

Quality Assurance Code of Practice

Approval of New Courses of Study

This document is primarily intended for:

- Developers of new courses
- Assistant Registrars (Faculty/School) or equivalents
- Members of committees involved in the approval of new courses

Queries

First point of contact:

• Assistant Registrars (Faculty/School) or equivalent

Technical specialist

Academic Registry

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Related documents and templates are available on the **QA3** statement page.

1. Purpose and Scope

- 1.1 This QA statement sets out the principles and process for approval of a new course of study and applies to:
 - all taught courses of study leading to an award of the University of Bath
 - research degrees with a taught element (for example professional doctorates, integrated PhDs)
 - variants to an existing academic course (for example, the addition to an existing course of a new placement or study year abroad)
 - new exit awards.
- 1.2 Where a proposed new course of study is to be delivered by or with a new or existing collaborative partner, then this QA statement should be read in conjunction with QA20 Collaborative Provision which sets out the additional steps to be followed for the approval of collaborative partners and taught courses. The approval process for joint research degrees is covered in QA20.
- 1.3 Where a new degree apprenticeship course is proposed, there will be specific requirements for approval (QA3 Annex I) and proposers should consult Academic Registry.
- 1.4 This QA statement should also be read in conjunction with the <u>Academic Frameworks</u> and the relevant University <u>assessment regulations</u>.

2 Principles and Overview

- 2.1 The University needs to ensure that any new course is consistent with the <u>University's Strategy</u> including the strategic pillar 'Driving excellence in education', is financially viable, and is academically appropriate and sound. The University also needs to ensure that it has the necessary capacity to deliver a high quality student learning experience.
- 2.2 The course approval process is intended to provide a high level of rigorous scrutiny to new course proposals whilst facilitating innovation and updating of the academic portfolio. It involves two main stages:
 - (i) **Stage One Initial Approval:** strategic consideration of a proposal for academic fit and financial viability including evidence of a viable and sustainable market
 - (ii) Stage Two Full Approval: a closer consideration of the detailed academic case.
- 2.3 The Course Specifications, regulations and the unit descriptions required in the course of this process must meet the standards of documentation expected under the principles of QA44 Course Handbooks and Course Specifications. (Guidance on drawing up Course Specifications. is available from Academic Registry).
- 2.4 The process for the approval of new taught courses is underpinned by the requirement for external opinion from professional accrediting bodies, employers and, at the final stages, reports from one or more independent External Reviewers.

3. Timescales

3.1 In planning for the introduction of a new course, course proposers need to take into account:

- **lead time for inclusion in <u>marketing</u> publications:** the deadline for inclusion in the printed undergraduate prospectus is the December that falls 21 months prior to the first Autumn student intake; inserts can be made into the web version relatively quickly (see also 5.9 below); it is advisable to allow 18 months prior to the first student intake for postgraduate provision in order that a viable cohort can be recruited
- lead time for the completion of the <u>approval process</u> prior to processing of applications: lead times should whenever possible be planned to provide for final approval from Senate and completion of any follow-up work required, at least one academic year prior to start-date to maximise recruitment potential
- **timescale for** <u>timetabling</u> **of teaching space:** information is normally gathered between Easter and Summer in the year prior to an Autumn student intake.
- 3.2 In most cases, it should be possible for the Department/School/Learning Partnerships Office (LPO) to take an initial idea through the approval process within an academic year: through Stage One Initial Strategic Approval in the one semester and then Stage Two Full Academic Approval in another. This is an indicative timeline only; for instance, courses involving collaborative provision may take longer to negotiate. There may be exceptional cases when the University supports a Department/School/LPO in acting more quickly in order to respond to an emerging strategic opportunity.

4. Preparing for the approval of a new course

- 4.1 The initial development of a new course of study takes place within a Department/ School/LPO or as a group development with others. Further guidance on the elements (internal and external) for consideration is available from Academic Registry (Academic Quality & Standards).
- 4.2 The Head of Department/School/LPO is responsible for incorporating an indication of planned new courses in departmental/School/partner college submissions during the annual planning round.
- 4.3 It is recognised that in some cases new initiatives will arise more quickly as the University takes advantage of emerging opportunities. Nevertheless, where new course proposals are included in a bid for external funding, Stage One Strategic Approval for the course(s) should be obtained from Board of Studies and Academic Programmes Committee (APC), as well as from University Doctoral Studies Committee (UDSC) in the case of research degree courses with a taught element, prior to submission of the bid. Further advice can be obtained from the Assistant Registrar in the relevant Faculty/School.
- 4.4 Where a new University award is being proposed (a list of existing awards can be found in the Credit Framework), advice should be sought from the Academic Registry (Academic Quality & Standards) on proposing to Senate and Council the creation of a new University award, by amendment of Ordinance 14. Academic Registry will liaise with the Secretary to Council in providing advice.

5. Stage One Initial Strategic Approval

Aims of Stage One

- 5.1 The aims of this stage are to:
 - establish that the proposal fits with the <u>University Strategy</u> and forms a coherent pattern of provision with other existing or planned courses in the University:

- establish that the proposal is financially viable including if the market information/ intelligence is rigorously evidenced and robust;
- establish that the University has the necessary capacity in human and physical resources to deliver a high quality student learning experience in respect of the proposal:
- agree the course title, level and outline structure, with the understanding that this should not then *normally* change at the Full Approval stage (see 6.6);
- agree material information for inclusion in the digital prospectus;
- agree the proposed success criteria for the course;
- identify, where possible, any complex aspects, such as the need for exemptions from the University's <u>Academic Frameworks</u> on which early advice should be sought. The aim here is to resolve potential issues at an early stage and avoid unnecessary delays at the Full Approval stage.

Information requirements for Stage One

- In seeking Stage One Initial Strategic Approval for a new course, the Course Development Team will provide the following documentation. Where the proposal is for a new exit award (i.e. that is not being recruited to), or for a new variant of an existing course, advice should be sought from Academic Registry (Academic Quality & Standards) in the first instance about relevant and proportionate documentation requirements:
 - the business case on Form QA3.1, setting out anticipated student numbers and fees, staffing and resource requirements, estimated income, and estimated costs. The timetabling and space implications e.g. for new units or where block (non-modular) timetabling booking is required, should be clearly stated. Advice can be sought from Departmental and Faculty Accountants.
 - a **brief rationale** for the new course with reference to the <u>University Strategy</u>, the University's Curriculum Design Principles (Annex C), and the strategic aims of the Faculty/School/LPO; and confirmation of support from all relevant Head(s) of Department(s) or equivalent in the School (including the Head(s) of any Department(s) which would provide service teaching). Entry requirements for the course should be described here. There is no specific template/format for the rationale and it can be provided as a cover paper for the approving committee. QA3.1 includes a section on links to University strategy. Information provided in QA3.1 can be signposted rather than duplicated in the rationale.
 - a draft Course Specification (QA44 Annex B) completed with input from Faculty Marketing, setting out the title, level, anticipated start date, draft intended learning outcomes, and course structure including the diet of core units and draft information on optional units, alongside the credit value of the units; and any partnership arrangements or professional accreditation, in order that the aims and shape of the proposed course can be clearly discerned, and material information is available for marketing the course.
 - completed with input from Faculty Marketing, as applicable (Form QA3.6):
 - o for **undergraduate** courses, synopses for compulsory units and a generic description of the options available in each course year
 - for postgraduate taught courses, compulsory and optional unit synopses, and a generic description of the options available by semester.
 - market information setting out the qualitative and quantitative evidence of the size and nature of the potential market, the estimated size of the applicant pool, market trends in the discipline, and competitor activity (Form QA3.3). Advice on developing a marketing strategy and establishing whether a market exists for the provision is

available from Faculty marketing teams and central Marketing, UG/PGT Admissions, the Student Recruitment team and the International Relations Office. In certain instances, where the costs and risks to the University of approving and offering a new course are clearly very low, a more limited marketing case may be acceptable. For example, this could apply to the development of a new variant to an existing successful course.

- **success criteria** (also on <u>Form QA3.1</u>) against which the course will be reviewed after two full years of operation: between three and five criteria (covering for example recruitment, progression to Masters and/or PhD courses and/or student feedback statistics) to be approved by APC.
- nominated Course Development Team Leader and Team which should normally include representatives from all academic departments substantially involved with the proposal.
- any other relevant background information, highlighting any substantive issues likely to arise in relation to the University's Academic Frameworks, for example a need to seek exemption from relevant assessment regulations, the need to establish a new category of award, or seek an exemption from the semester pattern.

Appointment of External Reviewers

- 5.3 The input and advice of approved External Reviewers may form part of the documentation for consideration at the first stage of the process and are normally a requirement for formal report for Stage Two Full Academic Approval. The course development team should present their nominations for External Reviewer(s) early in the process for approval by the Chair of the relevant Board of Studies:
 - two External Reviewers should be appointed for completely new course proposals, at least one of which should be familiar with UK academic standards in relation to the proposed course; one may be a professional/industrial specialist. The External Reviewers should be selected to provide informed comment on the various elements under consideration e.g. collaborative provision, innovative initiatives, elements of continual professional development or work-based learning.
 - in particularly complex or innovative cases, the Chair of Courses and Partnerships Approval Committee (CPAC) may require the attendance of an External Reviewer at the meeting of the Committee.
 - one External Reviewer only will be required for variant proposals where a substantial portion of the course content already exists.
 - at the discretion of the Chair of CPAC, External Reviewer input will not normally be required at Stage Two for proposals for a new exit award that will not be recruited to and does not contain any new taught units, or for a course variant involving the addition or removal of a placement element only
 - in determining approval of suitable nominees, the following points for the assurance of independence and objectivity should be taken into account:
 - o the principles for the appointment of External Examiners (see QA12 section 4);
 - the detail of the proposed External Reviewer(s') CV(s), which should include a section detailing any previous association with the University.
 - existing or recent (up to three years since the end of their role) External Examiners may not be appointed as External Reviewers, but can give valuable advice to Course Development Teams.

University Executive Board

5.4 The <u>business case on Form QA3.1 needs to be approved by the University Executive</u>

<u>Board (UEB), prior to presentation of the course for Stage One Initial Strategic Approval</u>

at APC. UEB meets regularly.

Faculty-level consideration: Faculty/School Board of Studies

- 5.5 Proposals for Stage One Initial Strategic Approval will first be considered by the relevant Faculty/School Board(s) of Studies. They are responsible for considering:
 - if the proposal fits with the strategic aims of the Faculty/School/LPO and forms a coherent pattern of provision with other existing or planned courses within the Faculty/School;
 - if the appropriate consultation has taken place, and in principle support has been received from all the Departments/School potentially affected by the proposal; Marketing information must be agreed with the Marketing teams;
 - that there is otherwise sufficient evidence that a proposed new course will meet the requirements of APC (see 5.1 and 5.2 above).
- 5.6 In cases of cross-Faculty/School proposals, the proposal must be considered by each of the Boards of Studies involved.
- 5.7 For new research degree courses with a taught element, the proposal must also be considered by UDSC prior to consideration by APC.

University-level consideration: Academic Programmes Committee (APC)

- 5.8 Once considered by the Faculty/School Board of Studies (and UDSC if applicable), proposals for Stage One Initial Strategic Approval will be sent to APC which will consider the points set out in 5.1 above.
- 5.9 Following Stage One Initial Approval the Secretary to APC will advise the Course Development Team, Academic Registry and the relevant Recruitment and Admissions Team of the new course for inclusion in the following publications, as appropriate:
 - UCAS database and website:
 - relevant postgraduate course listings (e.g. Prospects);
 - University of Bath prospectuses.
- 5.109 Once Stage One Initial Strategic Approval is given by APC, the Department/School/LPO may advertise the course. All advertising must clearly state that the course is subject to approval. Applications cannot be processed until Stage Two Full Academic Approval has been received.
- 5.11 Where more than eighteen months has elapsed between the granting of Stage One Initial Strategic Approval and Stage Two Full Academic Approval commencing, renewal of Stage One Initial Strategic Approval must be sought. This will give the University the opportunity to satisfy itself that the strategic and business cases remain valid.

Fast tracking through Stage One Initial Strategic Approval

- 5.12 Fast tracking through Stage One Initial Strategic Approval consists of permitting consideration by electronic circulation rather than at a scheduled meeting or, where that is not possible, firstly by the Chair(s) of the Board(s) of Studies on behalf of the Board(s), and on that recommendation, for approval by the Chair of the APC. Consideration for fast tracking is by exception only. Further guidance on the appropriateness of fast tracking may be obtained in the first instance from Academic Registry. The documents to be submitted for Stage One Initial Strategic Approval remain the same for fast tracking as for the normal process, proportionate to the nature of the proposal.
- 5.13 A proposal for a new course may be considered for fast tracking through Stage One Initial Strategic Approval where there is a compelling case to do so, meaning that it would be clearly disadvantageous to progress the proposal in accordance with the standard committee schedule and any associated risks can be managed. For example, fast tracking may be appropriate for proposals which are the subject of a submission to bid for external funding and which have a very short deadline, where it can be demonstrated that the timing of the normal approval process would result in the loss of the opportunity to bid. Agreement to fast track a proposal at Stage One should be sought in advance from the Chair(s) of the Board(s) of Studies and of APC, providing evidence to justify fast tracking.
- 5.14 The Chair of either the Faculty/School Board of Studies or APC may refer the proposal back for further work or consult with other members before making decisions on whether:
 - the circumstances are appropriate for fast tracking;
 - the case presented for Stage One approval is adequate.

6. Stage Two Full Academic Approval

Aims of Stage Two

- 6.1 The aim of Stage Two Full Academic Approval is to undertake scrutiny of the academic detail of the proposed new course, namely the:
 - (i) appropriateness of standards in accordance with the level and title of the award
 - (ii) academic coherence of the course
 - (iii) alignment with the University's Curriculum Design Principles (Annex C) and the Assessment for Learning Design Principles (Annex D), including appropriateness of the scheduling of assessment, and the range of assessment methodologies in relation to the discipline and aligned to the learning outcomes and in consideration of the University's approach to anonymous marking (see QA3 Annex J and QA16 Assessment Marking and Feedback)
 - (iv) nature of the learning opportunities offered by the course, and opportunities to enable all students within the diverse student body to achieve the learning outcomes
 - (v) relationship between the course and current research in the field
 - (vi) availability of the resources necessary to support the course
 - (vii) relationship between the course and the requirements of professional accrediting or regulatory bodies, employers' expectations
 - (viii) the role of placement or work based learning (where relevant)
 - (ix) content of the Course Specification proposed for publication.
- 6.2 Approval at this stage by Faculty/School Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (F/SLTQC) and CPAC will check specifically that

- (a) the course intended learning outcomes meet **in full** the statement of outcomes in the relevant Qualification Descriptor as set out in the Office for Students <u>Sector-recognised</u> standards,
- (b) unit intended learning outcomes meet **in part** the statement of outcomes in the relevant Qualification Descriptor
- (c) the course intended learning outcomes (ILOs) will be met by all who would graduate under the normal assessment and award provisions (e.g. by use of Designated Essential Units/Must Pass Units to underpin requirements without which the named award could not be made).

This will be explicitly recorded in the minutes of the F/SLTQC and CPAC where a new course is recommended for approval.

6.3 Approval at this stage will consider whether the course and its intended learning outcomes are appropriately engaged with any relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, except where the Benchmark Statement(s) conflict with requirements of Office for Students ongoing conditions of registration, in which case the former will be disregarded.

Faculty/School-level consideration: Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee Information requirements for Stage Two (F/SLTQC)

- 6.4 Prior to the complete documentation being prepared (see 6.10) for submission to CPAC, draft documentation should be submitted to the F/SLTQC. Ideally, this should occur soon after Stage One Initial Approval has been granted, so that the Committee's feedback may guide development of the final full documentation. The Committee will review:
 - academic content and coherence
 - academic standards and quality
 - relationships with existing provision
 - conformity to the University's Academic Framework
 - specifically, the points set out under para 6.2 above.
- 6.5 Although it is for F/SLTQC(s) to determine which elements of draft documentation they wish to routinely review for this purpose, it should normally include as a minimum:
 - the draft full Course Specification
 - the course ILO mapping document (Form QA3.4) including mapping of Course ILOs a) to the relevant Qualification Descriptor, and b) to the units (to demonstrate in combination mapping of course ILOs *in full* to the relevant Qualification Descriptor, and of unit ILOs *in part* to the relevant Qualification Descriptor)
 - the assessment mapping (Form QA3.5)
 - course regulations where these are not governed by the relevant assessment regulations
 - all unit descriptions.

The Course Development Team should normally be invited to attend the relevant F/SLTQC when the draft documentation is under consideration.

6.6 If there are any substantial changes to the proposal since Stage One Initial Strategic Approval, it is the responsibility of the Course Development Team to draw this to the attention of the relevant F/SLTQC and ensure that a clear case is being made for the changes, together with assurances that this will not entail an impact on resources, the

University's profile/marketing, or bring resource implications for other Departments or their equivalents (such as through changes to teaching patterns). If there is substantial doubt about these aspects, then it is open to the F/SLTQC to refer the proposal back for Stage One Initial Strategic Approval.

- 6.7 Where a new course of study involves collaboration between Departments or their equivalents in more than one Faculty/School, the key draft documentation should be reviewed by each of the relevant F/SLTQCs (or an ad hoc forum comprising representatives from all the relevant F/SLTQCs).
- 6.8 Where the new course involves a research element (such as an Integrated PhD or professional doctorate course) the Faculty Doctoral Studies Committee (FDSC) should also consider the draft documentation at this stage. Advice can be sought from Academic Registry (Academic Quality & Standards) on meeting this requirement in an appropriate and streamlined way.
- 6.9 The Chair of the F/SLTQC is responsible for signing off the final key documentation for a new course for submission to CPAC including explicit confirmation of assurances received on the points set out under para 6.2 above.

University-level consideration: Courses and Partnerships Approval Committee Information requirements for Stage Two (CPAC)

- 6.10 For Stage Two Full Academic Approval, the following documentation will be required to be submitted to the Secretary to CPAC via the Assistant Registrar in the Faculty/School:
 - introduction and rationale for the proposed course (using Form QA3.7). This should include:
 - reference to the Curriculum Design Principles (Annex C)
 - highlighting of key points for consideration, such as developments since Stage One Initial Approval, details of consultation undertaken, etc
 - a web link to the relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statement(s), if applicable
 - the rationale for any exemption required from the University's <u>Academic Frameworks</u> including the consequences for any other courses or on resources. A template for submitting any exemption request is available from Academic Registry (Academic Quality & Standards).
 - extracts of relevant minutes from Board(s) of Studies, APC, F/SLTQC(s), and FDSC(s) / UDSC where appropriate
 - the full Course Specification including the course structure which must be fully differentiated in respect of any exit awards and full-time/part-time study if applicable. Any changes to descriptive text for the prospectus (as contained in the Course Specification) since Stage 1 should have input from Faculty Marketing prior to submission. The Course Development Team should bear in mind that the Course Specification is student-facing material and should not contain information that is relevant for approval purposes only (the latter should be provided in the introduction/rationale).
 - **unit descriptions** in full, including unit synopses; with assessment information aligned to the Assessment Taxonomy (Annex E)
 - evidence that course intended learning outcomes can be met through completion of the **mapping of course intended learning outcomes** against units (Form QA3.4)
 - a course-level assessment strategy and mapping (for the mapping template, see

Form QA3.5); the strategy should refer to the Assessment for Learning Design Principles (Annex D) and both should be aligned to the Assessment Taxonomy (Annex E). The strategy and mapping should be produced with reference to the considerations set out in QA3 Annex J concerning summative assessment and group assessment design

- **course regulations** where these are fully governed by the relevant assessment regulations, this should be indicated in the 'course assessment regulations' section of the Course Specification(s). In other cases where a more distinctive set is required (e.g. some PGR courses) specific detail should be provided separately.
- written submission from the External Reviewer(s) on the above documentation, to be provided at least one week before the date of the meeting, although a written submission may be dispensed with if the External Reviewer(s) will be attending the relevant meeting of CPAC
- a written **response from the Course Development Team Leader** to the External Reviewer(s) report (not required if the External Reviewer is attending).

Approval by CPAC at Stage Two

- 6.11 The full proposal will be considered at a meeting of CPAC. Where appropriate, it may be possible for similar courses in cognate disciplines to be considered together. Advice should be sought on this in advance from Academic Registry. Where particularly complex or innovative courses are being considered, on the request of the Chair, one or more of the External Reviewers may be asked to attend the meeting, to assist the Committee directly with its decisions. The Course Development Team Leader, and representatives from the Course Development Team if appropriate, will also be invited to take questions from the Committee.
- 6.12 It is the responsibility of CPAC to employ its specialist expertise, with the input from the External Reviewer and any invited internal expert attendees, to undertake detailed scrutiny of the course proposal in accordance with the aims set out in paragraph 6.1 and 6.2 and to make a recommendation to Senate. CPAC will assure itself that any issues previously raised by staff or committees during the course approval process have been adequately resolved. However, the Course Development Team should ensure that Stage One issues are adequately resolved before submitting Stage Two proposals to CPAC.
- 6.13 CPAC is responsible for the consideration and approval of requests for exemption from elements of the University's <u>Academic Frameworks</u>.
- 6.14 CPAC has three options open to it: to recommend to Senate
 - i) approval of the proposal
 - ii) approval of the proposal subject to conditions that must be met by specified date(s)
 - iii) non-approval of the proposal with requirement for further work and re-presentation to a future meeting of CPAC.
- 6.15 Completion of conditions must be signed off by the Chair of CPAC.
- 6.16 Education, Quality & Standards Committee is responsible for approval of any exemptions required from University assessment regulations.

6.17 The Secretary of the Committee will report CPAC's recommendation in summary form to Senate, which is responsible for full and final approval of the new course. Once full and final approval is granted, the Secretary of Senate will notify the Secretary of CPAC, who will notify relevant staff, including the SAMIS (student records) team in Academic Registry to enable completion of course set-up in the University system (SAMIS).

Stage Two 'light touch' approval process

- 6.18 'Light touch' Stage Two Full Academic Approval consists of agreeing modified paperwork and scrutiny requirements (noting that this is different to potential Stage One 'fast tracking' arrangements and requires separate agreement to proceed).
- 6.19 The Chair of CPAC may consider and approve requests from Departments/the School for lighter touch paperwork and scrutiny requirements in relation to Stage Two Full Academic Approval of new courses where the potential benefits are considered to outweigh the risks. For example, this is likely to be appropriate for new exit awards associated with existing courses where no or very small additional resources will be needed and no separate marketing will be undertaken, or for new variants constructed substantially from existing units and requiring only marginal additional resources. Further guidance on this may be obtained from Academic Registry (Academic Quality & Standards).

7. Review and Monitoring

- 7.1 New courses of study and any recommendations from CPAC made at the time of Stage Two Full Academic Approval will be monitored by F/SLTQCs through External Examiners' reports, annual course review processes and periodic reviews, drawing upon feedback, such as unit evaluation, student surveys and proceedings of Staff/Student Liaison Committees.
- 7.2 The impact of subsequent amendments to units and courses will be monitored through the processes required by QA4 Amendments to Courses of Study and Approval of New Units, External Examiners' reports, annual review processes and periodic review, drawing upon feedback, such as unit evaluation, student surveys and proceedings of Staff/Student Liaison Committees.
- 7.3 After two full years of operation APC will review new courses of study against the success criteria identified by the course team (see 5.2 above). If the criteria are not met the course will be discontinued unless there are strong grounds to indicate otherwise.

Statement Details

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	QA17 V1.1 QA34 V2.0
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Related	External
Documentation:	Office for Students:
	Securing student success: Regulatory framework for higher education
	<u>in England</u>
	Sector-recognised standards (including Qualification Descriptors)
	Competition and Markets Authority: <u>Higher education: consumer law</u>
	advice for providers
	OAA IIIC Ovelite Oada far I link on Education
	QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education
	QAA Subject Benchmark Statements
	Advice and Guidance: Course Design and Development
	Information for Students: A guide to providing information to
	prospective undergraduate students
	Internal
	University Ordinances
	Regulations for Students
	University Assessment Regulations
	QA44 Course Handbooks and Course Specifications
	Course Flandbooks and Course Opcomoditions
Author:	Academic Registry