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Academic Regulations

Approval, Validation and Continuous Curriculum Enhancement

Section 13

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Section 13

Approval, Validation and Continuous Curriculum Enhancement

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Section 13: Approval, Validation and Continuous Curriculum Enhancement

13.1 Purpose

This section of the Academic Regulations defines the University's approach to the approval, validation of taught courses and modules, the monitoring of course performance through the application of both School and institutionally managed continuous improvement and annual review activities and the cyclical course review process that provides assurance of validation status good standing on an annual basis, thereby confirming a course's ongoing validated status.

These academic regulations and processes ensure that appropriate academic standards are set and maintained and make available learning opportunities which enable the intended learning outcomes to be achieved. These processes aim to enhance the quality of learning opportunities and to continuously improve the performance and satisfaction of our students.

The requirements establish distinct, inter-related, co-dependent processes of approval, validation and continuous curriculum enhancement and enable a distinction between activities which focus on the course as the unit of review, the subject and the location of delivery.

The systematic approach requires approval, validation and continuous curriculum enhancement activities. These are set within a formalised cycle of course approval, validation and continuous curriculum enhancement, and a strategic portfolio planning and review process based on the relevant portfolio and a defined process of partnerships and collaborations approval or validation to enable courses to be taught in other locations.

Validation and continuous curriculum enhancement processes are proportionate to the provision under consideration and are applied flexibly with due regard for risk. They are underpinned at each stage by externality and student views and where relevant, they are conducted with an awareness and appreciation of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements and apprenticeship governing bodies where applicable (ESFA, IFATE, Ofsted).

The focus of these activities is the course, since that is the unit of delivery with which our students identify. However, enhancement strategies are delivered at a range of aggregations, including modules and continuous improvement action benefit more than one course may benefit from these.

This enables a proportionate approach to validation and maintenance of validation status, course monitoring and review which supports flexibility applicable to the provision and focus e.g. course as the unit of review, the subject or the location of delivery.

The following regulations further explain the University's approach to:

- Approval of Course Proposals and new Partner proposals
- Validation and Maintenance of Validated Course Status
- Approval of collaborative delivery
- Course Monitoring and Continuous Curriculum Enhancement
- Enhanced Monitoring
- Modification
- Strategic Portfolio Planning and Review

13.2 General Principles of Approval, Validation, Cyclical Monitoring and Review

- 13.2.1** New taught course proposals require institutional approval before they can be included within the University's portfolio and advertised.
- 13.2.2** All courses leading to an award of the University must undergo a formal process of validation appropriate to the breadth and complexity of the proposal to be considered.
- 13.2.3** Course titles must conform to the usual expectations of higher education bodies, relevant professional bodies, students and employers about the level of knowledge and skills to be expected from a person holding such a qualification.
- 13.2.4** Course titles and awards which appear on certificates must be approved by the University, and may not be changed without the approval of Academic Board.
- 13.2.5** Courses must be designed and operated in accordance with the University's Regulations, and meet relevant national qualifications framework and external requirements.
- 13.2.6** Feedback from internal and external stakeholders will be used, as appropriate, in the design, development and validation of courses.
- 13.2.7** A system of peer review including experts external to the University will be applied to the validation of all taught provision.

13.2.8 Taught courses will be subject to monitoring and review in accordance with our regulations.

13.3 Validation Definition and Scope

13.3.1 Course validation is an institutional peer approval process which provides assurance of the quality and standards of newly developed courses prior to their delivery to students. It confirms:

- that the academic standards of taught courses and qualifications meet the requirements of relevant national qualifications frameworks, including the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and associated classification descriptors, and other relevant sector qualification standards, frameworks, qualifications characteristics and benchmarks.
- that the assessment strategies and associated learning outcomes provide a mechanism to differentiate clearly between performance at the threshold level and at higher levels of achievement.
- that the course design, content, structure, assessment student support and learning outcomes are well designed and appropriate for the provision of a high-quality academic learning experience for all students, which enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.
- the appropriateness of student support mechanisms to enable students to succeed in and benefit from higher education.
- that the course will provide students with the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonable comparable with those achieved in other UK sector providers.
- that the standards of University awards delivered in partnership or collaboration with others are credible and secure.
- For apprenticeships the relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours as required by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

13.3.2 Once validated and in delivery, all courses are required to maintain ongoing validation status and continue to meet the requirements of relevant national frameworks at the point of qualification and over time in line with sector recognised standards.

13.3.3 All taught courses are subject to a formal institutional review of the validation status, normally conducted on a cyclical basis annually or within a defined period. This process provides institutional oversight and assurance of ongoing validation good

standing, that the value of the University's qualifications over time is in line with sector recognised standards and confirmation of validation status.

- 13.3.4** Taught academic provision delivered in collaboration with others is required to be validated prior to the approval of collaborative delivery.
- 13.3.5** Approval of academic delivery in collaborative contexts is normally for a maximum of six years, or sooner if an earlier review is stipulated or required by the University. This may arise as a result of modifications to the home validated course, where academic standards or quality of course is imperiled or of concern to the institution, due to student protection, partner approval status or other reason.
- 13.3.6** Normally, collaborative provision for delivery as University accredited awards by a collaborative partner are subject to a separate validation and are required to undergo re-validation every six years or sooner, if a validation panel stipulates an earlier review.
- 13.3.7** These requirements enable institutional oversight and assurance of the effectiveness of arrangements for validation to ensure the academic standards of University awards are credible and secure and that the academic experience is of high quality, irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.

13.4 Approval, Validation and Continuous Curriculum Enhancement Arrangements

13.4.1 Institutional Approval of Course Proposals

- a) Documentation for Institutional Approval must, as a minimum, include the following information:
- the target award
 - the proposed title of the target award
 - the proposed structure of the award (e.g. course, short course)
 - the proposed mode(s) of delivery (e.g. full time, part time, sandwich)
 - the proposed start date for the first cohort
 - its congruence with the strategic direction of academic provision within the University
 - the market rationale
 - broad feasibility and costing projections, including requirements for academic and support staffing and the minimum number of anticipated students
 - partnership information, where relevant.

b) Institutional approval will confirm:

- the proposed title of the award
- the proposed structure of the award
- the planned start date of the first cohort
- the proposed provision may proceed to validation.

c) Formal admission of students is authorised only if the following apply:

- the course has received institutional approval
- the course is validated
- the course is offered for delivery in the current academic year
- in the case of collaborations and apprenticeships, the financial and contractual agreement is current and compliant with associated external requirements.

d) When a new course proposal has been approved but is awaiting validation (or approval of delivery in a recognised institution) this should be made clear in any advertising.

13.4.2 Course Validation

a) All validated courses leading to a target award will contain a series of contained awards at different levels unless specific provision is made to exclude these awards in the course specification. For courses leading to a final award of a degree with honours the contained awards are:

- Ordinary Degree
- Diploma of Higher Education
and
- Certificate of Higher Education
- Certificate in Lifelong Learning

For courses leading to a final award of a Masters degree the contained awards are:

- Postgraduate Diploma
- Postgraduate Certificate
- Advanced Certificate in Lifelong Learning

For courses leading to a final award of an Integrated Masters degree the contained awards are:

- Postgraduate Diploma (Level 7)
- Postgraduate Certificate (Level 7)
- Honours Degree (Level 6)
- Ordinary Degree (Level 6)
- Diploma of Higher Education (Level 5)
and
- Certificate of Higher Education (Level 4)
- Certificate of Lifelong Learning (level 4)

For Professional Doctorate courses the following contained awards apply to the taught element of the course (the first 180 credits):

- Masters Degree (Level 7)
- Postgraduate Diploma (Level 7)
- Postgraduate Certificate (Level 7)

All contained awards are required to have discrete academic coherence and the title shall be the same as the title of the target award unless specified otherwise in the Course Specification.

b) Course Development

Course development will normally be led by a Course Director who will ensure that the course is designed and developed with due consideration for:

- The University's Education Strategy
- Inclusive assessment, learning and teaching approaches
- Academic Regulations and guidance on validation
- Relevant University policies
- External Reference points and relevant national qualifications requirements (e.g. Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, the H.E. Credit Framework for England, Subject Benchmark Statements, Apprenticeship Standards)
- Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (where relevant), including Ofsted and Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and resource implications (responsibility for resourcing lies with the Dean of School)

The Course Director is responsible for:

- Development of the proposal

- Preparation of validation documentation
- Compliance with the Academic Regulations
- Liaison with appropriate stakeholders including students, apprentices and employers
- Consideration of resource implications

In addition to the above, at re-validation, the Course Director is responsible for:

- Critically appraising the course; and
 - Incorporating any enhancements, as appropriate
- c) The Dean of School is responsible for sign off of the validation documentation submitted to the Academic Quality Enhancement Office in accordance with the agreed deadlines.
- d) The course validation panel will be appropriate to the quality assurance requirements of the course under consideration and will involve peer review scrutiny by an institutionally agreed, proportionate and appropriately constituted panel.
- e) New course validation will normally be undertaken by a validation panel which includes:
- Chair (External to the School in which the course(s) resides)
 - External Panel Members (at least one Academic from the subject area under consideration and external to our university and one external employer representative)
 - Academic Panel Member (external to the School)
 - Internal Panel Member (from the School)

It is informed by feedback from students.

For apprenticeship validations, the Academic Quality Enhancement Office will ensure the panel contains suitable expertise in the area of apprenticeships and require internal panel members to complete the necessary training in advance of the event.

Other panel members may be assigned as appropriate to the course(s) under consideration.

- f) A University Validation Panel, institutionally constituted and chaired by the Deputy-Vice Chancellor Academic (or nominee), informed by internal and external expertise and student feedback in the design and development of the course, may be adopted

where proportionate to the provision. This may include validation of pathways and proposals for substantial modification.

g) The Validation documentation will be appropriate to the course(s) under consideration and will include, as a minimum:

- A Course Information Form
- A Briefing Statement
- (An Apprenticeship) Course Specification and Material Information Summary
- Module Specifications
- Staff CVs (for new course proposals)
- Professional Statutory or Regulatory Body requirements (as applicable)
- Mapping exercise to Apprenticeship Standard (as applicable)
- Evidence of engagement with employers/ industry that informed the design and development of the Leeds Beckett apprenticeship (as applicable)

h) The Validation Panel may make the following decisions:

- to validate the course
- validate the course subject to conditions and/or recommendations
- not to validate the course

Where the panel agree not to validate a course the Dean of School will be consulted to determine whether and when the provision may be re-presented for validation or is required to be suspended from recruitment or withdrawn from the university portfolio by a specified date.

i) The Validation Panel will establish that each course:

- is of a standard appropriate to the award offered in accordance with 13.3.1
 - will be delivered to a standard appropriate to the award offered
- and
- has sufficient resources to support student learning

The Academic Quality Enhancement Office will provide advice to the panel on areas of the proposal which require further consideration and/or approval.

j) The Academic Quality Enhancement Office will provide an oversight report on the outcomes of validation to Academic Quality and Standards Committee.

13.4.3 The Maintenance of Course Validation Status

- a) All courses will be subject to maintaining ongoing validation status and are required to undergo a formal institutional review of the validation status. This process will determine validation status and any requirements for further peer review or validation scrutiny necessary for assuring the ongoing confirmation of academic standards and quality requirements set out in section 13.3.

- b) Expectations Concerning Good Standing

In order to remain validated for delivery, courses are required to maintain good standing in respect of academic standards and quality expectations defined by the University and aligned with external requirements. These expectations will be consistent, transparent and equitable and will include consideration of a range of indicators:

- Threshold course performance relating to student progression, achievement and employability indicators;
- Threshold course performance relating to student satisfaction indicators;
- External Examiner feedback on Academic Standards
- External feedback
- Action planning already in train at Course, Subject and/ or School level that relates to any of the above

- c) Institutional Process for the Maintenance of Validated Course Status

A University Validation Panel will be convened annually in accordance with the specified institutional process to provide oversight of the maintenance of validated status of award bearing courses and will make recommendations concerning the outcomes of that process for consideration by Academic Quality and Standards Committee overseen by Academic Board.

The University Validation Panel will include:

- Chair (Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic – or nominee) – ex officio
- Director of Academic Quality Enhancement (or nominee) – ex officio
- Academic panel members drawn from University Schools [2]
- Students' Union Representation. The panel will receive feedback from student representatives to inform its decision making.

The University Validation Panel will determine the necessity for the engagement of and feedback from additional attendees, feedback or expertise at the panel's discretion, including:

- Internal representatives
- external subject experts relevant to the academic subject area
- students
- employers
- professional, statutory and regulatory bodies where applicable.

Courses subject to professional, statutory and regulatory body accreditation or recognition may be required to undergo a Course Validation within a defined period and may require a joint or separate accreditation process.

The Validation documentation considered by the panel will be appropriate to the courses under consideration and will include, as a minimum, a subject evaluation report and action plan considering matters relating to good standing (*provided by the Academic Quality Enhancement Office*).

Additionally, as part of the maintenance of ongoing validation status and formal institutional review Schools may be required to:

- provide a critical appraisal of the evidence informed by the annual review and evaluation of the course(s)
- provide examples of best practice, as applicable
- make an evaluation of modifications to the course
- consider external examiner reports and review external reference points and requirements e.g. Subject benchmark statements and Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
- consider student and other external stakeholder feedback
- consider management information and course performance indicators
- consider research within the subject area in relation to course content

d) Outcomes of the Process for the Maintenance of Validated Status

The University Validation Panel may make the following recommendations to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee overseen by Academic Board in respect of each course under consideration:

- to continue to validate the course
- to continue to validate the course subject to conditions and/or recommendations to

be satisfied within a specified period

- not to continue to validate the course
- not to validate the course and require conditions to be satisfied by a specified date
- not to validate and recommend suspension of recruitment or withdrawal of the course by a specified date

Conditions relating to the maintenance of validated status may include:

- remedial actions for improvement
- referral of the course for Enhanced Monitoring (see Regulation 13.7.2)
- referral of the course for redevelopment with a full validation panel required at the culmination of that process
- referral of the course for further scrutiny and feedback from external expertise or students)
- referral of the course for redevelopment with full validation via a separate validation panel required at the culmination of that process.

Changes to course content, structure and assessment generated by the outcomes of this process will be approved by the University Validation Panel and will be subject to the regulatory provisions concerning 'Course Modification' (see regulation 13.8)

Continuous Curriculum Enhancement

The process of Maintenance of Course Validation Status and assurance of validation good standing by the University Validation Panel will assure the continuous review of taught courses.

The University Validation Panel will maintain oversight of the course following initial validation and where appropriate will require a Course Validation periodically to provide additional assurance that the academic standards and quality of the course over time is in line with sector recognised standards and quality. In the case of validated collaborative provision, validation will be for a maximum period of six years.

Alongside the process for institutional assurance of courses' good standing, the monitoring and review activity at Course, Subject and School level will lead to proposals for modifications to courses. In some cases, these may trigger a more holistic view of course structure and content that requires a course to be redeveloped and re-validated discretely.

These activities may require an institutional Course validation event as defined in section 13.4.2 and should be planned between Schools and the Academic Quality Enhancement

Office with due regard for material change deadlines, any associated professional body expectations and the sustainable deployment of appropriate staff and resources.

In addition, there are some changes which are outside the purview of the modifications regulations and will require a proportionate institutional validation process. These are summarised in section 13.11.4: Limits on modifications and substantial changes to courses.

The Academic Quality Enhancement Office will advise on the appropriate validation process to be deployed with due regard for risk and responsiveness.

A modification request will be required for changes which trigger validation.

13.5 General Principles of Continuous Curriculum Enhancement

Continuous curriculum enhancement processes provide assurance of the ongoing academic quality and standards of validated courses and enables systematic enhancements to the quality of learning opportunities to be identified and delivered.

They support the continuous improvement of student performance and satisfaction through targeted action planning and require the progress and effectiveness of these actions to be monitored.

Continuous curriculum enhancement activities are informed by and relevant to the enhancement strategies defined at course, subject, School or institutional level.

The continuous curriculum enhancement framework provides a flexible framework within which information, course outcomes and data that relates to the academic standards of awards and the quality of learning opportunities are considered and evaluated in order to:

- a) maintain threshold standards
- b) provide the opportunity for students awarded qualifications to achieve beyond the threshold level and to be reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers
- c) maintain the ongoing value of qualifications awarded, in line with the relevant national qualifications framework and sector recognised standards
- d) ensure standards of University awards delivered in partnership with others are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them
- e) evaluate course performance and outcomes to provide assurance regarding the academic standards and quality of the course and any action required to deliver enhancements to the learning opportunities

- f) provide evidence for cyclical monitoring and review of academic provision
- g) provide assurance to Academic Board and its committees that the implementation of the University's academic regulations and processes are being conducted consistently and effectively.

13.6 Process of Continuous Curriculum Enhancement

Continuous curriculum enhancement is the process by which the continued health of each course is monitored, reviewed and enhanced on a continuous basis, taking account of core course information.

13.6.1 Elements of the process

The elements of the process comprise of:

- a) Opportunities for student engagement including meetings, individual and collective feedback
- b) Opportunities for Course Team reflection and action planning
- c) The production of a subject evaluation report and action plan
- d) The use and analysis of management information to inform decision making

13.6.2 School responsibility

It is the responsibility of each Dean of School to ensure the process of continuous curriculum enhancement is conducted effectively, including the production of summary reports and action plans.

Deans are further responsible for the provision of timely assurance reports and action plans to Academic Quality and Standards Committee arising from the conclusion of complete and effective continuous curriculum enhancement. This will support University academic assurances to our Board of Governors.

13.6.3 Use of data and other quality indicators

The University will provide data and management information for use in continuous curriculum enhancement. The information provided will be from a variety of sources including:

- a) Course performance data relating to student continuation/progression/completion, attainment and employment or further study;
- b) Course performance data relating to student satisfaction indicators;

- c) Graduate Employment or further study outcomes;
- d) Cohort profile data;
- e) External Examiner Reports;
- f) Reports from Module Boards and Progression and Award Boards.
- g) Data relating to compliance with external apprenticeship bodies, including ESFA and Ofsted (as applicable)

13.6.4 Other Information

Other relevant information will be derived from within the School, and will include outcomes from student engagement activities, module evaluations and other external feedback (for example from Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies).

13.7 University Responsibility

13.7.1 University Quality Action Plan

The Academic Quality Enhancement Office is responsible for maintaining an Action Plan overseen by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee drawing on the outputs of University monitoring and review prior to the Plan being received and ratified by Academic Board.

13.7.2 Enhanced Monitoring

- a) Enhanced monitoring is an opportunity to reflect on course progress and consider matters of academic standards, quality and course performance which have emerged since validation/re-validation, informed by KPIs and other relevant information.
- b) The Course Director and members of the course team will meet with the Head of subject to review course outcomes and planned enhancement, following this the head of subject will complete a subject area report and submit to Academic Quality Enhancement Office for review at the University Validation Panel.
- c) University Validation Panel outcomes will confirm how any recommendations or conditions for continuous improvement will be addressed by the Course Team.

13.8 Course Changes and Modification: General

13.8.1 Definition

Modification is a process, which enables a course or module to respond to internal or external stimuli and adapt itself to meet the needs of its students, or external stakeholders by making changes or modifications to a validated or published course or module.

Substantial modification of a course may lead to re-validation.

13.8.2 Course Modification

All proposals for modification require University oversight. No modifications may be made, implemented, delivered or published for applicants or students/apprentices without one of the following assurances, dependent on the scope/scale of the modification:

- School Academic Committee approval
- University Validation Panel approval
- Course validation panel approval

Substantial modification of a course or module may lead to re-validation.

13.9 Modification Approval

Changes to validated courses and modules may be proposed by Schools or appropriate University senior manager in accordance with our Academic Regulations.

Proposals for modifications are determined by Schools or appropriate University senior manager prior to these proposed modifications being submitted for consideration.

University approval is needed prior to implementation of change. Depending on the timing of the modification there may need to be a process of consultation with applicants and/or existing students/apprentices.

13.10 Consent from Applicants and/or Students/Apprentices

Depending on the timing of the modification there may need to be a process of consultation with applicants and/or existing students/apprentices. This may require the explicit consent from the identified group(s) in advance of implementation.

Should a proposal for change arise in relation to, or which constitutes, a potential risk under the University's Student Protection Plan, the Director of Academic Quality Enhancement shall be informed in accordance with the Plan.

The decision on whether a consultation process is required will be determined by the Director of Academic Quality Enhancement. This will consider and confirm the relevant consultation process with applicants and/or students/apprentices (as applicable), with external examiners (where applicable), any requirement for validation due to the nature or extent of change and the timescale for implementation of change.

The consent for change decision if and when confirmed will be made following completion of the necessary steps and requirements of the University's regulations and process.

13.11 Consultation

The Academic Quality Enhancement Office will provide guidance confirming the consultation process proportionate to the proposed modification. Normally, consultation with external examiners, students/apprentices or applicants will be required where the proposals are likely to affect current students/apprentices, future students/apprentices or applicants. In the case of apprenticeships, consultation with employers must also be undertaken.

13.11.1 Students/Apprentices and External Examiners

Students/apprentices likely to be affected by proposals for modification or change, must be consulted in relation to any such proposal.

The Student Consultation Framework will be used as guidance. Normally, consultation with students/apprentices in accordance with the University's required process will be conducted by the relevant School.

External Examiners will be consulted, where appropriate.

Consultation must be concluded before the modification can be implemented.

13.11.2 Applicants

Consultation with applicants will be conducted by Admissions, in accordance with the University's process for consultation with applicants, upon the notification by the Academic Quality Enhancement Office.

Consultation must be concluded before the modification is implemented. Applicants who do not consent to the proposed change will have the opportunity to be released from the University's offer of admission.

13.11.3 Implementing modifications and changes

Following approval of modifications the University will, in accordance with our associated University procedures, before implementation:

- updated published information
- updated course information, course specifications and student and curriculum/portfolio system data and
- communicate with relevant students/apprentices, applicants, staff

13.11.4 Limits on modifications and substantial changes to courses

The following changes will lead to a re-validation activity:

- a) title of the course and/or the award to which it leads
- b) overall aims and learning outcomes of the course
- c) Addition of or changes to pathways
- d) mode(s) of study or duration of a course
- e) awarding body
- f) the addition or deletion of module(s) where the course learning outcomes are changed or where this constitutes a material change to the course
- g) changes to the overall methods of assessment and strategy for the course
- h) changes to a material component of a course or pathway

A modification request will be required for changes which trigger re-validation.

13.12 Reporting Modifications

A report of approved modifications will be submitted to Academic Quality and Standards Committee periodically including assurances that definitive documentation have been updated.

13.13 Awards Withdrawn from the University Portfolio

Decisions to withdraw validated courses are taken from time to time as the University portfolio is reviewed. The School will take appropriate action to ensure that:

- Academic Standards are maintained for any students remaining on the course
- Students' continuation of study is protected in accordance with the Student Protection Plan;
or
- Students are consulted with a view to transferring to a suitable alternative course. Requirements for student consultation will be in accordance with the Academic Regulations.

All withdrawals must have institutional approval.

Academic Board shall withdraw validation of a course offered by the university or associated institution if there is evidence that the course is no longer meeting minimum acceptable standards.