

**GUIDE TO POLICY AND PROCEDURES RELATING TO THE ASSURANCE
AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF
TAUGHT PROGRAMMES OF STUDY (THE 'RED BOOK')**

VALIDATION HANDBOOK

**VALIDATION AND APPROVAL OF NEW AND MODIFIED
ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES LEADING TO UNIVERSITY
AND EXTERNAL AWARDS**

**Issued by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit
March 2009 edition**

**First approved by the Academic Board/Academic Quality and Development
Committee, January 2002**

http://www.bolton.ac.uk/aqas/PDF/Validation_Guide.pdf

CONTENTS

Preface

1. DEFINITION, PURPOSE AND OUTLINE OF VALIDATION

- 1.1 Definition of Validation
- 1.2 Validation Criteria
- 1.3 Validation Panels
 - 1.3.1 Panel responsibilities
 - 1.3.2 Composition of panels and roles of members
- 1.4 Validation Framework
 - 1.4.1 University awards
 - 1.4.2 Joint validation with professional bodies
 - 1.4.3 Professional body accreditation as a separate process
 - 1.4.4 External awards
 - 1.4.5 External examiners

2. VALIDATION PROCESS

- 2.1 Diagrammatic Overview of the Validation Process
- 2.2 Validation and Review Schedule
- 2.3 Preparation for Validation
 - 2.3.1 The validation planning meeting
 - 2.3.2 Programme variances
- 2.4 The Validation Event
- 2.5 The Outcomes of Validation
 - 2.5.1 Panel recommendations
 - 2.5.2 Summary event report
 - 2.5.3 Event report
 - 2.5.4 Administrative action following validation events and fulfillment of Conditions

3. DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

- 3.1 Submission of Documentation
- 3.2 Key Documentation
- 3.3 Programme Handbook (**See Important note on Page 1**)
- 3.4 Review and Revalidation
- 3.5 Supporting Documentation provided by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit
- 3.6 Definitive Documentation

4. MODIFICATIONS TO EXISTING PROGRAMMES AND OTHER ACADEMIC PROPOSALS

- 4.1 Purpose of Procedures
- 4.2 Types of Modification and Other Proposals Encompassed
- 4.3 Advice and Guidance
- 4.4 Documentation Requirements
 - 4.4.1 Type A proposals
 - 4.4.2 Type B, C and D changes
- 4.5 Approval Processes

ANNEXES

- A Edexcel requirements
- B Documentation requirements and approval processes for validation of proposed new programmes and major and minor modifications to existing programmes and modules
- C Validation criteria, the academic proposal document and an agenda for validation and approval events
- D Brief guide to the validation process
- E Example programme for validation events
- F Validation planning form
- G Programme variance request and approval form
- H Cover page for academic proposal documentation
- J The content of programme handbooks **(See Important note on Page 1)**
- K Guidelines for preparing programme specifications
- L Programme/module change request and approval for minor modifications to existing programmes and major or minor modifications to existing modules
- M External examiner comment form
- N Guidance notes on writing modules
- O Procedures and criteria for nomination and appointment of external members of validation and review panels
- P Documentation approval form (for School use)
- Q Staff guide to qualifications and levels descriptors
- R Module listing proforma
- S Staff curriculum vitae
- T Approval proforma for Definitive Programme Handbook and Module Validation Templates
- U Validation criteria summary checklist
- V An agenda for meetings with current and/or former students
- W Nomination form for external panel members
- X Programme Handbook summary checklist
- Y Claim for External Panel Members
- Z.2 Intention to Run/Not Run a Taught Programme
- Z.3 An agenda for meetings with employers
- Z.4 Validation of credits and awards in the University's Professional Development Framework

PREFACE

These guidelines describe the University's requirements for the validation and approval of new academic programmes and of modifications to existing academic programmes. They cover all programmes leading to awards or credit conferred by the University either in its own name or in that of an external awarding body.

Throughout these guidelines reference may be made to other publications concerning programme approval, monitoring and review which should be consulted and adhered to as appropriate.

These include the Academic Regulatory Framework and the 'Red Book' (Policies and Procedures Relating to the Assurance and Enhancement of the Academic Quality and Standards of Taught Programmes of Study).

All documents are available on the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit's web site. Your comments on any of them are welcome and should be addressed to the Dean of Academic Quality and Standards.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Reference is made throughout this document and in some of its annexes to the requirements regarding Programme Handbooks. For example, Annex J contains a list of headings to be used in Programme Handbooks, under which specific information about the programme is provided to readers. However some of these headings cover information which is common to all programmes in the University (eg in relation to Student Complaints, the Use of Unfair Means, Mitigating Circumstances etc) and therefore the information found under these headings will be common to all Programme Handbooks (apart from where local agreement has been reached with the Dean of Academic Quality and Standards for variation).

Where a School wishes to produce a School Handbook containing information common to programmes within that School and a Programme Handbook containing information specific to a particular programme, it is essential that the headings shown in Annex J (and the information to be included under each heading) are used and are divided appropriately between the two handbooks.

Any queries regarding this note should be addressed to the Head of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit.

PROGRAMME HANDBOOK CONTENTS

(See Important note on Page 1 of the Validation Handbook)

Welcome Statement

Introduction

- 1. PROGRAMME STRUCTURE AND CONTENT**
 - 1.1 Aims of the Programme
 - 1.2 Programme Features
 - 1.3 Programme Structure
 - 1.4 Levels of Study
 - 1.5 Professional Body or Professional/Subject Association Accreditation
 - 1.6 Module Specifications
- 2. SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS**
 - 2.1 Programme Management and Delivery
 - 2.2 Induction
 - 2.3 Programme Support
 - 2.4 Student Representatives and the Programme Committee
 - 2.5 Mitigating Circumstances
 - 2.6 Complaints
 - 2.7 Support for Part-time Students
 - 2.8 Students with Disabilities, Learning Difficulties or Specific Needs
- 3. ACCOMMODATION AND COMMUNICATION**
 - 3.1 Accommodation
 - 3.2 Opening Hours of Relevant Offices
 - 3.3 Communication Systems
 - 3.4 Contacting Staff
 - 3.5 Key Personnel
- 4. TEACHING AND LEARNING**
 - 4.1 Teaching and Learning Methods
 - 4.2 Personal Development Planning and Professional Skills
 - 4.3. Module Assessment and Methods
 - 4.4 Learning Opportunities Overseas
- 5. ASSESSEMENT**
 - 5.1 Assessment Strategy
 - 5.2 Assessment Criteria
 - 5.3 Guidelines for the Preparation and Submission of Assignments
 - 5.4 Procedures for Examinations
 - 5.5 Moderation of Marks
 - 5.6 Feedback on Assignments and Examinations
 - 5.7 Referencing
 - 5.8 Use of Unfair Means
 - 5.9 Publication of Results, Awards Ceremonies
 - 5.10 Appeals
- 6. ATTENDANCE AND WITHDRAWAL**
- 7. FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS**
- 8. HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE**
- 9. STUDENT DISCIPLINE**

Appendices

1. Programme Specification
2. Curriculum Outcomes Map
3. Curriculum Skills Map
4. Assessment Summary Table.

1. DEFINITION, PURPOSE AND OUTLINE OF VALIDATION

All proposed new programmes of study and proposed modifications to existing programmes, whether they lead to an award of the University or of an external awarding body, or to the award of credit in recognition of successful study, are required to undergo an academic approval process termed validation. Before they come to academic validation, proposed new programmes and certain types of modifications to existing programmes must have received permission to proceed via the Academic Development Approvals (ADA) process, as described in separate guidelines. Only when a programme has passed both of these tests will it be allowed to enrol students. The nature and scale of modifications to existing programmes which are encompassed by the validation procedures are described in Section 4 and summarised in Annex B.

1.1 Definition of Validation

Validation is a process which assures Senate that (a) the academic standards of University awards (or of external awards offered via programmes taught by the University) and (b) the quality of learning opportunities available to students following any programme offered by the University meet institutional and national expectations.

Validation involves scrutiny of a proposal by an informed and impartial validation panel of academic peers, including external representation where required. This scrutiny will be manifested and recorded through a 'validation event', consisting of critical dialogue and constructive debate, conducted with due professional courtesy but in a searching and challenging way, which aims to assure Senate that its expectations of academic standards and quality have been met.

1.2 Validation Criteria

The broad criteria against which academic proposals will be judged comprise the following; they will be applied to **all** proposed new programmes and **as appropriate** to proposed modifications to existing programmes, in the context of relevant institutional strategies, plans, policies and procedures.

- validity of the proposal, in terms of its academic rationale and intended learning outcomes, for the purposes which it is intended to serve;
- curriculum content embodying coherence, balance and progression and taking account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements, professional and/or accrediting body requirements, the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and the University's current strategic aims and policies;

- effective learning and teaching strategies and methods which match the curriculum content, intended learning outcomes and students' intake profile;
- sound assessment strategies and methods which effectively test student achievement of the intended learning outcomes to the appropriate standards, whilst affording opportunities for formative feedback to guide students' learning;
- appropriate criteria for entry, set in the context of an admissions policy reflecting the University's policy on widening access and participation;
- academic and pastoral support strategies and mechanisms which are matched to the likely needs of the intended student profile and to the nature of the programme;
- programme management and organisation arrangements which meet University requirements and facilitate student participation;
- human and physical resources of appropriate quality and quantity and which are subject to considered development and renewal over time;
- conformance of the curriculum with relevant statutory requirements and University policies in relation to eg. accessibility to students with special educational needs and disabilities, health and safety imperatives, equal opportunities issues;
- quality assurance procedures conforming to the University's framework and which are tailored to the programme and its students so as to provide effective means of monitoring, review and enhancement of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

Where the proposed programme or modification involves collaboration with a partner organisation and/or uses flexible and/or distributed learning (including e-learning), the panel scrutiny will incorporate further criteria, as described in the relevant publications, which should therefore be addressed in the Programme Handbook and accompanying proposal documentation. All proposals should pay heed to any pertinent sections of the QAA Code of Practice.

The detailed criteria for examining proposals are described in Annex C. **They should be adopted as an agenda by panels** and by programme teams in scrutinising and developing proposals respectively. Proforma comment sheets comprising the validation criteria and programme handbook contents, which may be useful for proposers and panels in briefly recording whether criteria have been

met, are reproduced as Annex U and X respectively of these guidelines.

1.3 Validation Panels

1.3.1 Panel responsibilities

For each academic proposal encompassed by the validation procedures a panel will be established with the following responsibilities:

- to ensure that the programme will fulfill the University's expectations of academic standards and quality and meet any national and external body requirements;
- to ensure that good practice in programme design and delivery is identified and commented upon;
- to ensure that students will have the opportunity to achieve the agreed learning outcomes of the programme;
- to ensure the academic validity of the proposal by exploring issues relating to: programme rationale, aims and intended learning outcomes, entry to the programme; programme structure and curriculum; learning and teaching; assessment; management and organisation; student guidance and support; learning resources; maintenance and enhancement of standards and quality;
- to recommend approval or non-approval of the proposal, normally to Senate (with conditions and/or recommendations as judged appropriate), which has the authority to accept the recommendation or to refer it back to the panel, with specific requirements to be met as Senate sees fit.

1.3.2 Composition of panels and roles of members

The minimum constitution of a validation panel for new programmes and for major modifications to existing programmes (see Annex B) will normally be:

- **The Chair**, who will be a senior member of University staff, external to the proposing School, with experience of the validation process, typically through prior membership or chairing of internal or external validation or review panels or comparable activities. The Chair's main responsibilities are to:
 - liaise with Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit staff ahead of the validation meeting to help

familiarise themselves with the broad nature of the proposal and to clarify any issues arising;

- attend the validation planning meeting with School representatives and the Dean of Academic Quality and Standards and/or Principal Quality Assurance Officer or nominated administrator and agree the programme for the validation event from the draft programme composed by the Principal Quality Assurance Officer;
 - chair the validation event, by guiding and directing the panel in their identification of issues to be explored and in their discussion with the programme team and with School/Centre/Subject management, as appropriate;
 - help to ensure conformance of the programme proposal and of the event proceedings to any relevant University policies, procedures, regulations and guidelines.
- **Internal Members.** Members of academic staff, external to the proposing School/Centre or Subject (in sufficient number to ensure adequate coverage of the proposal, normally two), with experience of the validation process, typically through prior membership of internal or external validation or review panels or comparable activities. The role of these members is to:
 - contribute knowledge and experience of quality and standards matters;
 - bring alternative perspectives and good practice to the validation process, stemming from the particular context within which they operate.
 - **External members** (nominated by the programme team). For entirely new programmes and for major reconfigurations of existing programmes, also encompassing collaborative proposals and flexible and distributed learning delivery (including e-learning) (types A1 – A4 in Annex B) there will normally be at least one external member to provide the necessary academic subject expertise and, where relevant, professional, industrial or other employment-related perspectives. A brief guide to the particular responsibilities of external panel members is contained within Annex D. In the case of proposals for a new award title, route, collaborative arrangement, or mode of delivery, through modifications to an existing programme (and for other proposals at the discretion of the Dean of Academic Quality and

Standards), an external member may be involved and/or comments on the proposal will be sought from the external examiner(s) for the existing programme and responded to by the programme team.

External members will not normally, over the five years prior to the academic year in which the event takes place, have had any kind of professional or personal association with the University or its staff which would, in the judgement of the Deputy Vice Chancellor, significantly compromise impartiality and objectivity. The nature of the relationship must be described on the nomination form before submitting it for approval (see Annex W).

- **Quality Assurance Administrator** from the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit, who will be Secretary to the event. Their role is to:
 - liaise with the Chair and others, prior to and over the course of the event, to ensure that the event operates efficiently and effectively;
 - provide advice and support to the panel on the protocols of validation;
 - produce the draft version of the event report normally within four weeks of the event and the draft summary event report within three working days of the event.

Other approvals panels may be constituted as the Standing Approvals Panel or Standing Panel for AP(E)L and CPD of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, with a membership and modus operandi which match the nature and scale of the proposal and which are determined by the Dean of Academic Quality and Standards.

1.4 Validation Framework

1.4.1 University awards

A typical validation event will normally take place over a single day, although large and complex programmes or schemes may require an extended event incorporating, for instance, some meetings during the preceding afternoon and/or evening. An example event programme is given in Annex E. During a series of meetings and visits the panel will explore with School/Centre, Subject, programme team, Library and Student Centre representatives, as appropriate, those issues which have been identified from the programme documentation or which arise during the course of the event.

Proposals subject to scrutiny via the Standing Approvals Panel or Standing Panel for AP(E)L and CPD of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee will undergo an approvals process which is appropriate to the nature and scale of the proposal and which is determined by the Dean of Academic Quality and Standards within prevailing procedures. Note that validation of credits and awards within the University's Professional Development Framework is subject to a separate set of procedures (see Annex Z.4 of Validation Handbook).

For some proposals, primarily types A7 – A9 in Annex B, a formal validation event will not be necessary. Documentation will still be prepared by the programme team in accordance with requirements and the proposal will be subject to approval according to prevailing procedures.

1.4.2 Joint validation with professional bodies

Programmes (to be) accredited by professional bodies are often subject to joint validation procedures with the relevant body. In such cases the panel composition and event programme will take account of their requirements, following any necessary liaison amongst the Principal Quality Assurance Officer, the programme/development leader and the professional body concerned.

1.4.3 Professional body accreditation as a separate process

Many professional bodies require production of separate documentation and/or a separate visit to the University to engage in their programme accreditation process. In either case, full consultation should be initiated by the School/Centre with the Principal Quality Assurance Officer on the documentation requirements and on any visit programme and proposed participants before agreement is reached with the body concerned. Such processes and events will be notified by the School/Centre concerned and included in the University's annual validation schedule. A copy of the written feedback on the visit and an action plan by the programme team in response to any points raised must be forwarded to the Principal Quality Assurance Officer to be received for comment and action by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee and the Senate (if required).

1.4.4 External awards

The validation process for programmes leading to external body awards will depend upon the precise requirements of the awarding body concerned. If the external award is intended to be achieved alongside or as part of a University award then the normal validation process will apply. Programmes leading solely to an external award will normally be scrutinised by the Standing Approvals Panel of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee prior to validation by the external body. Programmes leading to an external award are still subject to the University's Academic Development Approvals procedures and should therefore be included in School Annual Academic Development Plans. The format of the proposed documentation, the criteria to be adopted in scrutinising the proposal, the event programme and the panel composition, will all take account of any external body requirements. Those intending to propose a programme leading to an award of an external body should therefore consult the Principal Quality Assurance Officer at the earliest opportunity to discuss and agree the documentation requirements and validation process. Note that the University offers Edexcel/BTEC Higher National and customised short course awards under a licence agreement and that the normal validation procedures currently apply to these awards, subject to conformance with Edexcel's requirements, as described in Annex A.

1.4.5 External examiners

It is a University requirement that all programmes (including collaborative programmes) leading to University credits and/or awards have an external examiner appointed to them, normally at least nine months prior to the point at which the examiner will first need to become involved with any assessments for the programme. Programme/development leaders and validation panels should bear this in mind at the time of the validation event. External awards (other than those offered under licence from Edexcel) are normally subject to an external assessment and/or moderation regime stipulated by the external body concerned, including appointment by them of an external moderator to the programme.

2. VALIDATION PROCESS

2.1 Diagrammatic Overview of the Validation Process

Proposals enter the validation schedule after (a) approval in principle by the Executive Board through their consideration of School/Centre Annual Academic Development Plans and/or (b) approval by the Deputy Vice Chancellor at the stages of the Academic Development Approvals process which follow Executive Board approval. Note that all proposed new programmes, award titles, modes of study or attendance, collaborative arrangements and major modifications are subject to the planning approvals process just outlined. For a description of the nature and scale of proposals requiring validation or another type of approval process, see section 4 below and the detailed guidance in Annex B.

See ADA and Planning Guidelines for timescales

Proposal approved by Deputy Vice Chancellor on behalf of Executive; School/ Centre prepares validation documentation

Proposal included in validation schedule and provisional panel constituted by Principal Quality Assurance Officer

Principal Quality Assurance Officer solicits intended month for event from School/ Centre and confirms full panel membership

Validation planning meeting held for all proposed new programmes and for other proposals at the discretion of the Dean of Academic Quality and Standards

15 working days prior to event date

Following approval at School level and authorisation by the Director of School/Centre or nominee, Programme Team submits proposal documentation to Principal Quality Assurance Officer for circulation to panel

Validation event

normally 3 working days (and 4 weeks) post-event

Secretary to panel circulates summary event report (and event report) to panel Chair, programme/development leader, Subject Leader and nominated Principal Lecturer for comment on factual accuracy and agreement of any revisions

by specified deadline

Response to any conditions submitted by programme/development leader to panel Secretary and circulated as agreed by the panel

Approval confirmed by panel Chair to panel Secretary

Further action identified by panel

No response received. Failure to respond notified by panel Secretary to Principal Quality Assurance Officer who withholds the necessary administrative approvals

Panel Secretary informs Principal Quality Assurance Officer who undertakes necessary administration

Programme not approved

2 months post-approval or end of July, whichever is earlier

Definitive Programme Handbook submitted by programme/development leader

2.2 Validation and Review Schedule

Schools/Centres are asked by the Principal Quality Assurance Officer during the summer period to confirm all proposals for inclusion in the validation and review schedule for the following year. Proposals for new programmes and for most type A2 – A4 modifications to existing programmes (see Annex B) should normally already have received Executive approval where required and will in any case always be subject to the Academic Development Approvals (ADA) process. The Principal Quality Assurance Officer draws up the validation and review schedule for the year to include validation events, Standing Approvals Panels, internal subject/programme reviews and professional body accreditation processes. The schedule is updated regularly and presented to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (and Senate) for comment.

2.3 Preparation for Validation

Guidance on the validation process, criteria and documentation requirements are contained within these guidelines, which are available on the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit's website. To facilitate the planning of the event, a validation planning form (Annex F) may be used to collect basic information to assist in the preparations and is then normally reviewed at the validation planning meeting (see 2.3.1 below).

Programme teams, particularly programme/development leaders, should avail themselves of the ample written guidance on the preparation of proposals contained within the various publications cited in the preface to these guidelines. There are annual briefings for programme/development leaders, panel chairs and members involved in validation events and staff development sessions from time to time focussing on particular aspects of programme design and operation. Directors of Schools and nominated principal lecturers will be able to provide advice and support and Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit staff are available to assist in the development of the proposal, in addition to their involvement in any required validation planning meetings or other necessary consultations. The validation planning meeting itself will provide an opportunity to clarify any initial ambiguities and for all parties to gain a better understanding of the proposal, the documentation and validation requirements, and the intended process. The proposal is, however, owned by the programme team and the broader Subject and School proposing it.

2.3.1 The validation planning meeting

For all proposed new programmes and for other proposals at the discretion of the Dean of Academic Quality and Standards a validation planning meeting will be arranged, normally at least three months prior to the intended event date, to provide advice and guidance for the programme/development leader and nominated Principal Lecturer as appropriate, to enable the

panel/sub-committee Chair and Secretary to gather information to help them gain a better understanding of the proposal and to generally facilitate an effective and efficient validation event. A validation planning form (Annex F) may be reviewed at this meeting. The Dean of Academic Quality and Standards and/or the Principal Quality Assurance Officer or nominee will normally attend planning meetings. Where UK collaborative programmes are involved a representative from the relevant partner organisation will be invited to attend the meeting. The outline agenda for the planning meeting will encompass:

- nature of the proposal;
- main criteria to be addressed in the academic proposal document;
- production of documentation - format, content and timescales, School approval schedule;
- progress to date with development of the proposal;
- panel membership;
- date of event;
- draft event programme (compiled by Principal Quality Assurance Officer);
- variances from the University's academic and/or modular regulations and progress with their approval by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (see 2.3.2 below and Annex G).

Arising from the meeting will be an agreed set of decisions, actions, responsibilities and timescales, to be recorded by the Principal Quality Assurance Officer or nominee and distributed to those in attendance, plus any other relevant staff, and provided to the validation panel amongst the papers for the event.

2.3.2 Programme variances

At an early stage during the development of academic proposals the programme/development leader should complete a programme variance checklist (available in Annex G) and, if variances are identified, the form should be submitted to the Principal Quality Assurance Officer or nominee as Secretary to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee to enable approval for any variances to be sought from the Committee as deemed necessary by the Dean of Academic Quality and Standards. The outcome of applications for programme

variance will be communicated by the Secretary to the Committee to the relevant programme/development leader and nominated Principal Lecturer and, if relevant, to the Head of Student Data Management.

2.4 The Validation Event

Briefing papers and the proposal documentation will be distributed to the panel normally at least two weeks prior to the event. If the documentation is not clear, or as agreed, or raises issues which were not anticipated, a short briefing meeting between the panel Chair, programme/development leader, nominated Principal Lecturer and Dean of Academic Quality and Standards (if required) may be called for at this stage by any of the above individuals. The panel Secretary will arrange, attend and record the outcomes of this briefing meeting for distribution to the relevant parties.

The validation event will include those elements of the example programme (Annex E) which are appropriate for the proposal in hand. The draft event programme compiled by the Principal Quality Assurance Officer may have been amended at the validation planning meeting and/or at any briefing meeting.

Panel members will be asked to provide their list of issues to discuss with the development/programme team and School/Subject/Programme management, both in advance of the event and again at the beginning of the event. These issues will be assimilated into the agenda for the event, which will be ordered according to the list of validation criteria in Annex C of the Validation Handbook. Where there are other dimensions to be considered eg. in the form of a review of the existing programme, flexible and distributed learning materials (including e-learning), arrangements for collaborative partnerships, then these should be integrated within the agenda as appropriate.

The panel may meet with School/Subject/Programme management in addition to the programme team, may meet students and employers, and visit facilities, according to the nature and scale of the proposal under consideration. Agendas for meetings with students and employers are given in Annexes V and Z3 respectively of the Validation Handbook.

In all cases the panel, under the guidance of the Chair, should be focussed and concentrate on the validation criteria listed in Annex C and summarised in Annex U, in the context of the proposal before them.

Validation events should be conducted through a process of professional dialogue and constructive, critical and intellectually challenging debate, with due courtesy and respect for other points of view. To facilitate the effective operation of the event, panel members should pay due acknowledgement to the authority of the Chair.

The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit will make the arrangements for the event, including meeting rooms, catering, overnight accommodation for external panel members, etc.

The programme/development leader, Director of School and nominated Principal Lecturer may observe private panel meetings if they wish to do so and the panel agrees that they may.

2.5 The Outcomes of Validation

2.5.1 Panel decision

At the end of the validation event the panel will formulate its conclusions and a decision. These will be reported orally by the panel Chair to School/Subject representatives, who may seek clarification of any point but may not use the process to question the panel's judgement nor to re-open the debate.

Conclusions drawn by the panel will normally consist of a summative rationale for the final recommendation and a note of any features of the proposal considered sufficiently exemplary to be worthy of mention as good practice.

Decisions can be of the following form:

- to approve the proposal, with or without conditions and/or recommendations
- to approve the proposal for a fixed period, with or without conditions and/or recommendations
- to not approve the proposal, with detailed reasons.

All decisions are recommendations made to Senate, which receives the summary outcomes and conclusions from all validation and standing panel events. Senate may accept or not accept the panel's decision; in either case it may require further action by the panel, the programme team or others to address issues raised. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee receives the full report of each event and takes any action necessary to address issues raised by panels and to improve the validation process, with the ultimate aim of enhancing the academic standards and quality of the University's programmes of study.

Only programmes in current approval may enrol students. Continuing approval is contingent upon fulfillment of the University's quality assurance requirements ie. engaging in the annual monitoring process, participating in quinquennial subject reviews and in any other programme-related review and appraisal exercises. Fixed term approval may be appropriate

where the panel feels that a further review and re-validation is necessary to ensure that concerns raised have been addressed, or to align review periods for programmes falling into the same subject area.

Conditions are defined as points of action which must be fulfilled within a timescale set by the panel and signed off by the panel Chair as having been satisfactorily met. Conditions should be specified in sufficient detail by the panel to enable the programme/development leader or others to be able to respond appropriately. In their response the programme/development leader or others should include a paper explaining how each condition has been met and referencing any (existing and/or revised/additional) documentation accordingly. Conditions are classified as either 'academic' or 'documentary'. Until prior academic conditions have been approved as met by whatever means the panel decides, then the programme is not approved; no students can be enrolled on it and it cannot be delivered. Such conditions should therefore be relatively infrequent as they would involve substantive amendments to elements of the proposal bearing upon academic standards and quality issues. Panels should thus avoid introducing substantive academic conditions which have not previously been discussed with the programme team during the event. Documentary conditions would not normally preclude approval and delivery of the programme and the deadline set for their fulfillment will normally reflect this position. Such conditions might encompass amendments to the detail of the written description of the programme to enhance clarity and consistency of meaning or presentation. The detail of such conditions need not be presented as part of the event report but may be the subject of a separate note to programme proposers arising from panel discussions. Proposers should note that there are particular administrative requirements following most validation events, notably submission of the final ADA3 and module listing forms, without which no course number or identity can be allocated, no students can be enrolled or registered for modules, and allocation of funding to the School will therefore be impossible. The ongoing position regarding fulfillment of conditions will be monitored by the panel Secretary and reported for all events to the Secretary of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee for consideration by the Committee.

Recommendations are issues which the panel considers the programme team or others should consider further. Although it is not necessary to pursue them in order to secure approval for the proposal, a response to any recommendations is required by the deadline stipulated by the Panel and subsequent subject/programme review and/or validation panels may require evidence that the recommendations have been considered and acted upon, or reasons provided for not following the

recommendations, as judged appropriate by the programme team.

2.5.2 **Summary event report**

Within three working days of the event the panel Secretary will send a summary report of the conclusions and recommendations (including any conditions/recommendations and timescales for action) to the panel Chair for comment on/amendment of factual accuracy. The approved summary report will then be distributed to School representatives and the Principal Quality Assurance Officer. The summary event report will be considered by Senate, whose receipt of the panel's recommendation will constitute University approval of the same, unless Senate decides otherwise.

The summary report will normally contain:

- the award title(s), programme title(s), modes of study (single, joint, etc), modes of attendance, type of collaborative arrangement etc. of the programme(s) which were the subject of the proposal;
- the decision to be forwarded to Senate;
- any conditions and/or recommendations, the date for submission of a response to the panel Secretary and any particular requirements relating to the method of response;
- any good practice the panel wishes to highlight;
- the agreed means by which the panel will consider the response;
- the date(s) for production of the definitive version of the Programme Handbook, following approval of the response to any conditions and/or recommendations.

2.5.3 **Event report**

A complete report of the event should be produced normally within four weeks of the event. The draft report will be distributed to the panel Chair for comment, following which it is distributed to the other panel members, the programme/development leader, Director of School and nominated Principal Lecturer for comment on/amendment of factual accuracy. The approved event report will then be re-distributed to the above School representatives and will be considered by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee at its next available meeting. The Committee will identify any actions, responsibilities and timescales arising from its analysis of the report which will

contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of the standards and quality of the University's academic programmes.

2.5.4 Administrative action following validation events and fulfillment of conditions

The Principal Quality Assurance Officer will send notification of validation outcomes, for administrative action, to the Heads of Student Data Management, Recruitment and Admissions and the Library and, as appropriate, to the relevant administrative officers in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit concerned with taught programmes.

Following authorisation by the panel Chair that any conditions of approval have been met (see Annex T) the panel Secretary will notify the Principal Quality Assurance Officer, who will create or amend the definitive course record based on the information given in the final, signed ADA3 form received from the School, including where necessary the allocation of a computerised course number which will permit students to be enrolled on the programme.

The Director of School, Principal Lecturer i/c Quality, School Manager and the Heads and nominated staff in Student Data Management, Recruitment and Admissions and the Library will be informed of final approval by the Principal Quality Assurance Officer via distribution of a printed copy of the computerised course record.

Fulfillment of conditions will also necessitate amendment of the running record of validation and review outcomes by the Principal Quality Assurance Officer and will be reported via presentation of the outcomes listing to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. If the programme leads to the award of an external body then the Principal Quality Assurance Officer will take any action necessary to inform that body of programme approval/amendment, as required by the body concerned.

When received from the School the final ADA3 form will be copied to the Head and nominated staff in Student Data Management and to nominated staff in Recruitment and Admissions, whilst the final module listing form will be copied to nominated staff in Student Data Management. Both forms will have been checked by staff in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit to ensure that they reflect what was approved through validation.

3. DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

3.1 Submission of Documentation

Annex B defines the various categories of academic proposals and major modifications (types A1-A6) which are normally subject to validation and standing panel scrutiny. The programme/development leader is responsible for the production of the documentation required for the validation event. The number of copies required will normally be notified by the Principal Quality Assurance Officer in the planning meeting. **All documentation must have been subject to the specified approval processes at course committee/development team and School levels** (see Annexes B and P) and be accompanied by a Documentation Approval proforma (Annex P), duly signed by the required authorities at one or more of the specified levels (see Annex B). Documentation must be received by the panel Secretary no less than fifteen working days prior to the event. Working days normally exclude those days **not** designated as such in the University's calendar. However, discretion is given to the Dean of Academic Quality and Standards, in consultation with the panel Chair, to allow some leeway in documentation submission deadlines where an event falls within fifteen working days of the start of an academic term.

3.2 Key Documentation

The key documentation to be produced by the programme development team is described in Annex C of the Validation Handbook, along with the detailed validation criteria against which proposals are judged. The precise requirements for each validation will be agreed at the validation planning meeting held in advance of the event (see 2.3.1). Note that requirements for type A6 proposals are governed by the University's Professional Development Framework (see Annex Z4).

Note that where a proposed new programme or modification involves collaborative arrangements with a UK or overseas organisation and/or flexible and distributed learning delivery (including e-learning), then there are additional dimensions to be addressed. The additional dimensions are explained in those parts of the 'Red Book' dealing specifically with these types of programme whilst relevant additional documentation is referred to in Annex C and/or in Annex B to these guidelines.

3.3 Programme Handbook

The Programme Handbook provides all key information for students and should be written according to the headings which are expanded upon in Annex J. The Handbook represents the description of the programme, as presented for validation and subsequently provided to students, incorporating the Programme and Module Specifications. It is the contents of the Programme Handbook that the validation process will focus upon and the Handbook will ultimately become the description of the programme as validated.

3.4 Review and Validation

Programmes which come to (re)validation having been given limited approval at the previous event, pathway upgrades, and certain major modifications to existing programmes will normally require the submission of a review as part of the normal validation documentation described in Annex C. This review should provide evidence and reflection on the design, delivery and outcomes of the programme since it was last approved.

The review should address the validation criteria given in Annex C and as far as possible follow the structure given there. It should therefore encompass a review of one or more of: rationale, aims and learning outcomes, entry, curricula, learning and teaching, assessment and achievement, student support, management and organisation, learning resources, maintenance and enhancement of standards and quality – as dictated by the rationale for the modifications or the reasons for requiring a review specified by the original validation panel. Pathway upgrades will normally require all of these aspects to be reflected upon to help justify the enhancement eg. to single honours.

The type of evidence which should be drawn upon to inform the review will include as appropriate:

- External examiner reports
- Annual monitoring reports
- Professional body reports
- Student satisfaction survey outcomes
- Module questionnaire/review results
- Course committee minutes
- Statistical data on student intakes, progression, achievement, destinations.

The review should be an evaluative self assessment which is incisive, purposeful and analytical, focussing solely on the relevant major issues pertaining to the limited approval, upgrade, or modification of the programme. It should contain text and statistical evidence and where relevant also provide the rationale for any modifications, or the justification for any upgrade or continuing validation following limited approval. It should acknowledge both strengths and areas for development and refer to action taken both to build upon the former and to address the latter. In the case of pathway upgrades and major modifications, it is anticipated that the review element will be contained within the ADA1 submitted to seek planning approval. In the case of reviews arising from limited approvals a separate review paper should be submitted as part of the proposal documentation.

3.5 **Supporting Documentation provided by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit**

The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit will prepare a briefing folder to accompany the programme team's submission, comprising the following:

- briefing papers, including information on the University's undergraduate or postgraduate modular framework, the purpose of the event, the context of the proposal, any professional body requirements relevant to the proposal, identification of any key issues for the panel's attention;
- relevant extracts from the Validation Handbook, to include the criteria for validation and validation event agenda, panel responsibilities, decisions that can be made;
- panel membership;
- event programme;
- notes of the planning meeting;
- reports of the last relevant validation or review activity;
- additional guidance as appropriate eg. relating to collaborative provision, flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning), qualification benchmarks, Professional Development Framework.

The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit will ensure the availability of other documents at the event eg. academic regulations, modular regulations, as required.

3.6 **Definitive Documentation**

The final documentary outcomes following fulfillment of any conditions imposed by the panel will be the:

- Definitive Programme Handbook.

This document will incorporate any changes required by the panel either arising from discussion at the event or as a result of fulfilling any conditions of approval. The panel Chair will sign the authorisation to release the document for publication (see Annex T). The Handbook (along with the event report) will form the definitive description of the programme and the panel's interactions with the programme team and others leading to its conclusions and recommendation.

Copies of the Definitive Programme Handbook (including module specifications) and the Programme Specification Document must be

submitted to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit within two months of the validation event or of the date of confirmation being sent to the programme/development leader that any conditions of approval have been satisfactorily met, or by the end of July (whichever is earlier).

4. MODIFICATIONS TO EXISTING PROGRAMMES AND OTHER ACADEMIC PROPOSALS

4.1 Purpose of Procedures

The University aims to facilitate curriculum development and to support the rapid response of its academic and professional portfolio to the needs of students, industry, commerce and the public sector. The procedures for making modifications to existing programmes of study are designed to help achieve these aims whilst nevertheless ensuring the maintenance and enhancement of the academic standards and quality of University awards.

4.2 Types of Modification and Other Proposals Encompassed

As a general rule, modifications and proposals will normally belong to one (or more) of the categories which are shown in Annex B along with a complete description of the documentation requirements, Programme-, School - and University-level approval processes and administrative tasks following approval.

4.3 Advice and Guidance

Because of the range of possible changes, proposers should seek advice and guidance at an early stage on the precise requirements in particular cases. Such advice and guidance may sought from the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit.

Modifications to existing programmes will normally take effect from the academic year following that in which they were approved, although in exceptional cases they may take effect from the semester following approval in the same academic year.

Modifications will normally arise as a result of module review and feedback, course committee meetings, student satisfaction questionnaires, external examiner or professional body input, examination board recommendations or other elements of the annual monitoring or internal review processes.

Currently enrolled students who will be affected by modifications must be informed of the changes in writing and should have been consulted prior to the proposal of any change by the most appropriate means given the nature, scale and impact of the change. Students are not required to consent to changes as it is a general condition of admission to a programme of study at the University that modifications may be made. However, proposers should take care that changes are well-conceived, justifiable and contribute towards maintaining and enhancing academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Should a programme be the subject of a series of proposed modifications within its current approval period which together materially affect more than fifty percent of the programme as experienced by students, then the programme will normally be subject to revalidation. Such cumulative change is monitored by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit.

Whilst Course Committees and School Boards of Study (or their Chairs) must approve modifications prior to their submission, it is important to note that no change can be considered as validated until the University-level process is completed.

4.4 Documentation Requirements (see Annex B and Annex C)

4.4.1 Type A (major) modifications

Major modifications of types A2 – A5 normally require a form ADA1 and/or ADA2 form to seek prior planning approval. Thereafter, documentation requirements are noted in Annex B and Annex C. Requirements for type A6 proposals are governed by the University's Professional Development Framework. Types A7 – A9 modifications have their own specific requirements as described in Annex B.

4.4.2 Type B, C and D (minor) modifications

The classification of modifications as minor follows the descriptions in Annex B. There is a single proforma, reproduced in Annex L, to assist in the presentation of minor modifications to existing programmes. Similarly, to facilitate obtaining external comment there is a request form in Annex M which should be used to provide such comment. Additional documentation normally includes **(both the current and the proposed revised or new)** module specifications (see Annex N), proposed revised programme specification document (Annex K) and any minutes of Course Committee or School Board of Study/Quality Committee discussion and approval. Any further information which will assist the approval process should be included as supporting documentation.

4.5 Approval Processes

The type of approval process involved for modifications depends upon the nature and scale of the changes proposed, as detailed in Annex B. In all cases, however, approval is considered to be equivalent to validation of the changes and whichever group or individual is responsible for considering a proposal, they will employ the relevant criteria, as appropriate to the nature and scale of the changes, selected from the criteria set out for validation given in Annex C. They will also have at their disposal the recommendations listed in section 2.5.1 of these guidelines. The validation criteria to be addressed in any proposal will therefore need to be similarly considered by the proposers.

Because many proposed modifications often encompass more than one type of change it is the responsibility of proposers to seek prior advice and guidance on the nature of the approval process by consulting with the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit.