

**Programme Approval Handbook**

**2023/24**

A process guide for the approval of new and modified taught academic programmes leading to University and external qualifications

Standards and Enhancement Office (SEO) September 2023

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# 1. Introduction

All proposed new and amended academic programmes of study are required to gain *Strategic Approval (see below for criteria)* and *Academic Approval* **before** design and development begins.

**Strategic Approval**is the formal process by which the University’s Strategic Planning and Resources Development Committee (SPRDC) grants permission for the development of any of the following proposals:

* On Campus developments that require significant investment in learning resources including staff
* New partner organisations
* New programmes with a new or existing partner organisation
* Significant changes to the nature and academic level of provision with an existing partner organisation (e.g. a change from research to taught programmes; or a change from HE levels 4-6 to HE levels 7-8)
* Any proposal that includes the development of online delivery.

To apply for strategic approval, a **Strategic Approval Form (SAF)** should be completed.

**Academic Approval** is the formal process by which the University’s Programmes Committee gives permission for the development of any new programme.

To apply for academic approval, a **Programme Approval Form (PAF),** or in the case of apprenticeships, an **Apprenticeship Approval Form (AAF)** should be completed.

**Programme Approval** is the formal process by which the University’s Senate gives permission that a programme may be offered for study. Senate is responsible for information about, and the standards and quality of, all programmes that lead to a University qualification. The Standards and Enhancement Office (SEO) manages Programme Approval and reports the outcomes of this quality assurance process as a recommendation to the Senate, for ratification. The normal period of programme approval is five years or until the next periodic review and reapproval.

The Programme Approval process includes confirmation that a proposed new or changed programme meets the University’s expectations of standards, quality and information. The University has specified criteria for approval of programmes in order to meet the [regulatory requirements of the Office for Students](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/the-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/). Where relevant, the approval process will consider the requirements of any relevant *Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body* and *external awarding body/organisation*.

Programme Approval relies on *peer review* by approved University staff and student reviewers as well as subject-specialist external advisors and employers. Approved programmes normally operate in accordance with University regulations, unless otherwise stated.

All proposed modifications to programmes that are delivered on campus, which have an off- campus version that is delivered by a partner organisation under a franchise agreement, should be made simultaneously. This is to ensure that the franchise version of a programme remains identical to the version taught on campus at the University.

Further information regarding programme design and approval can be found online here: <https://www.bolton.ac.uk/staff-area/professional-services/standards-and-enhancement/programme-design-and-approval>

# 2. Programme Approval Route

There are two routes to Programme Approval, as follows:

**Route A:** This is the standard route which involves an iterative process of design and development. It ends with consideration of documentation on a Proposal Development Record (PDR) at a meeting of the **University Standing Panel**.

**Route B:** This is the standard route for off campus programmes and Apprenticeship programmes. It is also undertaken by exception for some on campus programmes. Route B also uses an iterative process of design and development which ends with consideration of documentation on a PDR by a **Programme Approval Panel.** Route B also involves an event with a series of meetings with the proposing team, students, employers etc. The event may be online, in person or hybrid.

The choice of arrangements will reflect the level of complexity of a proposal. Factors to be considered include:

* The number of programmes and complexity of the proposal
* The level of experience in programme development amongst the proposing team
* Whether the proposal is in a new or an existing subject area
* Any requirements for learning resources which are subject to confirmation
* The involvement and preferred approach of a PSRB
* Location and mode of programme delivery
* Involvement of an off-campus partner organisation
* Whether the proposal is for an apprenticeship

# 3. Route A and Route B Process Steps

**Route A** via **University Standing Panel and Route B** via **Programme Approval Panel** bothinvolve nine common initial steps:

**Step 1:** **Strategic and Academic Approval**

Strategic Approval Form approved via SPRDC (for some proposals only) and Programme Approval Form or Apprenticeship Approval Form approved via Programmes Committee.

**Step 2**: **SEO Scoping Meeting**

Risk assessment of required level of academic support, identification of SEO officer, Proposal Development Record (PDR) set up.

**Step 3**: **Initial Programme Development**

Programme design advice and guidance provided by SEO and/or AC SELE. Can be concurrent with Step 2.

 **Step 4:** **Planning Meeting**

 Planning Meeting to discuss nature of the proposal, proposed route and stages (Annex 1), Programme approval criteria (Annex 2) documentary requirements (Annex 3). Approval of External Advisor if details presented.

**Step 5**: **Programme Refinement and Consultation**

Consultation with Internal Advisor, External Advisor, students and employers to refine programme structure (consolidation/cohesion), contents, assessment strategy, support and resource requirements etc. Completion of the Approval Check-list by Proposer.

**Step 6**: **External Advisor Consultation Report (and Sign-off for Route A)**

External Advisor completes Approval Check-list + Consultation Report.

**Step 7:** **Internal Advisor Sign off**

Internal Advisor completes Approval Check-list and Internal Advisor Consultation Report.

**Step 8:** **SEO PDR Completion Check**

SEO Officer conducts a PDR completion check.

**Step 9:** **PDR Open to Panel for Scrutiny**

SEO Officer confirms that PDR documentation is available to the Panel for scrutiny.

**Route A via University Standing Panel (USP)** **– Step 10 onwards**

**Step 10:** **Scrutiny of documents by USP members**

USP members scrutinise documentation on the PDR and submit feedback prior to meeting.

**Step 11**: **USP Meeting and Outcome**

The Panel meets to determine whether due process has been followed, a complete and acceptable set of final programme documents has been produced & the programme is ready for recruitment and delivery. USP recommends an outcome and the Secretary completes a USP Outcome Report.

**Step 12**: **Endorsement and** **Approval**

Programmes recommended for approval are referred to Education Committee for endorsement and Senate for approval.

**Step 13**: **Programme made “live”**

Once the programme is approved, it can be made live on “SITs”. Programme and Module specifications are also made public online.

**Route B via Programme Approval Panel (PAP)** **– Step 10 onwards**

**Step 10:** **Scrutiny of documents by Approval Panel members**

Panel members scrutinise documentation on the PDR and submit Lines of Enquiry.

**Step 11**: **PAP Meeting and Outcome**

The Panel meets with staff, students and employers to determine whether the programme is ready for recruitment and delivery. PAP recommends an outcome. A summary report and a full report is produced by the Secretary.

**Step 12**: **Endorsement and** **Approval**

Programmes recommended for approval are referred to Education Committee (which receives the full report) for endorsement and Senate (which received the summary report) for approval.

**Step 13**: **Programme made “live”**

Once the programme is approved, it can be made live on “SITs”. Programme and Module specifications are also made public online.

# 4. Additional Requirements for Apprenticeship Programmes

As outlined earlier, all apprenticeship programme proposals require the completion of a bespoke form, the Apprenticeship Approval form (AAF) and will follow Route B.

The following additional arrangements are also required in the case of apprenticeship programmes:

Before a proposal for an apprenticeship can be taken forward for Academic Approval, it should first be discussed with the Apprenticeships Team.

The Director of Apprenticeships will need to endorse the proposal following consideration of a number of factors set out on an Apprenticeship Scoping Check-List.

The Planning Meeting will involve the Director of Apprenticeships or a nominee from the Apprenticeships team.

Additional Programme documentation will be required including a bespoke Programme Handbook incorporating a KSB map and the accompanying Apprenticeship Programme Handbook Approval Form. See Annex 2 Sub-Section I for the additional criteria for approval.

Following the academic approval of an IfATE Integrated apprenticeship standard, the Director of Apprenticeships will confirm the status of the application to DfE for the subject team to become the End Point Assessment Organisation.

# 5. Additional Requirements for Online Only Programmes

As outlined earlier, all online programme proposals require the completion of a Strategic Approval form and must be approved by SPRDC before the proposal is taken forward for Academic Approval.

A bespoke online Programme Guide as well as a Programme Landing page on the VLE is required,

One fully populated Moodle (or alternative VLE) site for whole module delivery per level together with a specified sample of Module Guides should also be provided. See Annex 2 Sub-Section J for the additional criteria for approval.

# 6. Additional Requirements for Off Campus Partnership Programmes

The following additional documents are required in the case of off-campus programmes:

Partnership Initial Assessment of Operations (for new partners), Partner Operations Manual, Responsibilities Check List, Equivalency check List, Contract, any Local Licence or regulatory documentation (if relevant), website/Link to CMA tracker. See Annex 2 Sub-Section K for the additional criteria for approval.

# 7. Programme Approval Advisor Roles

The Internal Advisor and External Advisor will work with the Proposer and their team to ensure that documentation is ready for Panel scrutiny.

## 7.1 Role of the Internal Advisor – Route A and Route B

An Internal Advisor will be a Quality specialist (usually an AC SELE) nominated by the Head of School.

The role of Internal Advisor is as follows:

1. To provide expert advice and leadership from within the proposing School/Centre about University requirements for programme design, development and approval.
2. To ensure they have a detailed knowledge and understanding of the University’s process for Programme Design, Development and Approval and to ensure the programme is developed according to SEO guidance.
3. To ensure that the proposing team consult stakeholders (employers/ students) and use their views in the design and development of the proposal.
4. To ensure that the proposal is fully documented in the PDR ready for external Scrutiny by the External Advisor.
5. To ensure that the programme proposer and team consider and respond, as required, to the comments within the Consultation Report from the External Advisor. To include finalizing the documentation and completing the PDR.
6. To complete a Consultation Report on the development of the proposal and to formally sign-off the PDR as ready for a University Standing Panel or a Programme Approval Panel, as relevant.

## 7.2 Role of the External Advisor – Route A and Route B

An External Advisor/PSRB representative will be a subject specialist nominated by the Programme Proposer and approved at the Planning Meeting in line with University criteria. he External Advisor may be drawn from an approved pool of subject specialists or be a new nominee.

The role of External Advisor/PSRB representative is as follows:

1. From the perspective of their subject specialist knowledge, industrial role and/or professional expertise to understand the broad nature of the proposal and to advise the Proposer and University on the suitability of the proposal.
2. To provide feedback to the Proposer and their team in a supportive, collegiate and transparent manner.
3. To access the programme documents in the Proposal Development Record and to assess the proposal against the critieria specified in the Programme Approval Check-list (Annex 2) sections B, C, D, E and F.
4. To complete the External Advisor Consultation Report and to provide feedback to the Internal reviewer and Panel on the development.

# 8. Annexes

Annex 1 Programme Approval Process in Detail

## Annex 2 Programme Approval Criteria and Check-List

## Annex 3 PDR Documentary Requirements and Structure

## Annex 4 Programme Design Guidance

4i Guidance for HE6 Programmes – PowerPoint Slides

4ii Guidance for HE7 Programmes – PowerPoint Slides

4iii Guidance for HE8 Programmes – PowerPoint Slides

4iv Best Practice Guide to Curriculum Design

4v GAME - Design Guidance

4vi Guidelines for Preparing a Programme Specification

4vii Guidelines for Preparing a Module Specification

4viii Example of a Learning Outcomes Map

4ix Example of a Cohesion Map

4x Example of an Assessment Table

4xi Example of an Assessment Journey Map

4xii Example of a GAME Map

4xiii Standard Hours Document

## Annex 5 Planning Meeting Notes and Agenda

## Annex 6 Timelines for the Panels in 2023-2024

## Annex 7 Stakeholder Consultation

7i Overview

7ii Employer and Professional Advisor Consultation Report

7iii Student and Applicant Consultation Report

## Annex 8 External Advisor/PSRB Representative Consultation

8i Criteria for the appointment of an External Advisor

8ii Nomination form for the appointment of an External Advisor

8iii External Advisor Consultation Report

8iv Payment of fees and expenses to an External Advisor

## Annex 9 Internal Advisor (AC SELE or equivalent) Consultation

9i Internal Advisor Consultation Report

## Annex 10 SEO PDR Completion Check

10i SEO PDR Check Report

## Annex 11 University Standing Panels

11i USP Terms of Reference

11ii USP Agenda

11iii USP Panel Member Report

11iv USP Recommendation Report

11v USP Outcome Report

## Annex 12 Programme Approval Panels

12i PAP Terms of Reference

12ii PAP Lines of enquiry

12iii PAP Schedule

12iv PAP Recommendation Report

12v PAP Summary Report

12vi PAP Full Programme Approval Report