BISHOP GROSSETESTE UNIVERSITY

Document Administration

Document Title:	Code of Practice for the Validation of Programmes
Document Category:	Code of Practice
Version Number:	2.3
Status:	*Approved.*
Reason for development:	To address the process required to validate programmes.
Scope:	This procedure applies to staff and students.
Author / developer:	Regulatory Compliance Manager
Owner	Registrar and Secretary
Assessment: (where relevant)	Tick relevant assessments ☐ Equality Assessment ☐ Legal ☐ Information Governance ☐ Academic Governance
Consultation: (where relevant)	☐ Staff Trade Unions via HR ☐ Students via Bishop Grosseteste University Students' Union ☐ Any relevant external statutory bodies
Authorised by (Board):	Quality Assurance Committee
Date Authorised:	8 December 2016
Effective from:	December 2016
Review due:	December 2019
Document location:	University Website
Document dissemination / communications plan	University website, Staff Portal, Student Portal.
Document control:	All printed versions of this document are classified as uncontrolled. A controlled version is available from the *University website*.

Table of Contents

Introduction

1. The Code of Practice for the Validation of Programmes describes the process of securing approval for new programmes and for changes to existing provision where those involve amendments which cannot be undertaken under the terms of the Code of Practice for Changes to Validated Programmes. It is designed to follow the precepts and guidance contained in the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*, specifically *Chapter B1 – Programme design, development and approval [2013] (2015)*.

The Process of Validation

2. New programmes and changes to existing programmes should normally be validated in the academic session before that in which they are to be introduced. Validation of new programmes should take into account the fact that the full UCAS process and related marketing procedures would need 18 months prior to the start of the course fully to unfold so as to give the most opportunities for the course to be marketed and thus enough students to enrol on the course. Moreover, best practice and key legal provisions dictate that the more major the changes, the earlier they should be completed; more information can be obtained from the QASA. It is, however, accepted that there may be occasions on which a swift response to demand is necessary, for example, when there is demand from an employer or other organisation for bespoke provision. However, the School in which the programme will be located should be mindful of the need to allow time for students to be recruited to a new programme and for applicants to the programme to be informed.

3. Before a new programme of study is introduced or major changes or additions are made to an existing programme, it is first necessary to obtain approval for the proposal in principle. All proposals must have the support of the relevant Head of School (or, exceptionally, an appropriate senior academic manager in the case of provision which is not located in a School). It is recommended that the proposal is discussed at an early stage with the Academic Quality Manager. It should be noted that any addition to the University's portfolio will need approval in principle by Portfolio Management Group (PMG) and a short concept paper for PMG outlining the rationale for the introduction of the new programme or subject should be prepared by the Head of School. If approved by PMG, the programme may be included in the next edition of the University prospectus and publicised in other ways provided that it is made clear that it is offered 'subject to validation'. The academic team will need to work with the Data Team, Admissions and Marketing to provide the necessary information in order to meet compliance requirements.

4. The formal process of validation begins with the completion of the Programme Proposal Form. The form is designed to provide the information needed by the Quality Assurance Committee in order to decide whether or not the proposal should proceed to validation. It should be noted that a modified Proposal Form is used for programmes to be offered through directly funded collaborative provision. All sections of the form should be completed in sufficient detail to allow members of the Committee to understand the nature of the proposed provision, the rationale for its introduction, the likely market for it, and its place within the overall portfolio of the University. The Committee is also charged with determining whether there are grounds for confidence in the academic standards and quality of the new or revised provision and the proposal should provide the information needed to satisfy members in this respect. The Head of School is responsible for ensuring

that the form is circulated to the heads of support departments who will complete the relevant section of Annexe 1 commenting upon the extent to which the proposal would require the allocation of additional resources. Sufficient time should be allowed for this, and the completed form with signatures should be returned to the Academic Quality Manager at least 10 working days before the meeting of the Committee at which the proposal will be considered. The Quality Assurance Committee will not normally approve a proposal unless all sections of Annexe 1 have been completed.

5. At the meeting of the Quality Assurance Committee at which the Programme Proposal Form is considered, the Chair will ask the Head to introduce the salient features of the new or revised provision and will also normally invite a member of the team which is developing the proposal to attend the meeting in order to provide such additional clarification as members of the Committee may require. In particular, in the case of collaborative provision, the Committee may also require additional due diligence or risk management checks to be performed on the organisation that is proposed to be delivering the programme.

6. It should be noted that, in the case of proposals regarding existing programmes, it may not be necessary to complete all sections of the Programme Proposal Form. The Academic Quality Manager should be consulted and will determine what is required in an individual case.

7. In the light of the evidence before it the Quality Assurance Committee may decide:

 (i) to give approval for the proposed programme to be developed and go forward for validation;

 (ii) to seek further clarification;

 (iii) to determine that the proposal should not proceed to validation in its present form.

8. The outcome and reasons for the decision, together with any suggestions for further consideration and significant reservations, will be communicated to the proposing team by the Chair of the Committee via QASA. The conclusions of the Quality Assurance Committee will be confirmed at the next meeting of the Academic Enhancement Committee and reported to Senate.

9. Where the Quality Assurance Committee gives its approval for the proposal to proceed, the programme will be placed on the schedule for validation.

10. Proposals requiring validation or revalidation should normally be prepared in time for consideration by the Quality Assurance Committee in the Autumn Term of the session before that in which the programme or revised programme is to be introduced at the latest; preferably even earlier so that the 18 month UCAS/marketing schedule could fully unfold. Proposals will not normally be considered after the first meeting of the Spring Term. Where, exceptionally, there is a need to do so, the Committee will consider whether there is sufficient time to offer a reasonable prospect that the process of validation can be completed successfully and, in the case of a new programme, that a robust strategy is in place for recruiting students.

Programme Development

11. The proposing team will prepare a Draft Programme Document. The team should make use of the Programme Development Manual, available from QASA, in preparing the validation documentation. The Draft Programme Document will have a cover in the house style of the University with the full title of the programme and the award to which it will lead, professional accreditation or endorsement (if any), the words *Draft Programme Document* and the number and date of the draft. The Draft Programme Document will consist of three parts (i) an introductory section (ii) a Programme Specification in the approved format and (iii) a full set of module specifications.

Draft Programme Document

12. The Programme Specification will conform to the current University template.

13. The introduction to the Draft Programme Document will contain the following sections:

(i) A rationale for the programme, expanding where necessary upon the information contained in the Programme Specification and showing how it:

- is consonant with the University's vision, purpose, mission, core beliefs and values, and *Strategic Plan*;
- reflects the QAA UK Quality Code, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and any requirements arising from professional accreditation;
- takes account of the place of the award within the QAA *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications*;
- and describes the intended outcome for students in terms of employment or progression to further study.

(ii) An account of the learning and teaching strategy to be adopted, demonstrating its relationship to the University's current Learning and Teaching Strategy and showing how the chosen methods of course delivery reflect the learning outcomes, secure progression in students' learning and provide opportunities and support for independent learning.

(iii) An overview of the resources available to support students' learning.

(iv) An account of the assessment strategy, including a representation of the assessment requirements in diagrammatic form and information on the pattern of assessment and the range and variety of assessed work. Particular care should be taken to relate the assessment methodology to the learning outcomes and to ensure that all learning outcomes are adequately assessed.

(v) An overview of the arrangements for the management and organisation of the programme.

(vi) The target student intake and an account of the steps that will be taken to maintain recruitment at that level and increase it.

(vii)   An account of the admission requirements, the process for the selection of applicants and details of the way in which admissions procedures will take account of the University's policies with regard to diversity and inclusion.

14. It should be noted that it will be assumed that the programme will conform to the University's regulations with regard to modular structure, credit and levels, assessment, progression and awards. Such information should be included only where it is proposed to deviate from the University's regulations and procedures. Any deviation will be regarded as exceptional and a clear rationale must be provided in each case - e.g. the need to conform to the requirements of professional accreditation. Such deviations can be accepted only where they demonstrably lead to outcomes which are equally, or more, stringent than those imposed by the University regulations.

15. The third part of the document will comprise a module specification for each module. Module specifications will conform to the current University template.

School Review of Programme Documentation

16. When completed, the draft programme documentation will be subject to a process of review by members of the School in which it will be located. The Head of School will be responsible for setting up a review panel. The panel will consist of at least three members of staff of the School who are not members of the team responsible for the programme under consideration, a student representative, and a member external to the University, approved by the Head of School according to the instructions (e.g. as regards impartiality) provided by QASA. In the case of a programme undergoing revalidation, the external member must not be the external examiner or a person who has acted in that capacity within the last five years. The Head of School may act as Chair or nominate an Academic Coordinator from within the School to act in this capacity. The external member should be an experienced academic with expertise in a relevant discipline or professional area, with no previous professional or other close involvement with the members of the proposed programme team within the past five years; more information and clarification can be provided by QASA.

17. The School review is intended to be an iterative and developmental process in which the panel engages with the programme team to enhance the proposal. The panel will review the documentation and, in dialogue with the programme team, formulate recommendations for its further development. The Chair will be responsible for co-ordinating the process and managing the event. The external member should attend a review event. Although the process is developmental, the Chair shall have the power to set conditions which must be met to secure the approval of the proposal. The review process is complete when the Chair is able to confirm that the panel is satisfied that the documentation is ready to progress to University validation and that any conditions which have been imposed have been met. A representative of QASA will provide help throughout the process and may attend the validation event to provide further advice.

18. Whether or not acting as Chair, the Head of School is responsible for confirming that the documentation is ready to progress to University validation. The Head of School will formally sign off the programme document and will forward a copy to the Academic Quality Manager. The signature is also taken as a guarantee that the appropriate resources for the

offering of the programme are in place. Exceptionally, the Head of School may decide to delay the process pending major changes or withdraw the proposal altogether. In such a case the Head will inform the Academic Quality Manager immediately and prepare a report on the circumstances for the School Board and for the Quality Assurance Committee.

19. The Quality Assurance Committee monitors the School Validation process as it unfolds and ensures as appropriate that adequate support measures are in place.

University Validation

20. The proposed programme will be subject to approval by a validation panel acting on behalf of the Quality Assurance Committee. In addition to the Chair, the panel will normally consist of at least three members of academic staff of the University who are not members of the team responsible for the programme under consideration. One of the members will normally have been a member of the School scrutiny panel but no other member of the scrutiny panel will be eligible to join the validation panel. At least one member of the validation panel must be a member of academic staff who is not a member of the School in which the programme will be located. In addition the panel will include at least one external member approved by Quality Assurance & Student Administration; similar rules as regards impartiality and non-involvement as discussed in the section on School Validation panels also apply here, and more information can be obtained from QASA. The Student Union will be invited to nominate a student representative as a member. One external member should be an experienced academic with expertise in a relevant discipline or professional area. This might include experience of the delivery of programmes through blended or distance learning where appropriate to the proposal. Consideration should be given to the inclusion of a second external member from a relevant business or other organisation with specific knowledge of an area of employment which students would typically enter on completing their studies. The Panel will be chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor or a nominee. The meeting will be attended by the Academic Quality Manager or a nominee who will advise on matters of University regulation. The Academic Quality Manager will appoint a servicing officer who will produce a record of the event.

21. In the case of new programmes and major changes, such as the introduction of new pathways within existing programmes or innovative modes of delivery, the panel will meet for a validation event which will provide an opportunity for the members to explore with the proposing team the documentation and issues arising from it in some depth. Where changes are proposed which fall outside the scope of those permissible under the *Code of Practice for Changes to Validated Programmes*, but are nevertheless of a minor character in terms of their scope and impact, a modified form of the validation process may be adopted with the agreement of the Quality Assurance Committee. For example the external member of the panel might contribute a written commentary without attendance. In considering whether to give its agreement to such a modification, the Committee will adopt the principle that the process to be followed should be proportionate to the scale of the change proposed and proportionate to the risks involved.

Conduct of the University Validation Events

22. Members of the validation panel will normally receive a copy of the programme documentation at least 10 working days in advance of the scrutiny event to allow it to receive full consideration.

23. At the validation event the panel will hold an initial private meeting. A member of the proposing team will be invited to attend for this part of the event in the capacity of observer. The panel will hold an initial meeting with the Deputy Vice Chancellor and Head of School to discuss the place of the programme in the School's portfolio, the arrangements for the management of the programme, and the sufficiency of the resources that will be available to support its delivery and the quality of the learning opportunities and experience offered to students. The panel will then meet with the proposing team in order to undertake an exploration of issues arising from the documentation.

24. Following its meeting with the proposing team, the panel will meet to formulate the conclusions and the recommendations that it will make to the Quality Assurance Committee. A member of the proposing team may attend this part of the event as an observer. It will be open to the panel to make one of the following recommendations:

   (i)   to   approve the proposal (with or without recommendations for modification);

   (ii)   to   approve the proposal subject to conditions (with or without recommendations for modification);

   (iii)   to approve the proposal in principle but with a requirement for major revisions;

   (iv)   to reject the proposal.

25. In the case of outcome (ii), the Chair will confirm on behalf of the panel (following consultation where necessary) that the conditions have been met. In the case of outcome (iii), the revised documentation will be circulated to all members of the panel for approval. A second panel meeting may be required in some cases.

26. The panel's recommendation and a summary of any conditions will be presented orally to the proposing team at the conclusion of the validation event and a date will be agreed between the panel and the proposing team by which any conditions must be met.

27. Within five working days of the event, the Academic Quality Manager will produce a written summary of the outcome, including any conditions and recommendations and stating the date by which the conditions must be met. The summary, together with the conditions and recommendations, will be circulated to members of the panel and, once agreed, a copy will be sent to the Head of School and leader of the presenting team. A copy will also be sent for information to Recruitment and Admissions, Marketing, and Registrar and Secretary. The presenting team will be responsible for making any changes to the documents that may be required to meet the conditions set by the panel and for sending the revised documents to the Academic Quality Manager or a nominee by the date agreed. The programme documents will then be forwarded to the Chair who will confirm whether the conditions, if any, have been met. The Servicing Officer will also prepare a written report of the event and its outcome. The draft report will be circulated to members of the panel, the Head of School and designated leader of the proposing team for confirmation of factual accuracy. The Chair of the panel will approve the final version of the report. The Quality Assurance Committee will receive the confirmed report, normally at its next meeting, together with a note from Chair of the panel indicating whether the conditions have been, or are still to be, met.

28. The Quality Assurance Committee will consider the report and, if the Committee endorses the result of the Validation panel, it reports the results to the University's Academic Enhancement Committee. The process of validation is concludes when the Academic Enhancement Committee has accepted a positive recommendation from the validation panel and it has been confirmed that all conditions have been met. Exceptionally, the Committee may determine that the programme should be subject to periodic review after an interval shorter than the usual five years. The outcome of the validation will be reported to the next meeting of Senate. After Senate's having endorsed the decision of the Academic Enhancement Committee, the process is complete, and the programme can be marketed without the caveat of 'subject to validation'. The University's Recruitment and Admissions and Marketing departments will be informed so that the relevant marketing and promoting actions can be done.

29. Once the proposal has been validated by the University, a copy of the programme documents incorporating the changes made in response to conditions and recommendations will be held in the office of the Academic Quality Manager and/or electronically in the University's electronic document repository system (SharePoint), with responsibility of the document being with the QASA. This copy will be the authoritative source of information regarding the programme. All subsequent changes made to the programme and its provision will be expressed with reference to these documents, and no changes to documentation can be made except by adhering to the relevant University Codes of Practice and keeping QASA informed at all stages. All information issued to students in handbooks providing details of modules and their assessment must conform to the authoritative, QASA-held programme specification and module specifications exactly and in all respects. Any changes approved through the relevant Code of Practice will be recorded and details appended and/or incorporated. The Programme Specification will provide a summary of information concerning the programme for use by stakeholders and will be published separately.

Collaborative Provision

30. Any programmes validated for use in partner organisations will be validated by BGU making use of this code. Partner institutions are not allowed to make changes to BGU provision but may comment on the provision in the AMRs and periodic reviews and request adaptations to the programme to be made by BGU on their behalf. Requests to such adaptations may be considered outside the re-approval cycle by a relevant University Senate sub-committee.