Quality & Standards Handbook Chapter 2 Programme design and approval

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

This section of the Quality & Standards handbook covers the approval procedures relating to taught programmes developed and delivered by Brookes staff.

Read this chapter if you are interested in any of the following procedures:
- approval of a new programme of study leading to a University award (qualification or credit)
- re-validation of an existing programme of study
- addition of a new type of award to the University's portfolio
- approval of a variation from the University Regulations to apply to a specific programme
- approval of modifications to existing modules or programmes
- programme closure or suspension of recruitment

For information about the approval, monitoring and review of **collaborative arrangements** go to **Chapter 5** of the Quality & Standards Handbook

For information about the approval, monitoring and review of **'home'/on-campus short courses**, go to **Chapter 6** of the Quality & Standards Handbook

For information about **Higher and Degree Apprenticeships**, go to **Chapter 7** of the Quality & Standards Handbook

Useful links: A1 of the University Regulations - definition of a programme of study, and the currently available awards in the University's portfolio.

2. PROGRAMME APPROVAL AND RE-VALIDATION

2.1 Initial development approval

2.1.1 All new programme proposals must be approved for further development by the relevant Faculty Executive Team, or other Faculty group with the relevant authority, prior to the establishment of a Programme Development Team (PDT). Initial development approval is the mechanism through which PVC/Deans assure themselves that new proposals demonstrate a fit with Faculty and University strategic priorities; and it enables them to assess and approve the allocation of resources to the development of the new programme. This process is currently under review by VCG (2019-20).

2.1.2 New programme proposers must prepare a submission to the appropriate Faculty Executive or business development group, with responsibility for approving proposals for new provision. The format of such submissions will vary according to individual Faculty requirements, but they should include the following minimum information:
- rationale for the development of the new programme, including the market rationale (i.e. why the programme will attract students in sustainable numbers);
- the contribution of the new provision to the achievement of Faculty and University strategic objectives;
- evidence of potential market demand - market intelligence resources on the SBPO Intranet pages,
- provide a good basis for structuring initial feasibility work; and the Know Your Market tool shows basic market trends in undergraduate subjects in which Brookes currently operates: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/17WNO-5ipiL-pp-bwFqsaZKhmqxfqAdURaE90vBgE58k/edit#gid=226751891
- costings for the programme (in consultation with the Faculty Head of Finance & Planning), including:
  - costs of development and delivery;
  - funding and fees (income) information;
  - risk assessment;
- proposed membership of the PDT.

2.1.3 Once the initial development approval has been signed off by the PVC/Dean (or, in their absence, an authorised member of the Faculty Executive Team) of each Faculty to be involved in the delivery of the new programme, the PDT should be established. On receipt of confirmation that Faculty permission has been given for further development – via the New Programme Registration Form (T2.1) - the link Quality Assurance Officer (QAO) will make an entry in the APQO programme approval schedule. New programmes may, at this stage, be advertised as "*subject to validation*".

2.1.4 At this stage, a preliminary meeting should be held between the PDT Chair, the link QAO, Faculty Quality Officer, and Associate Dean (Student Experience) or PL(Quality Assurance & Validation), to agree on a timescale for the completion of the validation process and set a date for the panel approval event. In deciding on deadlines for completion of the approval process, new programme proposers should bear in mind the application procedures that apply to their provision. From a QA perspective, it is possible to schedule approval events for new programmes (and re-validations) at any time of year, according to the needs of the Faculty. However, sufficient time must be allowed between the approval event and the intended start date, to enable effective marketing and recruitment activities to take place or – in the case of re-validations - to notify students/applicants of programme changes; and a number of deadlines are in place to help manage these processes. Further guidance (G2.5) is available to explain the implications of operating outside the agreed timescales.

2.2 The Programme Development Team (PDT)

If you are a PDT chair, please read guidance note G2.1

2.2.1 The role of the PDT is to provide a forum through which the design of a new (or re-validated) programme may be informed by a range of expertise from within and – crucially - external to the University, so as to meet sector expectations and the University's criteria for approval. The PDT is responsible for ensuring that appropriate consultation takes place, and for the preparation of the programme documentation to an appropriate standard for submission to an approval panel

2.2.2 The PDT must work with relevant colleagues in the Faculty and Directorates to ensure that the new or re-validated programme:

- is consistent with key external reference points, such as subject benchmark statements and professional body standards;
- meets the expectations of University strategies, policies and guidance relating to excellence in teaching, learning and assessment;
- complies with the relevant University Regulations;
- provides students with high quality teaching and learning support, including learning resources and specialist teaching facilities;
- takes into account the views of a wide range of stakeholders, as appropriate to the provision and the context in which it is to be delivered.

2.2.3   In order to ensure that these tasks are effectively completed, the PDT membership must include:
- Chair (usually the Programme Lead/Subject Coordinator or Liaison Manager);
- Academic staff (especially the leaders of all compulsory modules) who will be involved in the delivery of the programme;
- External Adviser/s (for re-validations, the current External Examiner may be asked to fulfil this role);
- Faculty Head of Finance & Planning (for collaborative arrangements);
- Academic Liaison Librarian;
- OCSLD link Educational Development Consultant;
- APQO link Quality Assurance Officer;
- Student Central link Curriculum & Student Information Manager;
- Secretary (usually a Faculty Quality Officer or Programme Administrator);
- Students and other stakeholders should also be invited to join the PDT, as appropriate;
- the Academic Office Timetabling Team should be consulted on timetabling options, and advice should be sought from the Faculty Marketing Manager on the effective marketing and promotion of the programme.

> *NOTE:* The PL(QA), or equivalent, and the Associate Dean (Student Experience) may also wish to attend PDT meetings in order to assure themselves that the PDT is adhering to agreed deadlines for consultation and development, and that the documentation is being prepared to an appropriate standard. They should, as a minimum, be treated as members of the PDT in respect of circulation of documents, agendas and action points, but may choose to maintain an overview of progress via regular updates from the PDT Chair rather than attendance at meetings.

2.2.4   In order to avoid excessive pressure on staff workloads, it is not necessary for all members to attend every meeting of the PDT. However, members must attend meetings at which their expertise is required in order to progress the business of the PDT - the agenda of each meeting must therefore be provided to all members in sufficient time to enable the appropriate personnel to make arrangements to attend.

2.3   Documentation for approval panels

2.3.1   The PDT must prepare the following documentation for submission to the programme approval panel:
i.   Submission document (use template/guidance T2.6);
ii.   Programme specification (use template T2.7, in conjunction with guidance G2.2);
iii.   Module descriptors (use template T2.8);
iv.   Programme handbook (use either the online Moodle handbook template, or refer to guidance in T2.9);
v.   Any additional documentation required by a professional body;
vi.   *For programmes which are to be delivered, in whole or substantial part, by distance or e-learning*, a selection of teaching materials must be provided, and a demonstration of the VLE included in the programme for the approval meeting. The specific requirements for demonstrations at individual events should be agreed in advance by the panel Chair and Officer with the Programme Lead, so that the panel is able to make a judgement on the learning experience that will be provided through the proposed mode of study;
vii.   For programmes being re-validated, or for new programmes which include existing modules, a Change Request form must be completed for any existing modules being amended for use in the new version of the programme (use template T2.13);
viii. Closure forms for any programmes being replaced by the new provision (see 6.3.3).

2.3.2 The Panel should also be provided with links to any websites containing information relevant to the proposal (e.g. PSRB websites, subject/qualification benchmark statements, apprenticeship standards, etc); and with guidance note G2.3 on the conduct of approval panels.

2.4   The programme approval panel

Please also read guidance note G2.3

2.4.1 All proposals for new (or re-validated) programmes of study are considered by a programme approval panel, acting on the principle of peer review. Programme teams and approval panels should note that they have a shared responsibility for identifying and solving any issues with a proposal, in order to achieve a successful outcome for the approval process. Information about training for panel chairs and members is available on the APQO website.

2.4.2 Programme approval panels should be constituted as follows:

**Chair	Independent of the proposing Faculty. They should have appropriate seniority within the University, e.g. Associate Dean (Student Experience), Head of Department, Programme Lead, Subject Coordinator, Senior or Principal Lecturer; and experience of programme approval panel membership, within Brookes and at other higher education institutions. They should also have attended the Chair's workshop run by APQO/OCSLD.
**Internal Assessors	• One academic staff member from each Faculty involved in the delivery of the proposal, but from outside the School/Department/s presenting the proposal. • One academic staff member from a Faculty not involved in the delivery of the proposed programme.
*External Assessor/s	At least one external panel member, employed in another UK higher education institution.
APQO link Quality Assurance Officer	To advise on the conduct of the approval event, and assist the panel in formulating their conclusions.
Panel Secretary	Usually a Faculty Quality Officer.

2.4.3 *External Assessors should have had no previous involvement with the development of the programme, nor should they have been an external examiner within the Department in the last five years. They must have:
- the ability to form an expert and objective opinion of the overall standards of the programme/s and the comparability of those standards within the UK HE sector;
- academic qualifications at least to the level of the proposed programme and expertise relevant to the subject area under consideration;
- familiarity with current developments in the field of study concerned;
- knowledge and experience of current practice and developments in teaching, learning and assessment in higher education;
- for programmes with professional elements, awareness of the educational requirements for the profession (it may be necessary to secure an additional external assessor in order to fulfill this criterion).

2.4.4 **Internal panel members must have experience of delivering and assessing at the level of the award under consideration, and a good understanding of the University's quality assurance requirements. An APQO workshop is available for staff wishing to take part in approval panels – particularly aimed at those who wish to become chairs. Other considerations for the selection of internal panel members include:
- Where a programme is to be delivered by distance or e-learning, at least one member of the panel must have expertise in this mode of delivery.
- In the case of complex validation events held conjointly with one or more professional bodies, the panel must be constituted so that it contains the knowledge and expertise to deal with the

potential issues involved. This may have particular implications for the selection of the panel member from within the Faculty.

- The link Curriculum & Student Information Manager may also be in attendance at the panel event, in order to provide advice on regulatory matters, changes to existing modules, and transition arrangements to enable the introduction of the new provision.

2.4.5   The membership of individual panels will be negotiated between the PDT and the link QAO, who will approve the final constitution of the panel - the panel nomination form (T2.4) may be used to keep a record of proposed members. The details of proposed External Assessors must also be presented separately to the link QAO, for approval against the criteria below, using the External Assessor nomination form (T2.5). In the case of a conjoint approval event with a professional body, the panel should also include a representative of the PSRB – this representative is normally nominated by the PSRB and notified to the University, and they should also be listed in the panel nomination form, for information.

2.5   Administration of approval events

2.5.1   Administrative arrangements for the panel meeting are the responsibility of the panel Secretary, who should ensure that the documentation for the approval panel event is circulated to all members of the panel at least two working weeks prior to the approval meeting. The documentation should, ideally, be circulated electronically (either by email, or made available to all panel members via Google or Moodle). The date of the approval event and deadline for submission of documentation should be agreed when the PDT is established, and the link QAO and the Faculty PL(QA) should be notified if the PDT wishes to re-negotiate the submission deadline at a later stage.

2.5.2   Advice on the formulation of the agenda for the event should be sought from the link QAO. An outline agenda is available in template T2.10, which should be tailored to the event so that the scheduled meetings enable the panel to meet with an appropriate range of staff, students and other stakeholders to explore:
   i.   the appropriateness of the standards set (i.e. the programme learning outcomes) and the match with the title of award;
   ii.   the range of internal and external consultation that has informed the development of the new programme;
   iii. the rationale for the proposal, the likely demand and student entry profiles;
   iv.   criteria for admission to the programme, and how candidates will be assessed against them;
   v.   the curriculum: its design, content, delivery and assessment, and how it promotes learning and enables students to meet the requirements of the target award;
   vi.   the adequacy of the programme management structures, including those concerned with academic and pastoral support for students;
   vii. the suitability of the staffing, physical learning environment, and other learning resources to support the provision.

2.5.3   If possible - particularly for events being held abroad to consider the approval or re-approval of international collaborative arrangements - a meeting should be held between the panel Chair, the link QAO and the PDT chair in advance of event, to confirm that the panel is properly constituted, the programme documentation is complete, members of the programme team are ready to meet with the panel, and, if necessary, identify any additional requirements for the event. It is also good practice for the Chair and link QAO to request all panel members to indicate, in advance of the event, the key areas they would like to explore during the panel meetings with staff and students – this will assist the panel in agenda-setting on the day of the event, facilitate the programme team's preparation for meeting with the panel, and promote the transparency and collegiality of the process.

2.6   Criteria for programme approval

Before they may confer an approval decision, programme approval panels must gain evidence - from the documentation submitted and from discussions with the programme team (and students and other stakeholders, as appropriate) - that the University's programme approval criteria have been met; or that they are likely to be met within a reasonable period from the panel event, such that conditional approval may be given. The Teaching Excellence & Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) expects course design, development, standards and assessment to be "effective in stretching students to develop independence, knowledge, understanding and skills that reflect their full potential" (*criterion TQ3*). Panels should bear this in mind when considering whether the criteria for the approval of new (and re-validated) programmes have been met.

The approval criteria are set out in guidance note G2.3 *Conduct of programme approval panels*

2.7   Outcomes of approval meetings

2.7.1   A panel event will result in one of the following three outcomes:

    i.   To recommend **approval** of the programme/s to the University's Academic Enhancement and Standards Committee, with or without conditions and/or recommendations;

    ii.   To **refer** the proposal for further work where there are a number of significant issues to be addressed. This will allow time for the programme development team to consult more widely and further develop the proposal to address the panel's concerns. The revised submission should be considered by a re-convened panel;

    iii.   To **reject** the proposal because a range of substantive issues affecting several aspects of delivery and assessment need to be addressed. This decision requires the proposal to be re-submitted for development approval from the start of the process as set out in section 2.1 above.

2.7.2   Conditions are set where essential action is required to address an issue that has the potential to put academic standards or quality of delivery at risk, or where action is required in order to meet the University's procedural or regulatory requirements. This action must be carried out before the programme may recruit students. All re-submitted documentation must meet the University's documentary standards, whether or not any other specific conditions relating to student-facing documents are set. The panel should agree the deadline for meeting any conditions with the chair of the PDT, bearing in mind the recruitment cycle for the programme. Any extensions to the re-submission deadline must be negotiated with the link QAO and ADSE/PLQA.

2.7.3   Recommendations are more advisory in nature and refer to action that the panel consider would enhance the student learning experience, but where no threat is posed to academic standards or quality of delivery. Action taken in response to recommendations should be recorded in the first annual programme review report following approval. Commendations for innovative practice may be made where the panel considers that the approach being taken by a programme team represents excellent practice in teaching and learning, and is likely to have a particularly positive impact on outcomes for all their students.

2.7.4   Once approved, a programme of study remains in approval - subject to continuing to meet the requirements of the University's quality assurance processes, including annual programme review and periodic review - until it is formally closed. However, in circumstances where a panel believes that - although the criteria for programme approval have been met - the proposing team may have limited capacity or resources for continuing to deliver the programme, they may consider defining a period of approval of less than the normal six year periodic review cycle. At the end of the approval period, the programme must be reviewed by another panel to determine whether the panel's concerns have been addressed and the programme may continue.

2.7.5   The report of the panel's discussions and conclusions will be prepared by the panel Secretary, following the format set out in the approval report template (T2.11) and guidance (G2.4). The report should be approved by the panel Chair, agreed as an accurate record by all other panel members; and forwarded to the programme team, to inform the action being taken in response to the conditions and recommendations. The Programme Lead should return the revised documentation to the panel Chair and link QAO, via the panel Secretary, together with a completed response to conditions and recommendations form (T2.12), indicating how the issues raised by the panel have been addressed. In some cases, the panel Chair may choose to consult with other panel members to confirm whether or not the conditions have been satisfactorily addressed.

2.7.6   Once confirmed, the panel report will be scrutinised by the Quality & Learning Infrastructure Committee, in order to:

    i.   confirm that the report provides evidence that the panel was properly constituted, that the process was properly conducted, and that appropriate conditions have been set by the panel;

    ii.   confirm that the report refers to the role of appropriate external reference points in defining academic standards, and to the University's criteria for approval;

    iii.   agree on responses to any recommendations for institutional action that have been made by the panel;

iv.   note any innovative practice that has been identified, and consider how it might be more widely disseminated;

v.   QLIC may also request further information, or action, from panels or Faculties if they identify any areas for concern within the report, or any themes arising across a number of reports.

2.7.7   The report is also received by the Faculty AESC/QLIC, in order to enable the committee to monitor the completion of conditions and recommendations, identify any themes arising from approval events across the Faculty, and respond to any matters raised by the panel for action at local level, for example, the appointment of an external examiner. Approval for delivery of the programme is not dependent on the programme team's response to recommendations, but the Faculty AESC/QLIC may ask programme teams to consider and act upon certain recommendations sooner than the first annual review of the programme if they consider that an early response will benefit students on the programme. Faculty AESC/QLICs should also consider any commendations for good practice, for wider dissemination to other PDTs.

2.7.8   When the Panel Chair and Associate Dean (Student Experience) are satisfied with the action taken by the PDT and have signed off the response to conditions form, the documentation will be forwarded to the Chair of QLIC (the PVC Student & Staff Experience) for final approval on behalf of QLIC and the Vice-Chancellor's Group. Following this approval, the link QAO will notify colleagues in the Marketing and Communications teams, Strategic & Business Planning Office, Admissions Office, Registry, and colleagues in the Faculty. The '*subject to validation*' tag will be removed from the programme marketing materials and prospectus and the programme will be allocated a UCAS code to enable students to enrol. The Student Records & Curriculum Management Team will be provided with a full set of the definitive programme information, in order it can be set up on the course records system, and the programme specification will be published on the APQO website.

3.   NEW AWARDS AND OTHER VARIATIONS FROM THE REGULATIONS There may be instances in which a new programme proposal does not fit within the existing University frameworks, and this section gives details of how to apply for variations. These processes may also be used for existing programmes.

3.1   Addition of a new award to the university's portfolio

3.1.1   The University's portfolio of awards is extensive (see University regulation A1.1) – it covers a range of awards at all levels of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) in England, and it should be possible to locate the majority of new programme proposals within this list. Hence, a strong rationale is required for the addition of any new awards. Where a PDT believes it is necessary to establish a new award type, they must secure Academic Board's approval as soon as possible after Faculty initial approval has been granted, well in advance of the programme approval event.

3.1.2   The application for the addition of a new award to the University's portfolio must be approved by the Faculty AESC/QLIC (this may be done by Chair's Action) and submitted for University approval to the Quality & Learning Infrastructure Committee, using template T2.2a. QLIC will assess the proposal and make a recommendation to Academic Board on whether or not to approve the new award.

3.1.3   The submission must provide a clear rationale for the establishment of this new award, referring to:
   i.   the list of existing University awards, giving an explanation of why none of the awards in the current portfolio will suffice;
   ii.   the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and the Higher Education Credit Framework for England;
   iii.   the needs of the discipline, i.e. how the new title expresses the nature of the programme/s of study it will relate to; and the extent to which it is being used by other higher education institutions, including examples of the award being used elsewhere;
   iv.   employer requirements, i.e. how the qualification will be recognised within the relevant profession/industry.

3.2   Application for variation from the university regulations

3.2.1   The University's expectation is that new programmes of study should be designed to fit within the University Regulations, which are informed by relevant sector guidance. However, it is recognised that it may be necessary for a minority of programmes to vary from the regulations in certain respects in order to meet national expectations in the discipline or profession. Where a programme team wishes to apply for a variation from the University Regulations - either for new or existing programmes - QLIC approval must be sought prior to the application of the variation. In the case of new programmes, this approval must be secured in advance of the approval event.

3.2.2   The application for variation from the regulations must be presented on template T2.2b, which requires programme teams to provide a clear rationale for the proposal, including reference to:

   i.   the consultation process (students, employers, external examiners, etc)
   ii.   the potential impact on any University policies on assessment
   iii.   relevant professional body requirements

The proforma must be signed off by the FAESC/QLIC (Chair) before submission to QLIC for approval.

4. MODIFICATIONS TO EXISTING APPROVED PROVISION (this section is currently under review and an amended section is in the process of gaining QLIC approval for 2019-20)

The programme specification, and associated programme documentation, may be considered as the 'contract' between the University (as the awarding body), its Departments and Faculties, and its students, which sets out the terms of delivery of a programme. Within this context, it is recognised that it may be necessary to make changes to existing programmes from time to time, in order to maintain the currency of the provision, to satisfy the requirements of accrediting or commissioning bodies, or to enhance the student learning experience.

These changes must be approved through the processes described in this section to ensure that staff, students, applicants, and other interested parties have access to accurate definitive programme information at all times. Modifications have been categorised according to their significance for the programme as a whole (see 4.1 below), and the approval processes tailored so that they are proportionate to the changes being proposed (see 4.2 below).

4.1   Definitions

4.1.1   Routine updating

For routine updates to modules and programmes, an appropriately authorised member of the Faculty (i.e. with the consent of the Programme Lead) must notify the Student Central Course & Student Administration Team using the CSAT Syllabus Update Request form, in order that PIP can be updated. This may include updates such as:
- change to module leader;
- textual amendments/updates which do not change the focus of a module or fall into a minor change category (see 4.1.2 below);
- updates to reading lists (updates to module bibliographies should also be negotiated directly with the appropriate Academic Liaison Librarian to ensure additional resources are made available to students);
- updates to list of level 4 recommended modules available to a programme (see 4.1.4 below).

Once the update has been carried out by the CSAT team, any amended documents should be lodged with the Faculty Quality Officer and the APQO.

Where they consider that a requested update constitutes a minor or major change, the Course & Student Administration Team will refer it back to the Module Leader or Programme Lead, who should follow the appropriate approval process as set out in 4.2 below.

4.1.2   Minor Changes refer to modifications to existing modules which relate to the teaching and learning experience, including changes to the following validated arrangements:

- Module title
- Module aims and learning outcomes
- Module assessment strategy
- Curriculum content
- Teaching and learning strategy - mode of delivery; the allocation of learning hours to different activities; etc.
- Pre- and co-requisites
- Extending the use of the module as acceptable to another programme
- Deletion of the module

4.1.3   Major Changes refer to modifications at the level of the programme, including changes to:

- Programme title
- Exit award/s available
- Professional body accreditation requirements
- Programme learning outcomes
- Significant changes to the overall approach to teaching, learning and assessment, affecting multiple modules across the programme (*especially where the Unistats return may be affected*)
- Curriculum structure (*this may affect the Unistats return*)
- Criteria for admission – e.g. changes to prior qualifications required (*changes to specific 'A' level grades/tariff points are not subject to this process*)

Major changes also include:
- Extending the use of an existing module to another existing programme as a compulsory module;
- Approval of new modules for inclusion in an existing programme;
- Variation from the University Regulations (*see section 3.2 above for the process to be followed*).

NOTE: Changes to resource requirements for programme delivery should be dealt with by the Head of Department/Faculty Executive group.

4.1.4   Faculties should be mindful of the cumulative effect of a significant number of individual changes to programmes over a period of time, and must ensure that all changes are approved through the appropriate process, and clearly communicated to students, staff and other relevant stakeholders in a timely manner. Revalidation of an existing programme, following the new programme approval process set out in section 3 above, should be initiated where substantial curriculum change is required, covering several of the areas listed in 4.1.3 at once. This may occur, for example, in the case of changing professional or industry requirements, or where the addition of a significant number of compulsory modules results in a change to the programme learning outcomes. *NOTE:* the addition of additional acceptable modules to an undergraduate programme may be dealt with through the minor/major change process and should not, on its own, trigger a re-validation.

4.2   Approval processes

4.2.1   Minor changes

i.   Approval of minor changes is delegated to faculties, although the agreement of the PVC (Student Experience) must be secured for the introduction of semester 1 examinations, following FAESC approval. Proposals for minor changes should be presented by the module leader on the request for changes template (T2.13), and must include confirmation that the relevant external examiner has been consulted in respect of any changes to the assessment strategy, and is in agreement with the proposals.

ii.   The Course & Student Administration Team (Student Central) must also be consulted prior to approval, to ensure that the proposed change fits with regulatory and systems requirements, and their comments should be recorded on the request for changes form. Module leaders should provide a summary of any feedback from students on the changes. This may take the form of a short account of the discussion at the Subject Committee (or other meeting at which students were present) or - where the change has come about as a result of student feedback - a statement to this effect.

iii.   Once the change has been agreed at a Subject Committee, the request for changes form, together with the updated module description, should be forwarded to the Faculty Quality Officer, who will arrange for the proposal to be considered by the Faculty AESC. Once FAESC approval has been granted, the form should be submitted to the APQO via the link QAO. The APQO will lodge the approved form with the programme documentation and forward a copy to the Course & Student Administration Team for the updates to be logged on the records system.

4.2.2   Major changes

i.   The approval of major changes is also devolved to faculties, but, because these changes affect the programme as a whole, the approval process should take the form of a panel approval (this may be by email correspondence), and consultation with students and external examiners must be recorded in more detail than for minor changes. Internal consultation with APQO and the Course & Student Administration Team should be undertaken to ensure that the programme continues to meet University regulatory requirements; and OCSLD should be consulted for advice on good practice in teaching, learning and assessment where changes are to be made to these strategies.

ii.   The proposal must initially be discussed by the Subject Committee, following which the appropriate documentation should be submitted to the Faculty Quality Officer, who will arrange for its consideration by a panel. The panel should include as a minimum:
- two academics from other departments within the Faculty, at least one of which must be a member of the Faculty AESC;

- a panel coordinator, nominated by the Chair of the Faculty AESC, who will be responsible for drawing the panel members' comments together and writing a short panel report for the major change form;
- the link QAO for the Faculty.

iii. The panel will be provided with the following evidence:
- request for changes form (T2.13)
- updated programme specification (T2.7)
- any new (and updated) module descriptors (T2.8)
- student/external examiner/other stakeholder consultation report/s (T2.14)

iv. The panel must consider whether the documentation provides evidence that an appropriate consultation process has been undertaken, and that the rationale for the change is robust. Where new compulsory modules are being introduced, the panel must check that the modules contribute to the achievement of the programme learning outcomes and that the proposed curriculum change does not substantially alter the nature of the award. The panel coordinator will then add a short report to the Request for Changes form to summarise the key points raised by panel members and to indicate their decision. The form will then be submitted to the FAESC for endorsement, following which the request for changes form, programme specification and (where applicable) module descriptors must be forwarded to the APQO via the link QAO. Students must be notified by the Subject Coordinator/Programme Lead when changes affecting their programmes of study have been approved.

v. NOTE: the process for obtaining approval for variations from the regulations is set out in section 3.2 above.

4.2.3 Deadlines for approval

i. Minor and major changes for implementation in the next academic year should have completed the approval process - i.e. they must have been agreed by Faculty AESC - by *28th February* (in order to meet the March deadline for systems amendments). Semester 2 modules for taught postgraduate provision must have completed the approval process in time for submission to the Student & Course Administration Team by *Week 12, Semester 2*. If changes need to be processed beyond these deadlines, the link QAO and the link Curriculum & Student Information Manager in CSAT should be consulted for advice on how to proceed.

ii. Except in the case of collaborative provision (for which periodic review incorporates an element of re-approval), programme teams going through periodic review should avoid presenting minor and major changes for approval by the review panel. These amendments should, wherever possible, be considered and approved by Faculty AESC prior to the panel event, so as to allow the panel to focus on the provision as a whole rather than on detailed changes to individual modules. Where the need to revalidate a particular programme is identified during the preparation for the periodic review of a Subject area, this should also be undertaken as a separate exercise. If amendments to existing provision are to be submitted during the periodic review exercise, particularly where they will require processing beyond the deadlines set out in 4.2.4 above, advice should be sought from the link QAO and the link Curriculum & Student Information Manager on whether it will be possible to carry out the systems update in time for the start of the next academic year.

5. PROGRAMME CLOSURE

5.1 Reasons for closure

5.1.1 There are a variety of reasons why a decision may be taken to close a programme, including, for example:
- a decline in student demand such that the viability of the provision is threatened;
- a new programme is approved which replaces existing provision;
- a reduction in funding or in funded student numbers;
- documented concerns about the standards and/or quality of the provision, which may affect its credibility;
- a change in University, Faculty or the partner's priorities for academic development;
- failure to meet the criteria set by the relevant group following a portfolio review exercise.

5.1.2 Many programme closures at Oxford Brookes are routine administrative exercises, involving the closure of programmes with no remaining students, or of those from which students are transferring onto improved, newly-validated replacement programmes. However, some programme closures require more complex issues to be addressed because the decision to close has implications for:
- remaining students, in respect of completing their studies;
- applicants holding offers of places on the programme;
- and/or for staff, whose positions may be at risk.

The procedures to be followed in these cases are set out in section 5.3 below. The appropriate closure process must be followed in order to assure the quality and standards of provision being phased out, so as to prevent reputational damage to the University and to protect the interests of students and applicants.

5.2 Authority to make closure decisions

5.2.1 Since the closure of a programme is primarily a business decision, the authority to initiate the programme closure process lies with the appropriate Faculty Executive group, acting on the advice of the relevant academic Department/School and (if appropriate) with the approval of the Vice-Chancellor's Group. In some cases (e.g. the closure of a partnership which involves more than one Faculty), a closure decision may originate from VCG, who will nominate a PVC/Dean to convene an exit group to take the closure process forward (see 5.3 below). The Portfolio Development & Advisory Group may also recommend that Faculty Executive Groups consider the future of programmes that have been unable to meet the criteria for quality and/or demand. See also the section on suspension of recruitment in 5.4 below.

5.2.2 However, the Academic Board has ultimate authority for making academic decisions about the University's portfolio of programmes, and - via its sub-committees, primarily QLIC - it may bring concerns about academic standards or quality to the attention of the relevant Faculty Executive group or to VCG, and ask them to consider whether a programme should be closed. In order to conclude the closure process, the relevant Faculty AESC/QLIC (or, for cross-University provision, University QLIC) must approve the delivery and quality assurance arrangements to be put in place while existing students complete their programme of study.

5.3 Closure processes

5.3.1 The appropriate closure form should be completed via route A or B (see below). All proposals for closure must, in due course, include the following information:
- Clear rationale for closure;
- Arrangements for phasing out the provision, or the identification of alternative provision, bearing in mind the University's contractual obligations to existing students and applicants holding offers; *NOTE: the aim of these arrangements should, wherever possible, be to enable existing students to continue on their current programme and complete the Brookes award for which they are registered;*
- Measures to be taken to protect the quality of the provision being phased out;
- Evidence of consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including students and staff.

Route A: Administrative closure - programmes that have never recruited or have no remaining students, or programmes being replaced through re-validation process

5.3.2   Where there are no students or applicants on a programme, and the programme is to be archived, the closure form (T2.15) should be completed by the appropriate Programme Lead or Liaison Manager (for collaborative provision), signed off by the Faculty AESC/QLIC and sent to APQO, via the link QAO. APQO will notify the Student Records & Curriculum Management Team and Admissions Office, and the University Quality & Learning Infrastructure Committee.

5.3.3   Where existing provision is to be replaced by a new programme in the same subject area, the implementation plan for the new provision, and phasing out of the old programme, will be outlined in the new programme submission document and in the report of the programme approval panel. A programme closure form (T2.15) should be completed by the Programme Lead, checked by the Student Records & Curriculum Management Team, and attached to the submission document, for processing on the course record system after the new programme approval event.

Route B: Closure of programmes with remaining students and/or current applicants

5.3.4   When a proposal is made to close a programme on which students are currently studying, or for which applicants are holding offers of a place, a risk assessment (*guidance to be provided*) should initially be undertaken by the Programme Lead or Subject Coordinator (or Liaison Manager, for collaborative arrangements) and the Faculty PLQA, in order to make recommendations about the process that should be followed in order to address the key issues as appropriate to the provision under consideration. The Head of the Department/School managing the provision should then submit the rationale for the closure, the initial risk assessment and the proposed closure process (including exit group membership) to the Faculty Executive group for approval. The Faculty Executive should then take a view on whether the PVC/Dean should submit a rationale for the closure to VCG, for approval of the decision to initiate the closure process. Once the appropriate level of executive support has been secured, the closure process may proceed.

5.3.5   Once the decision has been made by the Faculty Executive to close a programme with current students and/or applicants (see 5.3.4 above), an exit group should be convened to oversee the agreed closure process. The membership of a full exit group is given in 5.3.6 below; however, the size and membership of this group for a particular case will be determined by the initial assessment of the nature and severity of the risks and the likely issues that will need to be addressed (the minimum membership is indicated by asterisks – representation from Legal Services, Communications, and the Faculty Head of Finance & Planning should also be included for collaborative arrangements). If the provision is managed by a single Faculty, the exit group chair will be nominated by, and report to, the Faculty Executive group. If the exit group is to oversee the closure of a number of programmes managed by several Faculties, for example, in the case of the closure of a collaborative partnership delivering a range of provision, the chair will be appointed by VCG, to whom the exit group will be accountable until the final exit arrangements have been agreed and implemented (this may, in some cases, require only one meeting).

5.3.6   The membership of the exit group must be approved by either the Faculty Executive group or VCG (depending on the group to which it reports), and may include some or all of the following, depending on the process agreed, as per 5.3.4 above:
- Chair, nominated by Faculty Executive (or by VCG, in the case of multi-Faculty provision)
- Secretary, nominated by the Chair
- *Associate Dean/s Student Experience, and/or PLQA/s
- Associate Dean/s Strategy & Development, and/or PLCP/s
- Head/s of Department/School affected
- *Programme Lead/Subject Coordinator/Liaison Manager, as appropriate
- Faculty Head/s of Finance & Planning
- Faculty Head/s of Administration & Support Services, or Academic Administration Manager/s
- *Faculty link Quality Assurance Officer, or (for multi-Faculty exit groups) the Head of APQO
- Legal Services representative
- Human Resources Business Partner
- Communications team representative
- Academic Registrar, or nominee
- *the Head of Admissions (or their nominee) should be included if applicants are holding offers for places on the programme that is to be closed and the Academic Registrar is unable to attend the exit group.

5.3.7 The role of the exit group is to:
- to draw up and monitor an action plan for the exit process, ensuring all key players understand their responsibilities and the timescales for action;
- carry out a risk assessment on the action plan to ensure that all relevant legal, financial, HR and QA issues are taken into consideration in completing the programme closure form (template T2.16). A suggested risk assessment tool is available (template T2.17) which exit group Chairs may find useful when reporting on progress to FEG/VCG (see final bullet point below);
- ensure that appropriate consultation is carried out with students; and clear information is provided about the arrangements that are to be put in place for the remainder of their programme of study;
- ensure that appropriate consultation is carried out with staff, including relevant union representatives; and that clear information is provided about the implications of the closure on their employment (*referring to the HR guidance on handling redundancies and redeployments: http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/hr/handbook/end/redundancy.html*);
- ensure that consultation with relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body/ies and other key stakeholders (e.g. partner organisations, funding bodies) is undertaken;
- agree on the point at which applications to the provision should be suspended, and on the means and content of communications with applicants who are already in the system [*if no further applications are to be accepted, the Student Records & Curriculum Management Team should be notified at this point in order to close recruitment to the programme* – they will accept a draft closure form as the authority to do this];
- agree on the means and timing of internal and external communications, and the processes to be used for approving message content;
- draw up the proposed teach-out and quality assurance arrangements to be put in place to enable existing students to complete their programme of study, for approval by University QLIC, and subsequent monitoring by Faculty AESC/QLICs;
- the Chair will report regularly on progress to the Faculty Executive Group or VCG, as appropriate.

5.3.8 The end point of the exit group's work, once all the issues referred to in 5.3.7 above have been satisfactorily resolved, is the completion of the programme closure form (T2.16), which should be submitted together with the initial risk assessment and a report on phasing out costs, for approval by the Faculty Executive group, or VCG (if more than one Faculty is involved).

5.3.9 The approved closure form will then be submitted, via the Faculty link QAO, to Faculty AESC/QLIC for consideration of the teaching out and quality assurance arrangements to ensure they are sufficient to protect the interests of any remaining students. QLIC will approve the removal of the programme from the University's portfolio on behalf of Academic Board. The Faculty AESC/QLIC will be responsible for monitoring the teaching out plans once approved by QLIC and the exit group is not required to continue beyond approval of the closure form by the Faculty Executive. However, in some, more complex cases – for example the closure of a partnership involving more than one Faculty - the original exit group may continue to meet from time to time, to review progress with/share experiences of teach-out arrangements and, if necessary, recommend further action to the relevant Faculty AESC/QLICs, Faculty Executive Groups or VCG.

5.3.10 Once approved, the APQO will report the outcomes of the closure process to relevant teams, to ensure that prospectus and UCAS entries are amended, and the records system and other definitive programme information is updated. Once all remaining students have completed the programme, the Student Records & Curriculum Management Team will designate it as 'archived' on the system.

5.4 SUSPENSION OF RECRUITMENT

5.4.1 Suspension of recruitment, rather than closure, may be the preferred option where there is reason to believe that the issues underlying the decision to suspend are temporary. However, suspension of a programme is often a first step towards closure, which may be taken to allow Schools/Departments to undertake the revalidation of the current provision or the development of new, replacement provision. It is recommended that a programme should not remain in suspension for longer than two years - during which time it is subject to the normal QA processes - without a decision to re-open, replace, or close being made. Please note that recruitment to ACP provision is reviewed annually.

It is vital that an appropriate process is followed - including a risk assessment of proposed actions - in order to ensure that the University is compliant with consumer legislation in respect of providing early communication about any programme changes to applicants and students. When a proposal to suspend is made, a similar

group to the minimum exit group (see 5.3 above, and template T2.17) should be convened in order to determine whether suspension, rather than closure, is the appropriate course of action. The group should also ensure that a suspension form is completed (T2.18)