (competitor activities and other indicators of demand, such as employer feedback).

CaPSA will consider whether:

- the proposed course contributes to the delivery of the strategic aims of the University;
- the proposed course has the potential to enhance the University's national and international standing and reputation;
- the proposed course has a sufficient market and fits to the overall curriculum portfolio;
- the proposed course contributes to the delivery of the graduate hallmarks and employability;
- the title complies with any decisions the University has made about how course titles should be expressed, for instance in relation to the use of 'and' and 'with' and the use of abbreviations or punctuation;
- the title is unique within the University and sufficiently distinct to avoid confusion with existing courses; and
- the title is as straightforward and simple as is consistent with the points above.

In consideration of the proposal, CaPSA will decide:

- to approve the proposal can proceed
- to defer agreement until further information is provided
- to reject the proposal as it does not meet requirements of the University Strategy.

4.3 Faculty Executive Committee

Faculty Executive Committee considers the strategic, resource, financial and policy considerations along with the title and the potential market demand. The procedures for the subsequent Approval Panel are also determined.

¹⁷ First use: 2021.

Faculty Executive Committee will require information about the new proposal, including:

- the proposed course name and mode(s) of attendance, method(s) of delivery, start date, detailed recruitment targets and source of funding;
- an analysis of the market for the proposed course, both current and/or potential;
- an explanation of how the proposed course is aligned with the overall strategic plan of the University as a whole, and any Faculties involved – together with its relationship to existing provision and external reference points;
- a marketing statement;
- a financial statement which includes an estimate of the staffing and resources that shall be required to support and maintain the new course and a plan to indicate how these resource needs will be met; and
- a procedure for the following phase of approval proposed by the Faculty Associate Dean (Academic) and recommended by Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships.

Additional information will be required:

- where a Partnership is proposed; and
- where a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) is involved.

Faculty Executive Committee will consider the following factors when coming to a decision as to whether to approve the proposal:

- the proposal is consistent with the strategic aims of the Faculty, in addition to those of the University', given that CaPSA will have already reached a view on the latter;
- the proposal has sufficient market potential, is financially viable and that appropriate supporting resources are available;
- the title is accurate, taking into account the common current understanding of such a title by both prospective students and employers as well as academic peers;
- the title complies with any decisions the University has made about how course titles should be expressed, for instance in relation to the use of 'and' and 'with' and the use of abbreviations or punctuation;
- the title is unique within the University and sufficiently distinct to avoid confusion with existing courses; and
- the title is as straightforward and simple as is consistent with the two points above.

In consideration of the proposal, Faculty Executive Committee will decide:

- to approve the proposal;
- to defer an immediate decision regarding approval until such time as a full business case has been approved by UEB, if the proposal requires significant institutional investment;

- that the information provided is insufficient to make a decision and it is referred back to the proposer (possibly with advice as to the changes that would be required for approval to be given and may defer approval for Chair's Action following submission of required additional information);
- that the information is sufficient but, because of overall considerations of University policy, approval is inappropriate (approval refused and the proposal is referred back to the proposer with specified reasons for the non-approval and possibly invite a re-submission of the proposal when and if the specified issues are resolved); or
- to not approve the proposal.

In exceptional circumstances, for instance where there are commercial tender deadlines (see 4.3.1 below), the Chair of Faculty Executive Committee may, with the agreement of the Chair of QAC, agree to progress a proposal outside the usual procedures.

In determining the procedures for the following phase of approval, Faculty Executive Committee may discuss and identify any particular issues relating to University policies, or otherwise, that the Approval Panel should address. Faculty Executive Committee may also specify requirements for the composition of any Approval Panel in relation to members external or internal to the University. Quality Assurance Committee however retains the responsibility for the formal oversight of the composition of Approval Panels.

Following Faculty Executive Committee approval, Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships will allocate a course code and liaise with DSAA colleagues to ensure the course is set up correctly. The courses will be advertised (as 'subject to validation') on the web site and in relevant documentation unless the proposal has indicated otherwise.

Please refer to Annex A at the end of this policy for more information on set-up of course records.

4.3.1 Collaborative and other relevant proposals subject to external commercial requirements

Faculty Executive Committee approval will be required in order for a response to an Invitation to Tender, or other relevant external requirements, to be made.

The proposers (department and/or Research and Innovation Services) are to discuss the development of external bidding opportunities for collaborative courses with the Head of Student and Academic Administration (Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships) prior to the submission of the tender, or other externally-relevant documentation.

The Head of Student and Academic Administration (Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships) will discuss and agree significant proposals (e.g. those of high monetary value or ones requiring commercial and/or ethical consideration) with the University Executive Board.

Where submission deadlines allow, collaborative course bids should be progressed through the standard course approval channels for collaborative courses. However, if the submission date of

the Invitation to Tender, or other relevant commercial process, is prior to the next Faculty Executive Committee meeting date, the proposer may seek approval (via correspondence) using, where possible, the relevant approval documentation.

Although not all of the course details may be known at the time of the submission of the proposal, there must be sufficient information available in order for the Faculty Executive Committee to consider the strategic fit. The proposal documentation, updated where necessary, and the Faculty Executive Committee decision will be included for information and audit trail on the next Faculty Executive Committee agenda and the decision recorded appropriately in the minutes.

- Invitation to Tender, or other relevant document(s), to include the following statement:

The University of Portsmouth will develop, monitor and review its collaborative courses in accordance with the University of Portsmouth quality assurance framework. The collaborative course and partnership proposal is subject to approval through the University's Course Approval system.

- The Invitation to Tender, or other documentation completed as part of any relevant external requirements, document must not create a binding contract between the University and the client.

4.4 Approval panel

The purpose of an Approval Panel is to consider the totality of the curriculum, including admissions and induction arrangements, teaching, learning and assessment strategies, arrangements for academic guidance, tutorial support and the development of key and transferable skills as well as the specific syllabus content, delivery and assessment as set out in the course specification and module descriptions. The Approval Panel considers the documentation provided and invites members of the course team to the event to discuss the proposal. It is the responsibility of the proposer to ensure an appropriate representative course team are adequately briefed and able to attend the approval event. The Approval Panel reports its recommendations to Quality Assurance Committee (QAC).

An approval panel may meet in person or virtually, and may consider the proposal synchronously or asynchronously.

In some cases, it may be appropriate for the event to be conducted by an Approval Panel with a reduced membership and/ or by correspondence. This may be appropriate for the approval of a qualification where the curriculum of the proposed award is very similar to that of an existing award, or where a well-defined structure or framework has been established by the University into which new awards may be introduced in a prescribed manner. Agreement to hold a non-standard Approval Panel as detailed above requires discussion and agreement with Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships.

For courses that lead to an award of an external body, this is the phase of the process when the formal application to that external body should be made.

Depending on the nature of the proposal, the following Approval Panels will consider a new proposal:

- Approval Panel: to consider the curriculum for new courses delivered by the University
- Collaborative Approval Panel: to consider the course and partnership for new courses delivered by a partner institution.

Unless otherwise agreed with Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships, all Approval Panels are organised by the Faculty. Where approval is sought for courses (and, where applicable, partnerships) that involve more than one Faculty, appropriate co-ordination arrangements will be agreed.

4.4.1 The purpose of the approval panel

The purpose of the Approval Panel is to scrutinise the proposal to ensure that:

- any specific issues for the attention of the panel, which were raised by Faculty Executive Committee, are addressed;
- the proposal has been designed with proper attention to detail, is adequately documented, and that the course team is genuinely committed to its introduction;
- the learning experience proposed, including methods of teaching, tutorial provision and assessment, is capable of allowing students to achieve the required academic standard for the award and to attain the stated aims and outcomes;
- the proposal adheres to the regulations of the University and/or other awarding body;
- the curriculum content, delivery and assessment are consistent with the University's [Equality and Diversity Policies](#);
- there should be opportunities for informal, personal support and feedback from students;
- there should be opportunities for formal, scheduled points for feedback to students;
- the course design reflects the academic policies of the University and relevant good practice in the HE sector, and industry where relevant;
- confidence may be placed in the structure of course management, staffing and the process of staff development;
- any issues which emerge in relation to staffing and/or resources that were not covered in the original proposal considered by Faculty Executive Committee are explored; and
- in cases where Departmental, Faculty or institutional collaboration is involved, clear and sustainable operational principles have been agreed between the partners.

In addition to the above, where the course is wholly offered by, or contains an element¹⁸ or elements of delivery by others, the following additional areas are also to be considered:

- where the course delivery and student support arrangements are reliant upon the technological infrastructure of the Partner, there is evidence that the systems employed are sound and of

¹⁸ 'Element' means a single module.

appropriate quality to ensure delivery (this should include information of the Partner's IT support arrangements including technical backup, virus and password protection);

- that the courses have had the reliability of the delivery systems tested and what contingency plans are in place for both the University and the Partner and how they would come into operation in the event of the failure of the modes of delivery. Where the University of Portsmouth's technological infrastructure is used for course delivery and support, the Approval Panel may be assured of its fitness for purpose through existing resource investment strategies, backup and technological expertise of Information Services;
- that the information and delivery medium regarding the induction programme for students is appropriate and relevant and provided to the committee in advance;
- that the technologies used are realistic in taking into account levels of technology available to students and provision for students with special needs;
- that the course team provide a clear action plan for the design and implementation of all elements of the curriculum and provide a timescale for course development;
- that students should have a designated contact (local or via email or telephone) for academic, administrative and pastoral support;
- that particular thought has been given to parallels and equivalencies with face-to-face learning, e.g. in the areas of provision of tutorial sessions, web-based conferencing and online contacts between tutors and student, and between groups of students;
- that robust feedback processes and systems are established;
- that processes are in place to ensure that where students study for the same award through delivery by others and on campus, their results and feedback on their experience can be compared and evaluated;
- that staff who deliver, support and assess work have appropriate skills and receive appropriate training and development;
- that the Approval Panel have the opportunity to access some online materials, where relevant this may be exemplars¹⁹; and
- the Approval Panel should include at least one member who has experience in delivery/support of current courses also wholly offered by, or containing an element or elements of delivery by others.

4.4.2 Roles of panel members

The standard quorum for Approval Panels is the Chair, the Member External to the University and at least one other member. The list below gives the expected membership of an Approval Panel but other members may be added as befitting the nature of the proposal. Student members may also be added but it is expected that students will have been included in consideration of the design of the proposal at an earlier stage.

¹⁹ As discussed with, and confirmed by, the Associate Dean (Academic).

Chair

A senior member of staff external to the Faculty who is appropriately experienced and impartial. They should not be acting in any other capacity on the committee.

External Assessor

An external academic and/or professional who has subject specialist knowledge and meets the requirements of the External Assessor approval process.

Staff Member

An academic member of staff external to the Faculty who has appropriate training in the approval process.

Head of Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships

The Head of Student and Academic Administration (Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships) or representative from Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships who has quality assurance and collaborative provision experience and knowledge.

Associate Dean (Academic), Associate Dean (Students)

Both Associate Deans shall contribute to the discussions as full members of the Approval Panel.

Academic Standards and Quality Adviser (Secretary to Approval Panel)

The Secretary shall be responsible for taking notes and producing the appropriate report.

4.4.3 Documentation

A list of the minimum documents normally required by an Approval Panel is provided on the Course Approval²⁰ web pages.

It is the responsibility of the proposers of the new course to prepare the required documentation according to a prescribed format and timetable as agreed with the responsible Associate Dean (Academic).

The format of the documentation will vary to some extent according to the nature of the approval event. The Associate Dean (Academic) is responsible for giving advice as to the exact requirements and ensuring the correct documents are made available to the Approval Panel.

4.4.4 Decision

In consideration of the proposal, the Approval Panel will decide to recommend to QAC:

- to approve without conditions;
- to approve with conditions, which must be fulfilled by a date set by the Approval Panel (the conditions must be clear, with reasons given for making them; they will relate to major concerns, which must be addressed before a course can run);

²⁰ Staff.port.ac.uk/departments/services/academicregistry/qmd/courseapproval/

- that the decision is deferred pending a further meeting to give the course team time to prepare further documentation; or
- that the proposal not be approved.

In all cases it is also possible to make recommendations. A recommendation is a suggested enhancement which the course team may wish to consider after the course has commenced.

4.4.5 Approval panel report

The Approval Panel Report is the formal record that details the decision and any conditions and/or recommendations of the Approval Panel. Guidelines on timescales for producing the Approval Panel meeting reports are that:

- the decision reached, including any conditions and recommendations, is to be approved by the Chair and members within five working days of the event and then passed to the course team who attended the event for information;
- the full report, including the rationale, is to be approved by the Chair and members within a further two weeks and then passed to the course team who attended the event for information.

4.5 Quality Assurance Committee

Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) will have oversight of the outcomes of all curriculum and collaborative approval events including all conditions by consideration of the Approval Panel Report. This will enable QAC to give formal agreement (or otherwise) to the approval decision.

University Research Degrees Committee (URDC) will be notified of the outcomes of Collaborative Research Degree Approval Panels including all conditions by receipt of the Approval Panel Reports.

No student will be registered until QAC has ratified the Approval Panel decision and the proposal has received final sign-off (see item 4.6). Through the submission of QAC minutes, UESEC and Academic Council are informed of newly approved courses.

4.6 Final sign off

The Faculty Associate Dean (Academic) will make the decision about whether any conditions set have been met, taking advice from the Chair of the Committee or any other responsible officer of the University (e.g. Head of Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships, Finance Officer) as necessary. The outcome of considerations of those issues identified as recommendations, if not incorporated in the revised course documentation, should normally be reported at the first Board of Studies held.

The Faculty Associate Dean (Academic) will sign the appropriate form to certify that the conditions have been met and that the associated documentation is of an appropriate standard for the course to begin. For collaborative proposals, the Head of Student and Academic Administration (Academic Standards, Quality

and Partnerships) will also sign the appropriate form to confirm the fee schedule and the contract have been completed.

5. Course maintenance

The Course Specification for the course as it was finally approved will be maintained as the key reference document. Under document control procedures, the issuing authority will be deemed to be the Department in which the course is based. The Department, as advised by the relevant Associate Dean (Academic), will be responsible for maintaining the currency of the information and for ensuring that any changes made follow the appropriate procedures.

Course Specifications must be considered and updated as necessary to reflect any changes agreed through the year. The Associate Deans (Academic) are responsible for deciding whether cumulative changes in the Course Specification require submission of the course for re-approval. Senior managers of the University may also initiate a request for course re-approval if they have concerns about academic standards and/or quality of the overall course and/or student learning experience.

Course Specification Documents must be updated and stored in accordance with University policies for document management.

5.1 Course modification

It is expected that curricula will develop and change over time as modules are modified and new ones are introduced and there are shifts in focus, balance and approach of particular courses. These changes should be managed through normal Faculty/Departmental procedures.

5.1.1 Course modification process

Modifications that are more significant will require approval by Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). For example:

- changes to the academic award or its title
- the mode(s) of attendance (i.e. full-time/part-time) and/or method(s) of delivery (i.e. on campus or distance learning)
- an addition or change to annual intakes.

QAC will require different information according to the type of modification being requested. Details can be found on the Course Modification, Closure and Suspension Process²¹ web page.

²¹ Staff.port.ac.uk/departments/services/academicregistry/qmd/courseapproval/2014ModClsr/

5.1.2 Potential effects on existing students and applicants

Proposers must ensure that both applicants and students have adequate notice of any forthcoming changes to 'material information' about their course and that they are consulted on the changes where appropriate. Material information is defined in sections 4.7-4.10 of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) publication UK Higher Education Providers – Advice on Consumer Protection Law (2015)²².

Modification requests should clearly detail the extent of consultation with students. The detail needs to include any concerns expressed by students and the actions taken by the course team to address these concerns.

5.1.3 Addition of a part-time route to an existing full-time course

Addition of a part-time route to an existing course requires approval by QAC. This can be achieved through a course modification request but such a request must be accompanied by the following documentation:

- a course structure that makes plain the route through the course for the part-time student and highlights any differences compared to the structure available to the full-time student;
- an assurance, with appropriate demonstration, that the likely quality of the student learning experience will be equivalent to that of a full-time student on the same course;
- a strategic rationale for the addition of the further mode of study; and
- a financial statement which includes an estimate of the staffing and resources that shall be required to support and maintain the further mode of study and a plan to indicate how these resource needs will be met.

5.1.4 Modifications to be completed using the course approval process

In some circumstances, it is more appropriate for the modification to follow some (or all) of the course approval process, for example the addition of:

- a full-time route to an existing part-time course
- a distance-learning version of an existing campus-based course
- a degree apprenticeship alternative to an existing course
- a new award or change to the level of the award for an existing course.

Where this is the case, Academic Standards, Quality and Partnerships can advise on the process that needs to be followed.

5.1.5 Decision

In consideration of the proposal, QAC will decide:

- to give full approval;

²² gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-consumer-law-advice-for-providers

- to approve with conditions (for example, some modifications may require part or all of the course approval process);
- to refer the decision and seek further information from the Faculty; or
- to not approve.

5.2 Course closure

5.2.1 Course closure

Course closure requires approval by Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). Details can be found on the Course Modification, Closure and Suspension Process²³ web page. Requests will be considered based on:

- the cogency of the rationale provided;
- the adequacy of arrangements envisaged for remaining student cohorts and/or applicants (see 5.2.2);
- the evidence that other courses of action have been considered and rejected for good reason;
- the effect of the closure on other provision in the University; and
- where the closure proposals are substantial, evidence that the Faculty has considered how to deal with the broader issues linked to management of change during the run-out period such as impact on academic and support staffing provision.

5.2.2 Potential effects on existing students and applicants

Proposers must ensure that both applicants and students have adequate notice of closure or suspension of their course and that they are given adequate time to make informed decisions where required. Please see the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) publication UK Higher Education Providers – Advice on Consumer Protection Law (2015)²⁴.

Closure requests should clearly detail the impact on applicants and what steps will be taken to ameliorate any potential negative impacts.

5.2.3 Decision

In consideration of the proposal, QAC will decide:

- to give full approval;
- to approve with conditions;
- to refer the decision and seek further information from the Faculty; or
- to not approve.

²³ Staff.port.ac.uk/departments/services/academicregistry/qmd/courseapproval/2014ModClsr/

²⁴ gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-consumer-law-advice-for-providers

A course suspension will not be approved for more than one year. Normally thereafter, the course should either be continued or closed. A request for the continuance of a suspension can be considered in exceptional circumstances.

Annex A: Records set-up principles and guidance

1. Introduction

1.1 This document sets out the principles that should be followed as part of the process of setting up new course records in the University's student and course management system, SITS.

2. Course start dates

2.1 The start date is used to:

- advertise a month of entry to prospective applicants via the website and on the online form they complete as part of the application process, as well as advertising specific start dates in other external publications, e.g. UCAS;
- populate the start date on the Confirmation of Acceptance of Studies, and to inform study cap assessments and late registration dates (published to UKVI on the CAS);
- communicate a specific start date to students once they have accepted a place on the course;
- determine students' expected end dates (important for UKVI and external returns) and whether or not they are included in the University's returns at all²⁵;
- support planning around University-wide and Faculty-specific induction activities, as well as the International Orientation Programme provided to all non-UK students including Erasmus/Exchange & Study Abroad international students; and
- determine when students' individual timetables are made available to them.

2.2 For new course proposals (or modifications resulting in the creation of a new course record) for any University of Portsmouth home courses (those that do not involve a partner), the start date should conform to the following:

- For September intakes, the start date is the first date of Teaching Block 1 as outlined in the approved academic calendar.
- For January intakes, the start date is the first date of Teaching Block 2 as outlined in the approved academic calendar.
- For monthly starts/short courses, the start date is the first Monday of the relevant month, but can be moved for Easter and Bank Holidays.

²⁵ A student is only counted in HESA returns if they do not withdraw within two weeks of their start date. The start date must be accurate to ensure they are included or excluded appropriately.

- 2.3 Induction activities will usually immediately precede the start of teaching, and in line with statutory reporting requirements, the start date will reflect the start of the induction period. The first week of a Teaching Block is induction week.
- 2.4 There are legitimate circumstances under which a course might benefit from a delivery pattern that does not readily fit with the principles outlined above. Principal among these might be:
- Employer or workforce needs, for courses developed to meet the needs of particular industries or roles (e.g. Initial Teacher Training, some Degree Apprenticeships).
 - Requirements for courses intended to be taken as a precursor to or pathway into other courses (e.g. International College Portsmouth courses).

Other valid reasons may exist and will need to be evaluated on a case by case basis.

- 2.5 Where the standard principles outlined above are deemed not to be appropriate for the course in question, exemption should be sought via the extant process for requesting [exemption from academic policies and assessment regulations](#). All requests will need to be supported by the Associate Dean (Academic) in order to be taken forward for consideration under the usual arrangements.
- 2.6 The start dates for partner courses will be primarily determined by the partner's own academic year calendar, and will be specified in agreement with the University Academic Contact and Associate Dean (Academic). Exemptions are not required for partner courses.
- 2.7 There is some additional flexibility available to short courses. Whilst these are encouraged to adhere to these rules, there is scope to deviate where it is appropriate to do so. Again, no exemption needs to be sought in these instances.
- 2.8 As part of the course set up process, records are set up for each time the course runs (corresponding to each approved entry point/intake). If the above rules are adhered to, the start date will always fall within the month of entry advertised to potential applicants via the University's website. Where exemptions have been approved, the DSAA Systems team will apply appropriate validation to ensure that the start date always falls within the approved month of entry for the course in question. This will ensure that there is no negative impact on the various business processes and published information outlined in 2.1 above.

3. Course end dates

- 3.1 The course end date aligns with the overall duration of the course, and is also used in external publications (e.g. UCAS), in the CAS process, as well as in the University's statutory reporting.
- 3.2 The end date should reflect the last scheduled activity for the student, including any scheduled examination or assessment period but excluding the Board period and referral period.

3.3 For further guidance on course end dates, please contact ASQP.

4. Course duration

- 4.1 The duration of a course should be expressed as an integer (whole number), and in the largest appropriate units of measurement. This means, for example, that a course is recorded as 3 years rather than 36 months in length.
- 4.2 For further guidance on course duration in relation to a specific delivery pattern, please contact ASQP.

5. Course nomenclature

- 5.1 The University has a responsibility to ensure that the qualifications awarded to students retain their value over time. The course title, which will appear on the student's parchment, must be understood by prospective students, graduates, employers, professional statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), and other stakeholders. It must accurately represent the broader field of study, as well as the specific curriculum covered by all students who are eligible to receive the award in question.
- 5.2 Course teams involved in developing new and existing courses are encouraged to innovate and, where appropriate, reflect both the distinctiveness of their curriculum and the broader subject discipline in the nomenclature adopted. In doing so, longevity will need to be balanced with currency to ensure that the qualifications awarded remain relevant to the general subject area over time. Course titles will need to be sustainable, socially acceptable, and free from possible negative connotations.
- 5.3 Course titles should be concise and meaningful, avoid over-specification, and should not normally include reference to:
- Method of delivery (e.g. distance learning);
 - Type of award (e.g. top-up, degree apprenticeship);
 - Location of delivery (e.g. where the qualification has been taken by students via a transnational education arrangement); or
 - Accreditation by a PSRB.

The qualification awarded to students recognises their overall academic attainment, not the how or where they engaged in the learning required to achieve it. This information is captured elsewhere in the course record.

- 5.4 For professionally accredited courses, care should be taken to specify an appropriate alternative exit award to be conferred upon students who do not meet the requirements for the primary award. Those who have met the requirements for accreditation should be readily distinguishable from those

who have not. Colleagues involved in the development and delivery of such courses will be expected to seek advice as appropriate from the relevant PSRB.

6. Routes

- 6.1 Course records in the University's student and course management system, SITS, comprise a number of different individual components. Principal amongst these are the course (CRS) record, which holds information about the *structure* of the student's learning experience (e.g. its duration, intensity, location, academic level), and the route (ROU) record (and other records attached to it, including modules), which holds the *detail* of the student's curriculum.
- 6.2 In the majority of cases, there will be a single route attached to a course. However there is potential to hold multiple route associations against a single course if the structure of these is the same (i.e. same Department, durations, mode etc). A route is defined as a specific diet of modules that reflects an area of specialisation within a course, and which appears in the title of the award conferred upon students either:
 - In brackets alongside the generic course title, e.g. Music Technology (Production); or
 - Standalone, e.g. MSc Criminology and Forensic Investigation (which is a route of MSc Criminal Justice).
- 6.3 Faculties may opt to make routes available at the point of application, offer them to registered students at an agreed point in their learning journey (e.g. re-registration, or as part of making option choices), or move students on to a particular route to reflect choices they have made in the assessment process (e.g. as the result of the focus of their dissertation or other work). Broadly speaking, these reflect use of the terminology 'pathway course' (though see next point) and 'graduation only award'. The route name determines the specific award the student receives upon successful completion of their studies.
- 6.4 The notion of a 'pathway course' has also been used within the University to refer to specific combinations of modules representing specialisations within a given course structure but which have no impact on the award conferred. In SITS these are captured in module collections as part of diet (course structure) set up.
- 6.5 The naming of routes should adhere to the general principles outlined in section 5 above. For further guidance on routes, please contact ASQP.

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