A Guide to the Validation Process

Version Control

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Programme Validation and Revalidation

1. New Programme Development

Stage 1: Programme proposal

1.1 It is the responsibility of the Head of School to form a **Programme Development Team (PDT)** to undertake the work of preparing a programme proposal.

1.2 Where programme development is across Schools then one of the relevant Heads of School shall take the lead by agreement.

1.3 A PDT should normally consist of:
- The proposed Programme Manager.
- At least one member of staff from the same School.
- One member of staff from another School.
- The Head of School (optional).
- Where possible, an appropriate external advisor (e.g. industry representative, an academic from another HEI, etc.).

1.4 It is the responsibility of the PDT to complete a New Programme First Stage Approval Form and outline business plan for consideration by the Academic Strategy and Planning Committee, this must be completed for all new awards, or specified credit towards an award [e.g. stand-alone module(s)], of the University. A template for the form can be downloaded from the [Template Centre](). All sections of the Concept Note template must be completed.

1.5 It may not be practical to establish a full PDT at the initial approval stage. Therefore it is left to the discretion of the Head of School to decide the appropriate membership. If the Academic Strategy and Planning Committee approve the proposal for further development a full PDT will be required.

1.6 In preparing their proposal, the PDT will be expected to consult sufficiently widely both within and outside the University to ensure that it is fully aware of both the demand for the proposed programme and the existing provision for such a field of study elsewhere. Meetings should be convened and conducted in such a way as to ensure full participation of the members and outside advisers. Records must be kept of all meetings for presentation along with any documents or material used in deliberations to the Validation and Review Panel during the next stage of the process.

1.7 Guidance on completing the template can be provided by the Assistant Registrar, Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement if required.

Stage 2: Academic Strategy and Planning Committee

1.8 Once completed, the Concept Note must be emailed to quality@rau.ac.uk for submission to the Academic Strategy and Planning Committee.

1.9   The Academic Strategy and Planning Committee will consider the proposal and, if satisfied, will approve further development and identify a provisional start date.

1.10   If the Committee is not satisfied it may reject the proposal or return it to the PDT with comments for amendments to be resubmitted for a subsequent meeting.

1.11   Once a proposal has been accepted the Head of School is responsible for:
- Establishing a full PDT.
- Nominating to Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) external advisor(s) to sit on the Validation and Review Panels.
- Preparing a full Business Plan setting out potential student numbers, income streams, resource requirements (to include staff, rooms, library, ICT), impact on existing provision and risk analysis for approval by the Director of Finance. This should be approved by the ASPC at least one month prior to the validation meeting. A template for the Business Plan is available from the Template Centre.

1.12   The Academic Planning and Strategy Committee may request a six-month interim report on development progress from PDTs for all new provision.

Stage 3: Validation and Review Panel

1.13   The Assistant Registrar QAE may meet with the programme team during the (re)validation process to advise on key aspects of preparation and the expectations of both parties (Validation and Review Panel and programme teams).

1.14   Registry will seek appropriate staff members to sit on Validation and Review Panels and agree dates with staff and external panel members for the validation meetings. The deadline for document submission will normally be 20 working days prior to the validation meeting. Programme Managers are responsible for ensuring that the relevant documentation is completed and submitted to quality@rau.ac.uk on time.

Initial stage review of paperwork:

1.15   Registry will carry out an initial review of the paperwork before circulating to the Validation and Review Panel 10 working days before the validation meeting. Any concerns or omissions will be raised with the Programme Manager ASAP.

Final stage:

1.16   The main validation event will involve appropriate external representation, and will subsequently make recommendations regarding (re)validation of the programmes to AQSC. .

1.17   All internal members of the PDT will normally be required to present their proposals and deal with any questions at the validation meeting. The Programme Manager and Head of School will be informed of the main validation feedback given to the PDT at the end of the review process.

1.18   The final stage validation event will comprise:
   (i)   A closed meeting of the Validation and Review Panel.
   (ii) Discussion with the PDT.
   (iii) A closed meeting of the Validation and Review Panel to consider decide the validation outcome.
   (iv) Validation and Review Panel verbally advises the PDT of the outcome of the validation, including any conditions and recommendations.
   (v)   After the meeting the Panel secretary will send a brief summary of the outcome, including any conditions and recommendations to the PDT via email. Normally conditions must be met before the proposal can be put forward to AQSC. However where conditions are based on securing additional resources such as staff or equipment with a long procurement time, approval can be made subject to the conditions being met before the programme commencement date. Recommendations do not have to be met in order for the programme to gain approval. However, the PDT should respond to each recommendation in the first Annual Programme Manager's Report for the programme following validation.

1.19   For revalidations of existing programmes it is recommended that the Validation and Review Panel meets with current students to discuss their experience of the course.

External academic advisors to the Validation and Review Panel (VRP):

1.21   The PDT is responsible for recommending to AQSC a suitable External Academic Advisor to the Validation and Review Panel. Nomination forms must be forwarded to the AQSC secretary at quality@rau.ac.uk at least 20 working days before the proposed VRP date. The nomination form is available on Gateway.

1.22   Once AQSC approval has been given, Registry will contact the individual to ascertain their availability and discuss details of the validation process.

1.23   Individuals should hold appropriate qualifications and possess experience suitable to enable them to make appropriate judgements on the quality and relevance of the provision. It is therefore likely that an external academic advisor will have direct involvement in an academic programme of a similar level (e.g. Master's, Foundation Degree) and subject area. Ideally, individuals will also have experience of the validation of similar programmes.

1.24   The appointment of an external academic advisor will not normally extend beyond 3 years after retirement and candidates must provide sufficient

evidence of continuing involvement in the academic area in question, and with current developments in HE teaching, learning and assessment.

1.25 To avoid potential conflicts of interest (e.g. caused by close involvement with the University which might compromise objectivity), and to ensure that external academic advisors remain impartial in judgement, individuals will not be appointed if they are any of the following:
  (i) former staff or students of the University, unless a period of 5 years has elapsed and all students taught by or with the candidate have completed their programme(s).
  (ii) a member of a governing body or committee of the University or one of its collaborative partners, or a current employee of the University (including External Examiners) or one of its collaborative partners.
  (iii) anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of staff or student involved with the provision. This may include anyone closely (personally or corporately) associated with the sponsorship (financial or otherwise) of a student on the provision and anyone closely associated with placements or training forming part of the provision.
  (iv) anyone who is, or knows they will be, in a position to influence significantly the future of students on the provision.
  (v) anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative research activities with a member of staff closely involved in the delivery, management or assessment of the provision.

All formal arrangements involving third parties are subject to the RAU Policy and Procedures Relating to Bribery and Corruption.

1.26 An external academic advisor will not normally be appointed from an institution in which members of the programme team are simultaneously serving as External Examiners for cognate programmes.

1.27 An external academic advisor will not normally be appointed for more than one programme within 3 years, unless there are grounds for doing so due to a significant degree of congruence between the programmes involved. Furthermore, an external academic advisor will not normally be permitted to act in the same capacity for the subsequent revalidation of a programme(s) and neither would a colleague from the same institution faculty / department, nor would such a colleague normally be permitted to act as external academic advisor for the University for any other programmes within 3 years.

1.28 External panel members are:
  • Provided with copies of all documentation relating to the programme / institution in question 10 working days prior to the review.
  • Invited to attend and contribute to the Validation and Review Panel review as a full member of the team and to offer a perspective from outside the institution(s).
  • Invited to provide feedback on the validation process they have been involved in, as part of the Validation and Review Panel annual review process. Invited

to submit written comments to the Chair of the Validation and Review Panel should they so wish.

1.29   It will be the responsibility of the Head of School to ensure that any conditions for validation which have been identified are met, by way of revised documentation showing tracked changes being submitted to quality@rau.ac.uk.   Any recommendations must be considered and responded to in the first Annual Programme Manager's Report following validation. Normally the Chair of the Panel in conjunction with the Secretary is sufficient to confirm that the conditions have/have not been met. Conditions can be set at Programme, School or University Level. Consultation with the external academic advisor and Validation and Review Panel members regarding the signing-off of validation conditions is permitted where necessary

1.30.   External members are requested to make comments on the draft report and any final report arising from the Validation and Review Panel event prior to these being presented to the University's AQSC. Any modifications recommended by AQSC to the Validation and Review Panel's conditions and recommendations will be referred back to the Validation and Review Panel Chair and, where appropriate, to the external representation, for consultation. Confirmation that any revised conditions have been fulfilled will require sign off by AQSC.

1.31   The AQSC will determine whether or not the VRP has discharged its responsibilities in line with the agreed procedure and will make a recommendation to Academic Board regarding (re)validation of the proposed programme and the length of period for that validation. For RAU campus based programmes the period between revalidation of provision is normally six years. For collaborative partners the period between institutional review and revalidation of provision is usually three years. The validation period for partners may be reduced if:
- new areas of provision are proposed;
- there is a change of status to the partner, e.g. organisational change, change in ownership, change in significant activities or staffing changes;
- partners are assessed as being high risk.

<u>Documentation required:</u>

1.32   In addition to the New Programme First Stage Approval Form the VRP will also require from the PDT:
    (i)   A completed New Programme Proposal Document, the template for which can be downloaded from the Template Centre. (Not required for revalidations of existing programmes).
    (ii)   A complete Programme Specification, including all Module Reference Sheets, and making full reference to the appropriate QAA subject benchmarks and FHEQ. A template for the Programme Specification can be downloaded from the Template Centre.

(iii)	A complete Programme Specification annex A which can be downloaded from the [Template Centre]().
(iv)	For revalidations of existing programmes, a rationale, to contain details on outline lecture content and assessment, for any new level 5 and 6 modules requiring approval as part of the revalidation and APMRs for the previous period of validation
(v)	CVs of all staff teaching on the programmes.
(vi)	Minutes from any programme development meetings.
(vii)	For programmes with external PSRB accreditation a mapping document that shows how the programme meets the PSRB requirements may be required.

Stage 4: Validation and Review Panel summary report

1.33   The Validation and Review Panel will report its findings and recommendations to the AQSC using the report template, which can be downloaded from the [Template Centre.]()

1.34   On receipt of the Validation and Review Panels report, AQSC will determine whether or not the proposed programme should receive validation and the period for that validation (normally six years). Validation will run from the start of the relevant academic period (normally from September); when a revalidation takes place in the penultimate year of a validation period, the revalidated programme will commence from the start of the relevant academic period of that penultimate year. Any modifications recommended by AQSC to the Validation and Review Panel's conditions and recommendations will be referred back to the Validation and Review Panel Chair and, where appropriate, to the external representation, for consultation and confirmation.

1.35   The AQSC will report its recommendation to the Academic Board for final approval.

Appeals against Validation and Review Panel recommendations:

1.36   A PDT or Programme Management Group (PMG) may appeal against the (re)validation recommendations of the Validation and Review Panel on one or more of the following grounds:
   a.   That the judgement reached by the Validation and Review Panel is unsound or inappropriate on academic grounds;
   b.   That there had been irregularities in the conduct of, and procedures followed by, the Validation and Review Panel, and of such a nature as to raise reasonable doubt regarding the soundness of the Validation and Review Panel's recommendations;
   c.   That one or more members of the Validation and Review Panel were prejudiced or unreasonably biased in their judgement(s);
   d.   That new evidence is now available that could not have been provided at the time of the (re)validation meeting.

1.37   Any such appeal must be made in writing and submitted to the Chair of AQSC normally at the same time as the final report from the Validation and Review Panel on the (re)validation event is received.

1.38   Should this not be possible, the Chair of AQSC must receive the written appeal within one month of publishing its decision (through the AQSC minutes) in support of the Validation and Review Panel's recommendations.

1.39   Appeals received outside this timeframe, and without strong justification for their late receipt, will not be considered.

1.40   Where an appeal is made, the Chair of AQSC shall determine whether the alleged grounds satisfy any of points a-d above before asking the full Committee to consider the appeal at its next meeting. If the Chair determines that the appeal does not satisfy any of points a-d above, the appeal shall be dismissed.

1.41   AQSC reserves the right to hear the appellant (i.e. proposed or existing programme manager or their nominee) in person, in conjunction with their written appeal, and to invite other persons to provide verbal or written information relevant to the appeal. If the Committee finds the appeal is well founded, it shall either:
   (i)   Determine the case there and then;
   (ii)   Refer the case back to the Validation and Review Panel for reconsideration with, or without, recommendation.

1.42   Any modifications recommended by AQSC to the Validation and Review Panel's conditions and recommendations will be referred back to the Validation and Review Panel Chair and, where appropriate, to the external representation, for consultation and confirmation.

Timescales

1.43   On average it is expected that the entire process, from the initial idea through development to the programme commencing, will take at least 12 months. However, in order to take advantage of new initiatives and markets this timescale is only a guide. There are some key dates Schools should be aware of:

> DATES TO REMEMBER….FOR SEPTEMBER START, it is essential that the validation meeting takes place before the preceding **EASTER.** The Head of School/Programme Team should then confirm any conditions have been met, with details of how to the Chair and Secretary and the Programme report and documentation presented to the **May/June** AQSC meeting. If these dates are not met a programme will not be validated for an October start date and will **not** be eligible to recruit (but see paragraph 1.45 below). A full list of AQSC meeting dates is available on the University intranet.

1.44   Please bear these dates in mind when thinking about new programme development activity. Any queries should be directed in the first instance to the Assistant Registrar QA and E at quality@rau.ac.uk.

1.45   Under exceptional circumstances AQSC may permit an extension to the deadlines stipulated above for new programme validations. AQSC will consider the merits of permitting an extension on an individual validation basis, as required.