

NEW PROGRAMMES AND MODULES PROCEDURE AND GUIDANCE NOTES

These guidance notes and procedures have been prepared with reference to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, and their aim is to ensure that the University of Buckingham sets and maintains threshold academic standards for its awards.

The QA Office can provide further guidance on the application of this policy and procedure as required. Any deviation from the agreed procedures would require the agreement from the Chair of the University Learning and Teaching Committee.

GUIDANCE NOTES

A. Scope of Procedure

This procedure covers all module and programmes that lead to the award of academic credit and/or contribute to a higher education award at Level 4 or above in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). Proposers of provision set below Level 4 in the FHEQ, and/or not leading to the award of academic credit are still required to:

- Consider the guidance referenced in this procedure, along with any relevant national benchmarking criteria when designing the programme and to ensure good practice.
- Seek the comments of external advisors where possible
- Present the proposals, including any arrangements for resourcing (under 3.3) to the School Learning and Teaching Committee for comment, scrutiny and approval, and to ensure the appropriate recording and sharing of decisions and documentation. SLTCs are to report to ULTC about these items.

B. Link to 'Changes to Modules and Programme' Procedure

Where new modules are being introduced on existing programmes as a 'Major' change; and for existing programmes being redesigned, reapproved or replaced under the 'Review' category, this procedure should be read in conjunction with the 'Changes to Modules and Programmes' procedure. In particular, the requirements to consult and inform both prospective and current students should accord with the University's policy on making changes to programmes and modules to ensure we comply with the law in this area.

C. Timing

Wherever possible, developments should normally take place within the annual planning cycle, i.e. in the case of a new Programme if it is intended to admit students in January of one year the process should start at least 12 months earlier. In the case of a new Module the process should start at least 6 months before. This is to ensure that there is sufficient time for consultation, development, external review, committee approval, marketing and timetabling activities to be undertaken before teaching commences.

D. Terminology

The University of Buckingham's educational provision is organised into Programmes and Modules.

A Programme is the prescribed combination of Modules (or other prescribed pattern of study) which, taken together, lead to a degree or other award of the University. Undergraduate Programmes are available through single, joint or combined honours or major/minor routes. Each requires its own Programme Specification and should be treated as a separate Programme.

A Module is the prescribed combination of study supported by lectures and tutorials, laboratory classes or other tuition, which normally constitutes the smallest element of separate assessment. Modules carry a weighting based on the principle of one unit for each ten hours of notional learning time (i.e. the average time it takes a learner to acquire the specified learning outcomes). Undergraduate modules normally carry a value of 15 or 30 units depending upon whether they are taught over one or two terms, respectively.

E. Programme and Module Template Specifications

All programmes and modules should be designed following the University's standard specification templates.

F. External Reference Points

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)

The FHEQ sets out qualification descriptors that set out the generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of individual qualifications. The fundamental premise of the FHEQ is that qualifications should be awarded on the basis of achievement of outcomes and attainment rather than years of study. When preparing or revising a module or programme, it is essential to ensure that all programmes and modules are aligned to the relevant qualification descriptor.

Subject Benchmark Statements

Subject benchmark statements set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They describe what gives a discipline its coherence and identity, and define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding or competence in the subject. Subject benchmark statements do not represent a national curriculum in a subject area. Rather, they allow for flexibility and innovation in programme design within an overall conceptual framework established by an academic subject community. They are intended to assist those involved in programme design, delivery and review and may also be of interest to prospective students and employers, seeking information about the nature and standards of awards in a subject area.

Subject benchmark statements are available for honours degrees and master's degrees.

Characteristics Statements – Foundation, Masters and Doctoral

QAA also produce Characteristics Statements for Foundation, Masters, and Doctoral degrees. Where there is no subject specific Subject Benchmark Statement at Masters Level, reference should be made to the document: 'Characteristics Statement: Master's Degree (September 2015)'. Programme proposers of provision set at these levels are required to ensure documentation reflects these external expectations.

UK Quality Code

The Quality Code sets out the formal Expectations that all UK higher education providers reviewed by QAA are required to meet. It is the nationally agreed, definitive point of reference for all those involved in delivering higher education programmes that lead to an award from, or are validated by, a UK higher education awarding body (a provider entitled to award degrees). All higher education providers reviewed by QAA must commit to meeting the Expectations that it sets out.

Although the University has prepared its procedures in line with the expectations of the UK Quality Code, staff should refer to certain pertinent chapters when designing their programmes or modules – for example, Part A (ensuring academic standards), and Chapters B6 (Assessment of students) and B4 (Student support).

Professional, Statutory, Regulatory Bodies (PSRB's)

PSRB's often regulate at the subject area, for example, the General Medical Council **decides which bodies are entitled to award UK primary medical qualifications (PMQs)**, and the Solicitors Regulation Authority is the regulator responsible for the validation of Qualifying Law Degrees (QLDs). If the programme or module requires accreditation by a PSRB, then you must ensure in its design and any revisions to it, that the criteria of that body are met.

The University recognises that for some of its provision that is recognised by PSRBs, this approval procedure will be read in conjunction with any requirements from those bodies. Where the programme approval procedure of other regulating bodies affects the extent to which the University's procedure can be followed (for example, the 'external review' and 'outline approval' elements of this procedure are superseded by the regulations of the General Medical Council and General Dental Council), the Quality Assurance Office and the Chairman of the University Learning and Teaching Committee should be consulted to agree how such requirements should interlock with this procedure.

G. Assessment Design

QAA have provided useful guidance on thinking about assessment design in their 'Understanding Assessment' publication, in relation to building assessment into the course design process, choosing the methods of assessment, and agreeing the amount, timing, and weighting of assessment tasks.

SEEC's 'How to Use Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria' provides useful guidance when designing programmes.

Further guidance on assessment design is available here: N:\Quality Assurance\ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK GUIDELINES\Designing Assessment Guidance

H. Disability Guidance to Schools

The University has produced guidance on Implementing the Disability Policy in Schools: <https://intranet.buckingham.ac.uk/student-welfare/Pages/Disability.aspx>

I. External Reviews

Anonymous Subject Specialist Reviews

Higher education providers are expected to “ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards” (UK Quality Code for HE, Chapter A5). In relation to new programme approval, institutions should “make use of external participation at key stages...as independence and objectivity are essential to provide confidence that the standards and quality of the programmes are appropriate” (UK Quality Code for HE, Chapter B1).

All new programmes and modules must therefore undergo External Review (either by correspondence or through a validation event) before they are approved. To ensure independence and objectivity, formal External Reviews should not be sought from AAC Members, or external examiners currently working for Buckingham, or those who have been an external examiner at the University within the past five years.

For changes to programmes and modules, see the ‘Changes to Programmes and Modules Procedure’ for guidance. External examiners should normally be consulted for their comments on major changes. On occasion, dependent on the level and type of change and after consultation with the Chairman of the SLTC and the QA Manager, formal External Review may be required.

The Quality Assurance Office holds a register of approved External Reviewers in some subject areas, and the Quality Assurance Manager approves all reviewers. Programme and Module Directors are also encouraged to suggest suitable reviewers to the Quality Assurance Office, but they should not approach these reviewers themselves. All candidates will be approached by the Quality Assurance Office to ensure anonymity of responses.

Due to External Reviewer's time commitments from their own institutions, Programme and Module Directors are encouraged to discuss External Review requirements with the Quality Assurance Office at an early stage in the approval process.

J. Business Case

During the ‘Development’ stage of the process, proposers of new programmes are required to develop a Business Case (see appendix for form) for approval by the Executive Committee. This is to ensure that all new programmes are financially sustainable. The Business Case outlines the rationale for introduction; evidence of demand and the projected student intake; the fees, income and costs; the marketing strategy and any requirements for existing and additional resources. Once the Executive Committee has approved the Business Case, the form should also be included in the full documentation submitted to the School Learning and Teaching Committee.

K – Undergraduate and Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas

Non subject-specific awards:

To be awarded an undergraduate ‘Certificate in Higher Education’ or a ‘Diploma in Higher Education’, each award must:

- Be set at the correct level
 - Include the correct balance of credits at each level
- } (see below - **General Regulations for First Degrees, and levels and credits table**).

Subject-specific awards:

To be awarded a 'Diploma/Certificate of Higher Education in (subject)' or a 'Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate in (subject)' each award must:

- Be set at the correct level
- Include the correct balance of credits at each level
- Have learning outcomes in the curricula that reflect the correct level of the award

(see above **General Regulations for First Degrees, General Regulations for Higher Degrees and levels and credits table**).

These criteria must be reflected in a programme specification.

In establishing how each award might be given to satisfy these three criteria, Programme Directors may wish to consider using one of the following methods to select the module components:

1. **Core Group Only** - Specify exactly which modules must to be taken and passed (i.e specific modules from the full undergraduate bachelors or postgraduate masters award).
2. **Core Group Plus Optional Banks** - Specify a core group of modules that must be taken and passed AND specify an 'optional bank' of modules where a combination can be taken and passed
3. **Optional Banks Only** - Specify modules where any combination must be taken and passed.

This would provide the most flexibility in making the award. However, it would be necessary to ensure that the choice of modules enabled the achievement of the intended learning outcomes to be demonstrated.

Module mapping can be very helpful when writing intended learning outcomes for different awards as it clearly

General Regulations for First Degrees

3.2 In order to be eligible for the award for a Diploma of Higher Education, a student must have passed assessment for modules with a minimum total value of 240 credits of which at least 90 credits must have been achieved at level 5 of the FHEQ.

3.3 In order to be eligible for the award of a Certificate of Higher Education, a student must have passed assessment of modules with a minimum total value of 120 credits taken at level 4 in the FHEQ or above.

3.4 In order to be eligible for the award of a subject specific Diploma or Certificate, a student must meet the appropriate criteria as prescribed in 3.2 or 3.3 above and as prescribed by the curricula and any Special Regulations of the approved programme.

demonstrates how module learning outcomes at different levels contribute to programme learning outcomes. The Quality Assurance Office can provide help with module mapping.

All new programme specifications and regulations pertaining to the award of diplomas and certificates should be reviewed by at least one external reviewer, and approved by the SLTC, the Board of Study and ULTC as per our programme approval procedures. If Special Regulations are required, the Quality Assurance Manager should be consulted to ensure consistency with University Regulations.

General Regulations for Higher Degrees

5.8 In order to be eligible for the award of a Postgraduate Diploma a student must have passed assessment for modules with a minimum total value of 120 credits of which at least 90 credits must have been achieved at level 7 of the FHEQ.

5.9 In order to be eligible for the award of a Postgraduate Certificate a student must have passed assessment for modules with a minimum total value of 60 credits of which at least 40 credits must have been achieved at level 7 of the FHEQ.

5.10 In order to be eligible for the award of a subject specific Postgraduate Diploma or Postgraduate Certificate, a student must meet the appropriate criteria as prescribed in 5.8 or 5.9 above and as prescribed by the curricula and any Special Regulations of the approved programme.

PROGRAMMES AND MODULES APPROVAL PROCEDURE

1. Outline Permission

1.1 Obtain clearance from Dean (for Programmes) or Head of Department (for Modules).

2 Initial Consultations

N.B Written documentation of these consultations to be kept and submitted with Approval Checklist

- 2.1 Consult Quality Assurance Manager regarding programme and module specification requirements, approval documentation, QAA guidance, potential external reviewers and timeline for approval.
- 2.2 Consult the Quality Assurance Manager to ensure that the award is permitted under University Regulations, and that any proposed Special Regulations for the award are also consistent with University Regulations.
- 2.3 Consult colleagues and others internally with expertise in the area.
- 2.4 Consult other Module and Programme Directors and Heads of Department (regarding implications for other provision including major/minors)
- 2.5 Consult the Quality Assurance Manager, and the Timetabling and Quality Support Officer (regarding information on other courses and/or programmes which may be affected; seek advice on the practicality of the proposal in relation to teaching facilities, timetable and examination requirements).
- 2.6 Consult the Librarian and Head of IT (regarding library and IT resources)
- 2.7 Consult with the Visa Compliance Officer to establish whether the programme complies with Tier 4 visa requirements (e.g. relating to mode of teaching and attendance requirements).
- 2.8 Consult with the Head of HR to identify staffing needs.
- 2.9 Consult the Head of Marketing and Admissions (regarding student demand and minimum numbers, marketing plan and viability).
- 2.10 Consult with students and employers to establish demand. Under the 'Major Changes' or 'Review' category of the Changes to Modules and Programmes Procedure, for the introduction of new core modules onto existing programmes of study; or for the replacement of a programme of study with a new programme, or complete redesign and reapproval of a programme of study, students must be consulted in accordance with that procedure, and the outcome of this recorded on the Approval Checklist.

3 Detailed Development

3.1 **Rationale and Business Case**

- 3.1.1 For new modules, draw up a rationale including the following:
- Give reasons for the introduction of the module.
 - Include evidence of demand or requirement from employers/students/PSRB's;
- 3.1.2 For new programmes, a complete Business Case form should be completed (see Appendix) including the following:
- Draw up a rationale and give reasons for the introduction of the programme.
 - Include evidence of demand and the projected student intake
 - Include an outline of any marketing plans and the potential student market (including a consideration of any visa issues
 - Include details of fees, income and costs associated with the programme
 - Outline the existing and additional resources that the programme will require.

Submit the Business Case to the Dean of the relevant School who takes it to the Executive Committee for approval.

3.2 Academic Development and Documentation Requirements

3.2.1 Draw up documentation, including a Programme Specification, Module Specifications, and (for new programmes) a Module Map and Assessment Matrix, using the standard University templates. Ensure that the proposal reflects that you have taken account of:

- the QAA Framework for HE Qualifications (FHEQ);
- the relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statement(s)
- the relevant chapters from the UK Quality Code (notably Chapters B1 (Programme design and approval) B4 (Student Support) and B6 (Assessment of Students)).
- the requirements of any PSRB's

If it is proposed to depart from these there must be a clear statement of the reasons and this statement must form part of the documents sent to the External Reviewers.

3.2.2 Ensure that the proposal takes account of the Disability Policy and any ethical implications of the proposal have been addressed by consulting with the appropriate School ethics representative.

3.3 Resourcing Requirements

- a) Clarify availability of teaching staff (or develop a plan for recruiting them).
- b) Ensure the availability of a budget to meet the needs of the proposal.
- c) Clarify availability of library and IT resources (or develop a plan for providing them).
- d) Clarify availability of teaching and timetabling space.
- e) Clarify any examination or assessment requirements have been provided for
- f) Clarify any Health and Safety requirements have been met

4 External Reviews/Validation Events

4.1 Quality Assurance Manager to approach and ascertain the views of Independent External Subject Specialists/Reviewers. Proposers may suggest possible names (not normally current External Examiners or AAC members). Reviewers are approved by the Quality Assurance Manager.

4.2 Alternatively, proposers may instead opt for a validation event to be held. This would normally occur where an entirely new programme (with a majority of its modules also being new) is being approved.

4.3 Quality Assurance Office to ensure that External Reviewers receive a copy of the full programme/module documentation and a statement of any proposed variation or departure from QAA guidelines. The documentation **must** include the proposed Programme Specification and Module Specifications for the constituent modules, plus (for new programmes) a Module Map, in their **final** form. Major changes to programmes or modules cannot be made after External Review has been sought unless recommended and detailed by the External Reviewer or in Committee Stage.

5 Final Revisions and Outline Approval

5.1 Proposer to amend documentation in the light of external feedback.

5.2 If wished, 'Outline Approval' can be sought at this stage so that marketing of the programme/module can begin. The Quality Assurance Office seeks confirmation from the SLTC and the Board of Study Chairman that the documentation has been satisfactorily revised in light of external feedback, and then requests that the ULTC Chairman gives Outline Approval for the programme/module to be marketed. The Quality Assurance Office inform the relevant support departments via the *infoshare* distribution list.

Outline Approval is defined as: UCAS and MAS codes, online application and enquiry forms, web page to being created. All marketing material at this stage to be printed 'Subject To Formal Approval'. Application forms can be accepted but no places are to be offered until the programme/module has received Formal Approval.

5.3 Proposer to submit full revised, documentation to the School Learning & Teaching Committee (SLTC) for approval:

- Approval Checklist and Supporting Evidence
- Rationale and Business Case
- Programme and Module Specifications
- Module Map (for new programmes)
- External Reviewer and any Internal Subject Specialist Comments, plus record of how these have been addressed (see template for recording external reviewer responses)

In consultation with the Chairman of the SLTC ensure that any further documents and opinions are obtained in time for a final decision to be proposed by the Committee.

NB: SLTC, Board and ULTC Chairman's action CANNOT be taken on approval of new programmes and modules.

6 Committee Stage

6.1 School Learning and Teaching Committee to:

- Examine the documentation to ascertain the academic and commercial viability of the proposal.
- Confirm the academic standards of the proposed new programmes with reference to the relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statement(s), and the UK Quality Code.
- Confirm that external reviewer's feedback has been considered and addressed.
- Confirm that all resource implications have been considered and addressed.
- Identify any issues, which may require discussion at a higher level (e.g. ULTC)

6.2 SLTC to approve (with or without conditions or recommendations), remit, or reject the proposal in its submitted form, and make a recommendation to the School Board of Study. Quality Administrator to ensure that the Summary Curriculum Report is updated to track progress.

6.4 The School Board of Study to consider the recommendations of the SLTC and make recommendation for approval to the University Learning and Teaching Committee (ULTC).

6.5 ULTC to consider the SLTC and Board of Study recommendations (supported by full documentation as indicated above) to ensure appropriate procedures have been followed at School level. ULTC to approve (with or without conditions or recommendations) remit or reject the proposal in its submitted form.

6.6 ULTC to report its decision to Senate.

6.7 For new programmes, School/Quality Administrators to make necessary additions to eVision and upload final programme specifications to N/Quality Assurance/Curriculum Handbook, ensuring appropriate numbering of files and updating of the Contents page.

6.8 For new modules on existing programmes, School/Quality Administrators to inform Timetabling Officer who will generate module codes, and update eVision in accordance with the Changes procedure. School/Quality Administrators to upload final module specifications for ALL new modules to N/Quality Assurance/ N:\Quality Assurance\Module Library, ensuring appropriate naming and numbering of files.

6.9 In accordance with the 'Major Changes' and 'Review' policy in the 'Changes to Modules and Programmes' procedure, where new modules are approved on existing programmes; or where programmes are being redesigned, reapproved or replaced, departmental administrators to inform current and prospective students no later than Week 5 of the term preceding the term in which the variation shall take effect.

6.10 The Quality Assurance Office to circulate the 'Curriculum Bulletin' in Week 5 of term, confirming all Board of Study approvals for Changes, and circulate the 'Handbooks Bulletin' in the vacation period, confirming all ULTC/Senate approvals for New provision.