Programme Validation and revalidation policy 02.16

PURPOSE: This document sets out the process which must be followed to introduce, make major changes to, or review any taught undergraduate programme delivered at, or by, Solihull College & University Centre leading to the award, or partial award, of a Higher Education qualification.

SCOPE: Proposers of new programmes, College Senior Leadership, Programme Leaders, and Course teams.

RESPONSIBILITY: Deputy Principal

LEGAL CONTEXT:

Programme Validation & Periodic Review - new and existing programmes

1. Purpose:

This document sets out the process which must be followed to introduce, make major changes to, or review any taught undergraduate programme delivered at, or by, Solihull College & University Centre leading to the award, or partial award[1], of a Higher Education qualification.

2. This Policy is of Particular Interest to:

Proposers of new programmes[2], College Senior Leadership, Programme Leaders, and Course teams

3. Reference Points:

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)'s UK Quality Code, Part B, Chapter B1: Programme design and approval, and Part B Chapter B8 Programme Monitoring and Review.

4. See Also:

Programme Validation Process Flowchart
Programme Validation Form
Programme Specification Template

5. Background

5.1 Programme proposers should consult the Dean of Higher Education & Curriculum Innovation, their Head of School and Assistant Principal for advice on the arrangements for validation and the support available.

5.2 The process covers the validation of both new programmes and existing programmes after a period of operation and proposals for major changes to existing programmes.

5.3 Programmes are validated for a defined period only (normally a maximum of 5 years). In good time before this validation expires programme must again undergo validation in accordance with the procedures set out in this document, to assess their continuing validity and relevance in the light of:

5.3.1 the relevance of the programme to School and College education, local need and student enhancement strategies,

5.3.2 the effect of changes, including those which are cumulative and those made over time, to the design and operation of the programme,

5.3.3 the continuing availability of staff and physical resources,

5.3.4 current practice in the application of knowledge in the relevant discipline(s), technological advances, and developments in teaching and learning,

5.3.5 changes to external points of reference, such as subject benchmark statements,

5.3.6 relevant Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements,

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[1] For example credit certification for students leaving, or transferring, prior to completion of their intended qualification aim.
[2] The programme proposer is the member of staff proposing the introduction of a new programme or major amendments to an existing programme

5.3.7 changes in student demand, employer expectations and employment opportunities,
5.3.8 data relating to student progression and achievement,
5.3.9 student feedback, including Programme Quality Boards, College Surveys, Focus Groups and the National Student Survey.

5.4 Cognate groupings may be validated, but only after the initial, individual first validation of programmes.

6. Advice and Assistance

Programme proposers should consult their Head of School and The Dean of Higher Education & Curriculum Innovation for advice on the arrangements for validation and the support available.

7. Reference points

7.1 All new and existing programmes must be validated with reference to:
7.1.1 The National Framework for Higher Education Qualifications;
7.1.2 Relevant subject benchmark statements;
7.1.3 The requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (where relevant)
7.1.4 The College requirements as set out in the current College Strategy document and College priorities.

8. Initial Discussions

8.1 For a new programme, or for existing programmes due for re-validation, the programme proposer should in the first instance discuss the proposal informally with appropriate academic colleagues and the Dean of Higher Education & Curriculum Innovation to test the feasibility, or on-going feasibility, of the proposal.

8.2 The Dean of Higher Education & Curriculum Innovation should consider whether:
- there is a good academic rationale for the programme;
- the programme is consistent with School and College engagement and education strategies;
- there is a realistic estimate of (continued) student numbers and evidence of sustainable market demand;
- the College has the appropriate resources to support the delivery of the programme and to provide a high quality student experience;
- the proposal is likely to secure the support of all groups within the School and outside which will contribute to the delivery of the programme;
- for an existing programme, the programme continues to be valid and relevant

8.3 If the Dean of Higher Education & Curriculum Innovation is supportive of the development, the programme proposer should approach the relevant Head of School for advice on the process and to identify the colleagues who should be consulted as part of the initial consideration of the idea. At this stage there should normally be consultation with:
- Marketing (for market research)
- Strategy and Planning (through the Business Planning and HE Strategy Group)
- Finance (through the Vice Principal)
- Student representatives (through specifically convened focus groups and formally via the subject area's Programme Quality Boards).

8.4 If as a result of this consultation it appears that the new programme is likely to be viable the programme proposer should confirm with the HE Strategy Group that it is appropriate to proceed to develop the proposal to submit for strategic approval (Stage 1). The proposal will be tabled at the HE Strategy Group by the Assistant Principal of the School in which the programme will be delivered.

9. Stage 1 Strategic Approval

9.1   The programme proposer/Head of School should complete steps 1-9 of Stage 1 of the Programme Validation Form. This requires the programme proposer/Head of School to outline the academic rationale for the programme, provide an indication of anticipated student numbers (or actual number for an existing programme), and supply brief evidence of market demand as informed by initial external and internal consultation.

9.2   The Stage 1 form should be considered by the HE Strategy Group who may wish to seek additional input from across the college to enable them to reach a decision about whether to allow a proposal to proceed or continue.

9.3   If any significant concerns are raised, the Dean of Higher Education & Curriculum Innovation will bring together the relevant parties for discussion, and will have the final decision as to whether approval should be granted, refused or re-considered by the HE Strategy Group.

9.4   If strategic approval is granted, the programme may be promoted internally and externally as 'Subject to Validation' and the proposal can proceed to the development stage

10. Development of Programme Documentation

10.1   Following strategic approval the programme proposer should prepare the programme documentation or bring together existing documentation where applicable. At this stage the documentation will consist of:
For new programmes
- draft Programme Specification
- draft module profiles for all new modules

For existing programmes
- Programme Specification(s) and associated Module profiles
- a short report highlighting any issues with the current provision of resources (for example updated software requirements, previous difficulties with timetabling particular modules) on which the views of internal stakeholders are required.

For major change to existing programme – as for existing programmes plus
- document setting out the rationale for the changes proposed.

10.2   At this stage the programme proposer/Head of School/Dean of Higher Education & Curriculum Innovation, in consultation with relevant academic colleagues, should nominate an External Advisor to participate in the validation of the programme(s) by commenting on the proposal. The External Advisor policy, including the criteria for nomination, is available from the HE Quality Administration Team.

10.3   In consultation with the programme proposer/Head of School, the Dean of Higher Education & Curriculum Innovation will agree the timeline for the remainder of the process, including dates for the Stakeholder meeting (Stage 2 of the validation process) and provisional convening of the Pre-validation Group (Stage 3) if approval is granted at Stage 2.

11. Stage 2: Internal stakeholder consultation

11.1   Once the required documentation is available the programme proposer/Dean of Higher Education & Curriculum Innovation will convene a meeting of relevant academic colleagues with internal stakeholders. Departmental representatives may, in cases where they feel the proposal raises no significant issues for them, either submit comments to the meeting in writing or ask another representative to feed in comments on their behalf, but the meeting must include an opportunity for input from:
- Library and resources
- Management Information Systems
- Student Services
- Strategy and Planning
- Marketing

- Input from current students

11.2 The internal stake-holder meeting must have available to it the following documentation:
For new programmes
- Draft Programme Specification
- Draft module profiles for all new modules

For existing programmes
- Programme Specification(s) and associated Module profiles
- A short report highlighting any issues with the current provision of resources (for example updated software requirements, previous difficulties with timetabling particular modules) on which the views of internal stakeholders are required.

For major change to existing programme
- Document setting out the rationale for the changes proposed,
- Draft programme specification and associated module profiles

11.3 The meeting will discuss the resource requirements for the programme(s), highlight any specific issues and needs, confirm whether resource provision is likely to be (at least) adequate and, if this is not the case, what actions will be adopted to provide adequate resource. The meeting will also discuss any context relevant to the programme(s), as provided by Strategy and Planning, Marketing and student input.

11.4 Following this meeting Step 11 of the Programme Validation Form should be completed. Particular attention should be paid to recording any issues to which the programme proposer/Dean of Higher Education & Curriculum Innovation will need to respond in finalising the programme documentation for detailed academic scrutiny. This will form part of the documentation considered by the Pre-validation Group at Stage 3 of the validation process.

11.5 The Internal Stakeholder Group may prevent a proposal being submitted to the next stage for academic scrutiny, recording issues or concerns in the relevant section of the Programme Validation form, and returning it to the programme proposer.

11.6 If the programme proposal is accepted as viable by the Internal Stakeholder Group, the proposal should be forward to the Pre-validation Group with any issues or concerns recorded in the relevant section of the Programme Validation form.

11.7 The Pre-validation Group will take these views into consideration when making a recommendation to the Programme Validation Panel.

12. Preparation of revised programme documentation, reflective report for existing programmes, and involvement of External Advisor

12.1 For a new programme the programme proposer will:
- revise the draft programme documentation taking into account feedback from internal stakeholders,
- seek the advice of Marketing in refining those parts of the programme specification which will also be used to provide public information about the programme – for example on the 'find a course' webpages.

12.2 For existing programmes on the regular validation cycle the Head of School should prepare the following documents:
- An evaluative report on the operation of the programme(s) since the last validation, with an action plan, reflecting on the feedback available from the following sources:
- previous annual programme and module reports
- external examiner reports;
- reports from professional, statutory, regulatory, accreditation or other external bodies;
- staff and student feedback from module and annual programme reports, staff/student liaison groups, focus groups, minutes of management committees that consider module reviews;
- feedback from former students and their employers if available;

- management information including data on student progression and award data. The team should consider performance by different student groups (e.g. analysis by gender, disability, ethnicity) and should review award data taking into account equivalent data from comparator Colleges and Universities;
- information on Admissions and Applications to the programme
- external competitor information, where available
- data on alumni destinations
- feedback from employers

All staff teaching on the programme(s) should have the opportunity to input during the preparation of the reflective report.

12.3 The programme documentation and, for existing programmes, the evaluative report, should be made available to the External Advisor, together with Steps 1-11 of the Programme Validation Form.

12.4 The External Advisor must report to the Pre-validation Group in accordance with the procedures set out in the External Advisor Policy.

12.5 The programme proposer/ Dean of Higher Education & Curriculum Innovation should then complete Steps 12-25 of the Programme Validation Form.

13. Stage 3 Academic Scrutiny

13.1 The following documentation is required for Stage 3 consideration:
- Programme Validation Form (complete up to step 24);
- Programme specification;
- Module profiles for all core and compulsory modules and all new modules;
- External Advisor's report (this does not need to be formal), unless the External Advisor has agreed to be present at the Pre-validation Group meeting;
- Programme regulations for the College Calendar (where specific regulations for the programme(s) are required);
- Evaluative report and action plan (for existing programmes on the regular Validation cycle only);
- Rationale for major changes proposed to the programme (for major changes to an existing programme).

13.2 The Dean of Higher Education & Curriculum Innovation should convene a Pre-validation Group to undertake the detailed academic scrutiny of the proposal. The membership of a Pre-validation Group must include as a minimum:
- A member of academic staff external to the School, nominated by the School and approved by the Dean of Higher Education & Curriculum Innovation.
- Student representative,
- An External Advisor (for an existing programme).

Other members of staff with relevant expertise may be invited to join the Pre-validation Group as required. The member of staff from another School is asked to confirm on behalf of the Quality and Standards Department that the process has been followed appropriately, and that all reporting has been properly carried out.

13.3 Where appropriate, representatives from employer groups and partner institutions may also be invited to participate in the Pre-validation Group. In such cases there may be requirements for additional documentation and/or for engagement with the programme team as part of the process.

13.4 For a new programme the Pre-validation Group will discuss the proposed programme proposal in detail and consider whether:
- appropriate use has been made of the relevant external reference points (such as FHEQ, the relevant subject benchmark(s), PSRB standards where applicable) and internal guidelines in developing the programme;

- the aims and intended learning outcomes are appropriate to the level of the programme, and the learning outcomes relate to and are appropriate to the overall aims;
- the curriculum content and design is informed by current research and scholarship, promotes learning, demonstrates progression through parts of the programme, and will enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes;
- the modes of assessments are clearly linked to learning outcomes, and will enable students to demonstrate achievement of all the intended learning outcome;
- arrangements for feedback to students on assessment performance are clearly specified, and are designed to identify opportunities for students to improve their performance;
- there is a flexible and inclusive approach to learning and teaching and provision is made for all students to be able to access the curriculum and demonstrate achievement of all the intended learning outcomes;
- design of the programme and modules recognises that students have different learning styles and come from diverse backgrounds, for example by using examples and resources drawn from a range of sources, cultures and viewpoints;
- there is confirmation that all necessary resources are available to support the programme and any issues raised at Stage 2 of the Validation Process have been addressed satisfactorily;
- an appropriate response has been given to any issues or recommendations made by the External Advisor;
- the programme documentation is clear, accurate and suitable for a student audience;
- student employability has been considered as part of the curriculum development process;
- arrangements for student evaluation of the programme and modules are clear and appropriate;
- the arrangements for student support are clear;
- there is clarity about the opportunities for students to exercise choice in the curriculum.

13.5   For existing programmes on the regular validation cycle the Pre-validation Group will, in addition to reviewing documentation, also engage directly with staff, students and, wherever possible, employers and/or alumni associated with the programme(s), through a series of meetings. Through this process the Pre-validation Group will discuss the programme(s) in detail and consider whether:

Curriculum Design, Content and Organisation
- there is evidence that the design, content and organisation of the programme will enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and understanding, subject specific skills, professional skills, key skills, progression to employment/further study, and personal development;
- the programme's content and design are clearly informed by developments in techniques of teaching and learning, by current research and scholarship, and by any changes in relevant occupational or professional requirements;
- developments in the subject, current research and scholarship or changes in occupational/professional requirements (where appropriate);
- design of the programme and modules recognises that students have different learning styles and come from diverse backgrounds, for example by using examples and resources drawn from a range of sources, cultures and viewpoints;
- the intended learning outcomes relate appropriately to external reference points including relevant subject benchmark statements, the qualifications framework, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and any professional body requirements;
- the levels and modes of study, their breadth and depth, coherence, flexibility, extent of module choice, are appropriate to achieving the intended learning outcomes;

- there are any characteristics of the programme which are particularly distinctive or innovative to which attention should be drawn;
- that curriculum content enables students to achieve the intended learning outcomes
- that the design and organisation of the curriculum is effective in promoting student learning and achievement of the intended learning outcomes;
- there is clarity about the opportunities for students to exercise choice in the curriculum and to engage with modules outside of their home discipline.

Teaching, Learning and Assessment
- the teaching learning and assessment methods proposed will enable students to achieve and demonstrate the intended learning outcomes;
- there is a flexible and inclusive approach to learning and teaching and provision is made for all students to be able to access the curriculum and demonstrate achievement of all the intended learning outcomes;
- there is a suitable variety of teaching methods, to recognize diversity of learning styles and is that there is sufficient breadth, depth, and challenge in the curriculum to be offered;
- there is an appropriate range of assessment methods to effectively evaluate the attainment of learning outcomes and to differentiate levels of student attainment;
- sufficient provision is made for feedback to students on assessment which will enable them identify how to improve their academic performance ;
- there is clear information about the contribution of placement learning or study time spent abroad, to the programme (where applicable);
- Information about progression requirements is clear or clearly signposted to students;
- Information about possible exit awards and deferment is clear and consistent with College practice and policies.

Student Progression, Academic Support and Guidance
- where the nature of the programme indicates that there are particular requirements for support and guidance for students, there is clear evidence that this has been addressed in the documentation.;
- the student support and guidance provided (as referenced in the documentation) reflects the potential diversity of needs of the student body;
- there is an appropriate overall strategy for academic support, including written guidance, which is consistent with the student profile and the overall aims of the programme;
- there are effective arrangements for admission and induction, including cultural orientation, which are generally understood by staff and applicants;
- learning is effectively facilitated by academic guidance, feedback and tutorial arrangements;
- the arrangements for academic tutorial support are clear and there is evidence as to how the School knows if these are being offered by staff and taken up by students;
- written guidance is provided for students presented in language which is clear and unambiguous, and is material available in alternative formats as required
- reasonable adjustments are made for students with disabilities.

Quality Assurance and Enhancement
- it is clear how students can be involved in the development and enhancement of the programme;
- clear and accurate information is presented about the internal and external monitoring procedures that ensure the quality of the programme.

Learning Resources and Placement Learning
- appropriate technical and administrative support is available;
- there is an overall strategy for the effective use of learning resources;
- learning is effectively facilitated in terms of the provision of resources;
- there are any unresolved issues arising from the Internal stakeholder meeting. (Stage 2)

General presentational issues
- the programme specification clearly enables students to understand what the programme will enable them to achieve and how such achievement is realised through the learning, teaching and assessment methods used;
- the programme specification is clearly written in straightforward and inclusive language, recognising diversity of the audience.

13.6 Having considered the documentation the Pre-validation Group will make one of the following decisions:
- Recommend for approval of validation;
- Undertake further work to revise documentation and resubmit to the Pre-validation Group.

13.7 The Pre-validation Group will identify, where applicable, any general issues emerging from the discussion, including examples of good practice, which should be drawn to the attention of the Higher Education Forum.

For existing programmes on the regular Validation cycle the Pre-validation Group will also draw out and record on the Programme Validation Form general conclusions, commendations and recommendations.

Step 26 of the Programme Validation Form should be completed to record the proceedings and outcome.

14. Stage 4: Academic Approval

14.1 The following documentation is required for this stage:
- Programme Validation Form (steps 1-25 complete);
- Final version of programme specification amended in the light of Pre-validation Group comments;
- Module profiles for all core modules and all new modules;
- Mapping document to show where each programme learning outcome is assessed and by what type of assessment;
- External Advisor's report/opinion, and the Programme Proposer's response;
- Programme regulations for the College Calendar (where specific programme regulations are required). For an existing programme any changes to regulations should be highlighted, using 'track changes';
- Minutes of the Pre-validation Group meeting

14.2 Following consideration of the proposal, the Validation Panel will make one of the following decisions:
- Approve validation;
- Approve validation with conditions;
- Reject proposal (for new programmes)/close programme(s) (for existing programmes on the regular validation cycle).

The Validation Panel will also identify, where applicable, any general issues emerging from the discussion which should be explicitly drawn to the attention of SMT.

Step 27 of the Programme Validation Form should be completed by the Head of School following consideration of the proposal.

If a decision is taken to close an existing programme, the College's policy on programme closures must be followed, to ensure that appropriate provision is made for current applicants and students.

14.3 Once the decision has been taken and, where applicable, it is confirmed that any conditions required to be completed before the programme can proceed have been fulfilled, the Validation Panel Chair will notify:
- Finance
- Marketing
- Library
- MIS
- Student Services

- Registry
- Timetabling

14.4   The Programme Validation Panel Chair will complete Stage 4 of the Programme Validation Form, a file reference for the final approved version of the programme specification and a copy of the programme regulations (where specific regulations for the programme are required).

15. Post- approval

15.1   The Course Leader is responsible for obtaining new programme codes, and for ensuring that all necessary action is taken to create or update the programme(s) and associated modules.

15.2   The Head of School/Dean of Higher Education & Curriculum Innovation is responsible for ensuring that, where applicable, the programme has an accurate KIS, published in accordance with HEFCE requirements. Undergraduate programmes cannot be advertised through UCAS without a complete KIS.

15.3   The Head of School is responsible for ensuring that accurate programme regulations are submitted for inclusion in the College Calendar.

15.4   The Director of Marketing is responsible to for ensuring the accuracy of public information regarding the programme (for example the 'find a course' page on the College website).

15.5   The Dean of Higher Education & Curriculum Innovation is responsible for ensuring that any actions arising from programme validations are included in the College's Strategic Planning cycle and monitored via the HE Strategy Group.

Document History:

Created	12/07/14
Revised for new job titles	15/08/15
Revised Title/Footer & Section 9	23/09/15
Moved considerations to 8 from 9	30/11/15