



## Programme Approval Procedure

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### Amendment History

Version	Revision Summary	Date Approved	Author
041/21	Substantial redraft with a change in responsibilities and procedure.	18/11/21	JB



## Programme Approval Procedure

### Introduction

1. When the College establishes a new programme or course, it is vital that it is academically and economically viable, that academic standards have been appropriately defined and that it will offer students the best opportunity to learn.
2. The aims of the programme approval process are to:
  - a. Ensure that each proposed new programme has a sound academic rationale and contributes towards achievement of the strategic aims and objectives of the College.
  - b. Ensure that an appropriate business case is in place for each proposed new programme, which demonstrates the viability of the proposed new programme and that appropriate staffing and learning resources are in place for the effective delivery of the programme.
  - c. Ensure that each proposed new programme has been designed in such a way as to meet the College's expectations for academic quality and standards, to meet or exceed the expectations of the *UK QAA Quality Code* where relevant, and to meet any appropriate requirements of Professional and Statutory Regulatory Bodies (PSRB).

### Scope

3. This procedure applies to all programmes delivered by Spurgeon's College, both those leading to a Spurgeon's College Award (including awards involving credit accumulation and transfer), and those validated or accredited by other bodies.
4. For the purposes of this procedure, the term 'programme' refers to both higher education courses and non-higher education courses where relevant.
5. The approval process will vary according to whether the programme carries higher education credits, whether it is validated by the College or by another institution and the particular validation or accreditation arrangements in place.

### Responsibilities

6. The Academic Board is responsible for giving academic approval for the proposed programme and recommending it to the Governors who will give the final decision for the programme to be implemented.
7. The Finance Committee is responsible for scrutinising the business case for the proposed programme and recommending it to the Governors for approval.

8. The Academic Director, in conjunction with the programme proposer/lead, will develop the case for strategic approval and complete the 'Programme Approval – Strategic Approval Form'.
9. The Senior Management Team (SMT) is responsible for assessing the strategic proposal for resource and management implications and deciding if the strategic benefits of the proposed programme justify the allocation of time and resources to develop a fuller proposal. This decision will be reported to the programme proposer/s, Academic Board and Governors. The SMT is responsible for keeping a record of all Strategic Approval and Business Case Approval Forms.
10. The Programme Approval, Revalidation and Review Committee (PARRC) is responsible for overseeing the development and approval process of all new programmes. It makes recommendations to the Academic Board on the academic proposals for new taught programmes of study for which the Committee has responsibility under this procedure.
11. The Programme Development Working Group reports to the PARRC and carries out the detailed work involved in the development of the business case and the full academic proposal (with input from relevant members of professional and academic staff).
12. The College's Validation Panel is responsible for the independent scrutiny of new programmes or courses carrying higher education credits.
13. The Senior Registrar is responsible for the storage and maintenance of the Definitive Programme Documentation (programme specifications and unit descriptors) during the life of the programme.

### **Overview of the process**

14. There are three stages to the programme approval process:
  1. Strategic approval
  2. Business case approval
  3. Academic approval.
15. The normal expectation is that the three stages of the programme approval process are sequential and success at one stage does not guarantee success at the next stage. Caution should be exercised before starting work on a later stage before the outcome of the preceding stage is known. In exceptional circumstances, and with the approval of the SMT, stages 2 and 3 can be undertaken concurrently.
16. A summary flowchart of the process is contained in Appendix 1.

### **Programmes developed and validated/approved by Spurgeon's College**

17. Higher education programmes that are developed and validated by the College follow all three stages of the procedure. They are validated by the College Validation Panel and approved by the Academic Board. Once approved, the Governors will give the final decision for the programme to be implemented.
18. Non-higher education programmes or courses that are developed and subject to sole approval by the College follow all three stages of the procedure. They

are scrutinised by the PARRC who will recommend approval to the Academic Board. Once approved by the Academic Board, the Governors will give the final decision for the programme to be implemented.

#### Programmes developed by the College but validated by another institution

19. These programmes should follow stages one and two of the procedure.
20. Where academic approval is given by another institution, stage three will not apply, and the programme will be subject to the relevant approval processes of that institution. The College must wait for this approval prior to recommending the programme to Governors for final approval to implement it.
21. Where a programme is validated by another institution, but the validation arrangements allow for the College to undertake its own academic approval processes, the programme will be subject to stage three of this procedure, and the programme approval process may be subject to a final stage check/approval by the validating institution. The specific procedures of the validating institution must be followed.

#### Programmes validated or accredited by another institution where the College has no jurisdiction over academic content

22. For programmes or courses that will be delivered by the College but where the College has no jurisdiction over the academic content of the programme, stages one and two of this procedure will apply.
23. They will be subject to the approval of the Governors and reported to the Academic Board.

#### **Advice and Consultation**

24. The programme proposer should consult colleagues and the relevant Programme Committee for advice and support in developing the strategic proposal.
25. Stakeholder<sup>1</sup> engagement is a key element of the process. Stakeholders must support the proposed new programme or course at the strategic approval stage. Appropriate mechanisms for achieving stakeholder engagement at other stages of the process will vary according to the programme being proposed. It is especially important that students should be engaged in the development of the full academic proposal.
26. At least one external academic member normally from another higher education institution is appointed to the PARRC and will have an important role to play to give advice at the academic approval stage of the process. They will play an important role in supporting the College to discharge its responsibility for ensuring that proposed new programmes meet the expectations of the *UK Quality Code*, and that the academic quality and standards of proposed programmes are at least comparable to those in similar subjects in other UK Higher Education Institutions. They act as 'critical friends' by providing informed, independent and impartial judgments. Comments made by the external advisor should be documented along with a summary of

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<sup>1</sup> Stakeholders include students, staff and those external to the College who may have an interest in the development of the programme e.g. Employers or PSRB's.

actions taken in response.

### **Strategic Approval**

27. New programme proposals may be initiated through a member or group of staff or a PSRB. Outline ideas for a new programme should be taken, via the appropriate Head of Department, to the SMT at an early stage so that they can agree the proposal considering management, resource and strategic implications, prior to the idea being developed further. If SMT agree the initial idea then the programme proposer/s, in conjunction with the Academic Director will complete the 'Programme Approval - Strategic Approval Form'. At this stage, the programme proposer must show that the proposal has in-principal support of colleagues, key stakeholders and students.
28. The completed Strategic Approval Form should be sent to the SMT to come to a decision on whether the potential strategic benefits of the proposed programme are sufficient to justify the allocation of time and resources to develop a fuller proposal.
29. The SMT will consider whether the proposal demonstrates that:
  - There is a clear and appropriate academic rationale for the proposed programme;
  - The proposed programme will support the achievement of the College's academic and strategic objectives;
  - There is sufficient evidence of likely student demand for the programme to merit carrying out further market research.
30. Having considered all the information submitted, the SMT will either:
  - grant permission for a Business Case to be developed;
  - reject the proposal; or
  - refer the form back to the Programme proposer for revision.

This decision should be recorded on the 'Programme Approval – Strategic Approval Form'.

### **Business Case Approval**

31. Following strategic approval, the Academic Director should convene a PARRC to oversee the programme development process. The PARRC will then convene a Programme Development Working Group to prepare and submit a Business Case for the proposed programme using the 'Programme Approval – Business Case Approval Form'.
32. Completion of the Business Case Approval Form will rely on the input of key members of professional and academic staff, particularly the Chief Operating Officer and the Head of Finance.
33. The Business Case must demonstrate:
  - a full strategic and academic rationale for the proposed programme;
  - clear and sufficient evidence of sustainable market demand, or compelling non-monetary strategic reason for running the Programme;

- appropriate resources are in place or identified to support the delivery of the programme and provide a high quality student learning experience.
34. The section on resource requirements requires consideration of staffing implications and other resources such as IT, the library, pastoral support, catering, accommodation, consumables, and space requirements.
  35. The Business Case should include a financial assessment from the Head of Finance. The financial case should be demonstrated for a minimum five-year period or an estimated period before recruitment reaches a steady state. It should include full estimates of costs, revenues and the impact of the proposed programme on the College.
  36. A proposed fee structure should also be submitted and approved by the Finance Committee, within the guidelines of the Office for Students.
  37. Further advice on completing the Business Case is contained in Appendix 2.
  38. Once the Business Case Approval Form has been completed to the satisfaction of the PARRC, it should be sent to the SMT.
  39. The Business case will be scrutinised by the SMT who will determine whether it should proceed for consideration by the Finance Committee. The SMT may refer the business case back to the PARRC with recommendations for revision or reject the proposal outright if they consider that the business case will not be able to show that the proposed programme is financially viable.
  40. The Finance Committee will:
    - Recommend the business case for approval by the Governors; or
    - Reject the business case; or
    - Refer the business case back to the PARRC for revision.
  41. Approval of the business case by Governors will signal approval for development of a full academic proposal. This decision should be recorded on the 'Programme Approval - Business Case Approval Form' and reported to the Academic Board by the PARRC.

### Academic Approval

42. This section of the approval process is **not** required for those programmes or courses where the College has no jurisdiction over the academic content of the programme or where the academic content of the programme is subject to a similar approval process within the validating institution. Where academic approval is given by another institution, the College must wait for this approval prior to fully marketing or admitting students to the programme.
43. On approval of the business case, the Programme Development Working Group should prepare a full academic proposal using the 'Programme Approval – Academic Approval Form' and supplying additional documentation as necessary. This should demonstrate that the proposed programme will meet internal and external requirements and reference points for academic quality and standards. It also requires evidence of student/stakeholder engagement and consultation.
44. The final draft of the full academic proposal should be submitted to the SMT to sign off in terms of resource and management implications, and in light of the

original business case. Once agreed, the proposal will then be considered through the relevant process as outlined in paragraphs 51 to 61.

### External Advice

45. The External Adviser on the PARRC should be provided with the following:
  - Completed Programme Approval Forms
  - Draft programme and unit specifications (guidance on Programme Specifications is contained in Appendix 3)
  - Draft programme regulations
  - Details of the teaching and learning methods
  - Proposed assessment methods, criteria and integrity safeguards
  - Details of feedback mechanisms for students
  - How learning support needs will be met
  - How placements will operate and be monitored
46. External advisers should record their comments on the 'External Adviser Report Form' which sets out key issues relating to academic quality and standards and any other issues they wish to raise.
47. The PARRC is required to consider any comments made by the External Adviser and respond to these as part of the Academic Approval stage.
48. If the External Advisor on the PARRC feels that the programme is outside their expertise, then the PARRC may consult with another external advisor who is suitably qualified or has relevant experience.

### Student Engagement

49. The PARRC must engage with current students to obtain their input on the proposed programme and keep records of the process and outcomes.

### Competition and Marketing Authority

50. In offering new programmes, the College must comply with regulations published by the Competition and Market Authority (CMA). The information likely to be subject to these requirements is denoted *CMA* on the 'Programme Approval – Academic Approval Form'. This provides an opportunity to review the information that will be provided to students about the programme to ensure that it complies with Consumer Rights Legislation and is clear, up to date and transparent. Advice can be sought from the Head of Regulation and Transformation.

### Approval route for higher education programmes

51. A validation panel will be convened through the Office of the Academic Director and run according to the College's Validation Procedure<sup>2</sup>.
52. The Validation Panel will consider the full academic proposal, in relation to various criteria which must be met for a proposed programme to be approved. The validation process establishes that a new programme is academically

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.spurgeons.ac.uk/policies/>

viable, that academic standards have been appropriately defined and that it will offer students the best opportunity to learn.

#### Approval route for non-higher education courses

53. For courses that do not attract academic credit, the academic case will be considered by the PARRC against all the criteria set out in Appendix 4 and using the 'Non-Higher Education Courses Approval Form'.

#### Academic recommendation

54. The Validation Panel or PARRC (as relevant) will make one of the following recommendations:
- **Approval for six years**, without or without conditions and/or required technical corrections, and/or recommendations
  - **Approval for a shorter fixed period**, with or without conditions and/or required technical corrections, and/or recommendations
  - **Not approved** – an invitation given to resubmit
  - **Not approved** – recommendation that the proposal be withdrawn.
55. The Validation Panel or PARRC can also impose conditions, require technical corrections and make recommendations relating to the proposed programme. Conditions must be fulfilled before the programme can commence.
56. Evidence of the decision making, or approval process should be recorded on the Programme Approval – Academic Approval Form and any relevant documentation (such as the Validation Panel Report) should be submitted to the Academic Board for final approval.

#### **Final Approval by the Academic Board**

57. Once the Validation Panel or the PARRC has approved the proposed programme, it will then be sent to the SMT to sign off the final programme in terms of any further resource or management implications.
58. It should then be passed to the Academic Board for final academic approval.
59. Once approved by the Academic Board, the Governors will give the final decision for the programme to be implemented. This approval is required for a programme to be marketed and for recruitment and admissions to begin.
60. Decisions made should be fed back to key stakeholders.
61. Following programme approval, the Senior Registrar is responsible for the storage and maintenance of the Definitive Programme Documentation (Programme Specifications and Unit Descriptors) during the life of the programme.

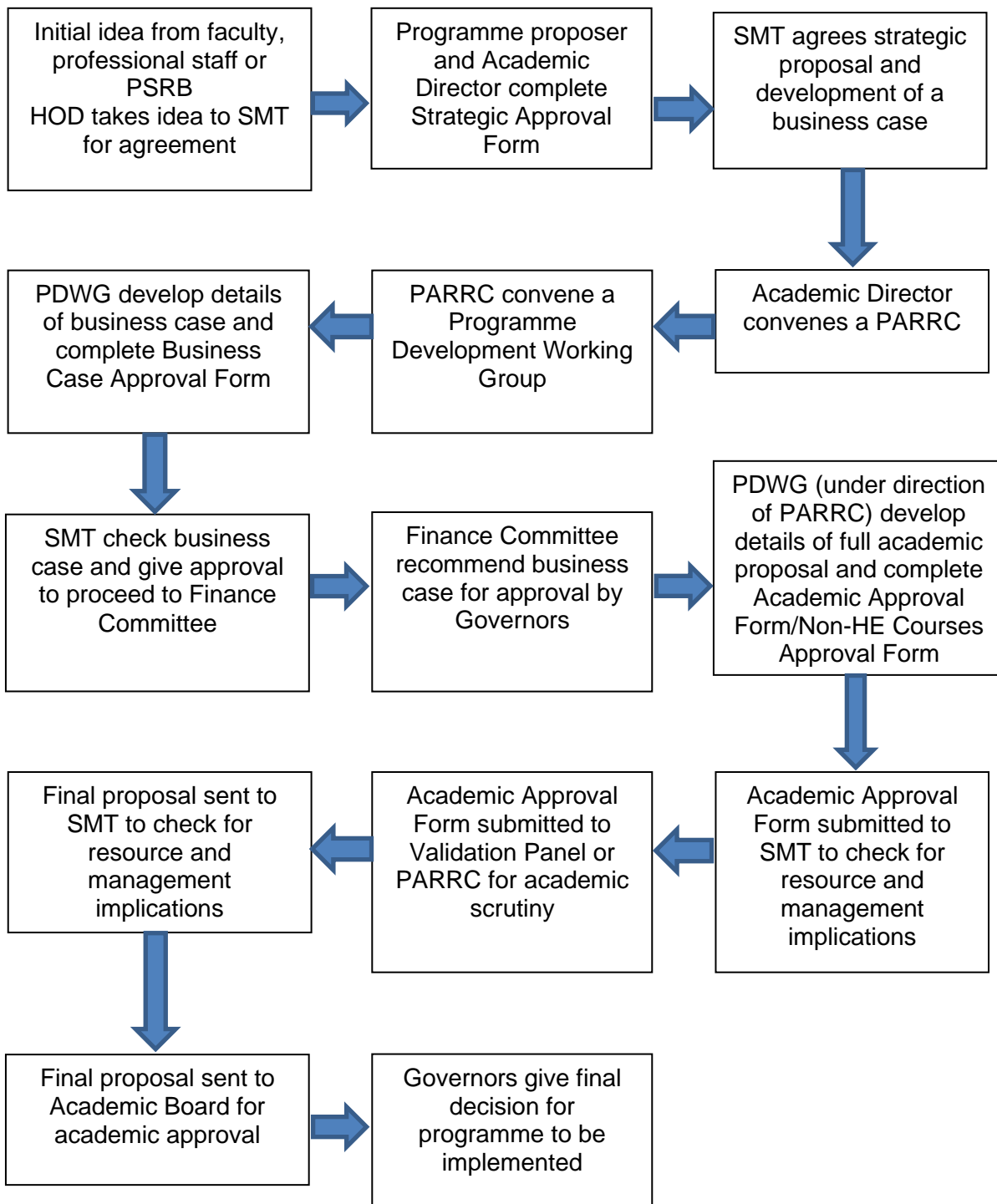
#### **Timescales**

62. The timeline for the development and approval of each new programme will be impacted by internal and external drivers e.g., marketing, timetabling or the requirements of external bodies such as UCAS. It will be agreed between the relevant Programme Committee and the Academic Board taking into account academic, operational and marketing planning requirements.



63. The College's use of UCAS for undergraduate admissions means that the following timescales must be followed in relation to the approval of and recruitment to, undergraduate programmes. All new undergraduate programmes must normally have received final approval by the Academic Board no later than 31 May of the calendar year prior to the first admission to the programme.

## Appendix 1: Programme Approval Process Flowchart



## **Appendix 2: Additional information for a Business Case**

### Strategic Rationale for the proposed programme

- 1) Consider:
  - The strategic aims and objectives of the College
  - The academic reputation and strengths of the College. Particular specialisms or combinations of subjects unique to the College
  - Links to research
  - Opportunities presented by the availability of new sources of funding
  - Professional/statutory body requirements
  - New developments within a subject area
  - Utilisation of new areas of staff expertise or sources of funding
  - Reorganisation of previously offered programmes into a new structure for reasons of economies of scale, shared teaching, utilisation of course units offered in other programmes etc.
  - Widening student choice
  - Creation of opportunities for progression for further study

### Supporting the academic case

- 2) Points you may want to consider and include are:
  - Are there similar programmes running at other UK HE institutions? If similar programmes exist, what would be attractive/unique about the Spurgeon's College programme?
  - If the programme does not already exist elsewhere, what is the target market for the programme and what demand would be generated?
  - Is the programme a Spurgeon's College first in a new area which may lead to the delivery of other new courses?
  - Consider any potential overlap with other programmes in the College.
  - Consult with colleagues about the impact the new programme may have on existing provision.
  - eLearning opportunities to extend or open up new markets.

### Demonstrating demand

- 3) This section should include a statement of the anticipated level of student recruitment for the first 5 years of the programme's operation.
- 4) Has any direct market research been carried out? For example, have students attending open days in the College been asked if they would be interested in this programme? Has it been discussed with any schools, Sixth Form Colleges, or with current students or employer groups?
- 5) In providing evidence that there is demand for the programme you may wish to consider the following:
  - statistical evidence: HESA data, college data;
  - market gaps;
  - national trends: in the area, other areas which may impact on this discipline, feeder subjects;
  - potential for growth;
  - student enquiries in this area;
  - attractiveness to students;

- size of the recruitment pool – anticipated number of home and overseas students;
- what is being offered by competitor institutions; if so how successful are they in recruitment;
- student/alumni/employer/professional body feedback;
- entry requirements (academic and non-academic) which may have a bearing on likely recruitment;
- other issues that may affect demand such as availability of student accommodation or facilities.

### Financial Assessment

- 6) The financial viability of the programme should be considered and detailed for a minimum five-year period or an estimated period before recruitment reaches a steady state. This should include full estimates of costs, revenues and the impact of the proposed programme on the College. A student fee structure will also need to be agreed.
- 7) The Financial assessment should consider:

#### Income

- List the base assumptions in terms of student fee levels (home and overseas) and OFS grants.
- Classify the projected total income according to the stated projected student numbers and base assumptions for fees, bursaries or other income

#### Expenditure

- List the base assumptions for staff costs according to role and level.
- Staff time for programme design and development (academic and administration)
- Staff time for programme management
  - Recruitment and admissions (and placements if relevant)
  - Management and administration
  - Registry
  - Student support
- Teaching supervision and assessment costs
  - Preparation time
  - Teaching time
  - Assessment time
  - Supervision time
- Other costs
  - Marketing
  - Technical support
  - Materials/equipment
  - Catering/library/accommodation etc.

## **Appendix 3: Programme Specification Guidance**

### What is a Programme Specification?

- 1) The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) expects that a definitive record of each programme and qualification is maintained by the College. This record acts as a reference point for the delivery, assessment, monitoring and review of the programme and is designed to be shared with academic and professional support staff, students, internal and external examiners, professional and statutory bodies, and academic reviewers. The record will be updated as and when amendments to the programme or learning outcomes are approved.
- 2) Programme specifications are used for this purpose, and they should make explicit the intended outcomes in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills and other attributes.
- 3) They should help students to understand the teaching and learning methods that enable the outcomes to be achieved; the assessment methods that enable the outcomes to be demonstrated; and the relationship of the programme and its study elements to the qualifications framework and to any subsequent professional qualification and career path.
- 4) They should help the student to understand:
  - a. the aims and structure of the programme;
  - b. how different units contribute to the overall aims;
  - c. and what makes the programme offered at Spurgeon's College distinctive.
- 5) They should also provide information on:
  - a. how a student will progress through the programme;
  - b. how they can expect to develop from year to year;
  - c. and what knowledge, understanding and skills they can expect to have acquired by the time they graduate.
- 6) Claims about learning outcomes must be supported by evidence of how they are developed and, where appropriate, assessed.
- 7) Usually, programme specifications are drafted by groups of staff including a number of colleagues involved in the delivery of the programme. The process should also involve student input. A programme specification is required for all programmes and should be reviewed regularly to keep them up to date.

### How do I write a Programme Specification?

- 8) The purpose of this guidance is to provide advice on the writing of programme specifications, not to be prescriptive. The guidance centres on the minimum core content required in programme specifications but there is no prescribed format for this.
- 9) A programme specification document should contain information on the following topics:

## **Summary**

- a. Awarding body/institution
- b. Teaching institution (if different)
- c. Details of accreditation by a professional/statutory body (if any)
- d. Name of the final award (*include details of any exit awards, if relevant*)
- e. Programme title
- f. UCAS code (undergraduate only)
- g. Subject benchmark (not applicable for research degrees)
- h. Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
- i. The role of the programme specification (generic statement of purpose)
- j. Date at which the programme specification was written or revised
- k. Further links to other relevant information such as programme handbooks,

## **Aims and intended learning outcomes**

10) It may be helpful in terms of both aims and intended learning outcomes to refer to the development of discipline-specific skills, knowledge and understanding, intellectual and practical skills, and personal qualities, though this need not be done under separate headings.

### **Aims of the programme**

11) This section should act as a “mission statement” for the programme and should be written to enthuse students about studying this particular programme. What is the programme’s overall purpose? What makes it distinctive? Why have these aims been settled on?

12) The aims are for the programme as a whole. It may be helpful to refer to links with current research and scholarship, and the employability of graduates.

13) Items mentioned in the ‘Aims of the programme’ should be able to be demonstrated through a combination of learning outcomes in the next section.

14) It is accepted that aims may be quite general and may not cover all aspects of the programme. It is not advisable to state too many aims.

### **Intended learning outcomes**

15) The learning outcomes should set out what students should be able to do on successful completion of the programme. They should be determined by considering what the typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve if full advantage is taken of the learning opportunities.

16) Programme learning outcomes will often be different from unit learning outcomes; they will be more than the sum of the unit learning outcomes. It should however be possible to evidence the programme learning outcomes through a combination of unit learning outcomes.

17) It is not expected that the programme specification will list every learning outcome associated with the programme. The specification is a concise

summary rather than an exhaustive description.

- 18) For undergraduate programmes, intended learning outcomes should be listed for each year of the programme as markers for student progression. Outcomes for the programme as a whole should also be provided.
- 19) For postgraduate taught and research programmes, aims and intended learning outcomes should be provided for the complete programme. Separate outcomes for exit awards at postgraduate level are not required.
- 20) Staff setting up a new programme or revising an existing programme may wish to discuss with potential employers or accreditation bodies the intended learning outcomes that employers are particularly looking for.

### ***Teaching, learning and assessment methods***

- 21) A summary of teaching, learning and assessment methods for the programme
  - a. The particular approaches to teaching, learning and assessment for the programme as a whole should be noted, including any distinctive or innovative features such as major independent work or unique project work.
  - b. Students should also be made aware of the breadth of types of assessment involved in the programme.
  - c. Programme specifications are not required to contain lists of every teaching, learning and assessment method for every unit; the exact assessment will depend on the students' selection of units. Students may therefore find it helpful if this section of the programme specification includes a cross-reference (a web link if possible) to unit specifications.
- 22) Support for student learning and development
  - a. Provide an overview of sources of support for students on the programme.
  - b. Detail specific support including support for part-time, disabled, overseas students, skills support, English Language, supervision for research degrees and generic and subject skills training.

### ***Programme structure***

- 23) A summary of the programme structure and requirements
  - a. For each year or component of study, a list of the mandatory units and the credit rating for each of these units should be noted. Also, the total amount of credit that can be taken as optional units should be listed and cross-referenced (by a web link if possible) to the appropriate unit specifications.
  - b. Requirements for exit awards and any specified pathways should also be made clear.
  - c. A curriculum (or skills) map of units and learning outcomes is not required but it may be included if the Programme staff believe that students will find it useful. If a skills map is not included, then particular care should be taken to ensure that a narrative is provided that explains how the programme fits together. The QAA website provides examples of how partial skills maps can be used.

### ***Mechanisms for programme revision***

24) A summary of what the procedures are for revising the programme and in particular, how feedback from students feeds into this process. This might involve reference to annual monitoring, the procedures for dealing with the outcome of unit questionnaires and what use is made of other methods for gaining student feedback.



#### **Appendix 4: Criteria for the approval of courses not attracting academic credit**

The PARRC will consider the full academic proposal, in relation to the following criteria, and any other threshold criteria set:

- 1) The programme design is coherent in terms of design, delivery and structure.
- 2) The programme design has taken account of equality and diversity issues.
- 3) The content and level of the curriculum of the programme is designed to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes; promotes intellectual progression during the course or the programme; and is up to date.
- 4) There are assessment criteria in place that are clear and which discriminate between different levels of student achievement.
- 5) Appropriate arrangements are in place for obtaining feedback from students and informing students of the outcome of consideration of this feedback.
- 6) Appropriate resources are in place to support the programme.
- 7) For programmes involving placement learning, that the design of the placement enables students to achieve specific intended learning outcomes, at the appropriate level given the timing of the placement within the programme; and that there are appropriate management and communication structures in place with the placement provider and students.
- 8) Where the placement is assessed:
  - i. the proposed methods of assessment and feedback are appropriate to the intended learning outcomes and the structure of the placement;
  - ii. mechanisms will be put in place to ensure the security and consistency of assessment and marking procedures;
  - iii. resit opportunities are appropriate;
  - iv. all staff involved are suitably trained.
- 9) Where appropriate, any PSRB requirements have been taken into consideration.

Please use the Non-Higher Education Courses Approval Form.