Validation of New Courses and Revalidation of Existing Courses

**Guidance for Partners**

**2024/25**

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# Introduction

The purpose of the validation process for a new course is to ensure:

* equivalence in academic standards with comparable courses across the Higher Education (HE) sector;
* compatibility with the existing curriculum portfolio at the partner institution;
* compliance with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and QAA Subject Benchmark Statements where relevant;
* compliance with the requirement to promote equality of opportunity and diversity particularly in relation to learning, teaching and assessment;
* the provision of a high quality HE experience to students at an appropriate level;
* compliance with internal academic regulations/framework;
* appropriateness of course documentation including handbooks;
* appropriate staffing;
* appropriate resourcing.

The purpose of the revalidation process for an existing course is to:

* review the continuing validity and relevance of the stated aims of the course and the intended learning outcomes in accordance with QAA guidelines;
* enable an external subject expert or experts to contribute advice on the course;
* identify good practice for wider dissemination;
* identify areas for enhancement;
* audit the procedures of partner institutions for quality assurance and enhancement and the maintenance of academic standards as they apply to the course under review.

The University may make an academic contribution to the design and development of curriculum proposals from an early stage on the request of the partner or if the University deems it appropriate.

# Proposal of New Courses

An initial proposal for a new course providing basic details of the nature of the proposal should go through agreed internal partner institution planning and consultation procedures prior to being presented to the relevant JBOS for approval and permission to proceed to a validation panel.

In addition, where relevant, the UEA Academic Link may be involved in the process and consulted on the proposal, and relevant colleagues at the University consulted by Academic Partnerships as appropriate.

Please see the Course Proposal Flowchart for guidance on the process and timeframes.

# Role of UEA Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) and Joint Board of Study (JBOS)

Once the proposal has received initial approval by JBOS, for courses articulating to awards delivered at UEA, LTC will receive the course proposal. For courses leading to UEA awards delivered at partner institutions, LTC will receive the course titles, via the JBOS report.

Once the initial course proposal has been approved by JBOS course details can be submitted to UCAS for coding and listing in the UCAS Directory and to be included in the partner institution prospectus, and to go forward for validation. All references to the proposed new course, including any information (in whatever form) given to prospective students must make clear that the course is subject to validation.

# Revalidation of Existing Courses

A revalidation proposal form should be completed for any courses due for revalidation to outline key changes being proposed.

Please see the Course Proposal Flowchart for guidance on the process and timeframes.

# Publicity Policy

The Publicity Policy for publicising all courses validated by UEA can be found in the Partner Resources and Guidance Folder on the Academic Partnerships website.

# Timescale

Partner institutions should ensure that an adequate period of notice is given in order to permit sufficient time for the execution of the procedures described above.

Please see the Course Proposal Flowchart for guidance on the process and timeframes.

Academic Partnerships have devised an example Gantt chart which illustrates an example of timescales associated with an event.

# Internal Event

UEA recommends that an internal event is held by the partner institution to give the course team initial feedback on the completed documentation and to ensure that what is presented to the full panel is of high a standard as possible.

The internal panel should include the partner institution Head of HE or equivalent and where possible an academic colleague from outside the subject area concerned.

# Event Preparation

Partner institutions need to ensure that the following preparation is undertaken prior to the event:

* Provide student panel member, student representatives, employer representatives and course team attendee details (Academic Partnerships will provide a template for completion)
* Book an appropriate room
* Arrange refreshments and lunch for the panel on the day
* Ensure name place settings are available on the day
* Submit the documentation to Academic Partnerships 20 working days before the event

# Panel

A panel comprises members who are able to judge the academic integrity of the course and the national standards expected of the type of award, and who can evaluate the course in terms of its structure and content. A variety of experience and views should be available amongst the panel members. Members will not have had close involvement with the detailed development of the course. Within the panel there must be sufficient understanding of the subject matter and academic context to enable the panel to make a sound judgement.

Panel membership typically comprises:

* Chair (a senior member of UEA academic staff)
* at least one academic subject expert, external to the University and its partner institutions;
* relevant employer or industry representative;
* professional, accrediting and/or statutory regulatory body representative(s) as appropriate to the award(s);
* at least one member of the academic staff from UEA (where possible from a cognate discipline area. If a member of academic staff from UEA is not available, a second academic subject expert, external to the University will be sought);
* Academic Partnerships representative (panel member and secretary);
* student representative of the relevant partner institution (preferably a current student or recent graduate from the course being revalidated or in the case of a validation a student on a related/similar course).

The exact membership of the panel for each event will be subject to approval by the UEA Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Partnerships and Apprenticeships. In the absence of any panel members on the day of the event, the decision as to whether the event should proceed is at the Chair’s discretion. It may be possible to continue with the event and deal with the contribution of the missing panel member by correspondence.

Panel members should normally meet with students and/or recent graduates from a similar course as part of the validation event and where this is not the case, a rationale should be agreed in advance by the Chair.

Academic Partnerships are responsible for identifying the UEA and external academic members of the validation panel. The institution concerned is responsible for nominating the student representative, employer/industry representative and/or professional body representative. These nominations should be submitted to Academic Partnerships and are subject to approval by the UEA Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Partnerships and Apprenticeships.

The course team should normally consist of key members of staff that will be involved in the delivery of the proposed course, normally up to a maximum of eight.

Up to two peers from the partner institution may be invited to attend validation events as observers, to facilitate staff development and the sharing of good practice, subject to agreement by the Chair.

# Briefing Panel Members

Academic Partnerships take responsibility for offering/providing briefing on the process for all panel members, including the student representative, and will make arrangements to do this virtually, in advance of the event.

# Duties of the Panel

It is the duty of the validation panel to:

* critically examine the documentation and undertake discussion with the course team in order to make a collective judgement as to the quality and academic standard of the course and to ensure that the award conferred by UEA is of an equivalent standard to comparable awards;
* agree whether the proposed course(s) should be validated/revalidated (the panel acts with the delegated authority of LTC).

Guidance notes for panel Chairs and panel members are available on the Academic Partnerships website and are sent out to all panel members with the documentation pre event.

# Documentation

The documentation provides the formal record of the course(s) to be offered to students. The Head of HE or equivalent is required to sign off all documentation before it is submitted to UEA and the panel. For guidance refer to the validation/revalidation document checklist which details all of the documentation required.

Key documents include a template for all documentation, course programme specification, module specifications, staff CVs and course handbooks. Templates and guidance relating to these documents can be found on the Academic Partnerships website.

# Event

The event normally takes place over a full day depending on the size and nature of the award(s) being considered. The agenda is normally based on a standard agenda which may be modified as appropriate for each event. Normally, a meeting with students and employers is included in the event. The meeting with students is opportunity for the panel to hear about their experiences as HE students at the institution and on their course. The meeting with employers is an opportunity for the panel to understand their involvement with the course and obtain their feedback as industry specialists. There are guidance documents for students and employers available from Academic Partnerships which the institution is responsible for sharing with these groups in advance of the event. A tour of facilities and any specialist resources is also included in the event. An example of a typical agenda for an event can be used as both a template and reference point.

The agenda will include one or more blocks of time in which the panel may discuss the proposed course in detail with the course team, and in which the course team will have the opportunity to respond to points raised. The Chair is responsible for ensuring that the panel conducts its discussions in the spirit of a ‘critical friend’.

After this discussion the course team departs to allow the panel members to determine their decision. The Chair normally commences this second private meeting of the panel by summarising the issues and the course team’s responses and they will conclude the meeting by agreeing the outcome of the event with the panel. Where the decision of the Panel is not unanimous, the decision of the Chair is final.

# Online Events

It is expected that validation and revalidation events will take place face-to-face at the partner institution. There are, however, occasions where it is necessary and appropriate for events to take place online. This will lead to some differences in documentation requirements and how the events are organised:

* The typical agenda for online events differs to accommodate panel members leaving and joining meetings throughout the day. This may impact the timings of course team discussions. Academic Partnerships will liaise with partner institutions directly where this is relevant.
* Partner institutions must submit with the documentation photos and/or videos as appropriate of course specific facilities and resources in lieu of a tour.
* During the course team and feedback discussions, partner institutions should avoid group attendance from the same physical room. Where this is not possible, no more than 3 course team attendees should attend from the same location. This is to ensure that panel members can clearly see and hear who from the course team is addressing/responding to questions.

# Outcomes

During the concluding feedback session, the Chair will announce the outcome of the event and notify the course team of any conditions or requirements that must be addressed and/or recommendations to be considered. The Chair will also announce any commendations and areas of good practice. A deadline will be set (normally 6 weeks after the date of the event) by which conditions must be met and/or recommendations responded to, and a decision made by the Chair as to whether the conditions may be met via correspondence. The Chair and Secretary will liaise to ensure that conditions, requirements and recommendations are circulated to the course team normally within five working days of the event.

There are three possible outcomes from an event:

* decision to validate/revalidate the proposed course, in which case no further action by the course team is required;
* rejection of the proposed course;
* decision to validate/revalidate the proposed course with conditions and/or requirements and/or recommendations, in which case the course team must provide the Chair with evidence, within agreed timescales, that the conditions and/or requirements have been met and must respond to any recommendations.

**Commendations** allow the panel a chance to congratulate the course team on aspects of good practice.

**Conditions** are those issues that must be addressed to the satisfaction of the validation panel prior to a course’s commencement, by agreed deadlines.

**Requirements** are those issues on which action will be expected once the course has started/recommenced, by agreed deadlines, and progress will be signed off by the panel Chair

**Recommendations** are those issues on which action is to be considered, possibly after the course has commenced/recommenced and are considered by the panel Chair.

The panel will specify the date by which the conditions and/or requirements must be met and to recommend the period of validation/revalidation, which for most courses is up to five years.

The panel may not set further conditions, requirements and/or recommendations after it has reported.

# Course Team’s Response

The course team makes a formal response to the outcomes report, by the agreed deadlines, evidencing how specific conditions and/or requirements have been met and addressing any recommendations that were made using the action plan, Appendix A of the report. A report template has been created as a guide through the process, this can also be found on the Academic Partnerships website. This response should be reviewed by the Chair of the internal event where applicable before it is submitted to UEA Academic Partnerships for consideration and comment and forwarding on to the panel Chair for consideration. The Chair may sign off the response from the course team, or alternatively send the response back for further evidence.

The formal response should include:

* amended documents (with tracked changes);
* a brief summary of how each condition and/or requirement has been met with reference to the amended documents;
* how each recommendation has been considered;
* any other appropriate evidence.

Any revisions and amendments to the documentation should be mapped and cross-referenced to the new documentation.

# Conditions

Conditions are signed off by correspondence under Chair’s Action, in consultation with panel members as necessary.

If the conditions have been met, the Chair will confirm validation/revalidation of the programme. If in the Chair’s opinion any condition has not been met or further evidence is required, the Chair will consider any additional documentation intended to address only the outstanding issues, in consultation with panel members as necessary. If the conditions are not able to be met, the matter should be referred back to the panel to determine whether to request that the prospective institution undertake further work on the proposal and proceed to a further event or to withdraw the programme altogether.

In the absence of the Chair of the validation panel, the Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Partnerships and Apprenticeships will consider the response to the validation report and sign off as appropriate.

# Definitive Course Documentation

For all validated provision the University maintains the final record of a course as approved at validation, accompanied by any subsequently approved course modifications and supporting documentation, to ensure that the University can track curriculum changes over the period of validation.

Partner institutions are responsible for updating all course documentation, including but not limited to programme specifications, module definition forms and student handbooks, to reflect amendments approved via the course modification process to ensure that students have access to up-to-date course documentation and information.