

E APPROVALS PROCESS FOR SQA AWARDS

Purpose

- E.1 These approval structures determine the SQA provision that will be included within the university's HE curriculum. University approval in setting its SQA curriculum has primacy over all SQA automatic approval decisions. The university's approval process addresses quality aspects additional to SQA's approval criteria. Furthermore it holds fully devolved approval powers from SQA to offer specific SQA awards. Through its internal procedures the university approves itself to offer devolvable SQA awards, and has established quality assurance arrangements to secure SQA non-devolvable awards. Paragraph E.53 provides the procedure for seeking approval for SQA non-devolvable awards.
- E.2 The university's approval procedure is primarily designed to meet its needs in terms of quality criteria, curriculum coherence and implementation of faculty agreed SQA programme frameworks. The procedure reflects its regional structure and meets both internal and external approval criteria. Faculty Boards (FB) consider all approval applications. Course applications that are either new to the university portfolio, or replacement awards with significant development requirements, will not be considered after the final FB in May. This is to ensure that quality assurance activity is completed satisfactorily prior to delivery in the following session.

Scope

- E.3 This procedure applies to the following types of approval activity for SQA provision at SCQF level 7 and above:
- curriculum that is new to the portfolio, eg a validated group award not currently offered anywhere in the partnership. The process could involve a single site or multiple sites
 - awards new to an academic partner but already offered elsewhere in the network. This process would usually fall into the single-site category but could be multi-site where additional academic partners wish to seek approval via a multi-site event
 - replacement programmes: awards revised as part of SQA updating. This process could involve a single site or multiple sites. All revised or replacement programmes, including those with SQA automatic approval require to be internally approved prior to commencement. In those cases where a replacement award gives full or significant amounts of credit transfer from the previous award, a simplified approval process will apply (see paragraph F.50)
 - approval of single units – either as stand-alone units or as part of a group award. This could involve single sites or multiple sites.

Definitions

- E.4 In relation to SQA awards, there is a very clear distinction between the terms 'validation' and 'approval'.
- E.5 'Validation' addresses the nature of the award itself. It focuses on the justification, coherence and content of the new award, ie it is award-specific. The validation of SQA awards is primarily dealt with by SQA and all HN units are validated by SQA.

- E.6 'Approval' addresses the capacity of the institution to offer a unit/group award. It focuses on the institution's ability to deliver and manage the award successfully. The university as a single SQA centre uses its FB structure and its Partnership Planning Forum (PPF) to approve and confirm all SQA HE curriculum approval proposals.

Responsibilities

- E.7 The SQA co-ordinator has overall responsibility for ensuring the appropriate implementation and updating of this approval procedure and for reporting on compliance in relation to internal and external reviews. The SQA co-ordinator acts as centre contact between the university and SQA for all approval matters.
- E.8 Curriculum approval is a key responsibility of FBs and PPF. Academic partner staff (curriculum and quality) work closely with SNLs and faculty officers (FO) and each holds a responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the procedure in order to submit approval proposals to FBs.
- E.9 The co-ordinating approval partner (CAP) arranges the organisation of the approval event. The CAP will collate the necessary documentation, confirm the date, establish the panel and prepare the report. The panel chair shall ensure that the conditions (if any) are duly signed-off by the approval panel before appropriate forms are forwarded, normally by the CAP quality manager to the SQA co-ordinator.

Procedure

- E.10 The procedure to gain approval to offer a specific award falls into two distinct stages.
- E.11 **Stage One:** is the initial planning stage and essentially covers planning approval to develop the award.
- E.12 **Stage Two:** involves the quality assurance aspect of approval. It addresses the quality checks to ensure readiness and ability to deliver and also provides the opportunity to identify areas where resources or good practice can be shared (quality enhancement).

Stage one: planning approval

- E.13 Proposals for new courses, or the identification of the need to replace an existing course may be initiated within an academic partner, subject network or faculty. Informal discussion and partner consultation via the FO must take place at an early stage. This consultation should be prior to formal FB approval and should include agreement to implement a framework (if already approved by FB) and include approval of a new framework if not yet faculty-approved ie for a new award. At this early discussion stage, the AP1 document is considered as a draft. It is submitted through the FO for initial consideration by the appropriate subject network committee (SNC). Dates of SNC and FB meetings are available from the FO.
- E.14 Provisional agreement about participating partners and preliminary discussions around CAP identification (if applicable) should take place at the subject network committee. The responsibilities of the CAP are described in paragraph F.13.
- E.15 The FO of the relevant SNC is responsible for informing other academic partner quality managers when proposals are to be discussed so that all potential participating partners are aware of the proposed developments. The FO will identify the timescale within which quality

managers should indicate their intention of being involved so that a coordinated multi-site approach can be achieved.

- E.16 If more than one academic partner is involved, the approval will follow the multi-site model and a CAP should be established.
- E.17 If, after the consultation described above, only one academic partner is involved (single site), the AP1 form should be finalised and approval secured within the academic partner. An AP1 duly signed-off by the principal or designated nominee shall then be submitted by the quality manager to the FO.
- E.18 After the initial discussion at the SNC and where a multi-site activity applies, the course team in each participating partner is responsible for finalising the Programme Development Approval form (AP1). The completed forms shall be duly signed-off by the principal or designated nominee before being submitted by the quality manager to the FO.
- E.19 It is important to note that the Stage One planning approval at partner level is required for all proposals, ie for 'replacement' programmes as well as for completely new provision. The type of proposal (new or replacement) should be identified clearly on the AP1 form to ensure that the appropriate procedure is followed during Stage Two. The quality manager in each partner will provide advice and guidance.
- E.20 The FO shall acknowledge receipt of each AP1 to the quality manager. This acknowledgement is required to ensure that the submitted AP1 has been sent from the authorised post-holder (quality manager).
- E.21 The FO, in consultation with the dean or his nominee shall determine whether the AP1s are complete and if these are able to be considered directly by the FB, or alternatively if more development is required through the SNC. The FO shall arrange for the completed AP1 forms to be considered by the FB.
- E.22 When an AP1 for new or replacement provision comes to the FB for approval it should include an accompanying proposed framework. The framework will specify the selected mandatory and optional units to be offered within the award across delivering academic partners. The list will be extracted from those available within the SQA arrangements document. Once approved by FB the agreed framework will be published on the intranet and any changes to it will require to be approved via a faculty modification process. The agreed framework will be determined in consultation with all delivering academic partners.
- E.23 Academic partners seeking AP1 approval to offer an award already approved within the university should confirm that they will adhere to the approved framework. If the academic partner wishes to propose any modification to the agreed framework this should be discussed in the first instance with the SNL. An appendix to the AP1 should detail a rationale for the proposed amendment.
- E.24 If the FB has concerns about specific elements of AP1 proposals, the matter shall be referred back to the academic partner quality manager for further dialogue.

- E.25 When the proposal has been approved by the FB (including use of Chair's Action for items following within F.26), the FO shall seek confirmation and agreement from the CAP quality manager (provisionally agreed at F.18 above) that he/she is prepared to undertake the co-ordination of the approval event. A CAP must be established before the proposal proceeds to Stage Two.
- E.26 If the proposal is for provision which is entirely new, it must be considered by PPF. The CAP will have responsibility for compiling an AP1 (a composite AP1 when more than one partner is involved) and sending this to the FO who will arrange for it to be considered at the next PPF meeting. The AP1 will also be submitted by the FO to Admissions and Marketing for early notification of possible prospectus changes.
- E.27 It is important to note that if the proposal is for 'replacement' provision or for the approval of an additional partner, formal approval consideration by PPF is not required as the award under discussion will already be approved within the curriculum portfolio. The AP should however ensure that the provision in this (and in the following paragraph) is included within its funded numbers plan and agreed by PPF.
- E.28 Formal consideration by PPF is not required where the approval request relates to a group award such as a PDA at levels 7 or 8 which comprise units already approved as part of an HNC/D. (This applies to a number of PDAs where the award is nested within the normal award framework.) In this circumstance the quality manager shall submit an AP1 to the FO and request Faculty approval. Following a positive outcome, the appropriate SQA form for group award approval will be forwarded by the quality manager to the FO and to the SQA co-ordinator who will notify SQA.
- E.29 PPF approval outcomes shall be communicated to FOs who will inform quality managers of all participating academic partners. The FO shall also inform Admissions and Marketing when new provision or replacement provision has been approved so that the prospectus can be updated.
- E.30 Where a partner (or partners) is seeking approval for an award that is already approved in other partners, the AP1 form should be formally approved within the academic partner(s) as described above and then sent to the FO for consideration by the Faculty Executive (FE). Following a positive FE outcome, the single-site or multi-site approval process should be followed.

Stage two: quality assurance process (Single-Site)

- E.31 The form AP2 is primarily used in order to consider the proposal against the SQA's published approval criteria. The form consists of two sections – one for generic information about the programme itself and the other for information specific to each contributing partner.
- E.32 The quality manager in the academic partner shall negotiate with the course team to agree the dates for the submission of the AP2 and will liaise with the FO on the date for the approval event as this will involve Faculty attendance, usually at SNL level.
- E.33 When the date has been agreed, the quality manager working with the FO shall establish a panel to consider the proposal at the approval event following panel requirements.

- E.34 For a single-site approval event, the panel shall consist of (as a minimum):
- The chair of the APQC or nominee as the chair of the panel
 - The dean of the faculty from which the proposal has originated (or their nominee)
 - Two other members of staff not connected to the programme, from within the academic partner.
- E.35 Approval panels shall use current SQA approval criteria as their main point of reference for assessing the proposal. In addition, other curriculum considerations and learning and teaching approaches shall also be considered along with opportunities for identifying and sharing good practice.
- E.36 Approval panels can make one of three decisions:
- The programme is approved without conditions
 - Approval is withheld until conditions are met
 - The programme is not approved.
- E.37 Any of the decisions listed above may be accompanied by recommendations if considered appropriate by the panel.
- E.38 The outcome of the approval event is recorded on Form AP4. When the conditions are met and the programme is approved this is then signed-off by the chair of the event. The FO shall receive a copy of the AP4 for faculty records. The qualification approval application shall be completed by the quality manager and sent, together with the AP4, to the SQA co-ordinator for completion of the SQA submission process. Quality manager(s) and SNL shall be advised by the SQA administrator when the SQA approval is fully processed and showing on SQA net. Approval records for academic partners shall be updated by student records office (SRO).
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- E.39 Further amendments and guidance on the operation of approval events, both single- and multi-site, will be reviewed annually, based on best practice in implementing the procedure.

Stage two: quality assurance process (Multi-Site)

- E.40 The form AP2 is used in order to ensure the proposal is considered against SQA's current approval criteria. The first section of the form (generic information) is completed by the team from the Co-ordinating Approval Partner (CAP) and is then circulated to and agreed by all other participating partners. The second section of the form is for information specific to each partner and shall be completed separately by each partner.
- E.41 The quality manager in the CAP shall communicate with the quality managers of the other participating partners to agree the dates for the submission of the AP2 and the approval event itself. Each quality manager is responsible for liaising with the course teams in their own college during this process.
- E.42 When the dates have been agreed, the quality manager in the CAP in communication with the FO shall establish a panel to consider the proposal at the approval event.
- E.43 For a multi-site approval event, the panel consists of (as a minimum):
- The chair of the CAP APQC, or nominee as the chair of the panel
 - The dean of the faculty from which the proposal has originated (or their nominee)

- At least one member of staff not connected to the programme, from each participating academic partner.
- E.44 The quality manager in the CAP in communication with the FO secures approval on the constitution of the panel from the quality managers in all participating partners and receives and collates the AP2 information and organises the approval event. The CAP responsibilities in this context are focussed on co-ordinating the approval process, ie following up on conditions and dealing with other matters until approval has been confirmed.
- E.45 Approval panels use current SQA approval criteria as a key point of reference for assessing the proposal. In addition, institutional curriculum considerations, learning and teaching approaches and opportunities for identifying and sharing good practice will also be considered.
- E.46 Approval panels can make one of three decisions:
- The programme is approved without conditions
 - Approval is withheld until conditions are met
 - The programme is not approved.
- E.47 Any of the decisions listed above may be accompanied by recommendations if considered appropriate by the panel.
- E.48 The outcome of the approval event is recorded on Form AP4. The completed AP4 is then normally circulated by the quality manager in the CAP to the quality managers in all the other participating academic partners, for forwarding to the appropriate course teams.
- E.49 When the conditions are met and the programme is approved, the SQA qualification approval application is completed by the quality manager in the CAP and sent, together with the AP4, to the SQA co-ordinator for onward transmission to SQA. The FO shall receive a copy of the AP4 from the CAP for faculty records. Quality manager(s) and SNL shall be advised by the SQA administrator when the SQA approval is fully processed and showing on SQA net. Following this, approval records for academic partners shall be updated by student records office (SRO).
- E.50 In cases where replacement awards give full or significant amounts (normally over 75%) of credit transfer from a previous held award, the following minor modification approval route will apply. A collective AP1 for all academic partners involved in delivery of the award will be submitted to FB and a CAP will be appointed. Individual academic partners will take forward QA checks, advise the CAP on outcomes and submit their AP4 forms to the SQA Coordinator. The CAP will submit an update to FB providing confirmation that all relevant academic partners have completed the required process.

Approval of individual units

- E.51 Individual units are initially approved for quality assurance purposes within each academic partner using form AP3 and this is then forwarded to the FO for FB approval. The form is designed to ensure that resources, staffing, assessments, master folder etc, are in place ready for delivery. There is an opportunity for the originator to indicate the extent and potential for networking of assessments, teaching materials or delivery.

- E.52 When the individual unit(s) has been approved by FB, the quality manager completes the qualification approval application form and sends it to the SQA co-ordinator together with the completed AP3. Following transmission to SQA and confirmation of approval from SQA, the academic partner will receive confirmation of this from the SQA co-ordinator and records will be updated.

Approval of SVQs and other non-devolvable awards

- E.53 SVQ awards at levels 4 and 5 normally come under SQA's non-devolvable approval category, as do some PDAs particularly those above SCQF level 8. SVQs usually have additional requirements set by SQA such as compliance with a specific assessment strategy. Forms are available on the SQA and university's websites in order to provide SQA with the necessary support information on all non-devolvable awards.
- E.54 The university approval procedure for SVQs and other non-devolvable awards is as in the proceeding paragraphs for stage 1/stage 2 devolvable awards and involves completion of forms AP1 and AP2. Some additional information is required from the academic partner beyond the standard AP1. The procedure above is, therefore, in most respects the same but with specific additional information from the academic partner available to FB's for their scrutiny. FB will carefully consider the level of the group award and also its constituent units to confirm that the award fully satisfies the university's higher education criteria.
- E.55 SQA's response to the approval application will be either to complete the approval process or to generate an approval visit to the academic partner(s), usually from a specialist SQA external verifier. In the latter case SQA approval will be dependent on the outcome of the approval report submitted by the external verifier following a visit. The SQA co-ordinator will advise designated staff in academic partners and faculty on visit arrangements and visit outcomes and will ensure that following approval completion of approval records are updated.

Approval forms for SQA provision

- AP1 First stage approval request (Planning and Development Consent)
AP2 Submission for approval (Quality Assurance and Enhancement)
AP3 Request for approval of individual units
AP4 Report of approval event.
Qualification approval application (SQA form) – listed on intranet

STAGE 1
PLANNING APPROVAL

