

VALIDATION AND APPROVALS COMMITTEE
BRIEFING AND GUIDELINE DOCUMENT
Issue 6

Purpose

This document should be read in conjunction with the Validation and Approvals Procedure. Its purpose is to provide a guide for Validation and Approvals Committee members to facilitate their decision making when considering proposals for new or revalidating programmes, new or amended modules or component parts of programmes, and when considering proposals to recognise a progression or collaborative agreement with another institution.

When questioning the rigour and integrity of programme design proposals, this guide will assist in the testing and questioning process to ensure the appropriateness and relevance of the programme being considered.

Introduction

Programmes should be designed to enable students to develop appropriate skills, knowledge and abilities to enable them to compete, with advantage, for employment within the sectors that UCB serves. Employability is the key characteristic that UCB aims to offer successful students. This will enable programmes to contribute to the achievement of UCB's mission.

UCB is committed to widening participation. Therefore,

- programme development should adopt an all-inclusive philosophy to further expand the range of learning opportunities available to students with specific and varied learning needs.
- programme development should explore part-time, flexible and distance education and training possibilities in order to meet the needs of potential students who cannot attend in a traditional full-time mode.

Because UCB attracts a significant proportion of mature students and students from backgrounds with little or no experience of higher education, programme design and plans for delivery should respond to the concerns and needs of such students.

Programme Design

A balance should be struck between long-term and generic work-related competences and specific knowledge and skills relevant to immediate employment.

Programme design should be informed by planned development of the academic skills and attributes necessary to perform successfully at the final stage.

Programme design should include development and assessment of the skills necessary to perform successfully in subsequent employment.

In particular, design elements should address,

- The requirements of the UK Quality Code. In particular, it should be consistent with the Framework for HE Qualifications (FHEQ) and the relevant subject benchmarks provided by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)
- Vocational knowledge, skills and experience and the delivery of module content in context
- The specific transferable skills/graduate attributes at the levels necessary for success in the target employment sector
- The wider transferable skills/graduate attributes in working with others, improving own learning and performance, problem solving and creativity at the levels necessary for success in employment in the target sector
- Where appropriate, option modules should allow development of individual areas of interest reflecting different sub-sections of the sector and student preference

The Validation and Approvals Committee should consider exploring the following themes where necessary:

- Is there a proven student market or evidence of a potential market?
- Are the aims of the programme expressed in terms of meeting the needs of the labour market in the specific industry sector that will be the focus of study?
- Is the design of the programme consistent with the requirements of the UK Quality Code?
- Are the objectives of the programme expressed in terms of learning outcomes and the characteristics of successful candidates? Are they consistent with subject benchmarks and FHEQ?
- Are the aims of the programme expressed in terms of developing knowledge and understanding and skills and attributes appropriate to the level of study and laying the foundation for lifelong learning?
- Will the teaching and learning strategies support students in meeting the objectives of the programme? Are these consistent with subject benchmarks?

- Is there a clear rationale for the programme structure? This should demonstrate a planned development of knowledge and academic skills through the stages of study. Is this consistent with the FHEQ?
- Can UCB provide an appropriate context for programme delivery, in terms of existing teaching expertise, facilities and equipment, access to public and commercial facilities within the West Midlands and arrangements for study visits further afield when this is relevant?
- Are there existing partnerships with industry, practitioners and professional bodies?
- Are there appropriate arrangements for work experience?
- Is there access to relevant professional, technical or vocational certification which will add to the value of the successful student's CV?
- What is the expected initial cohort size? What is the minimum number required for the programme to cover its costs? Do resource considerations limit cohort size?
- What is the local and National competition for this programme subject area?
- Have students and employers been involved in the development of the programme?

Does the new programme meet the local, regional and National agenda, with reference to economic and other data? Does the programme develop a global perspective and citizenship? Including, for instance:

1. Employment trends identified by the Local Enterprise Partnerships.
2. Issues and skills shortages identified by appropriate industrial liaison groups.
3. Labour market intelligence on 'hard to fill' vacancies and demand for new skills.
4. Contribution to social inclusion by widening participation by disadvantaged and under-represented groups and promoting lifelong learning.
5. The tendency for students to progress from FE to HE programmes within UCB rather than to transfer to another institution. Is this reflected in clear links for progression from feeder courses?
6. The likelihood of attracting students to this programme in Birmingham.
7. Does the programme fit with a National agenda? This needs to be considered for several reasons: the provision of similar programmes at other institutions is increasingly significant in geographical terms because of the tendency for an increasing proportion of students to study from the family home. UCB will normally seek to have some distinguishing or unique characteristics that differentiate its programme from similar programmes at other institutions.

8. Does the new programme have an international agenda, for reasons resulting from globalisation and is it responding to the needs and interests of the significant proportion of overseas students who enrol at the University because of its international reputation and the offering of specialist programmes not available in other countries.
9. Does the new programme encourage students to adopt an international perspective on the issues that they are studying? (This will be pertinent because of the international dimensions of the service sector and the role of international organisations in promoting marketing and providing services, reflecting the fact that a proportion of successful students will find employment overseas or with international companies).

Features to examine in the Definitive Documentation:

- Does the programme have a title which accurately reflects content studied and will be effective in marketing the award?
- Has the proposal taken account of teaching and learning resources necessary for delivery and/or staff specialist knowledge and has a cost evaluation and/or staff development assessment been undertaken?
- Is the award a UoB or UCB award, and what are the reasons for this?
- Is the length of programme appropriate to the depth of study required?
- Are the entrance requirements appropriate and consistent with UCB policy?
- Have the tuition fees, available bursaries and student expenditure been accurately stated?
- For a Foundation or Honours degree, is there a total credit value of 120 at each level?
- Are the Aims and Objectives reflected in the teaching and learning strategies?
- Where there is a Foundation Degree, does it require an appropriate element of work-place based learning?
- Where there is a Foundation Degree, is there appropriate variation between its stages and the parallel stages of the honours programme and are these justified?
- Where there is a Foundation Degree, are there appropriate arrangements to support students' progression to an Honours Degree?
- Does the structure of the programme demonstrate obvious progression between levels?

- Is the assessment methodology appropriate? Is assessment stated clearly and proportionately with a fair balance of methods and loading across each level of the programme and credit value?
- Do the teaching, learning and assessment strategies include a range of international themes and case studies with a cross-cultural focus?
- Does the teaching team possess international experience including teaching overseas, contribution to international projects or engagement in overseas teaching exchanges for example?
- Will the programme use international visiting speakers (through Erasmus or UCB links)?
- Will the programme or its modules be aligned with any international networks?
- Will opportunities be afforded to students to explore different cultures/international contexts?
- How is the Graduate Attribute of 'Developing as a Global Citizen' achieved on this programme?
- What opportunities will exist for students on the programme to develop international experience?
- Are there clear mechanisms for quality assurance and programme enhancement?
- Are there clear strategies for engaging students in programme development?
- Does the programme address equal opportunities issues?
- Is there appropriate development of employability skills, both generic and vocationally specific, including opportunities for work placement and/or experience?

When considering proposals for new programme modules or substantial module amendments:

- How were the proposed changes/developments identified? Did this involve staff, student or industry consultation/feedback?
- Are the changes compatible with the aims and learning objectives of the programme?

- What is the consequence for curriculum delivery and assessment of the proposed changes? Does this benefit the student experience? What is the implication for overall assessment balance across the stage of the programme?
- Are any changes to assessment strategies clear, proportionate and fair?
- Are there resource implications for the proposed changes in terms of specialised staffing, learning resources and programme expenditure?
- Has the External Examiner been consulted or reviewed the proposals? What was his/her opinion?

When considering proposals for progression or collaborative agreements:

- Is there a clear rationale for the proposal?
- Have appropriate staff visited the University/College and assessed the suitability, level and quality of the teaching and resources?
- Have any risks to academic standards or the student experience been identified?
- Are the students taught in English and what is the requirement for English language level for students to progress to UCB?
- For recognition of international awards as a basis for progression to UCB at a certain level/award; has the international award level equivalency been determined and subject content mapped and independently checked?
- Would a bridging or other familiarisation programme be necessary for students progressing to the identified programme(s) and levels within UCB?
- How many students would be expected to progress each year?
- What would progressing students need in terms of academic and pastoral support and can this be accommodated through existing student support arrangements?
- What are the benefits to UCB of such an arrangement and what are the costs and/or implications for quality and standards?

When considering proposals for new FE programmes or new or changes of FE awarding bodies:

- Is the proposed FE programme in line with the FE portfolio strategy of UCB and would it fit within the existing skills and resource set of UCB FE provision?
- Are there resource/cost implications in terms of specialist resources and/or staffing associated with the proposal?
- What would be the progression destinations for students on this programme for both employment and further academic progression?
- Would the programme provide further choice and opportunities for potential students to UCB?
- Is the qualification staged: does it have intermediate awards or 'stop-off' stages for student achievement?
- What are the reasons for changing awarding body for this/these programmes? What are the registration/certification costs per student? Has UCB awarding body permission or does this need to be secured with the awarding body? Are there resit charges with this awarding body? What are the assessment requirements including assessor, IV, EV sampling and quality assurance visiting?

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