

University of Glasgow

Council of Senate – 4 June 2015

Review of Course and Programme Approval Process

Dr Jack Aitken, Director, Senate Office

The course and programme approval process has been the subject of concerns around the University on the grounds that it is unduly involving –overly elaborate and time-consuming. The process is kept under regular scrutiny by the Academic Standards Committee through its Programme & Course Approval Working Group, but was last subject to a substantive review in 2006.

The review was commissioned by Professor Frank Coton, Vice-Principal for Learning & Teaching and carried out by Dr Jack Aitken, Director of the senate Office.

Objectives and Principles of the review

To ensure our course and programme approval process and supporting systems are fit for purpose and consistent with the following principles:

- The process supports curriculum development
- There is maximum streamlining of processes consistent with inclusion of the necessary minimum amount of information for accountability purposes and student needs
- There is maximum devolution of authority with the minimum number of steps to approval consistent with necessary accountability and good governance practice
- Agreed changes are thoroughly piloted
- Identification of potential developments to related systems and processes

Outputs

- Gathering of information on difficulties with current process
- Checking of University process against external requirements and practice at comparator institutions
- Desirable changes identified concerning:
 - The approval process
 - Supporting information and IT systems

Intended Outcomes

- Maximally efficient course and programme approval process consistent with good practice and external requirements
- Improved user satisfaction with approval process
- Sufficient appropriate information on courses and programmes is held and is accessible

Contents

- 1. Key Recommendations**
- 2. Why do we need the approval process?**
- 3. Quality Assurance and Enhancement context**
- 4. The Programme and Course Approval Process – review**
 - 4.1 Programmes**
 - 4.1.1 Present process
 - 4.1.2 Programme Approval: recommended changes
 - 4.1.2.1 Decision-making authority
 - 4.1.2.2 Approval of programme changes
 - 4.1.2.3 Resources and Strategic Fit
 - 4.2 Courses**
 - 4.2.1 Present process
 - 4.2.2 Course Approval: recommended changes
 - 4.2.2.1 Decision-making authority
 - 4.2.2.2 Course changes
 - 4.2.2.3 Resources and Strategic Fit
- 5. Information for approval and the supporting IT systems**
 - 5.1 Information**
 - 5.1.1 Course and Programme Specifications
 - 5.1.2 Information Issues
 - 5.1.2.1 Content and Structure
 - 5.1.2.2 Guidance material
 - 5.2 Supporting IT**
 - 5.2.1 PIP (Programme Information Process)
 - 5.2.2 PIP and MyCampus
 - 5.2.3 Recommended amendments to PIP
 - 5.2.3.1 PIP changes consequent on approval process changes
 - 5.2.3.2 Further changes
- 6. Outline of further activity**
- 7. Resource requirements**
- 8. List of Appendices**

1. Key Recommendations in this Report

- **Authority is delegated to all Colleges on a pilot basis to approve new and amended programmes from 2016-17.** This to be monitored by Academic Standards Committee (ASC) with a view to full implementation from 2017-18.
- **Authority is delegated to all Schools and Research Institutes on a pilot basis to approve new and amended courses and withdrawal of courses they provide from 2016-17.** This to be monitored by ASC and Boards of Studies with a view to full implementation from 2017-18.
- **For 2015-16, PAGs are given authority to approve new programmes without need for ASC endorsement.**
- **For 2015-16, authority is delegated to all Colleges to approve all amendments to existing programmes.** This to be monitored by ASC.
- **For 2015-16, authority is delegated to all Schools/Research Institutes to approve all amendments to and (subject to confirmation) withdrawals of existing courses.** This to be monitored by Boards of studies and ASC.
- **Beginning in 2015-16, the composition of Boards of Studies and School Learning & Teaching Committees/equivalents changes to include additional members external to the School/College.**
- **Consideration is given to extending the functionality of MyCampus to support the course and programme approval process.** As a first step, it is recommended that a specification is prepared and an estimate of the resource required is developed for consideration by the MyCampus Approvals Board.
- **During 2015-16, development of the Programme Information Process takes place to facilitate the process changes recommended**
- **Other identified enhancements to the Programme Information Process are actioned,** subject to longer-term decisions re PIP and MyCampus.

2. Why do we need the approval process?

- We must tell our students what they can expect from courses and programmes for which they register.
- We need to be able to evidence our academic standards. This is partly achieved by ensuring objective, external advice is provided on proposed developments and that the provision we offer is consistent with the University's strategy.
- Information is also required to support the course/programme in operation.

3. Quality Assurance and Enhancement context

Quality assurance considerations in approving new provision may be found in the Quality Assurance Agency's *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*, Chapter B1: 'Programme Design, Development and Approval'¹. **The key matters are:**

- **Business and academic judgements are taken independently of one another**
- **There is externality in the process – within (staff and students) and beyond the University (external academics, Professional/Statutory/Regulatory bodies, potential employers, as appropriate)**
- **Effectiveness, efficiency and proportionality in the weight of the approval process**
- **Appropriate, accurate and up-to-date information is provided**

Quality enhancement emerges from the approval process through:

- Improved provision for students concerned
- Development and sharing of good practice in the design and delivery of provision (L&T and assessment methods; technical enhancement of writing of ILOs and aims, etc.)

The recommendations in this report seek to ensure that these requirements are met without unnecessary/redundant activity.

4. The Programme and Course Approval Process

4.1 Programmes

4.1.1 Programmes – Present Process

The present process for the approval of new programmes and amendments to existing programmes is set out on Senate Office web pages². The diagram provided includes little detail of the activity that takes place within Schools, Research Institutes and Colleges in developing programmes. How programmes are developed within Schools varies across the University and may also vary between individual programme developments in Schools – i.e., for consideration of both resources/strategic and academic dimensions.

Re the business case for new provision, consultation takes place with the Recruitment and International Office (RIO) to help establish whether there is market viability. Heads of School typically sign off new proposals to confirm the proposal is consistent with School and College strategy and that any additional resources specified in the supporting documentation will be provided. This may follow discussion with the Vice-Principal/Head of College and/or at the College Management Group. The Proposal Support Document³ requires details on any additional resources and confirmation that the relevant budget holder has signed off on the proposal.

¹ Quality Assurance Agency *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*, Chapter B1: 'Programme Design, Development and Approval': www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b

² www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/qea/progdesignapproval/

³ www.gla.ac.uk/services/it/pip/templates/

Information required for consideration also includes technical matters – credits, mode of study, SCQF level, language of instruction, equality and diversity issues, etc. – as well as the programme aims, Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs), assessment and learning & teaching methods and programme structure and features. Consultation is required with external examiners, current students, potential employers, other schools, etc., and evidence that this has taken place is also required. Documentation (Programme Specification and Proposal Support Document) are completed within the Programme Information Process (PIP) system, by administrative or academic staff, or a combination of both.

The proposed programme is then submitted to the College for scrutiny (mainly November – February). Practice again varies in detail, but this will typically involve consideration by the relevant Board of Studies. Detailed consideration of proposals will often be carried out by a small number of Board members from academic disciplines outwith the area submitting the proposal. The findings of the sub-group are then received at a Board meeting.

Following College approval, the proposal is submitted to the Senate Office. Consideration of proposals is carried out by a sub-group of the Academic Standards Committee (ASC) – a Programme Approval Group (PAG). The PAG comprises three ASC members, none of whom are from the College that is the source of the proposal. A small number of proposals are received from Colleges for consideration by a PAG in Semester 1; the bulk of programme approval activity takes place in Semester 2. The PAG meetings (March) are phased to allow recommendations from meetings to be received and approved by ASC at its April meeting. This is to permit degree programmes to be approved by the end of the academic year for commencement in year n+1. ASC has devolved authority from Senate to approve new programmes on Senate's behalf and provides the Council of Senate with a list of approved programmes in June, ahead of programme commencement.

Where the RIO assesses the viability of a programme to be weak, detailed information is required for scrutiny ultimately by the PAG.

Major changes to existing programmes are subject to the process outlined above. Minor changes are considered and approved by the Boards of studies. (The distinction between minor and major changes is described in guidance and decisions on doubtful cases are made by the Head of College.)

The University is presently investing in the development of its online based provision. Thus far, online proposals taken through the approvals process have not met with significant difficulties: no significant regulatory barriers exist, and the approval process seems to accommodate online considerations comfortably, other than that there may be need to provide additional drop-down options to address forms of assessment more typical of online than conventional provision.

A fast-track procedure is available, subject to the approval of the Clerk of Senate and Convener of ASC, where the opportunity to introduce new provision has arisen late in the academic year. This process also involves consideration of the proposed programme by the Board of studies and a PAG. ASC receives the recommendation from the PAG and reports approvals to the Council of Senate in October.

The approval of the suspension or withdrawal of programmes is approved by the College concerned, reporting the decision to the Senate Office.

Additional activity is required where the regulations of the proposed programme would depart from standard regulations and/or would mean the introduction of a new degree title. The associated process is statutory and stems from the point that regulations (and programmes themselves) are given formal approval by means of a Resolution of the University Court. The associated procedure involves consultation on draft regulations (prepared by the Senate Office in consultation with the School[s] concerned) with the General Council and the public ahead of formal Court approval. The necessary details are then published in the next edition of the University Calendar. Introduction of the programme is **not** held up by this procedure.

4.1.2 Programme Approval: Recommended Changes

4.1.2.1 Decision-making authority

It is essential that decisions concerning our academic provision are properly informed and made objectively. This requires that there is external input to decision-making. Programme proposals are supported by consultation with other contributing Schools/Research Institutes, students on existing related programmes, external academics (mostly External Examiners), potential employers, professional/regulatory bodies, RIO and Central Room Bookings. College and School staff report that carrying out these consultations can be time-consuming and can seem like box-ticking. However, these activities are essential to ensuring that decisions are appropriately informed and it is not recommended that this aspect of the process is changed⁴ – and, notably, other universities may make more extensive use of external academics than we do.

The process whereby external scrutiny takes place *within* the University presently involves two main stages: Board of Studies and PAG. In terms of the requirements of good governance, however, it is not necessary that there are two stages and, in itself, there is no added value in a two-stage process in quality assurance terms. Efficiency and the principle of devolving decisions to the most appropriate local body argue that we should consider changing to a one-stage process. Colleagues in the Schools and Colleges report significant pressure is generated by the need to complete Board of Studies activity in time to submit proposals to the PAGs, and for the PAGs to report to ASC before the end of the academic year⁵. If the PAG stage were removed, this would simplify procedures and would permit Colleges more time to complete the approval process and would introduce greater flexibility in the timeframe during which proposed programmes are developed. Importantly, a shorter process would also enable Schools to advertise new programmes as fully approved earlier in the recruitment cycle.

The main counterargument to removing one of the stages is that, while the quality of documentation submitted by the Colleges has improved in recent years, PAGs still sometimes identify deficiencies in proposals – consultation information is incomplete or there may be concerns about technical aspects of the programme. However, these shortcomings could be more easily addressed given a longer period for completion of the process within the College. There is also the positive argument that empowering Schools, RIs and Colleges with greater authority will encourage high-quality performance.

⁴ However, see below at 5.1.2.1 on review and reformatting of the consultation pro formas.

⁵ In actuality, ASC has never rejected a recommendation made by a PAG.

With respect to comparable universities, of those surveyed, the programme approval process in the large majority of universities (12) involves one primary stage in considering proposals. In two instances, there are one or two stages, depending on the potential impact of the proposal. Four universities have two-stage processes, and one has a three-stage process. (Of the Universities currently employing a two-stage process, Newcastle is very likely to switch to a one-stage process in the near future.) Where there are multiple stages, there is little sense that the process involves much duplication – i.e., in these cases, the final stage appears more formal/audit-based.

It is **recommended** that authority is delegated to College Boards of Studies across the University on a pilot basis to approve new and amended programmes from 2016-17⁶. It is **recommended** that this is monitored by ASC with a view to full implementation from 2017-18. To support this change, it is **recommended** that:

- from 2015-16, Boards of Studies include in their membership either current PAG Chairs or members of PAGs (subsequently, experienced members of ASC) from other Colleges
- ASC establishes a sub-group in 2016-17 (perhaps comprising the current PAG Conveners or other experienced PAG members) to consider and decide on its behalf the approval of programme proposals that span Colleges and/or where there is concern at the Board of Studies whether the proposal complies with University policy
- The Senate Office audits and reports annually to ASC on programme approval activity by Boards of Studies⁷
- To help address workload issues at Boards of Studies, the practice at ASC and in some Schools and Colleges should be adopted across the University, whereby detailed consideration of programme proposals is provided by a small number of Board members, who then identify the key issues for consideration at the Board meeting. (Ideally, the sub-groups would include the Board members who are ASC members from other Colleges.)

It is further **recommended** that, as interim measures:

- for 2015-16, the College Boards of Studies across the University are given authority to approve all changes to programmes
- in 2015-16, PAGs are given authority to approve new programmes without the need to submit recommendations to a meeting of ASC for endorsement (though referring programme proposals to ASC for decision where there is concern that they comply with University policy)
- and that these measures are monitored by ASC by means of an audit report prepared by the Senate Office

It is further **recommended** that:

- there is appropriate and updated guidance on procedural changes and training of the members of Boards of Studies as agreed by ASC and delivered and developed in conjunction with the Senate Office

⁶ As with the current PAGs, the focus of the scrutiny carried out by the Board of studies should be the auditing of appropriate, generic rather than subject-specific dimensions of proposals: ILOs, Aims, Assessment and L&T approaches and programme coherence.

⁷ A key concern in this regard will be to check that Boards of Studies have ensured that all relevant Schools and RIs have been consulted during the development period.

- there is appropriate promotion of the procedural changes to the University community

4.1.2.2 Approval of programme changes

A further issue is that a significant proportion of programme development activity now concerns the reformulation and updating of existing degrees, with the consequence that the bulk of new provision lies at course level. This is likely to increase. However, the development of new streams and variants invokes significant documentation and in some instances the full programme approval process. As noted above, a key consideration for quality assurance is proportionality, and the focus of scrutiny of such developments should be on the high-level overall impact of proposed changes – i.e., the implications for assessment, on aims and ILOs and on programme coherence. It is **recommended** that ASC reviews the definitions of minor and major presently provided to develop criteria to determine when the full approval process should be triggered by proposed changes, and that ASC develops appropriate lighter-touch arrangements to deal with less significant changes to programmes.

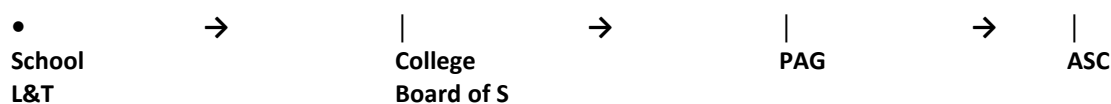
It must also be noted that, in a context of decision-making being devolved to more local bodies, the importance of ensuring that all academic areas affected by a proposed change to a programme are aware of and supportive of the change becomes even more crucial.

4.1.2.3 Resources and Strategic Fit

The concern to separate financial from academic decision-making concerning new provision stems from the need to avoid the latter being contaminated by the former. The present process does not fully separate business case and academic consideration of proposals. Moreover, Boards of Studies are requested to judge the adequacy of any additional resources that would be provided were the programme to be approved. It is unlikely that the Board would be appropriately informed or qualified to make this decision and it is **recommended** that this is removed from the role of the Boards. It is **recommended** that it would suffice for Boards to receive by means of a simple box-tick confirmation that the College has approved the financial implications of introducing new/amended programmes.

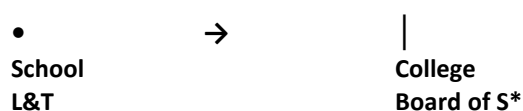
In practice, arrangements for considering the resource and strategic implications of proposed programmes vary. It is **recommended** that, following appropriate consultation with the Vice-Principal/Head of College, the Head of School/Director of Research Centre⁸ signs off to confirm that the resource requirements have been assessed and approved and that the proposed programme is consistent with College and University strategy.

Fig. 1: Programme Approval Process: Current



⁸ In the case of programmes shared by a number of Schools/RIs, the Head/Director of the lead unit would sign off, following consultation with his/her opposite numbers.

Fig. 2: Programme Approval Process: Recommended



*With current membership augmented by PAG/ASC members

4.2 Courses

4.2.1 Present Process – Course Approval

The present process for the approval, amendment and withdrawal of courses is set out on Senate Office web pages⁹. Responsibility for approval of course developments lies with the Colleges; in practice, the Boards of Studies. Proposals are processed through PIP, using Course Specification and Course Proposal Support Documents. Some changes may be approved by the Schools/Research Institutes; more significant matters require approval by the College Boards of Studies, which may be decided by the Convener, out of committee.

As with programme proposals, resource implications are noted (with additional resources and intended student numbers listed) and signed off by the budget holder. Technical aspects are recorded (level, credits, etc.), pre- and co-requisite courses and excluded combinations, associated programmes, as well as the aims and ILOs, learning & teaching methods and assessment details.

Also as with programmes, the development process within the School varies across the University and between individual instances.

The bulk of approval activity conducted by Boards of Studies concerns course proposals, with peak periods in the early months of the calendar year and towards the end of the academic year.

4.2.2 Recommended changes – Course Approval

4.2.2.1 Decision-making authority

Again, a central consideration in quality assurance is that there is externality in decision-making, and course proposals require consultation with external academic(s), students, central University services, other Schools and potential employers, as appropriate. Within the University, academic involvement external to the School/RI submitting the proposal is provided at the Board of Studies.

However, other key quality management factors are the proportionality and efficiency of procedures, and it is arguable that University processes are relatively heavy-handed regarding course approval. A process would be possible where primary consideration and approval was given to proposals by the School concerned, but with the external dimension buttressed by the addition of Board of Studies members from outwith the School added to the membership of the School Learning & Teaching Committee. As with the recommendations above concerning programmes (see 4.1.2.2), an essential feature of a process that ended within Schools would be careful consideration of any implications for other Schools/RIs and it would be essential that they are in agreement with the changes. At the University of Edinburgh, while courses are approved by the relevant College Board

⁹ www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/gea/progdesignapproval/courseapproval/summary/

of Studies, this is relatively formal, in that active consideration at college level is triggered only where a proposal would deviate from standard curricular features. Recourse to the Board of Studies could be retained as a feature at Glasgow also, but a process that meant that Schools/RIs were given authority to approve courses and referred *only* non-standard proposals for consideration by the Board of Studies would permit earlier/more flexible approval arrangements. Courses would be approved in a shorter timeframe overall, and earlier completion of the process would dovetail better with processes such as timetable planning and room allocation. Greater latitude also means more time for matters to be sorted out by the School ahead of approval and introduction. The extended dialogue between Schools and Colleges that can be required at present would largely be removed.

A feature of the present process is the reporting of bottlenecks at Boards of Studies due to the volume of course approval activity and the amount of relatively detailed information to be considered. One danger here is that the concentration on approval activity drives the consideration of pedagogical development to the margins of committee business. The other risk is that it impacts on the quality of the scrutiny given to individual proposals. Paradoxically, the quality of scrutiny could be enhanced where the volume of activity (within a single School or RI) is smaller and with a Learning & Teaching Committee augmented as suggested above by Board of Studies members from elsewhere in the College.

The present process also relies on the submission of School minutes to Boards of Studies, to evidence that due consideration has taken place. This is a very solid approach, but also time-consuming. Activity would also be reduced if only non-standard matters were referred forward.

It is **recommended** that authority is delegated to Schools and Research Institutes across the University on a pilot basis to approve new and amended courses and withdrawal of courses they provide from 2016-17. It is **recommended** that this is monitored by ASC and Boards of Studies with a view to full implementation from 2016-17. To support this change, it is **recommended** that:

- from 2015-16, School/Research institute Learning and Teaching Committees¹⁰ include in their membership experienced members of the corresponding College Board of Studies from other Schools/RIs
- School/RI L&T Committees refer to the Board of studies for consideration and approval course proposals that raise issues of precedence or principle or significantly impact on the provision of other Schools/RIs
- Boards of Studies audit annually and report to ASC on course approval activity by the corresponding Schools/RIs
- To address workload issues at L&T Committees, detailed consideration of proposals should be carried out by a small sub-group of Committee members, who then identify key issues for consideration at the Committee meeting. Where practicable, these sub-groups should include a member from another School.

It is further **recommended** that, as interim measures:

- For 2015-16, Schools/RIs across the University are given authority to approve all changes to courses (also **withdrawals**, subject to confirmation that it will be possible to amend PIP to accommodate this in time)

¹⁰ Or the equivalent body.

- And that this is monitored by the Boards of Studies and ASC by means of an audit report compiled by each Board

It is further **recommended** that:

- there is appropriate and updated guidance on procedural changes and training of the members of School/RI Learning & Teaching Committees as agreed by ASC and delivered and developed in conjunction with the Senate Office and Boards of Studies
- there is appropriate promotion of the procedural changes to the University community

4.2.2.2 Course Changes

As with changes to existing programmes, it is **recommended** that ASC reviews the criteria used to determine the approval process required for the approval of changes to courses with a view to adopting lighter-touch arrangements proportionate to the scale of the activity. Again, a further consideration in this regard is the need to ensure that the documentation produced for the approval process is also minimised. As part of this activity, consideration should also be given to the retention of the process for suspending courses in PIP.

4.2.2.3 Resources and Strategic Fit

It is noted that an internal audit review of the budgetary control aspect of the course approval process is to take place during spring 2015. The outcomes of this audit will dovetail with the present report. However, it should be noted that, as with programme approvals, the present course approval process does not fully separate business case and academic consideration of proposals. The recommended completion of the process at School level will obviate the problem of inappropriate issues being considered by Boards of Studies. However, it is **recommended** that the School/RI Learning and Teaching Committee receives confirmation that the financial and other resource issues and strategic fit of the proposal are certified for the L&T Committee by means of a simple box-tick confirmation approved by the Head of School/RI Director.

Fig. 3: Course Approval Process: Current

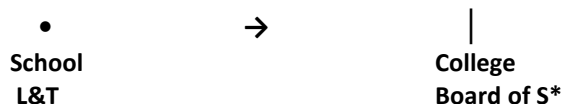


Fig. 4: Course Approval Process: Recommended



***With current membership augmented by Board of Studies members**

Table 1: Summary of recommendations on decision-making authority

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
New programme	PAG (without ASC endorsement)	College (pilot)	College (full)
Amend programme	College (pilot)	College (Pilot)	College (full)
Withdraw programme	College (already the case)	College	College
New course	College	School/RI (pilot)	School/RI (full)
Amend course	School/RI (pilot)	School/RI (pilot)	School/RI (full)
Withdraw course	School/RI (Pilot) - TBC	School/RI (Pilot)	School/RI (full)

5. Information requested for approval purposes and supporting IT systems

5.1 Information

5.1.1 Course and Programme Specifications

The documents that form the basis of the approval process are the course and programme specifications and the associated programme support documents, which also comprise pro formas evidencing the necessary consultations¹¹. The Specifications are developed using the PIP system.

Programme Specifications have their origins in the ‘Dearing Review’ of UK HE in 1997. That review noted that universities had been weak hitherto at producing information that told students what they could expect would be provided for them and would be expected of them in their studies. Dearing recommended that universities produce succinct and comparable summaries of their degree programmes. The idea was subsequently picked up and applied by the Quality Assurance Agency and UK Funding Councils. It was also considered by the HE sector that such summary specifications could provide the vehicle for considering proposed new programmes. This is still common practice.

Programme Specifications were introduced at the University of Glasgow c. 2004; Course Specifications followed shortly after. They fulfil a number of critical purposes, providing information for:

- (prospective) students
- course and programme handbooks
- academic information for approval purposes
- graduates, which they can access electronically for the purposes of employment, further study, etc
- MyCampus, which is used for:
 - administrative purposes to permit courses and programmes to run, including Registry exam planning, Enrolment Requirement coding and plan Rule Building to direct and control which courses students enrol on.
 - the Course Catalogue (shorter summary)
 - the Programme Catalogue
 - data required by HESA (HE Statistical Agency)
 - information required for the UK-wide KIS (Key Information Set)

¹¹ ¹¹ www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/gea/progdesignapproval/programmeapproval/#tabs=1
www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/gea/progdesignapproval/courseapproval/#tabs=1
www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/gea/progdesignapproval/programmeapproval/#tabs=1

5.1.2 Information Issues

5.1.2.1 Content and structure

The Specifications and Support Documents contain some information that is superfluous. The main area where reduction could be made concerns resource issues (see 4.1.2.3 and 4.2.2.3 above also) and it is **recommended** that this is removed aside from a simple box to indicate that the College is content in this respect. A small number of other questions might also be removed. It is also **recommended** that additional fields are pre-populated with standard responses: frequent users report frustration with repeated re-entry of information, and this would help to reduce irritation, and that additional options are added to drop-down lists (e.g., re assessment types).

The multipurpose nature of Specifications is a weakness as well as a strength of the process. Some of the information included is relatively technical, concerning confirmation that the proposal conforms to University and sector expectations and requirements, but is likely to be of little direct value to students. The present format of the Specifications foregrounds the technical data rather than more student-related information, and it is **recommended** that the Specifications are reformatted to reverse this and that their general appearance is revised, to make them more appealing and accessible to students and to foreground pedagogic matters better. Going slightly further, it has been suggested that consideration is given to either splitting the document into two parts or enabling two versions of the document to be viewed: one version to include the technical information and guidance on completing the template, with tick-boxes to highlight where the proposal would deviate from standard wording. In the other version, to be viewed by (prospective) students and to be the focus of attention of the L&T Committee/Board, the guidance and technical information would be invisible.

It has also been suggested that the PIP Specifications could be improved by including further information about the plans (and requirements) likely to be affected by newly approved courses, to assist in updating in MyCampus, and it is **recommended** that this is considered (see Appendix 5).

The Specifications focus on course and programme aims and ILOs. These are now the lingua franca expected in the HE sector and it is not recommended that these are dropped. However, it was reported that the focus on writing aims and ILOs might have come at the cost of the provision of more than very brief descriptions of what the course or programme is 'about' and have had the unintended effect of reducing comprehensible information to guide student choice. Course information can be very minimal in both the Specification and Catalogue, with the same 1.5 sentences on the course simply repeated in both. This can present difficulties for prospective students, perhaps especially those from overseas. One of the principles of this review is to streamline the process, so it is **recommended** that guidance is provided to indicate that **as an option only**, further detail may be provided to field 14: Short Description (possibly along the lines of a brief syllabus, it has been suggested).

It is also **recommended** that recruiting agents working for the University should receive a briefing document on the terminology used to describe provision so they may better advise prospective students. It has also been reported that it would be useful in order to facilitate communications for the Support Documents to record the name of the person proposing the new/changed course or programme; this is also **recommended**.

Feedback has also been received that the consultation pro formas are not always helpfully or appropriately configured – for example, while it is appropriate that students are requested to provide views on the withdrawal of an optional course and may wish to voice strong support for its retention, the context for the proposal may be the retirement of teaching staff concerned, rendering the course effectively undeliverable and potentially provoking needless tension. A link to the room-booking system has also been suggested and it is recommended that this is given further consideration (see Appendix 5). It is **recommended** that the User Group proposed below in 5.2.3.2 and reporting to ASC reviews the content and structure of the pro formas to ensure they are supportive.

5.1.2.2 Guidance Materials

Guidance on the process is provided in a number of online documents produced by the Senate Office. These will require to be updated in line with process changes recommended above, but there is also need to review the approach taken to ensure it supports staff effectively, notably those on committees taking on new responsibilities as well as system users, and ensures consistent application of the process across the University. A specific matter to be addressed in revised guidance is amplification of information on the Specification documents - it was reported that staff are concerned about what the implications might be when answering some questions; further advice should help dispel that concern. A further specific development of the process would be to introduce a system whereby users are alerted to forthcoming changes to processes/procedures. There is also need to provide up-to-date exemplars of completed Specifications, etc. As recommended above, the new guidance would be used in conjunction with training. It is **recommended** that Senate Office revamps the guidance information in line with the foregoing.

5.2 Supporting IT

5.2.1 PIP (Programme Information Process)

PIP was created to provide the vehicle to support the approval process. It derives from the University's Electronic Document and Records Management System, which itself is based on Documentum, a well-supported commercial IT product with a good reputation. It uses Microsoft Word, and part of the rationale for developing PIP was that a Word-based system would be familiar to most users – a valuable point for occasional users of PIP.

Since its introduction, PIP has continued to evolve, and IT Services staff who provide the support for PIP and its development are highly responsive and constructive. Independently of this review, the Head of Development and Integration in ITS has proposed that an initiative is taken forward with a view to improving PIP's effectiveness and user-friendliness. That exercise will dovetail well with the present review.

Extensive feedback was provided on PIP during the present review. The following notes some of the main comments made.

A critical concern is the view voiced in all Colleges that academic staff particularly can be daunted by and reluctant to engage with PIP. The effect of this is to inhibit innovation. This must be addressed. Some of the uncertainty can be dispelled by the reduction in the number of steps to approval for courses and programmes and by the review of guidance material recommended above. However, a

feature of the PIP system is its sensitivity. This is an unfortunate and ironic consequence of the desire to have a system that is as automated as possible. At the extreme, a matter such as correcting a typo will generate a change report and a prompt to have the change approved. This can also be addressed in part through the review of the thresholds that trigger approval procedures, but further consideration of how the system can be changed technically is also **recommended** (see below at 5.2.3 and Appendix 5).

There are also unintended consequences of the use of a Word-based system. The track-changes function can result in documentation that is difficult to follow. A further significant issue is that the submission of a number of proposals including similar content requires repetitive extensive cutting and pasting. This represents a serious drawback when staff are seeking to make the same changes to a large number of courses simultaneously. Again, the system tends to require extensive documentation, making it difficult to tell the wood from the (felled?) trees, and users have reported that a revision which more clearly foregrounds and highlights the proposed changes would be very helpful. The use of a text-based process also means that analysis across courses and programmes must be done manually. Amendments cannot be made using an iPad – a concerning matter when the volume of paper is so considerable¹² - and there can be version-control issues.

Requests were also made that the interface between PIP and CMIS is improved.

5.2.2 PIP and MyCampus

Comments were also made regarding the interface between PIP and MyCampus. As noted above, most of the information recorded in Specifications transfers to MyCampus. Some information that is similar is requested by both systems: for course approval, co- and pre-requisite courses and combinations of courses that are not permitted are required; this information is also generated in entering plan rules in MyCampus.

As noted above, the information contained in Specifications is necessary for other purposes as well as the approval process, and it is essential that Specifications are kept up to date. However, plan details must also be carefully maintained in MyCampus – fundamentally, to ensure administrative information is current so that courses can in practice be run. The risk arises that staff will tend to prioritise the latter over the maintenance of Specifications, with the potential that the latter and the Course and Programme Catalogues become out of date.

A key principle that underpinned the implementation of MyCampus was that, where possible, the maintenance of separate systems across the University should be avoided. The necessarily close relationship between PIP and MyCampus prompts the question whether both software systems should be separately maintained or whether course and programme approvals should be fully integrated within MyCampus. In 2014, the Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching convened a Working Group on PIP and Plan-building tasked by the Student Lifecycle Project Board to look at these questions. The Working Group concluded that it:

...recognised that the ideal solution would be to integrate plan maintenance processes under a single software solution. However, Group members were clear that staff engagement with the current approvals process was good and

¹² It might be argued that this is a problem with iPad technology, but many University staff use them.

they would not recommend discontinuation of PIP until such time as the alternative software solution has been proved to deliver the required functionality and an equivalent or improved user experience.¹³

Since the Working Group made its report, however, there has been an external development that has a bearing on the PIP/MyCampus relationship. While the information in Specifications needs to remain accessible and accurate, and the provision of information is a key aspect of academic quality management, the requirement to maintain Programme Specifications as separately identifiable unitary documents is no longer explicitly stated in the QAA Quality Code¹⁴. This provides greater latitude re how and where the University holds the information Specifications contain. It is also the case that relocation of the course and programme approval process within MyCampus could provide the opportunity to change and streamline the way programme data is recorded and used by making use of existing and reported new functionality offered by MyCampus.

In view of the foregoing and the difficulties with PIP noted above, it is **recommended** that fresh consideration is given to extending the functionality of MyCampus to support the course and programme approval process. As a first step, it is **recommended** that a specification is prepared and an estimate of the resource required developed for consideration by the MyCampus Approvals Board. If it is agreed that the course and programme approval process is integrated into MyCampus, it is **recommended** that thorough testing and piloting of the system and full involvement of users in the design and building processes are required before it is implemented.

5.2.3 Recommended amendments to PIP

5.2.3.1 Changes consequent to revision of the approval process

Regardless of the decision whether to integrate the approval process within MyCampus, amendment of PIP will be required to facilitate the process changes recommended above, and it is **recommended** that these are taken forward during 2015-16.

5.2.3.2 Further amendments

A list of potential changes to PIP has been compiled from the suggestions made by those consulted in compiling this report. The range of suggestions re PIP is listed in Appendix 5. They form a hierarchy according to whether they constitute relatively minor or more substantial matters.

It is **recommended** that:

- it is decided which proposals are implemented in light of a decision whether to maintain PIP or not
- the review of PIP suggested by the Head of Development and Integration in ITS proceeds and implements the agreed amendments to PIP.

It is further **recommended** that the governance structure for PIP is reviewed, with a view potentially to establishing a Steering Group and Good Practice and online general users' Fora.

¹³ PIP/Plan-building Working Group: Final Report

¹⁴ Previously, the QAA Code of Practice.

6. Further Activity Outline

Table 2

Task	Person/body responsible	Timescale
1. Detailed planning for administrative changes (process details, committee remits, etc.)	Director of Senate Office	June 2016
2. Development of guidance and training packages	Director SO & ASC	June 2016
3. Development of PIP to accommodate approved process changes	Head of Development & Integration, ITS	June 2016
4. Decision on longer-term maintenance of PIP	SLSD Board, SMG	Autumn 15

7. Resources for implementing changes

Further detailed work, concentrated in 2015-16 is necessary to permit the implementation of the recommended changes. This would be centred on ITS and the Senate Office, with consultation and involvement of staff in Colleges and Schools, and will require dedicated resource. However, the associated costs would be offset by the savings to Schools and Colleges through the simplification and improvement of the process.

8. List of Appendices

1. List of consultees
2. The process at other universities
3. List of detailed changes to PIP suggested during the review

Further information – the complete list of review recommendations and on the background to the approval process and its evolution – are available on the Senate website.

Review of Course and Programme Approval Process:

Consultees

Ms Jenny Beattie, Head of Student and Academic Administration, College of Social Sciences

Ms Leeann Brennan-Stevenson, Student Records, Student Lifecycle Support and Development

Ms Helen Clegg, Senior Academic Policy Officer, Senate Office (*Helen also wrote Appendix 3 and some of Appendix 4.*)

Professor Frank Coton, Vice-Principal, Learning & Teaching

Mr Caelum Davies, Students' Representative Council Vice-President (Education)

Professor John Davies, School of Engineering and Dean of Learning & Teaching, College of Science and Engineering

Mrs Pat Duncan, Head of Student and Academic Administration, College of Science and Engineering

Professor Christine Edwards, School of Medicine, Programme Approval Group Convener

Professor Neil Evans, School of Veterinary Medicine, Convener, Programme and Course Approval Working Group, and PAG convener

Professor Mark Furse, Head of the School of Law

Mrs Fiona Green, Graduate School Administrator, College of Social Sciences

Professor Tom Guthrie, School of Law, Convener, Academic Standards Committee

Mr Richard Harrison, Director of Learning & Teaching Development, University of Newcastle

Professor Bob Hill, Head of Teaching, School of Chemistry and Programme Approval Group Convener

Ms Gail Honeyman, Graduate School Administrator, College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences

Professor Alice Jenkins, School of Critical Studies, previously Dean of Learning & Teaching, College of Arts and convener of the Programme and Course Approval Working Group

Mrs Christine Lowther, Director of Student Services

Mr Sandy Macdonald, Director, IT Services

Dr Gillian Mackintosh, Director of Academic Affairs, University of Aberdeen

Ms Arlene Macrae, Undergraduate School Manager, School of Veterinary Medicine

Mrs Caroline Mallon, Head of Student and Academic Administration, College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences

Ms Fran McCulloch, PGT Cluster Manager, College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences

Dr Karen McIlvaney, Senior Administrator, School of Engineering

Ms Dawn McKenzie, Functional Lead, Student Lifecycle Support and Development

Mrs Kathleen Mosson, Teaching Administrator, School of Mathematics and Statistics

Ms Wendy Muir, Head of Academic Collaborations Office

Professor Thomas Munck, School of Humanities

Mr Michael Murray, Head of School Administration, Humanities

Professor Kevin O'Dell, School of Life Sciences, Programme Approval Group Convener

Ms Anna Phelan, Head of Development and Integration, IT Services

Ms Helen Reid, Teaching and Quality Administrator, School of Life Sciences

Dr Donald Speath, Dean of Learning & Teaching, College of Arts

Dr Helen Stoddart, Learning & Teaching Convener, School of Critical Studies

Ms Val Stringfellow, Head of Student and Academic Administration, College of Arts

Mrs Fiona Webster, Undergraduate Administrative Officer, College of Social Sciences

Information was also kindly provided by:

Mr Frank Lynch, Ms Alison McGuiggan and Mr David Martin (respectively, Deputy Director, Deputy Director of Data Quality and Senior Data Quality Analyst, Planning and Business Intelligence)

Mr Matthew Hastings (Assistant Director, Registry)

Ms Karen McCluskey, Business Development Manager (Learning & Teaching), College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences

Course and Programme Approval Process Review:

List of Recommendations

Programme Approval

1. Authority is delegated to College Boards of Studies across the University on a pilot basis to approve new and amended programmes from 2016-17.
2. Recommendation 1 to be monitored by ASC with a view to full implementation from 2017-18.
3. To support this change:
 - from 2015-16, Boards of Studies include in their membership either current PAG Chairs or members of PAGs (subsequently, experienced members of ASC) from other Colleges
 - ASC establishes a sub-group in 2016-17 (perhaps comprising the current PAG Conveners or other experienced PAG members) to consider and decide on its behalf the approval of programme proposals that span Colleges and/or where there is concern at the Board of Studies whether the proposal complies with University policy
 - The Senate Office audits and reports annually to ASC on programme approval activity by Boards of Studies
 - To help address workload issues at Boards of Studies, the practice at ASC and in some Schools and Colleges should be adopted across the University, whereby detailed consideration of programme proposals is provided by a small number of Board members, who then identify the key issues for consideration at the Board meeting. (Ideally, the sub-groups would include the Board members who are ASC members from other Colleges.)
4. As interim measures:
 - in 2015-16, the College Boards of Studies across the University are given authority to approve all changes to programmes
 - in 2015-16, PAGS are given authority to approve new programmes without the need to submit recommendations to a meeting of ASC for endorsement (though referring programme proposals to ASC for decision where there is concern that they comply with University policy)
 - and that these measures are monitored by ASC by means of an audit report prepared by the Senate Office
5. Further, that:
 - there is appropriate and updated guidance on procedural changes and training of the members of Boards of Studies as agreed by ASC and delivered and developed in conjunction with the Senate Office
 - there is appropriate promotion of the procedural changes to the University community
6. ASC reviews the definitions of minor and major presently provided to develop criteria to determine when the full approval process should be triggered by proposed changes, and

that ASC develops appropriate lighter-touch arrangements to deal with less significant changes to programmes.

7. Judgement on the adequacy of resources to support programme proposals is removed from the role of the Boards of Studies.
8. Boards should receive by means of a simple box-tick confirmation that the College has approved the financial implications of introducing new/amended programmes.
9. Following appropriate consultation with the Vice-Principal/Head of College, the Head of School/Director of Research Centre signs off to confirm that the resource requirements have been assessed and approved and that the proposed programme is consistent with College and University strategy.

Course Approval

10. Authority is delegated to Schools and Research Institutes across the University on a pilot basis to approve new and amended courses and withdrawal of courses they provide from 2016-17.
11. Recommendation 10 is monitored by ASC and Boards of Studies with a view to full implementation from 2016-17.
12. To support this change:
 - from 2015-16, School/Research institute Learning and Teaching Committees include in their membership experienced members of the corresponding Board of Studies from other Schools/RIs
 - School/RI L&T Committees refer to the Board of studies for consideration and approval course proposals that raise issues of precedence or principle or significantly impact on the provision of other Schools/RIs
 - Boards of Studies audit annually and report to ASC on course approval activity by the corresponding Schools/RIs
 - To address workload issues at L&T Committees, detailed consideration of proposals should be carried out by a small sub-group of Committee members, who then identify key issues for consideration at the Committee meeting. Where practicable, these sub-groups should include a member from another School.
13. Further, that, as interim measures:
 - for 2015-16, Schools/RIs across the University are given authority to approve all changes to courses (also **withdrawals**, subject to confirmation that it will be possible to amend PIP to accommodate this in time)
 - and that this is monitored by the Boards of Studies and ASC by means of an audit report compiled by each Board
14. As with changes to existing programmes, that ASC reviews the criteria used to determine the approval process required for the approval of changes to courses with a view to adopting lighter-touch arrangements proportionate to the scale of the activity. Again, a further consideration in this regard is the need to ensure that the documentation produced for the

approval process is also minimised. As part of this activity, consideration should also be given to the retention of the process for suspending courses in PIP.

15. The School/RI Learning and Teaching Committee receives confirmation that the financial and other resource issues and strategic fit of the proposal are certified for the L&T Committee by means of a simple box-tick confirmation approved by the Head of School/RI Director.

Information Issues

16. Re Specifications and Support Documents, fields concerning resource issues to be removed and replaced by a simple box to indicate that the College is content in this respect.
17. Re Specifications and Support Documents , additional fields are pre-populated with standard responses and that additional options are added to drop-down lists (e.g., re assessment types).
18. Specifications are reformatted to foreground student-related rather than technical information, and that their general appearance is revised, to make them more appealing and accessible to students and to foreground pedagogic matters better. As part of this, consideration should be given to either splitting the document into two parts or enabling two versions of the document to be viewed: one version to include the technical information and guidance on completing the template, with tick-boxes to highlight where the proposal would deviate from standard wording. In the other version, to be viewed by (prospective) students and to be the focus of attention of the L&T Committee/Board, the guidance and technical information would be invisible.
19. Consideration is given to including in Specifications further information about the plans (and requirements) likely to be affected by newly approved courses, to assist in updating in MyCampus.
20. Guidance is provided to indicate that **as an option only**, further detail may be provided to field 14: Short Description (possibly along the lines of a brief syllabus, it has been suggested).
21. Recruiting agents working for the University should receive a briefing document on the terminology used to describe provision so they may better advise prospective students.
22. The Support Documents should include the name of the person proposing the new/changed course or programme.
23. The User Group proposed below reviews the content and structure of the pro formas to ensure they are supportive and submits recommendations to ASC to ensure the consultation pro formas are helpfully and appropriately configured – for example, while it is appropriate that students are requested to provide views on the withdrawal of an optional course and may wish to voice strong support for its retention, the context for the proposal may be the retirement of teaching staff concerned, rendering the course effectively undeliverable and potentially provoking needless tension. A link to the room-booking system has also been suggested and the Group should also consider this.
24. The Senate Office should revamp guidance information thoroughly in line with the report.

Supporting IT

25. Further consideration to be given to how PIP can be changed technically with a view to reducing the thresholds that prompt re-approval of provision, subject to decisions made under recommendation 26.
26. Fresh consideration is given to extending the functionality of MyCampus to support the course and programme approval process. As a first step, it is recommended that a specification is prepared and an estimate of the resource required developed for consideration by the MyCampus Approvals Board.
27. If it is agreed that the course and programme approval process is integrated into MyCampus, thorough testing and piloting of the system and full involvement of users in the design and building processes should be required before it is implemented.
28. Amendment of PIP is made to facilitate the changes to the approval process, to be taken forward during 2015-16.
29. With respect to the detailed potential amendments to PIP listed in Appendix 5, that:
 - it is decided which proposals are implemented in light of a decision whether to maintain PIP or not
 - the review of PIP suggested by the Head of Development and Integration in ITS proceeds and implements the agreed amendments to PIP.
30. The governance structure for PIP is reviewed, with a view potentially to establishing a Steering Group and Good Practice and online general users' Fora.

Course and Programme Approval Process Review:

Process Background & Evolution

The Course and Programme Approval process was last reviewed in its entirety in 2006 by the Programme and Course Approval Working Group (a sub-group of the Academic Standards Committee (ASC)). This had involved an analysis of the current process, including a piloted revised project which had run for two years in the (then) Faculty of Law, Business and Social Sciences, and for a year in the (then) Faculty of Science and Engineering. It was found that the pilot was not having a significant impact on the effectiveness or efficiency of approval procedures in those Faculties and, rather, had shifted workload and responsibility from Senate Office to Faculty staff with no notable benefit. Practice at a number of other institutions (Dundee, Edinburgh, Leeds, Nottingham, St Andrews and Strathclyde) was also examined. It was found that these institutions required at least as much, if not more, information to be presented by proposers.

The main recommendation of the Working Group was that more scrutiny of proposals should be devolved to Faculties (as existed at the time). Academic and resource/operational information would be separated, with the Programme Specification becoming the primary document. PAGs would focus on academic approval, and ensure Faculties had considered and approved resource issues. Senate Office would separately check the administrative data.

The following changes were approved by ASC with regard to programme approval:

1. ASC Scrutiny groups were renamed ASC Programme Approval Groups ('PAGs').
2. The Programme Specification document became the primary document for all stages of the approval process.
3. Two checklists were devised to indicate the outcomes of scrutiny at Faculty level.
4. New or amended regulations for undergraduate programmes were to conform to the standard template and be submitted to the PAG. Taught postgraduate programmes were to be governed by the generic PGT regulations, and any rationale needed to be approved by the PAG.
5. The Board of Studies/Higher Degrees Committee minute was to describe the feedback received through consultation, and any actions taken as a result.
6. The checklist forms were to be submitted to the PAG, together with the Board of Studies/Higher Degrees Committee minute extract relating to the proposal. The rationale for the proposal was to be included.
7. CCIMS¹ forms and consultation² documents were no longer required to be seen routinely by the PAG, but these were to be submitted to College and be immediately available if requested by the PAG.
8. The PAG could request supporting documentation as it saw fit, including a more descriptive minute.

¹ CCIMS was the approval system in place at the time, through which proposers were required to submit course, programme and administrative data for approval. It was replaced in 2008 by PIP, a document-based system which manages the proposal→approval→publication workflow in its entirety.

² Consultations with students/applicants and an external specialist are mandatory for all proposals other than suspensions and corrections.

9. Senate Office would investigate how administrative data would be checked, given that CCIMS forms would no longer be considered by PAGs.
10. A proforma would be developed for Faculties to use for costing/business planning of new PGT proposals.
11. Fast-track scrutiny procedures would be revised to take account of the new arrangements.

Course approval was already devolved to Faculties at the time and it was recommended that, at the end of Semester 2, Faculties should present the number of course proposals submitted by the Faculty to the October meeting of the Academic Standards Committee. Minimal changes to the process were recommended, other than the introduction of the monitoring of late course approvals, which could lead to difficulties related to enrolment and timetabling.

The purpose of these changes was to streamline the process and reduce the amount of paperwork Faculties needed to present to the PAG. Additionally, as Programme Specifications had become a Funding Council requirement, the inclusion of these documents as the primary part of the approval process seemed highly appropriate and avoided the need for a separate exercise.

The need for robust approval processes

The University aims to provide high quality programmes and courses for its students, and is obliged to demonstrate that appropriate quality assurance procedures are in place. The QAA Quality Code (Section B1: Programme design, development and approval) frames institutions' responsibility in terms of an Expectation and seven Indicators³. The Expectation is that:

Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.

The Indicators specify that institutions must maintain strategic oversight of its processes to ensure they are consistently implemented. They make clear the criteria against which proposals are assessed, define the roles of those involved, and evaluate the processes, making revisions as necessary. Institutions should make use of external expertise and reference points, include students in the process, and enable other stakeholders to contribute to the design, development and approval of proposals. The University's current process meets and exceeds the requirements of the Quality Code.

University restructuring

In 2010, the University was restructured, resulting in a move from Faculties and Departments, to four Colleges and 26 Schools/Research Institutes. The devolution of course approval responsibility moved directly from Faculties to Colleges, and the process has been reviewed on an annual basis by the four College Deans of Learning and Teaching since that time. Concerns and suggestions arising from this group, or indeed from any other member of staff, are presented to the Programme and Course Approval Working group for consideration. In this way, gradual changes to the process are

³ See www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/quality-code-B1.pdf for the Indicators in full.

implemented each year. However, no comprehensive review of the course and programme Approval process has taken place since University restructuring took effect.

The current process

The current programme and course approval process is summarised in the flowchart (Appendix 1), and further detail about each step, the required documentation, and the various guidance documents can be found on the Senate Office website⁴.

All decisions relating to course proposals are devolved to Colleges, and require no scrutiny or approval above College level. This is also the case where minor changes to existing programmes are proposed. Proposals to introduce new programmes, or make major changes to existing ones, must be submitted to PAGs after being approved at College level. The PAG does not require full documentation – only the programme specification, proposal support document and College minute is required – although the additional documentation (e.g. consultation documents, course specifications for the component courses, etc) must be available immediately if requested by the PAG. As these documents are required to be considered at College level, they should always be available.

At its meeting on 23 May 2014, Academic Standards Committee heard that there was not adequate guidance on where responsibility lies within the College for ensuring the robustness, viability and strategic alignment of new programme proposals. There was concern that current guidance suggested this responsibility lay solely with the College Board of Studies, placing inappropriate expectations on it.

During 2014, it was also suggested that consideration should be given to appropriate separation of resource- and academic-related decision.

⁴ www.gla.ac.uk/services/senateoffice/qea/progdesignapproval/programmeapproval/#tabs=2

Course and Programme Approval Process Review:

Practice at other institutions

Brief summary of approach at comparable Universities

Key points

- All universities have defined and published processes for programme approval.
- Documentary requirements are very similar.
- The extent of the externality of the mechanisms varies. In many instances, there is extensive use of external academics (sometimes paid for their input) to provide advice on proposed programmes.
- Of those surveyed, the programme approval process in the majority of universities (12) involves one primary stage in considering proposals. In two instances, there are one or two stages, depending on the nature of the proposal. Four universities have two-stage processes, and one has a three-stage process. One of the universities employing a two-stage process (Newcastle) is very likely to switch to a one-stage programme approval process.
- Where there are multiple stages, there is little sense that the process involves much duplication – ie, in these cases, the final stage appears more formal/audit-based.
- QUB are the most overt about employing a single stage, and that takes place within the host School. The Durham model involves a panel which is locally organised by the host School, but is chaired and part-populated by academics from elsewhere in the University.
- Many institutions require approval of a programme in the academic year two sessions prior to the intended commencement date.
- All have a specified process for consideration of the business case for new provision, sometimes involving staff at Pro Vice-Chancellor level.
- In most cases, the formal process for withdrawing programmes is also prominently stated.

University of Bristol

'Low risk' changes approved at Faculty level. Some require business cases.

Two stage (Faculty Dean and PVC) approval of business cases.

'Critical Friend' appointed to assist development team and provide report on the proposal for Education Committee.

Workflow process similar to PIP used.

Documentary evidence of consultation with two external academics and students required.

'Low-risk' proposals approved by Faculty.

Faculty and University Committee approval required for 'high-risk' proposals.

University of Southampton

Marketing assessment, student comment, internal academic and other stakeholder views required for initial strategic approval at faculty and centrally. External academic appointed to advise.

Extensive reference to QAA in guidance to staff.

Similar information requirements as Glasgow.

Two-stage faculty approval process

University of Nottingham

Business case required, which is widely considered. This includes financials and market assessment, but also impact on range of stakeholder services (time tabling, disability services, etc). Business plan approved by Dean, possibly in conjunction with PVC. School may appeal Dean's decision to PVC.

Programme specification prepared. Includes consultation with other Schools, etc. Similar information requirements, though no mention of student or external academic input. Considered by Quality & Standards Committee (in practice two members) with advice from Academic Services.

University of Leeds

New and substantially changed programmes considered at School, faculty and university levels in principle and substantially. Central committee advised in practice by Faculty PAGs, which look at generic matters mainly (ILOs, assessment etc).

In principle approval 24 months before commencement, full approval 12 months ahead.

Little detailed information on website.

University of York

For new/substantially changed programmes, Board of studies and university teaching committee approve academic case; university Planning Committee approves business case. Two external academics appointed.

Programme Specification forms basis of academic case, with similar information requirements.

University of Sheffield

Similar information requirements, similar level of reference to external framework.

Faculty approve business case (financials and strategic fit). Central committee approves programme.

University of Manchester

Faculty in principle approval of business case - includes marketing and strategic fit.

Faculty approval of detailed programme case.

Includes external academic advice and student comments.

Similar information requirements.

University of Warwick

Similar information requirements.

Approval by faculty and university level committees, depending on nature of proposal. Not much detail on role of committees.

University College London

Again, very similar.

Approval of business case by faculty finance director. Academic case approved by departmental and university committees. Significant role for external academic.

University of Exeter

Similar again (very wordy guidance documentation). Specification-based approach.

Business case approved by College Strategy committee and deputy VC.

Academic case approved by proposing faculty committee and College strategy committee.

University of Cardiff

New/substantially amended programmes approved by school and university level panels.

College signs off resources.

Specifications are aimed at students.

Similar information requirements.

Queen's University Belfast

Central sub-committee provides in principle approval using business case and academic case information.

Detailed scrutiny by School at meeting including external academic. Outcome reported to central committee.

University of Durham

Very similar information requirements.

External academic involvement.

Initial approval of business case by Faculty (resources, finances, strategic fit).

Full approval by faculty panel chaired by non-faculty member of university quality committee & including staff from within and beyond faculty concerned.

Queen Mary University London

Same information

Initial approval by faculty of resources and strategic fit.

Full proposal approved by central committee panel.

Keele University

Essentially one (Faculty) stage. Where Faculty has view that changes are required prior to commencement, a central committee confirms the requirement.

Details of the process at other Universities

In addition, the approval processes at five other UK institutions have been examined in detail – Strathclyde, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Newcastle and Birmingham. A summary of the procedure at each of these is provided below.

University of Strathclyde

Strathclyde's Procedure and Guidelines⁵ on Course⁶ and Class⁷ Approval was last updated in 2009. The procedure indicates that new programmes and major changes to existing programmes are recommended by the relevant Faculty Board of Study and approved by Senate. These proposals as well as all changes to courses must be recommended by the relevant Faculty Board of Study and approved by Ordinances & Regulations Committee on behalf of Senate. The Faculty Board recommendation follows scrutiny by the appropriate Faculty committees in accordance with University procedures and guidelines.

⁵ www.strath.ac.uk/media/ps/cs/gmap/academicaffairs/policies/course_and_class_approval.pdf

⁶ 'Courses' are equivalent to what are termed 'programmes' at Glasgow

⁷ 'Classes' are equivalent to what are termed 'courses' at Glasgow

Regulations for a new programme must be submitted to the relevant Faculty as part of the course proposal. Changes to existing programme regulations, including the addition of new courses, must be sent to the O&R Committee with the required changes after scrutiny by the relevant Faculty committees.

New programmes and major changes to existing programmes for the following session require to be brought to Senate no later than March. New courses and minor changes to existing programmes for the following session require to be brought to O&R Committee no later than June. See Section 6 of the Procedure for a description of the process and the information required.

Strathclyde University does not prescribe a detailed format for programme proposals although individual Faculties may do so themselves. It is specified that particular information must be included and that a programme proposal should comprise three parts:

1. A programme specification
2. Draft programme regulations
3. Supplementary information, particularly regarding rationale, resource requirements and availability, and detailed programme content.

Before being submitted to the Faculty Board of Study, Faculty Committees will scrutinise programme proposals, particularly with regard to academic matters and resourcing matters. Once approval at these Committees has been obtained, the proposal is submitted to the Board of Study. Once the Faculty Board has approved a programme proposal, the Board's recommendation accompanied by summary information and programme regulations is submitted to Senate for approval.

New courses and revisions to existing courses can only be introduced following approval by O&R Committee on behalf of Senate of a recommendation from the Faculty Board of Study. The information required for a new course proposal is similar to but less extensive than that required for a new course proposal – see Section 8 of the Procedure. As with programme proposals, Faculty Committees will scrutinise new course proposals prior to submission to the Faculty Board of Study. Once approval at these committees has been reached the proposal is submitted to the Board of Study.

University of Edinburgh

At Edinburgh, the same procedures are applied both to programmes and to courses. Detailed programme and course proposals are considered by the School Board of Studies, and are then transmitted to the College Undergraduate or Postgraduate Studies Committee (or equivalent). Proposals which comply with the University's Curriculum Framework, or have no wider implications, are approved at this level.

A proposed change to a programme or course is considered minor if it meets the following criteria:

- it is fully documented;
- it is compliant with the curriculum models specified on the Academic Services Programme Approval web pages⁸ ;

⁸ www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/quality-unit/quality-assurance/programmes-courses/programme-approval

- it has no implications that lie outside the competence of Board of Studies membership;
- it follows University's guidance on collaborative provision, where appropriate.

If the proposed change meets the criteria set out above, then it may be approved by the Board of Studies without further approval being required.

There are three Colleges and each appears to have its own detailed procedures for approval – see the College of Science & Engineering's procedure⁹ as an example. In summary, this involves the production of a programme specification, course specifications, proposal cover form and business case spreadsheet. The proposal is submitted to the relevant Board of Studies and then, if approved, to the College Learning & Teaching Committee. This Committee then consults with others in the University (recruitment, finance, planning). The College Learning & Teaching Committee requires:

- The programme proposal cover sheet
- The programme specification and programme table
- Business case costings
- College cover sheet for notification of the new proposal
- Confirmation that new courses have been entered on the University system

The Senate Curriculum & Student Progression Committee considers proposals for new programmes that:

- do not comply with the University's Curriculum Framework or academic year structure
- concern the wider University
- are major inter-college proposals

Where the proposed programme does not comply with the Curriculum Framework, approval by a Senate Committee is required.

New programme proposals are considered towards the end of Semester 1 and the middle of Semester 2. The expected lead-in time for development, approval and promotion of new programmes is 18 months.

University of Aberdeen

Aberdeen has two approval processes – one for undergraduate programmes and courses, and one for postgraduate programmes and courses¹⁰. All proposals must be submitted by 30 November in the year prior to their proposed commencement. Separate forms have been devised for proposals for new programmes, new courses, changes to programmes and changes to courses. Proposals forms are considered by a group including the Head of School, Head of College, and a representative of the Quality Assurance Committee.

The course proposal form requires a larger amount of information to be entered, including aims, ILOs, and assessment. It is more in line with the Glasgow requirements for new courses though asks

⁹

<https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/download/attachments/175637625/Policy%20and%20procedures%20for%20approval%20of%20new%20taught%20courses%20programmes%20and%20changes%2020132711.pdf?version=1&modificationDate=1385549829000&api=v2>

¹⁰ www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/teaching/senas-1034.php

for less information. The information from these forms appears to inform the online Course Catalogue which, even on clicking the option for 'more information', gives rather basic detail.

The course and programme approval process at the University of Aberdeen is also under review, and is addressing a number of the same considerations as the Glasgow review.

Newcastle University

Newcastle has separate policies on the approval of new programmes¹¹ and changes to programmes¹², as well as guidance notes on proposing new courses and changes to courses¹³.

New programme proposals

When a new programme is being proposed, a 'Part 1 Proposal Form' is completed, giving the rationale for the proposal, evidence of market demand, and expected uptake. Feedback on the student experience within the proposing academic unit is required. The form is considered at School level by the Board of Studies and School Executive. If those groups approve the Part 1 proposal, the form is then sent to the Faculty office for submitting to the Faculty Learning, Teaching & Student Experience Committee (FLTSEC). That Committee decides whether the proposal will be allowed to proceed, and whether additional detail is needed. If permission is granted, the proposal proceeds to the second stage. At this stage there is detailed academic scrutiny of the proposal. The following documents are required:

- Programme specification
- Programme regulations
- All module outline forms
- Business case
- Planned fees form
- Programme assessment criteria
- Programme summary
- Any other information requested by the FLTSEC

The documentation is checked by the Faculty Quality Team, who then consult with the nominated External Examiner for the new programme. The feedback obtained is sent back to the proposer to inform the development of the proposal. The revised documentation is again checked by the Faculty Quality Team, which then convenes a meeting of its Programme Approval Committee.

The Programme Approval Committee requires the following for each new programme proposals:

- Part 1 form
- Oral report on Part 1 approval by the Chair of the FLTSEC
- Programme specification
- Programme regulations

¹¹ www.ncl.ac.uk/quilt/assets/documents/qsh-progapp-policy.pdf

¹² www.ncl.ac.uk/quilt/assets/documents/qsh-progapp-majminchanges-policy.pdf

¹³ www.ncl.ac.uk/quilt/assets/documents/qsh-modapp-guidance.pdf

- Programme assessment criteria
- All module outline forms
- External Examiner feedback, and evidence of the proposer's response
- Confirmation of any exemption from the Quality Management Framework (including regulations)
- Planned fees form
- Business case
- Draft Memorandum of Agreement, risk assessment, student lifecycle table, report of partner visit(s), where relevant
- Any other information requested by the Chair

The Programme Approval Committee considers the proposal against a range of criteria (e.g. academic standards and content, learning, teaching and assessment, skills and employability, resourcing). If it is satisfied these criteria have been met, it recommends approval to the University Learning, Teaching & Student Experience Committee (ULTSEC) which makes the final decision on approval of the programme.

Programme change proposals

Like Glasgow, Newcastle has different processes for major and minor programme changes. Minor changes are categorised as changes to the modules within programmes, changes to regulations, or annual updates to Programme Specifications. All others are classed as major changes.

For major changes, the Degree Programme Director (DPD) completes a Major Change form. There must be consultation with the External Examiner, any students who would be affected by the change, and any collaborative partner. The Head of the proposing School(s) must confirm that any new resource requirements will be met. The proposal is then considered by the Board of Studies at School level. If approved, it is forwarded to the Chair of FLTSEC (or, if the proposal is contentious or unprecedented, to the full FLTSEC). The proposal is then considered by the Chair of ULTSEC, who makes the final decision on approving the change.

For each major change proposal, the following documentation is required:

- Major change form
- Revised programme specification with tracked changes
- Revised programme regulations with tracked changes
- All module outline forms for new modules being introduced as part of the changed programme

For minor changes, approval is at Faculty level through Faculty Quality teams (for module changes) and through School Boards of Studies and then Quality in Learning and Teaching (QILT) for approval.

Courses

Very little information on course approval is available on the website¹⁴. However it is stated that Newcastle requires its new courses to be approved by the relevant Faculty Board of Studies and, in some cases, by the FLTSEC. It uses a 'locking' mechanism on its course database so that some changes cannot be made after a certain time. All new modules need to be completed by January and all course changes by July.

The University of Newcastle course and programme approval process is presently under review and is likely to lead to the implementation of a one-stage approval process for programmes.

University of Birmingham

*New programmes*¹⁵

New programmes firstly require the preparation of a Plan to Develop a New Programme (PDNP). The plan is considered by the relevant School committee and is then submitted to the College Programme Approval Review Committee. Next, a more detailed programme proposal form is required. The form must be accompanied by:

- A programme specification
- An external comments form
- A skills audit
- A curriculum map
- An assessment methods matrix
- A market research report
- Information relating to any collaborative arrangement

The proposal form and accompanying documentation are considered first by the School, then the College Programme Approval Review Committee, and finally are sent to the University Programme Approval Review Committee for consideration and final approval.

*Programme changes*¹⁶

As in Glasgow, there are different processes for major and minor changes to programmes. Minor changes, such as the addition of new options, changes to the administrative details, or modification of the aims or ILOs, are submitted to and approved by the relevant School Committee, and then reported to the College Learning & Teaching Committee. Major changes follow a similar route but are considered by, rather than reported to, the College Learning & Teaching Committee, which gives final approval. In some cases, further consideration is needed by the University Programme Approval Review Committee – for example, changes which make the programme materially different to the existing programme – e.g. the introduction of a new mode of delivery, the addition of a placement - or a proposal for a change for which there is no existing regulation in the University.

¹⁴ www.ncl.ac.uk/quilt/assets/documents/qsh-modapp-guidance.pdf

¹⁵ <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/programmemodule/programmes/new-programme.aspx>

¹⁶ <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/programmemodule/programmes/modification.aspx>

Courses

For new course proposals¹⁷, a New Module Proposal form is completed and submitted to the relevant School committee, then to the College Learning & Teaching Committee for approval. For course changes¹⁸, a Modifications to Module form is completed and approved by the relevant School committee.

¹⁷ <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/programmemodule/modules/newmodule.aspx>

¹⁸ <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/programmemodule/modules/modificationmodule.aspx>

Review of Course and Programme Approval Process:

List of changes to PIP suggested during the review

The following comprises the list of suggestions received during the review concerning possible changes to PIP.

As noted in the report, it is recommended that consideration is given to extending the functionality of MyCampus to support the course and programme approval process. The outcome of that consideration (which would include likely timescales for such a change) should determine what changes should be made to PIP. To help with the latter decisions, the following provides an approximate grading of the scale of the undertaking required to effect the suggested change. It is also recommended that detailed assessment and recommendations on potential changes should be provided by a new PIP Steering Group. That apart, however, change will be required to PIP to accommodate the changes to the approval process itself.

1. Minor amendments

- Re Specifications:
 - reformatting,
 - revision of appearance
 - possible splitting into technical and general user versions
 - possible addition of information on plans and requirements likely to be affected by proposed changes
- Open access to system (for Library staff, eg)
- Add to drop-down prompts for assessment and L&T methods, etc
- Amend heading to '**Planned** L&T Methods'
- Check why course code allocation can stall
- Additional pre-population of fields – awarding institution, eg
- Reorder table for KIS to match HESA table
- Course Specification Qu.11.1 – consider removing
- Course Specification Qu. 25 – remove
- Proposal Support documents – consult Schools and Colleges on retention/removal of resource questions and replacement with tick box to confirm resources and strategic fit are approved

2. Mid-level amendments

- **AMEND TO FIT REVISED APPROVAL PROCESSES: REQUIRED**
- Improve interface with CMIS
- Action to reduce sensitivity of system in prompting need for approval
- Can system be amended to facilitate better use on Apple devices?

3. Substantial/fundamental amendments

- Can the system be changed to foreground/highlight the proposed changes to courses and programmes and significantly reduce documentation?

- Can the requirement to cut and paste be reduced?
- How to facilitate analysis across courses and programmes?
- Enhance interface with MyCampus –can the systems correspond better?

