

NEW COURSE APPROVAL EVENTS AT PARTNER INSTITUTIONS GUIDANCE FOR THE PARTNERS

1. Proposal of new courses

Proposals for new undergraduate and postgraduate (taught and research) courses are to be submitted to the Partnerships Team using a 'New Course Approval - Concept Stage Form'. The purpose of the concept stage is for the Partner Institution to provide a brief overview of the new course, provide a case for strategic fit and potential market demand and indicate whether any major new resources or capital expenditure is required. All concept stage requests will be passed to the Dean of Partnerships for approval, and this is reported to the Partnerships Education Committee.

A new course will be assigned into one of three categories. Categories are determined by the level of new provision and courses may move between categories, for example where details change during development or where those with authority to approve feel further scrutiny is required.

- **Category 1** – A new course constructed entirely from existing provision. The Dean of Partnerships can give final stage approval and no new course approval event is required.
- **Category 2** – A new course constructed from all existing provision plus a small number of new modules at established partners. AQSC approval (following Dean's review).
- **Category 3** – A new course with higher levels of new content or courses in a new curriculum area and all courses for new partners. AQSC approval (following new course approval panel).

When concept stage approval has been granted, the course proposal can move to the development stage. The development stage requires the completion of the 'New Course Approval – Development Stage Form'. The purpose of the development stage is to gather more detailed information on the new course, including a detailed business case, information on academic / course design and evidence of external / student consultation.

It is possible to request to advertise / make offers to applicants at the development stage and if accepted all references to the proposed new course, including any information given to prospective students (whether verbally or in writing), must clearly state that the proposal is still subject to final approval. Confirmation of approval by the Dean of Partnerships to advertise allows undergraduate course proposals to be submitted to UCAS for coding and listing in the UCAS Directory and for all undergraduate and postgraduate courses to be included in the Partner Institution's Higher Education prospectus, with a statement advising that the course is subject to final approval.

Proposed new courses that have received development stage approval and permitted to proceed will be reported to the Partnerships Education Committee. Once development stage approval has been granted the route for seeking final stage approval will be confirmed. Please note, the Partnerships Team can change the category of approval, if deemed necessary.

- **Category 1** - courses do not require a new course approval event but does require a completed '**New Course Approval - Final Stage Form**'. Once final stage approval has been granted by the Dean of Partnerships and there are no conditions, enrolment on the new programme can take place.
- **Category 2/3** - A '**New Course Approval - Final Stage Form**' is to be submitted along with the documentation noted on the documentation checklist. Approval for Category 2 courses would be via the Dean of Partnerships to PEC and then to AQSC. Category 3 courses would require a full approval event.

2. Introduction to New Course Approval

The new course approval process allows for a new or significantly revised course to be examined by an acknowledged group of experienced peers including University and external academics and employer representatives. Approval policies and procedures follow the expectations of the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education¹ and are informed by guidance from the Council of Validating Universities².

The new course approval event enables a panel to evaluate the academic content, quality, and fitness for purpose of the proposed course(s). The new course approval panel comprises members who can judge the academic integrity of the course in relation to the University's regulations and the national standards expected of the type of award and evaluate the course in terms of its structure and content.

The purpose of the approval process for a new course is to ensure the:

- equivalence in academic standards with comparable courses across the higher education sector and within the University
- compatibility with the existing curriculum portfolio
- alignment with any relevant external reference points (including the QAA Quality Code and the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies)
- compliance with University academic regulations and alignment with the University's strategic plan and its supporting Education Strategy³
- provision of a high-quality higher education experience to students
- appropriate staffing and resourcing
- appropriateness of course documentation including handbooks

3. New Course Approval Documentation

The new course approval documentation should provide the new course approval panel / Dean of Partnerships with the information they need to understand the course or courses being proposed, including how they will be taught, assessed, and resourced. The Dean of Partnerships/panel members appreciate concise documentation, but documentation must be sufficiently detailed to allow the Dean/panel to evaluate the proposal properly.

A new course approval documentation checklist outlines the requirements of what information and documents need to be submitted by the course team (for Categories 2 and 3). For professional doctorate or postgraduate research degree provision, documentation should also cover how the course team's arrangements comply with the University's Code of Practice on Professional Doctorates and/or the University's Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees. Further details about the additional documentation requirements for the new course approval of professional doctorates and postgraduate research degree provision at partner institutions can be found in the new course approval documentation checklist on the Partnerships team webpages.

Category 3 – New Course Approval Documentation

In preparation for new Category 3 course approval, the course team is required to submit all relevant documentation to the Partnerships team in an agreed electronic format at least four weeks in advance of the new course approval event. For international partnerships, all documentation should be submitted in English. A longer timescale may be required where

¹ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

² <http://www.cvu.ac.uk/>

³ <http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/strategy/>

professional or accrediting bodies are involved. The new course documentation is sent to members of the new course approval panel at least two weeks in advance of the event.

For Category 3 approvals - Once the documentation has been received the Partnerships team will compile the new course approval pack and distribute this electronically to all panel members. A printed version can be provided to members of the panel upon request. The new course documentation will typically contain the following:

- Introduction and background to the partnership
- Agenda
- List of the panel members
- Guidance for panel members
- Supporting course documentation

4. New Course Approvals via Dean's Review (Category 2)

New course approvals (category 2) may take place via Dean's Review without a new course approval event. This may take place when, for example, a new pathway is introduced on an existing course, incorporating a significant number of modules that have already been validated for an established partner. For category 2 new course approvals, the Deputy Dean and Dean of Partnerships will review the documentation. The documentation will include external academic and where possible, employer input.

The Dean/Deputy Dean of Partnerships will review the documentation and decide, in liaison with the secretary, whether any points need further investigation with the course team.

When the Dean/Deputy Dean of Partnerships are content that all Areas of Consideration have been adequately addressed via the documentation The Dean/Deputy Dean of Partnerships will determine whether any conditions or recommendations are needed. The secretary will draft a new course approval report on behalf of the Dean.

The new course approval report will be submitted to the Partnerships Education Committee to request the Committee's recommendation to Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The authority for final approval rests with the Academic Quality and Standards Committee under delegated authority from Senate.

5. New Course Approval Panel (Category 3)

A new course approval panel comprises members who are able to judge the academic integrity of the course in relation to the University's regulations and the national standards expected of the type of award, and who can evaluate the course in terms of its structure and content. A variety of experience and views should be available among the panel members.

Members will normally be dissociated from the planning and development of the course, but within the panel there should be sufficient understanding of the subject matter and academic context to enable the panel to make a sound judgement. Aspects such as professional body accreditation and requirements will also be taken into account.

A typical new course approval panel will include an external academic subject expert and a University academic member of staff. Where relevant there will also be a student representative, representatives from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) and employer/industry representatives.

Panel membership is approved by the Dean of Partnerships and typically comprises:

- Dean or Deputy Dean of Partnerships, University of Essex, or nominee (chair)
- at least one academic subject expert from outside the University and its partner institutions

- one employer or professional body representative (where relevant, e.g. for vocational or professional programmes)
- at least one member external to the course team concerned but internal to the partner institution
- at least one member of the University's teaching staff, where possible from a cognate discipline area
- one member of the of the University's Quality and Development Team (i.e. the Partnerships Team, Quality and Academic Development Team, Essex Abroad or Essex Apprenticeships and Summer Schools)
- a member of the Partnerships Team (secretary)

The University is responsible for identifying the external academic expert(s) and internal members of the new course approval panel. The partner institution concerned is responsible for nominating all other members of the new course approval panel, including the employer and/or professional body representative. These nominations should be submitted to the partnerships team and are subject to approval by the Chair.

The following criteria are normally applied to the selection of external academics to be members of new course approval panels. The external academic panel member:

- should be a senior academic currently employed in a substantive role at a higher education institution with degree awarding powers;
- should have relevant subject expertise and current experience of delivering provision at the same level as the course(s) being validated;
- should not be a previous student or previous member of academic staff of the University or any collaborative provision partner institution, unless at least five years have elapsed between leaving the University or partner institution and the date of the new course approval event;
- should not be a current or previous external examiner employed by the University to oversee provision at the University or any partner institution, unless at least five years have elapsed between ceasing employment as an external examiner and the date of the new course approval event;
- should not have any conflict of interest arising from links with the University or relevant partner institution, or from personal or professional relationships with members of staff or students at the University or relevant partner institution;
- should, where more than one external academic is included on the panel, be from a different institution to any other external representative.

In the absence of one or more panel members on the day of the event, the decision as to whether the new course approval event should proceed is at the chair's discretion.

6. Duties of the panel (Category 3)

It is the duty of the new course approval panel to:

- critically examine the documentation and undertake discussion with the course team
- make a collective judgement as to the quality and standard of the courses to ensure that the award conferred by the University of Essex is of an equivalent standard to comparable awards conferred throughout higher education in the UK, and that UK threshold standards would be achieved
- review the quality of the learning opportunities and information that would be provided to students

- recommend to the University whether the proposed courses should be validated either conditionally or unconditionally, or should be rejected

The choice between whether to validate the course(s) with conditions and/or recommendations or reject for possible re-submission is based on:

- The magnitude of change required to reach an acceptability threshold
- The confidence the panel has that the course team will be able to deliver the changes to reach this threshold

Guidance notes for panel members can be found on the partnerships team webpages.

7. New Course Approval Event (Category 3)

A new course approval event normally takes place over a half or full day depending on the size and nature of the award(s) being validated. The chair will normally commence by:

- explaining the purpose of the event and confirming the course(s) to be considered, including exit awards and the mode(s) of study
- confirming the agenda
- introducing panel members and explaining new course approval procedures and the responsibilities of the panel
- identifying any collective or individual issues raised by panel members in relation to the course documentation

The agenda will normally include one or more blocks of time in which the panel may discuss the proposed course in detail with the course team, and in which the course team will have the opportunity to respond to points raised. The course team may choose to give a short presentation or introduction to the course. The chair is responsible for highlighting positive aspects of the course and raising issues in a constructive manner. The new course approval panel should conduct its discussions in the spirit of a 'critical friend'.

After debate, it is usual for the course team to depart to allow the panel to determine its recommendations. The chair normally commences this meeting of the panel by summarising the issues and the course team's responses and they will conclude the meeting by agreeing the outcome of the event with the panel before inviting the course team back for verbal feedback. A unanimous decision of the panel is required for the conclusion of the new course approval event.

During the concluding feedback session, the chair will announce the outcome of the event and notify the course team of any conditions and/or recommendations that must be addressed or considered. A deadline will be set by which conditions and/or recommendations must be met and/or responded to. The chair and secretary will liaise to ensure that finalised conditions and recommendations are circulated to the course team as soon as possible after the event.

The outcome of the event, including the context around any conditions or recommendations made by the panel, is formally recorded in the new course approval report, which is submitted to the University of Essex Partnerships Education Committee.

8. New Course Approval Report (Category 2 & 3)

The new course approval report summarises the Dean and the panel's conclusions and specifies any conditions and/or recommendations that are to be met or responded to before the course may commence. It is usual for the Dean/panel to specify the date by which the conditions and/or recommendations must be met or responded to and to recommend the period of approval, which for most courses is five years.

There are three possible outcomes from a new course approval:

- **Recommendation to validate the proposed courses**, in which case no further action by the course team is required
- **Rejection of the proposed courses**, in which case no further action is required
- **Recommendation to validate the proposed courses with conditions and/or recommendations**, in which case the course team must provide the chair with evidence, within any agreed timescales, that the conditions have been met, and must respond to any recommendations.
 - **Commendations** allow the panel a chance to congratulate the course team on aspects of good practice.
 - **Conditions** are those issues that must be addressed to the satisfaction of the new course approval panel, normally prior to a course's commencement.
 - **Recommendations** are those issues on which action is to be considered, possibly after the course has commenced.

In exceptional circumstances the report may recommend suspension of the new course approval process whilst the course team undertakes a major revision to the proposal.

9. Course team's response (Category 2 & 3)

The course team makes a formal response to the new course approval report, evidencing how specific conditions have been met and addressing any recommendations that were made. This response is submitted electronically to the Partnerships team for onward submission to the new course approval panel chair.

The formal response from the course team should include:

- amended documents (using tracked changes to highlight any amendments)
- a brief summary of how each condition has been met with reference to the amended documents
- how each recommendation has been considered and any action that will be taken
- any other appropriate evidence.

Any revisions and amendments to the documentation should be mapped and cross-referenced to the new documentation.

When the Chair of the new course approval panel is satisfied that all conditions have been met and that all recommendations have been responded to appropriately, they complete a sign-off sheet to confirm the new course approval decision which is issued to the Partner Institution.

10. Final approval (Category 2 and 3)

The new course approval report will be submitted to the Partnerships Education Committee to request the Committee's recommendation to Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The authority for final approval (Categories 2 and 3) rests with the Academic Quality and Standards Committee under delegated authority from Senate. The course(s) would usually be recommended to be validated for delivery at the partner institution for a given period of time (usually for five year), subject to any conditions contained in the report being met. The Partnerships Education Committee subsequently reports to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee when the conditions have been met.

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Document author	Rachel Frost, Senior Partnerships Manager
Document last reviewed by	Dawn Mott, Partnerships Manager (Development and Oversight)
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