

Academic Quality Framework 2017-2018

Chapter 4: Programme and Course Approval & Modification

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 This section of the Academic Quality Framework details the procedures that the College uses to design, develop and approve new taught programmes and courses, details how modifications may be made to such programmes and courses following approval and aims to meet the following UK Quality Code Expectation about programme design, development and approval:

*"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 and approval of programmes."*¹

4.1.2 Academic staff at the College are required to review all programmes and courses on an annual basis as part of the annual monitoring procedures.² This provides academic staff with the opportunity to evaluate the quality and standards of the College's taught provision and stimulate curriculum development. The development of new programmes and modifications to existing programmes, that may arise from annual monitoring reviews, involves external peer review and consultations, thereby ensuring that practices and experiences of external peers are utilised and considered.

4.1.3 The overall aims of programme and course approval, review and modifications are:

4.1.3.1 To assure all stakeholders of the College and the public of the quality and standards of the College's taught provision.

4.1.3.2 To ensure that the College secures the highest academic standards and education experience for its students.

¹ UK Quality Code Chapter A Setting and Maintaining Standards

² AQF Chapter 5: Annual Monitoring and Reporting (To be drafted)

4.2 DESIGNING NEW PROGRAMMES AND COURSES

- 4.2.1 The design of new programmes takes a significant amount of research and development, and it is supported by consultation within the College (involving academic, professional staff and students) and through engagement with external advisors.
- 4.2.2 The design phase culminates in Programme Approval events which are based on the peer review of documentation and meetings with staff and students. These events enable the College and external approval bodies to evaluate the academic strength, standards, quality, appeal and viability of the provision in detail.

4.3 MODIFYING EXISTING PROGRAMMES AND COURSES

- 4.3.1 Modifications to existing programmes and courses may be made between programme approval and periodic review points to enhance provision, being instigated by student feedback or changes to sector or Professional, Statutory and Professional Body (PSRB) requirements.
- 4.3.2 The modification procedures involve consultation and peer review to a depth which is proportionate to the level of the proposed modification(s).

4.4 PROGRAMME AND COURSE APPROVAL AND MODIFICATION PROCESSES

- 4.4.1 The College's procedures for approving and modifying programmes and courses are agreed by Academic Board, prior to University-level approval, and are designed to adhere to requirement of external approval bodies and to the relevant Expectations and Indicators as detailed in the UK Quality Code.
- 4.4.2 The overall aims of programme approval and modification procedures are:
- 4.4.2.1 To ensure that the College maintains strategic oversight of the procedures for the development and approval of programmes;
 - 4.4.2.2 To ensure that programmes are strategically and academically appropriate, and are developed in line with the College's Mission, Strategic Plan and Academic Regulations;³
 - 4.4.2.3 To assure that the College approves programmes that meet the appropriate quality and academic standards as defined by the College, the UK Quality Code and expectations of relevant professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs);
 - 4.4.2.4 To ensure that learning and other resources are adequate and available to support programme delivery and students;

³ AQF Chapter 7: Academic Regulations

- 4.4.2.5 To ensure that the programme learning environment is fit for purpose;
- 4.4.2.6 To ensure that new programme proposals are designed and developed appropriately according to the prescribed criteria and decision-making procedures;
- 4.4.2.7 To ensure that the programme is coherent and provides students with a developmental educational experience;
- 4.4.2.8 To ensure that the quality and standards of teaching and assessment of the programme are in line with national practice and will be continuously enhanced;
- 4.4.2.9 To ensure that the responsibility for academic ownership and quality management of programmes by the Faculty, teaching teams and other College departments are clearly communicated and acknowledged;
- 4.4.2.10 To ensure that post-graduation, programmes have prepared students sufficiently to enable them to meet employer expectations as appropriate;
- 4.4.2.11 To ensure that external reference points and expertise are drawn upon to maintain and enhance quality standards regarding current developments and practices outside the College environment;
- 4.4.2.12 To ensure that students, academics and professional staff are appropriately involved in the design, development and approval of programmes;
- 4.4.2.13 To ensure that appropriate External Examiner appointments for new programmes are considered by the Teaching, Learning and Enhancement Committee and recommended for approval by Academic Board, before being recommended to the validating University.

4.5 RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING PROGRAMME AND COURSE APPROVAL AND MODIFICATION

- 4.5.1 Generally, the primary responsibility for programme and course development, approval and modification rests with the Master of the College, Heads of Faculty, Course Leaders, and academics.
- 4.5.2 Normally the Quality Team provides procedural support and monitors the complete of the required approval and modification stages.
- 4.5.3 Academic and corporate committees also have roles in the review and approval of proposals. Further details about specific responsibilities are contained in the sub-sections below.

- 4.5.4 Programme approval and modification procedures are monitored by Academic Board, ensuring that they are followed appropriately and remain effective.

4.6 THE LENGTH OF TIME FOR WHICH PROGRAMMES AND COURSES ARE APPROVED

- 4.6.1 Programmes and courses are normally approved for five years unless otherwise specified at the Programme Approval Event, or until the next Periodic Review point, whichever occurs sooner.
- 4.6.2 Programmes are normally subject to a Periodic Review every five years.⁴
- 4.6.3 Where a single programme is recommended for periodic review on the basis of a substantial proposed changes or concerns, this will be considered and recorded as an 'approval' event and the programme approval process will apply.

4.7 ALIGNMENT WITH THE UK QUALITY CODE

- 4.7.1 Programme and course approval procedures are developed and operated at the College in-line with the external body requirements and adhere to the UK Quality Code's state Expectation 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."⁵

PART 2: PROGRAMME APPROVAL

4.8 DRIVERS FOR NEW PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

- 4.8.1 The College's portfolio of taught programmes is regularly reviewed in order to maintain and enhance academic quality and standards. Programme portfolios evolve over time in response to a number of drivers including:
- 4.8.1.1 The gradual development of existing programmes;
 - 4.8.1.2 Securing entry into new subject areas;
 - 4.8.1.3 Entry into new subject areas through a collaborative partnership;
 - 4.8.1.4 Evidence of demand in student markets;
 - 4.8.1.5 Developments in academic strategies;
 - 4.8.1.6 The identification of new areas through staff research and enterprise;

⁴ AQF Chapter 6: Periodic Review (To be drafted)

⁵ UK Quality Code Chapter A: Setting and Maintaining Standards

- 4.8.1.7 Demand from employers or professional bodies;
 - 4.8.1.8 Feedback from External Examiners;
 - 4.8.1.9 Opportunities or threats from competitor institutions;
 - 4.8.1.10 Changes in patterns of student progression;
 - 4.8.1.11 Changes in government policy.
- 4.8.2 In addition to responding to the above and to ensure that the College's taught provision remains current and attractive to prospective students, new programmes proposed for development should also meet at least one of the following criteria within the resource capacity of the College:
- 4.8.2.1 Attract viable new cohort of students to the programme;
 - 4.8.2.2 Increase the conversion of applicants and prospective applicants to registered students in existing programmes;
 - 4.8.2.3 Increase the progression opportunities for students at the College including progression to postgraduate studies;
 - 4.8.2.4 Includes a more effective and sustainable use of College expertise on existing programmes.

4.9 FRAMEWORK FOR NEW PROGRAMME APPROVALS

- 4.9.1 Programme design and approval procedures are developed and operate in line with external body requirements and the UK Quality Code.
- 4.9.2 Each new programme proposal requires significant research and development, as well as detailed criteria to guide the approval procedure. The approval procedure is rigorous to assure the quality of the proposed provision.
- 4.9.3 Development of the programme portfolio must be coherent and consistent with the College's strategy, and must make business sense in terms of market demand, income generated, and the resources required to run the programme.
- 4.9.4 All proposals must consider relevant external inputs, including subject benchmark statements and the requirement of Professional and Statutory Bodies where applicable.
- 4.9.5 New programmes are assessed against criteria in areas including strategic fit and viability, quality and standards, assessment, staffing, and learning resources.

4.10 TIMESCALES OF THE PROGRAMME APPROVAL PROCESS

- 4.10.1 The expected timeframe for the approval of a new programme is 12 months from initial programme development to delivery.

4.11 NEW PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

- 4.11.1 The Head of Faculty, in collaboration with the Head of Quality Assurance, will set up a programme development team, with a nominated leader, to design and develop the new programme and prepare the documentation. The team should consist of academics, and ensure that there is external expertise and student consultation.
- 4.11.2 The nominated leader has overall responsibility to ensure that:
- 4.11.2.1 The programme is informed by relevant internal and external reference points;
 - 4.11.2.2 The curriculum design and learning outcomes ensure full student engagement for the length of the programme, including employability;
 - 4.11.2.3 The development team takes into account the resources required to deliver the programme and consult with appropriate staff on teaching room availability and timetable scheduling;
 - 4.11.2.4 In collaboration with the Quality Team, all the documentation required by the validating University is completed to a high standard;
 - 4.11.2.5 The documentation produced contains all the information required for the panel to assess the programme against the criteria listed in paragraph 4.14;
 - 4.11.2.6 In collaboration with the Quality Team and the marketing department, marketing materials are produced in accordance with the documentation approved by the validating University.
- 4.11.3 The programme documentation required is as follows:
- 4.11.3.1 All course descriptors;
 - 4.11.3.2 All programme handbooks (which include the programme specification);
 - 4.11.3.3 Academic CVs.
- 4.11.4 The Head of Faculty must be satisfied, before the documents can be sent to the internal programme approval panel members, that:
- 4.11.4.1 The proposed programme meets all internal and external requirements;
 - 4.11.4.2 Required resources are in place or have been agreed by the Executive Committee;
 - 4.11.4.3 Students have been involved in the design of the programme;
 - 4.11.4.4 The proposed programme will enable students to achieve the learning outcomes;

- 4.11.4.5 The proposed programme has been fully and appropriately documented.

4.12 INTERNAL APPROVAL OF THE NEW PROGRAMME PROPOSAL

4.12.1 The Internal Programme Approval event will be organised by the Quality Team. The Panel's role is to review the programme design and documentation against the following criteria and make recommendations to Academic Board:

- 4.12.1.1 The programme documentation is clear and conforms with the College's and validating University's regulations, such that students, academics and staff would know what is expected of them;
- 4.12.1.2 The learning outcomes relate appropriately to the relevant internal and external reference points and aims of the provision;
- 4.12.1.3 The design and organisation of the curriculum are effective in promoting student learning and creating conditions for the learning outcomes to be achieved;
- 4.12.1.4 There is sufficient evidence that the curriculum and programme design have been informed by current thinking within this discipline, by recent developments in learning and teaching, enterprise and advance professional practice of academics;
- 4.12.1.5 The Teaching and Learning Strategy, Assessment Strategy, variety and balance of assessment methods, and learning and teaching methods employed will effectively enable and support student learning, the achievement of the learning outcomes, and will promote inclusive practice;
- 4.12.1.6 There is an appropriate balance of academic, practical and personal development elements;
- 4.12.1.7 There is a robust logical and intellectual coherence to the programme ensuring a high-level experience for students, which is clearly related to the programme aims and learning outcomes;
- 4.12.1.8 The increasing demands on the learners as they progress through the levels of the programme are clearly and appropriately articulated;
- 4.12.1.9 The embedding of employability within the programme is clearly articulated and appropriate, which prepares students adequately for career opportunities in the field, for other forms of graduate-level, managerial and professional employment or for further study.

4.12.2 The Panel may wish to comment on other aspects, and any such comments will be considered by the faculty and, where appropriate, Academic Board.

4.13 INTERNAL PROGRAMME APPROVAL PANEL MEMBERSHIP

- 4.13.1 Each panel will consist of at a minimum:
 - 4.13.1.1 Master of the College (Chair) or appointed replacement;
 - 4.13.1.2 Two Heads of Faculty not related to the new major subject under approval;
 - 4.13.1.3 One student representative, appropriate to the programme being proposed;
 - 4.13.1.4 One independent external representative from another higher education institution.
- 4.13.2 The remit of the Panel is to review the documentation, question the programme development team if necessary, come to a conclusion, and determine any conditions and/or recommendations.
- 4.13.3 It is expected that the individual Panel members will review the proposed programme documentation prior to the event. Normally, Panel members will be expected to attend the event but attendance can be via virtual methods if required.
- 4.13.4 The Head of Quality Assurance is responsible for the organisation of the event and the circulation of the documentation and may sit in during the panel meeting to assure the process is consistent and fair.
- 4.13.5 The nomination of the External panel member is the responsibility of the Head of Faculty proposing the new programme. For further information in the external panel member please refer to the Programme Approval Event External Panel Member policy.
- 4.13.6 The Chair is responsible for overseeing the event itself and ensuring a thorough review of the programme materials is conducted, in order to recommend the approval or non-approval of the programme.

4.14 CRITERIA FOR THE APPROVAL OF NEW PROGRAMMES

- 4.14.1 **Academic Strength and Significance**
 - 4.14.1.1 The proposed programme constitutes a significant and sector-benchmarked academic offering in the subject area(s).
 - 4.14.1.2 The programme is accurately understood and evidenced by the Faculty as distinctive, developmental, or comparable with others within HE provisions.
- 4.14.2 **Strategic Fit and Viability**
 - 4.14.2.1 The proposed programme supports the College's mission and strategic direction.

4.14.2.2 There is market research and/or quantitative evidence to support the viability of the proposed provision.

4.14.2.3 The proposed programme constitutes a worthwhile extension of the College's existing provision in terms of its curriculum and proposed market(s).

4.14.3 **Quality of the Learning Experience**

4.14.3.1 The proposed programme provides students with a coherent and developmental educational experience.

4.14.3.2 The graduate/postgraduate outcomes for students represent a good return on their investment.

4.14.3.3 Engagement with relevant employers and/or professional bodies throughout the programme is sufficient to confirm that the student experience is informed by current and contemporary practice.

4.14.3.4 The expectations of students, employers and other relevant professional bodies have been considered within the programme development procedures.

4.14.3.5 The provision is consistent with the College's equal opportunities and diversity policies, and promotes an inclusive environment for learning by anticipating the varied requirements of learners (for example, because of a declared disability, specific cultural background, location or age), and aims to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities.

4.14.4 **Quality and Standards of the Programme**

4.14.4.1 The aims and objectives of the provision are consistent with the College's educational aims and objectives;

4.14.4.2 The proposed programme complies with the College's and validating University's Academic Regulations, unless a variation to these regulations is proposed and detailed within the approval documentation (e.g. on the recognition of prior learning, admissions, etc.).

4.14.4.3 The College's policies on the design of programmes and courses have been met.

4.14.4.4 The programme has been appropriately aligned with the UK Quality Code, including the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).

4.14.4.5 Relevant benchmarks, including QAA subject benchmarks, and appropriate industry/professional standards, have been considered and addressed appropriately within the development procedure.

4.14.4.6 The learning outcomes for the programme, and the standards that will be achieved, are appropriate to the level of the proposed award and title, and are appropriately distinct from any other award and/or titles offered or already proposed for approval.

4.14.4.7 There are opportunities for academic progression to and from the proposed programme, with entry and exit requirements in line with the College's policies and regulations.

4.14.5 **Programme Structure**

4.14.5.1 The curriculum and learning outcomes match the rationale for the programme.

4.14.5.2 The educational rationale is sound and the curriculum is coherent, with clear progression in the subject matter.

4.14.5.3 The teaching methods are appropriate to the curriculum, and the learning outcomes reflect the educational aims of the programme.

4.14.5.4 The programme is balanced in terms of subject specialism and skill development.

4.14.5.5 The programme structure takes into account the entitlements of students with diverse characteristics, including ensuring that the learning outcomes, learning and teaching activities, learning environment, and planned assessment methods do not create unnecessary barriers.

4.14.5.6 There is evidence that the quality of teaching and standards of assessment in the subject are likely to be consistent with national practice.

4.14.6 **Assessment**

4.14.6.1 The learning outcomes are tested through the assessment process.

4.14.6.2 The assessment strategy is clear, with students exposed to appropriate methods of assessment for the subject.

4.14.6.3 Individual assessments within courses are clearly identified and provide an effective measurement of performance, with an acceptable and balanced overall student experience.

4.14.6.4 College policies and procedures associated with assessment management are recognised and met.

4.14.6.5 Assessment practices are inclusive and equitable, and the methods, tasks and procedures do not advantage or disadvantage any group or individual.

4.14.7 **Regulatory and Technical Compliance**

- 4.14.7.1 The programme does not contain any elements or procedures at variance with the College's Academic Regulations, other than any exceptions for which approval is explicitly sought as part of the approval procedure.
- 4.14.7.2 The College's policies and operational procedures are applied consistently, or identified and justified as variations.
- 4.14.7.3 College expectations in respect of academic provision and its delivery are met in full.
- 4.14.7.4 Any relevant PSRB requirements are met and aligned appropriately with the College's requirements and expectations.
- 4.14.7.5 External requirements relevant to the provision are met.
- 4.14.7.6 The programme complies with the College's policies on equality and diversity.

4.14.8 Staffing & Resources

- 4.14.8.1 The human and physical resources available (or the plans that are in place to provide them), and the environment within which the programme will be offered, are satisfactory.
- 4.14.8.2 There is confidence that the Faculty can deliver and develop the programme.
- 4.14.8.3 Library and information resources are available and adequate.
- 4.14.8.4 The Faculty is engaged with relevant subject and professional communities.
- 4.14.8.5 The quality of provision and its further enhancement are fully supported by research, scholarship and academic enterprise with the Faculty.
- 4.14.8.6 There is a staff development policy in place that values and encourages academic and professional development activity by academics.
- 4.14.8.7 The research and scholarly activity of the delivery team is sufficient to maintain the standards of provision and enrich the curriculum with contemporary developments in the subject, particularly to underpin work at Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) Level 6 and Level 7.

4.14.9 Student Support and Guidance (excluding standard NCH support systems)

- 4.14.9.1 There are appropriate opportunities for, and sound arrangements in place, for the management of work-based learning, mentoring, projects, etc.

4.14.9.2 Induction arrangements are appropriate to any specific programme features.

4.14.9.3 Support is available to students in respect of any critical programme-related choices or decisions (e.g. course options).

4.14.9.4 Arrangements are in place for support required by particular groups of students (e.g. overseas), and provision is made for students from diverse backgrounds and/or educational experience, and students with a range of characteristics including protected characteristics.

4.14.10 Programme Management

4.14.10.1 There are procedures in place for the management of quality assurance procedures, such as the appointment and reporting of External Examiners, annual monitoring, and programme review.

4.14.10.2 The Faculty understands the responsibilities in respect of the management of student learning opportunities with regard to teaching, learning and assessment procedures and learning resources.

4.14.10.3 There are appropriate mechanisms in place for obtaining and responding to student feedback on the programme and the student experience.

4.15 AGENDA FOR INTERNAL PROGRAMME APPROVAL EVENTS

4.15.1 The indicative agenda, below, may be adapted as necessary:

Time	Meeting	Expected Attendance
10.00	Private meeting of the panel to discuss the format for the day and lines of enquiry.	Panel
10.30	Meeting with senior staff to discuss how the programme fits with institutional and faculty strategic aims, staffing, resourcing and staff development.	Panel, Head of Faculty, and Senior Management Staff
11.30	Private meeting of panel to consider comments made by senior staff in the light of the next meeting.	Panel
12.00	Meeting with Faculty and academics to discuss the structure, curriculum, delivery, assessment, pedagogic and	Panel

	<p>operational issues of the proposed programme, and especially the relationship to the QAA Benchmarks and the College’s Academic Regulations.</p> <p>This meeting should include all of the staff who will deliver the programme together with Student and Academic Services representatives.</p>	<p>Head of Faculty</p> <p>Course Leaders and other teaching academics</p> <p>Student Wellbeing Coordinator</p>
13.30	Lunch: private meeting of the panel, or meeting with students on cognate programmes.	<p>Panel</p> <p>Students</p>
14.30	Tour of the facilities, if appropriate	<p>Panel</p> <p>Head of Faculty</p>
15.30	Provisional feedback to the Faculty	<p>Panel</p> <p>Head of Faculty</p> <p>Course Leaders and other teaching academics</p> <p>Student Wellbeing Coordinator</p>

4.16 OUTCOMES OF INTERNAL PANEL APPROVAL EVENT

4.16.1 The Internal Programme Approval Panel may recommend:

- 4.16.1.1 Approval with no conditions and recommendations, proceed to University validation procedure;
- 4.16.1.2 Approval with conditions to be met, to be signed off by the Chair, prior to proceeding to the University validation procedure;
- 4.16.1.3 Suspension of the process with conditions or recommendations;
- 4.16.1.4 Non-approval with feedback.

4.17 UNIVERSITY APPROVAL

- 4.17.1 The outcome of the Internal Programme Approval event will be recorded at the subsequent Academic Board, and the Chair of the panel will confirm that the conditions have been met and/or recommendations have been reviewed and modifications have been made.
- 4.17.2 The Head of Quality Assurance is responsible for ensuring that the all the programme documentation is submitted to the validating University for its programme approval procedure.
- 4.17.3 The Head of Quality Assurance will inform the Head of Faculty the outcome of the University approval procedure and of the conditions/recommendations made. It is the responsibility of the Head of Faculty to respond to the University's conditions/recommendations within the timeline given by the University.
- 4.17.4 Once the approval process is completed by the validating University, the Head of Quality Assurance will inform Academic Board and the Executive Committee.

4.18 PUBLICITY FOR AND MARKETING OF NEW PROGRAMMES

- 4.18.1 In line with the UK Quality Code and the indicators relating to publically available information about higher education provision, the College works to ensure the accuracy of the public information.⁶
- 4.18.2 Information presented through the College's public website is verified as accurate by the Head of Faculty in conjunction with the Quality Team, following approval of the programme.
- 4.18.3 Where new provision is being considered the programme may only be advertised formally once the validating University has approved the programme. Prior to this point the programme must be marketed as "subject to approval/validation" if the business case has been approved by the validating University.⁷ Following formal confirmation from the validating University that conditions and/or recommendations have been met and final approval gained, this caveat may be removed.

PART 3: PROGRAMME AND COURSE MODIFICATIONS

4.19 MODIFICATIONS TO PROGRAMMES AND COURSES

- 4.19.1 Programmes and courses are usually approved for a period of five years. The College acknowledges that modifications may be required before the periodic review to enhance the provision.

⁶ UK Quality Code C: Information about Higher Education Provision

⁷ "Subject to approval/validation" – wording dependant upon the validating University.

- 4.19.2 Academics may identify opportunities for enhancing approved programmes as part of routine monitoring and other reflective activity.
- 4.19.3 As with new programme development, modifications to programmes and courses must be coherent and consistent with the College's strategic plan, must make business sense, and must be approved through the relevant modification approval procedure outlined below. In all cases, a rationale for the proposed modification must be provided by the Head of Faculty or Course Leader as appropriate. The modifications to the programmes and/or course must be identifiable in the core documentation (Programme Specification and Course Descriptor) and consultation with appropriate stakeholders must be evidenced.

4.20 CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF PROGRAMME AND COURSE MODIFICATION PROPOSALS

- 4.20.1 Programme and course modification proposals are considered by the committee with educational oversight of the provision in question as appropriate; major changes which have a resource implication are also considered by the Executive Committee. Proposed modifications are then approved through the relevant process according to the level of modification.
- 4.20.2 Proposal for programme and course modifications are subject to peer-review and external and internal consultation to provide assurance of the maintenance of academic quality and standards prior to their final approval.
- 4.20.3 Consultation may be undertaken at relevant committee meetings and through electronic communication. Where electronic consultation is undertaken in place of discussion at a committee meeting, this should be noted at the next available meeting and documented in the minutes.
- 4.20.4 In the case of student consultation, a 10-day consultation period is recommended as a minimum to enable all affected students to consider and feedback on the proposed modifications.
- 4.20.5 For all modification proposals, the Quality Team shall liaise with the Head of Faculty and/or Course Leader as appropriate regarding details of timelines and documentation needs, to provide process support and to monitor the completion of the required approval stages as outlined below. The Quality Team will monitor that the modification approval stages are followed, and will report this to the Teaching, Learning and Enhancement Committee and Academic Board
- 4.20.6 For undergraduate programmes, all modifications must be submitted to Southampton Solent University, by the College's Head of Quality Assurance
- 4.20.7 For postgraduate programmes, all modifications must be submitted to Swansea University, by the College's Head of Quality Assurance.

4.21 ALIGNMENT WITH THE QUALITY CODE

4.21.1 Programme and course modification procedures are developed and operated at the College in line with external body requirements, and in line with the UK Quality Code's stated Expectation that:

*"Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes."*⁸

4.22 DRIVERS FOR MODIFICATIONS TO PROGRAMMES AND COURSES

4.22.1 Programmes and courses are typically approved for a period of five years from the point of approval to the point of periodic programme review. During this period, it may be identified that modifications to a programme or its courses would enhance the provision. Heads of Faculty and Course Leaders may propose in response to a number of sources of information, including:

- 4.22.1.1 External Examiner reports;
- 4.22.1.2 Academic staff, student and graduate feedback;
- 4.22.1.3 Student progress and other relevant data;
- 4.22.1.4 Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body requirements;
- 4.22.1.5 Institutional goals and mission;
- 4.22.1.6 Strategic academic and resource planning;
- 4.22.1.7 Subject sectoral developments;
- 4.22.1.8 Changing external environment;
- 4.22.1.9 Good practice in other programmes or courses at the College, or other sources of good practice.

4.23 FRAMEWORK FOR MODIFICATIONS TO PROGRAMMES AND COURSES

4.23.1 The approval of programme and course modifications is subject to clear identification of the modifications, the production of sound rationale, and evidence of undertaking appropriate consultation with stakeholders.

4.23.2 As with new programme and course development, modifications to programmes and courses must be coherent and consistent with the College's Strategic Plan, make business sense, and be academically sound and appropriate.

4.23.3 The following areas of the Programme Specification and Course Descriptor may not be changed:

⁸ UK Quality Code Chapter A: Setting and Maintaining Standards

- 4.23.3.1 Programme Code
- 4.23.3.2 UCAS Programme Code
- 4.23.3.3 Course Code

4.23.4 The following programme and course modifications can be approved by this process:

- 4.23.4.1 Changes to the learning and teaching strategy, learning outcomes or assessment of courses;
- 4.23.4.2 Changes/additions to the mode of course delivery;
- 4.23.4.3 Changes to credit weightings of courses;
- 4.23.4.4 Changes to course level;
- 4.23.4.5 Removing, replacing or adding courses in the programme structure;
- 4.23.4.6 Changes to course aims and programme/level learning outcomes.

4.24 TIMESCALES OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMME AND COURSE MODIFICATIONS

4.24.1 There are normally two time points within the year when programme and course modifications may be proposed for approval and implementation in the next academic year:

- 4.24.1.1 November
- 4.24.1.2 April (in response to External Examiner recommendations only)

4.24.2 Categories of Modification

4.24.2.1 Category 1: Documentary Updates

Modifications to programme specifications or course descriptors to provide minor clarifications or to correct typographical/grammatical errors. These changes can be agreed by a Senior Academic Partnerships Officer, in consultation with the Course Leader or Head of Faculty.

4.24.2.2 Category 2: Minor Modifications

Modifications that have no impact on the overall programme aims, learning outcomes, objectives, structure and balance of the programme, subject benchmarks and PSRB requirements. Modifications should not alter the fundamental character of the programme. Proposals for minor changes must be endorsed by the Head of Faculty and can be approved by SSU's Head of Quality Management.

4.24.2.3 Category 3: Major Modifications

Extensive modifications often across multiple courses where a programme's overall aims, learning outcomes, structure and balance may be affected. Modifications may include those that more significantly affect the programme's award, aims and objectives, learning teaching and assessment strategy, overall structure or its management. Proposals for Category 3 modifications must be endorsed by the Master of the College before submission to the University.

4.24.3 **Approval of New Credit-bearing Courses**

- 4.24.3.1 New credit-bearing courses, credit rated between 2-60 credits, at level 4-6, can be approved by applying this procedure.
- 4.24.3.2 Course Descriptors should be prepared in accordance with the College's template and an appropriate External Examiner should be consulted to ensure that the proposed course will be comparable with other courses in terms of standards and quality of the student learning experience.
- 4.24.3.3 Where new courses will form part of an existing programme structure, this will be dealt with as a programme modification, and will need to also meet the requirements as set out below.
- 4.24.3.4 The following criteria will be used in deciding whether to approve the new courses:
 - a) Clear and coherent rationale for the new course;
 - b) Documentation correct and consultation process completed;
 - c) Appropriate learning outcomes, assessment, and content for credit value and level.

4.24.4 **Approval of Course and Programme Modifications**

- 4.24.4.1 Following the framework, section 4.22 and 4.23, all proposed Category 2 and 3 programme modifications should be discussed at the relevant Faculty meeting, which includes student representatives.
- 4.24.4.2 Where proposed modifications impact on assessment or the learning outcomes, the External Examiner for that subject should be consulted prior to the submission of the proposal to the University.
- 4.24.4.3 In assessing the change request, feedback received from the External Examiner(s) and students must be taken into account.
- 4.24.4.4 The following criteria will be used in deciding whether to approve proposed modifications:
 - a) The reason for proposing the modification meets one or more of the criteria in section 4.14;
 - b) Documentation correct;

- c) Consultation procedure completed, confirmation and evidence of consultation with students must be specifically provided;
- d) Clear and coherent rationale;
- e) Maintenance of academic standards;
- f) Enhancement of the integrity of the course and/or programme;
- g) Enhancement of the students' learning experience and/or performance, enabling them to more clearly demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes;
- h) Improvement of the overall quality of the provision;
- i) Improvement of the operational effectiveness of the course and/or programme;
- j) Volume and impact of modifications made and/or proposed to the programme since it was approved.

4.24.5 **Within-session Modifications**

4.24.5.1 Exceptionally, there may be a need to change a course/programme within the academic session it is running. In such circumstances and where appropriate internal and external consultation has been demonstrated and agreement of the students been obtained, the University may take Chair's action to approve the change.

4.24.6 **Internal Quality Assurance Modification Procedure**

4.24.6.1 Following the procedures outline above, all modifications must be approved through the College's internal quality assurance BEFORE being submitted to the validating University. In summary, the internal approval procedures are as follows:

4.24.6.2 **Category 1: Documentary Updates**

Category 1 modifications can be submitted to the University at any time during the academic year. These modifications must be approved by the Head of Quality Assurance, who will log the modification before submitting to the University.

4.24.6.3 **Category 2: Minor Modifications**

All Category 2 modifications can only be submitted to the University in accordance with the timeline as set out in section 4.24.

Category 2 modifications must be endorsed by the Head of Faculty and approved by the October Academic Board. Once approved by Academic Board, the Head of Quality Assurance will log the modification and submit the proposal to the University.

4.24.6.4 **Category 3: Major Modifications**

All Category 3 modifications can only be submitted to the University in accordance with the timeline as set out in section 4.24.

Category 3 modifications must be endorsed by the Master of the College and approved by the October Academic Board. Once approved by Academic Board, the Head of Quality Assurance will log the modification and submit the proposal to the University.

4.25 TIMESCALES OF POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMME AND COURSE MODIFICATIONS

4.25.1 Awaiting information from Swansea University.

4.26 INFORMING THE COLLEGE OF MODIFICATION APPROVAL

4.26.1 Once the proposed modification has been approved by the University, the Quality Team will inform the relevant College personnel, which can include:

- 4.26.1.1 Head of Faculty (who has the responsibility of informing the students, Course Leader and academics);
- 4.26.1.2 Academic Operations Officer (who has the responsibility of preparing for the modifications in the following academic year);
- 4.26.1.3 Director of Marketing (who has the responsibility of updating the website, if appropriate);
- 4.26.1.4 Academic Board – confirming that the proposal has been approved, at the next meeting.

4.27 VERSION CONTROL OF CORE DOCUMENTATION

4.27.1 The Quality Team is responsible for updating the following core documentation, where appropriate:

- 4.27.1.1 Course Descriptors
- 4.27.1.2 Programme Specifications
- 4.27.1.3 Programme Handbooks

4.27.2 The Course Leader is responsible for updating the Course Guide.

Title	Academic Quality Framework (AQF) Chapter 4: Programme and Course Approval and Modification	Author	Head of Quality Assurance
Location	NCH Academic Handbook	Approved by	Academic Board
Version	1.0	Last updated	December 2017
Publication date	December 2017	Review date	December 2018
Related policies	AQF 5: Annual Monitoring and Reporting; AQF 6: Periodic Review; AQF 7: Academic Regulations Programme Approval Event External Panel Member Policy;		
External Reference Point	UK Quality Code Chapter A: Setting and Maintaining Standards UK Quality Code C: Information about Higher Education Provision		

ANNEX 1

UNDERGRADUTE MODIFICATIONS AND INDICATIVE CATEGORY

CD – Course Descriptor; PS – Programme Specification

Category 1 – Documentary Updates

Modification Type	Modification Impact
Corrections/clarifications to documents which do not change approved content or learning outcomes	Document changes (CD and/or PS)
“Course Description” section of the CD	Document changes (CD)
Course’s areas of study	Document changes (CD)
Course’s additional assessment information (online submission, grade marking, anonymous marking)	Document changes (CD) (Grade marking exemptions are subject to separate scrutiny and approval)

Category 2 – Minor Modifications

Modification Type	Modification Impact
Course title change	Document change (CD & PS)
Changes to pre/co-requisite details on CD	Document changes (CD)
Course Learning and Teaching Strategy	Subject to scale and scope – may be treated as major following consideration by the University. Document changes (CD & PS). Possible impact on learning outcomes.
Course assessment type	Subject to scale and scope – may be treated as major following consideration by the University. Document changes (CD & PS). Possible impact on learning outcomes.
Course length/duration of assessment	Documentation changes (CD & PS)
Course assessment weighting	Documentation changes (CD & PS)
Course aggregation of assessment	Documentation changes (CD & PS) (Separate approval arrangements cover requests to exempt from aggregation or cessation of exemption)
Course re-assessment	Documentation changes (CD & PS)
Programme structure changes involving option courses <40UG, including course closure	Documentation changes (CD & PS)

Category 3 – Major Modifications

Modification Type	Modification Impact
Course credits	Likely to require a programme structure modification
Course level	Documentation change (CD & PS) May require a programme structure modification
Course designation	Documentation change (CD & PS). Should only occur where existing course becomes a non-credit bearing course.
Changes/addition to course delivery mode	Document change (CD & PS). Rationale for new mode – impact on programme and student learning experience.
Programme learning outcomes	Documentation change (PS). Possible impact on programme learning outcomes.
Programme structure changes involving core courses	Document changes (PS). Possible impact on student learning and experience
Programme structure changes involving option courses >30 UG, including course closure	Document changes (PS). Possible change to balance of programme.
Programme aims/programme learning outcomes	Document changes (PS), but change likely to arise out of other modifications (not likely as a separate occurrence).