Programme and Course Approval Process

Programme Proposals

Requirements & Monitoring:
The University’s procedures for the design and approval of new courses and programmes exist to ensure academic standards are maintained. The University’s excellent reputation relies on this and, therefore, it is essential that these procedures are both robust and efficient and that all staff engage fully with the process.

These procedures are subject to review internally and externally. The procedures described here are intended to ensure that programme proposals are not adopted without careful consideration of their relevance and appeal for potential students, their compatibility with other programmes offered and the strategic objectives of the leading School and the University as a whole. They are intended to ensure also that consideration is given to the availability of resources, the coherence and academic standard of constituent courses, and the standard and appropriateness of awards offered on completion of the proposed programme.

New Responsibilities:
There are changed responsibilities as a result of the process review:

Colleges
The authority to approve new programmes is now delegated to College Board of Studies on a pilot basis. Approval of proposals relating to major changes to, and withdrawal of, existing programmes, is also a responsibility of the Colleges.

- Colleges are expected to adhere to the standard procedures. If Colleges identify any reason why they would need to divert from the standard procedures, they must notify the Senate Office. The issue will then be considered by the Academic Standards Committee (ASC) through a Programme Approval Group – see below.
- These activities will be monitored by the Academic Standards Committee (ASC). The Senate Office will audit and report annually to the ASC on programme approval activity by College Boards of Studies.

Academic Standards Committee
The Academic Standards Committee (ASC) will establish a sub-group in 2016-17 to consider and decide on its behalf the approval of programme proposals that span Colleges and/ or where there is concern at the College Board of Studies as to whether the proposal complies with University policy. This sub-group might consist of former PAG conveners or other experienced PAG members. The Programme Approval Groups (PAGs) will otherwise be dissolved.

Useful Resources:
- Information on Programme and Course Design & Review: The Learning & Teaching Centre has developed guidelines to assist academic staff with Programme and Course Design and Review.
- Guidance on writing a Programme Specification: Guidance on writing Programme
Specifications is available on the Senate Office web pages and further advice can be obtained from the University's Learning & Teaching Centre. The template also offers instructional text to assist the proposer.

- The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
- Guidance on Writing Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes
- New Regulations Data Input Form

Preparation of Proposals

General Guidance

- **Use of PIP**

  Proposers must use PIP to submit all proposals for new programmes/courses, changes to existing programmes/courses and withdrawal of programmes/courses. This includes all undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes, including taught doctorates, and also masters programmes which include some taught courses as well as research – such as the MRes.

- **Provision of accurate information**

  Programme and course information must be entered into the system to allow students to apply, register and enrol via MyCampus. It is essential, therefore, that records are completed in PIP accurately and on time. Information from PIP is transferred automatically to MyCampus but further data input is required in MyCampus before new programmes and courses are ready for use. The system will allow users to confirm that all required information has been recorded and will alert users where mandatory information has been omitted.

- **Timing**

  Where a new programme is being proposed in order to respond to rapidly emerging external demand, proposal documentation should be entered into PIP as early as possible – ideally, at the stage of funding bids being made. This allows the School and College the maximum time for preparation, development and approval, and for consultations to be undertaken and considered. There must also be early consultation with MaRIO to allow a market assessment to be made.

- **Programme Specifications for Related Programmes**

  If what is proposed is a suite of programmes with a similar structure and some common content, all with similar aims and intended learning outcomes, a sample proposal of one programme may be entered on PIP at this stage. Following approval of the programme by the College Board of Studies, the remaining programmes must be entered on PIP. However, care must be taken to ensure that the document does not become over long, confusing to the reader, or unhelpfully vague. Where different specialisms are proposed, usually there will be differences in Aims, Intended Learning Outcomes and Programme Structure. In these cases, a separate programme specification is normally needed for each specialism. Occasionally, one specification will suffice (for example, where there are only two streams and the document can cover both without becoming too lengthy or confusing). If in doubt, please contact the Senate Office for advice, or refer to the Guidance document.

Guidance on writing Programme Specifications is provided and further advice can be obtained from the University’s Learning & Teaching Centre. The template also offers instructional text to assist the proposer.

Where new regulations are required, these will be drafted by the Senate Office. Colleges must supply the necessary information in the New Regulations Data Input Form as early as possible.
• **Consultations**

Consultations must be undertaken with **students, external consultants**, and, as appropriate, **employers and others**, and **forms** reporting the outcome of these consultations must be completed in advance of submission to the relevant Committee, together with information on how comments have been considered.

All proposed new programmes must be submitted to MaRIO for market assessment and appropriate action taken in response to this assessment. In some cases, substantial changes to programmes may also require consultation with MaRIO.

Further information on consultations is available here.

The outcome of all consultations must be available to the relevant Committee(s) to assist in their consideration of proposals, rather than being sought afterwards. It is not acceptable for this to be done after the event. Committees must be able to consider the responses at their meetings. Follow up action taken as a result of consultation must also be recorded.

Any student registering on a programme should be entitled to assume that that programme will not be changed to his/her disadvantage while s/he is so registered. Where it is proposed that an existing programme is changed to such an extent that the previously published descriptions or regulations of that programme are no longer valid, that change should not impact on students who first registered for the programme with its former description, without the express approval of all of the students concerned.

**College Scrutiny of Programme Proposals**

Programme proposals, including all of the documentation identified above, are submitted to the College Board of Studies. A Proposal Support Document has been prepared for use as an aide-memoire and to certify the completion of different aspects of the preparation and scrutiny of the proposal. Section 1 will be completed by the proposer, Section 2 by the College Board of Studies, and Section 3 by a senior member of College staff (e.g., the Dean of Learning & Teaching or nominee). The Proposal Support Document may be accessed directly from the PIP system.

The College Board of Studies should check the following elements of the proposal, and should use the support document for each proposal to record progress of the scrutiny.

- Is the proposal clear and consistent?
- Is the proposal compliant with the **Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework**?¹
- Are student learning hours and assessment methods appropriate to the level of the programme and the number of credits assigned to it?
- Are **Intended Learning Outcomes** capable of being assessed by the indicated instrument(s) of assessment, and are they appropriately worded for the level of the programme?
- Has the proposal been developed with due consideration for matters relating to:
  - equal opportunities?
  - employability and developing students’ graduate attributes?
  - disability access?
  - cultural issues?
- Is there adequate provision for, and monitoring of, the external supervision of project work, work placement, etc., where this is an integral part of the programme?

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¹ The SCQF web site does not provide the credit requirements for all awards. These may be found on the QAA site at [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/FHEQscotland.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/FHEQscotland.pdf)
• Has it been confirmed by the Head of the lead School that there are adequate resources available in respect of:
  • staffing?
  • equipment?
  • audio-visual facilities?
  • library materials?
  • accommodation?

• Has a Programme Specification been submitted, and is this in accordance with the University template and guidelines? Does the document provide the core factual information on the programme of study in a format and language which will be easily understood by the prime target audience, i.e. current and potential students? University Guidelines and templates are available.

• Has there been appropriate consultation:
  • within the appropriate School(s)
  • with students (present and, if possible, past)
  • external examiner(s)
  • potential employers
  • University Services (e.g. MaRIO, Central Timetabling Team, and professional bodies as appropriate)
  • Any other School affected by the change. Other Schools affected must be fully committed to the change(s) and have the comments received been addressed in full by the College Board of Studies?

• Do proposed degree regulations conform to generic or other existing regulations?

• Has the New Regulations Data Input Form been completed where new regulations are required?

• Are proposed degree regulations consistent with the proposed programme?

• Does the weighting for the calculation of Honours classification follow the credit rating of courses taken in the Honours programme (usually a 50:50 weighting between years 3 and 4 or within the range of 10:20:70 to 20:30:50 for Integrated Masters). This weighting information must be provided in the programme specification. Further information on the weighting process can be found in the Code of Assessment (see 16.36 and 16.37). If not, the proposer should explain the rationale for the variation from the norm.

• Does any placement meet the requirement of constituting no more than one-third of the programme?

Consultation with MaRIO

Proposals for new programmes must be submitted to Marketing, Recruitment & International Office (MaRIO). Please see the Consultations guidance document for more information.

College Board of Studies Minute Extract

An extract of the relevant College Board of Studies minute, relating the discussion and approval of the proposal, should be attached to the proposal in PIP for reference.
Approval Process

Colleges must determine whether the programme proposals presented to it are each robust, viable, deliverable and in alignment with the University’s strategic priorities. Only proposals meeting these criteria, and for which the documentation (including consultations) has been examined fully by the College Board of Studies, should be approved.

In support of each such new programme proposal the following documentation should be submitted to the College Board of Studies. Documentation should be submitted in electronic form via PIP.

- Programme Specification – this should provide the key information on the programme being offered.
- Proposal Support Document reporting the rationale and progress of the scrutiny of the proposal.
- Minutes of the School Learning & Teaching Committee (or equivalent) reporting the consideration of proposals. Minutes should record the results of consultations with students, external examiners and others, and the responses to any comments. Where this information is not provided within the formal minutes it may be appended to these minutes.
- New Regulations Data Input Form. Where new supplementary undergraduate degree regulations are required, or where existing taught postgraduate regulations will not cover the proposed programme. For PGT programmes, justification for divergence from the generic Masters regulations should be supplied. Although PGR degrees are not covered by these procedures, the New Regulations Data Input Form can still be used once the degree has been approved by the College Graduate School.

For each programme proposal found to be satisfactory (in terms of its overall coherence, the structure and content of the programme specification and other documentation, response to consultations, etc.), the College Board of Studies will grant approval, either with no changes, or minor changes, required. For each proposal found not yet to be satisfactory, the College Board of Studies should identify actions that must be taken before approval can be granted.

The Clerk of ASC must submit approved proposals to the General Council and initiate the preparation of a new or amended draft Resolutions of the University Court. The College Board of Studies must therefore ensure the correct version of the proposal is approved in PIP and that the New Regulations Data Input Form is used if new regulations will be required.

Joint Programmes

New joint Honours degree programmes which are the sum of two existing half-programmes must be submitted to the College Board of Studies but do not need to have accompanying documentation for the current half-programmes. If, however, there is provision within College regulations for new combinations of joint degrees to be made, there is no requirement for new joint Honours combinations which are based on existing provision to be submitted for approval.

If either half of a new joint Honours programme is itself new, the new half must be scrutinised by the College for approval as part of the new programme.

MRes Programmes

MRes or other Masters programmes which contain an element of taught courses as well as research are required to follow the approval process (MRes degrees which are entirely research-based follow a different procedure requiring approval from the College Graduate School and consultation with RPSC). The following criteria categorise programmes as taught,
and such programmes should therefore be considered by College Boards of Studies and Programme Approval Groups in the normal way:

1. programmes with any award, including an exit award (e.g. PG Certificate), comprised of taught credits; and/or
2. programmes including taught credit for courses which would be delivered to cohorts of students, rather than through individual research supervision.

The inclusion of a small element of research skills training would not, by itself, categorise a programme as taught.

**Minor Changes to Programmes**

Proposals for all changes to programmes should be entered in PIP system. The Head of College (or his/her representative) should agree on the internal mechanism for College approval of changes (which may be different for major and minor changes (see Flowchart), and once approval has been given, this should be entered in PIP by the College. It should be noted that course changes, or even the introduction of new courses (if they are electives) will not necessarily imply a programme change, particularly in the Colleges which offer a wide range of programmes and courses.