Office of Quality, Standards
and Partnerships

QUALITY ASSURANCE MANUAL

Programme Approval

SECTION 02

Introduction

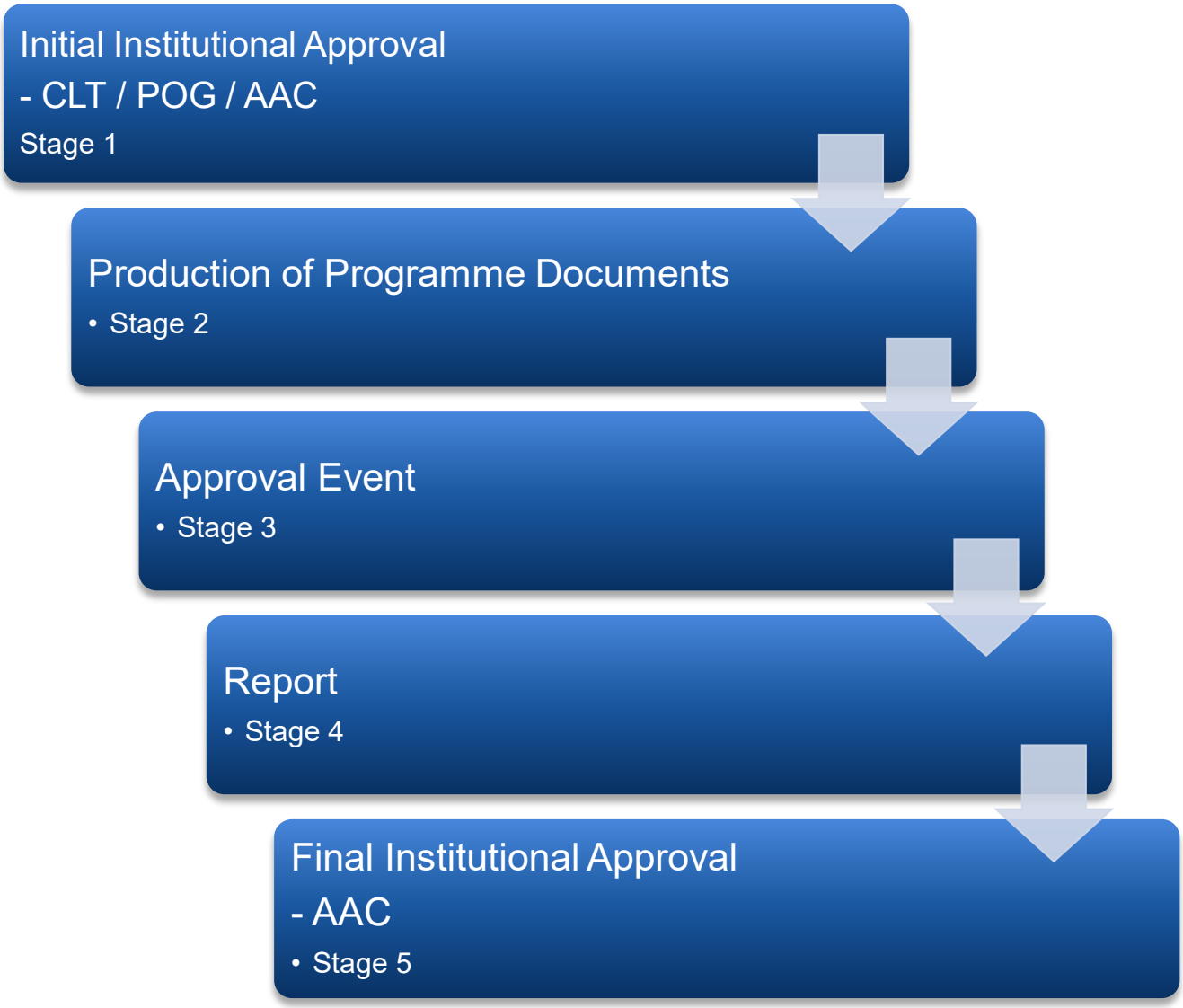
This document summarises the University's processes for programme design, validation and revalidation. The University's overall approach to Quality Assurance is detailed fully in Quality Assurance Manual Section 01 – *General Principles and Quality Assurance Policy*.

The University has a duty to ensure that its responsibility for standards and quality is discharged effectively through its procedures for the design and approval of programmes. In doing this it seeks to ensure that due account is taken of:

- Appropriate external reference points, including:
  - The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area 2015.
  - The Office for Students (OfS) ongoing Quality and Standards Conditions (B Conditions) of Registration.
  - The UK Quality Code for Higher Education.
  - The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ).
  - QAA Qualifications Characteristics Statements.
  - QAA Subject Benchmark Statements.
  - Requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), employers and any relevant national legislation/national commitments to European and international processes.
- The compatibility of programme proposals and developments with institutional goals and the Strategic Plan.
- Strategic academic and resource planning.
- Existing provision within the institution, including any awards that may be offered jointly with other institutions.
- The level of risk involved in each approval and the optimal level of resource necessary to ensure that the required outcomes of the process are achieved.

The (re)validation process and preparation of programme and module specifications provides a stimulus to teaching teams to reflect on, clarify and better integrate the aims and intended outcomes of their programmes with their design and delivery. These specifications also satisfy a requirement for accurate public information and accountability. In carrying out this process the teams are advised by a panel, which includes appropriate members external to the team and the institution.

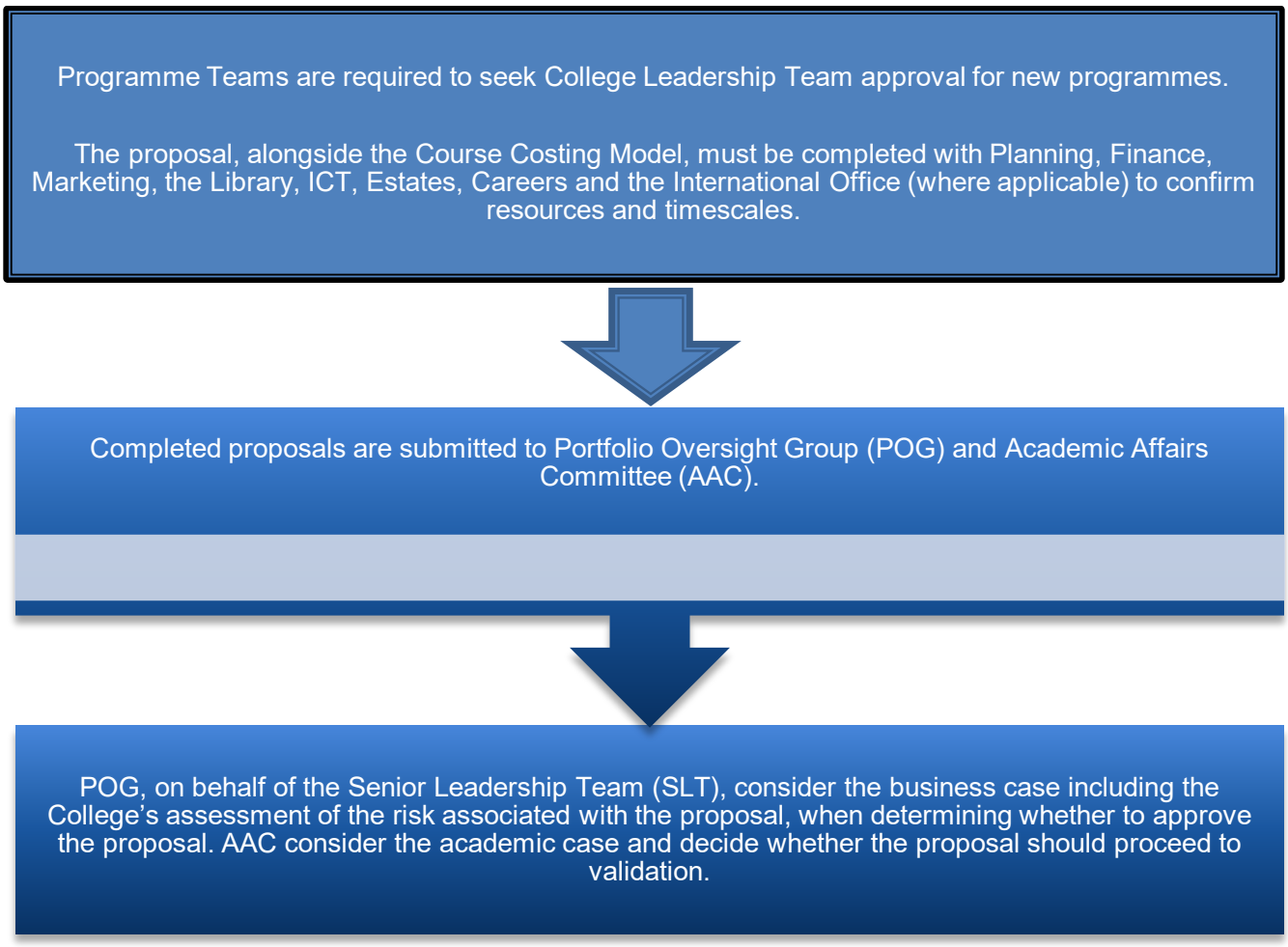
Programme Approval Stages



Each of the stages must be completed before the next can begin. Advice regarding any stage is available from the Office of Quality, Standards and Partnerships (OQSP).

Where the programme is to be delivered by an approved partner institution, an Approval to Deliver event must also be undertaken (see QAM - *Academic Partnerships*). Where new partnership arrangements require approval, the programme team should seek advice from OQSP at the earliest opportunity.

Stage 1 - Initial Institutional Approval of a New Programme



SLT and AAC expect that new programme proposals made during 2021/22 should normally be for delivery commencing 2023/24. The initial planning of the programme should take place at least 18 months prior to the proposed commencement of the programme to allow full planning and marketing of the programme, to meet marketing and/or UCAS deadlines, and to allow effective recruitment of students. However, there may be instances where proposals are approved to operate outside of these timescales, for example for a programme developed for an external client.

Where Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) are involved in the (re)validation and approval process, these timescales may also vary. Programme teams should consult with OQSP regarding appropriate timings before agreeing dates with PSRBs.

The deadline for completion of (re)validations for commencement the following September is 01 March, for the purpose of central timetable production.

Programme Titles

University Regulations state that, for undergraduate and postgraduate taught awards, 'a programme of studies shall have a unique title and set of programme learning outcomes and be made up of a unique combination of modules'.

The appropriateness of programme titles are agreed during Stage 1, at Portfolio Oversight Group (POG) and subsequently at Academic Affairs Committee (AAC) and programme validation. Programme validation confirms that the proposed curriculum content appropriately reflects the programme title.

Programme Teams often wish to incorporate a bracketed element within programme titles, and University processes support this. Guidance on the application of bracketed titles is provided below.

Programme with Pathways

For programmes of study that include subject specific curriculum pathways, a bracketed element within the programme title may be used. The robustness of the proposed pathways will be tested at validation. Examples of such programme titles include BSc (Hons) Genetics (Microbiology), BSc (Hons) Genetics (Molecular Cell Biology), BSc (Hons) Genetics (Medical).

Programmes with a formal Workplace Activity

Bracketed titles may also be used when students successfully complete an approved, credit-rated and assessed workplace education activity as part of a programme of study. This is usually a 60 credit work placement module or year in industry. The University does not stipulate the exact terminology for the bracketed element, and allows Programme Teams the flexibility to choose what is best for their students and markets. Examples of such programme titles include BA (Hons) Urban Studies (Work Placement), BA (Hons) Urban Studies (Industry Placement), BA (Hons) Urban Studies (Professional Practice). Such titles are normally approved as part of a single programme of study, and awarded to students that successfully complete the workplace activity.

Programmes with a formal International Study opportunity

Bracketed titles may also be used when students successfully complete an approved, credit-rated and assessed international study opportunity as part of a programme of study. This is usually a 60 credit exchange module or a study abroad year. The University does not stipulate the exact terminology for the bracketed element, and allows Programme Teams the flexibility to choose what is best for their students and market. Examples of such programme titles include BA (Hons) Tourism (International Study), BA (Hons) Tourism (Exchange), BA (Hons) Tourism (International Placement). Such titles are normally approved as part of a single programme of study, and awarded to students that successfully complete the international study opportunity.

Programme Exit Awards

Programmes may offer alternative programme titles for approved exit awards, should a student leave a programme of study before completing their main award and where there is judged to be either insufficient coverage of a topic of study or stipulated by any involved PSRB. The appropriateness of any alternative title will be considered, tested and confirmed at validation. Examples of such programme titles include BSc (Hons) Neurobiology, DipHE in General Biology, CertHE in General Biology.

Higher and Degree Apprenticeships

The University may approve programmes of study that, upon successful completion of the required end-point assessment, also lead to a Higher or Degree Apprenticeship. The programme title should only reflect the University award and programme, and not include the word 'apprenticeship'. The associated apprenticeship is awarded by the Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education, and is not an academic award of the University.

PSRBs

Where programmes of study are developed under the regulation of Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), professional accreditation may dictate a specific format or name for programme titles.

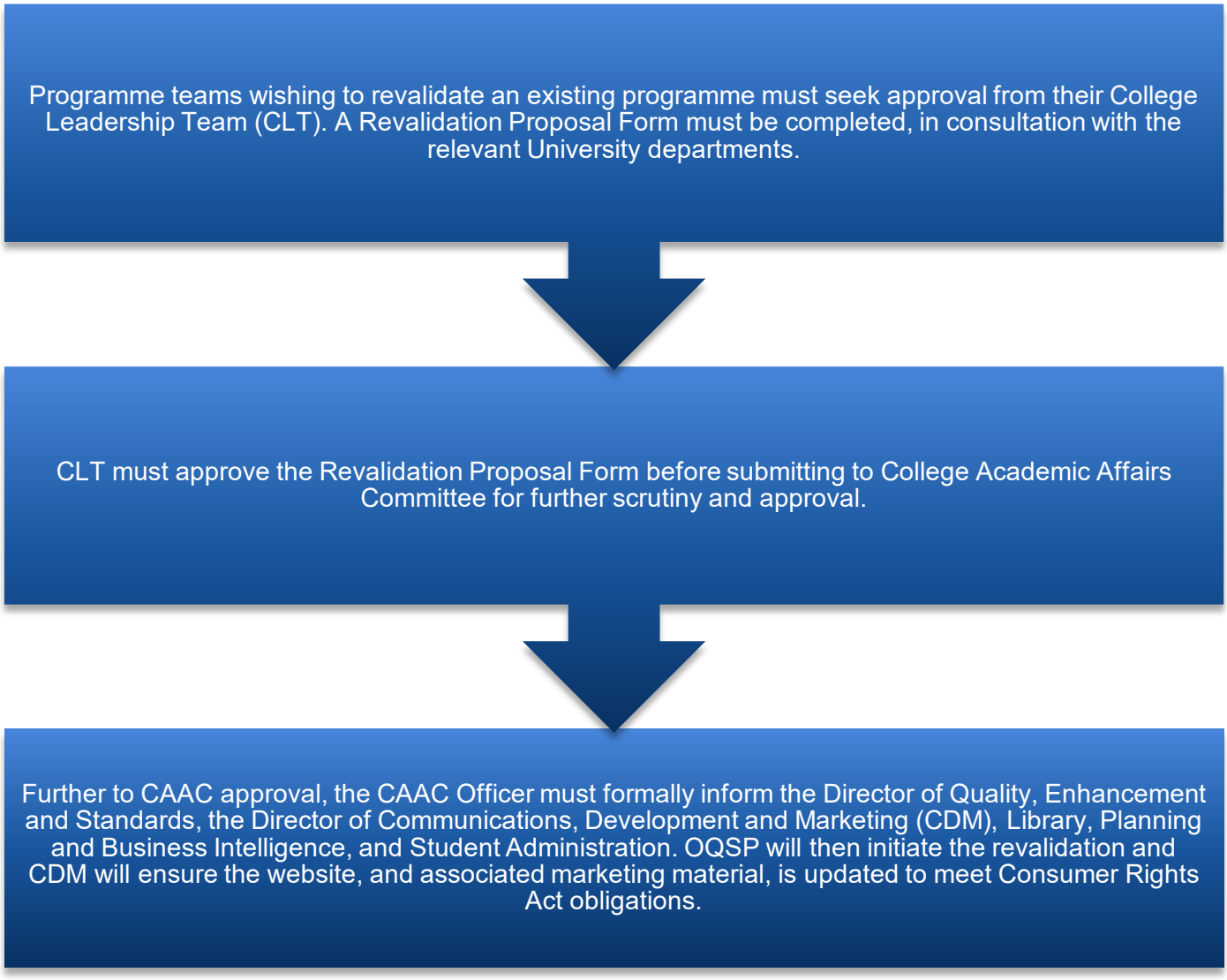
Change to a Programme Title

Where a Programme Team wish to change the title of their programme they will need to complete a POG Form B - *Major Change Request* and submit this to POG and AAC for approval.

Following approval of a change to programme title, one of the following actions will be undertaken to validate the major change:

- A significant amount of curriculum changes needed to reflect the new title: A *Revalidation* is required, with a subsequent revalidation proposal to be considered and approved by CAAC.
- A small number of curriculum changes needed to reflect the new title: The *Programme Modification* process undertaken.
- No curriculum changes required: Academic Affairs Committee (CAAC) are required to confirm that the existing curriculum is still accurately reflected by the new title. This confirmation must be formally noted in CAAC minutes.

Stage 1 - Initial Approval of a Revalidation



Revalidations must take place within the same timescales as new programmes.

For validations and revalidations, once initial approval to proceed has been granted, a Quality, Standards and Partnerships Officer will be appointed to manage the (re)validation.

For events involving PSRBs, the Programme Leader will act as the main point of contact for the PSRB but will work closely with OQSP to ensure smooth co-ordination of the event.

Stage 2 – Production of Programme Documents

The programme team must manage the process of designing the new programme and modules. All programme information is developed within the Academic Programme Management System (APMS), allowing draft programme and module information to be shared electronically or exported in hard copy.

https://lincoln.worktribe.com/

The following documents are required for a (re)validation meeting to take place:

A rationale for the proposal

Draft programme and module specifications (exported from APMS)

Staff CVs/Online Profiles

The programme documents must be received by the Quality, Standards and Partnerships Officer at least 15 working days before the date of the (re)validation meeting. This allows time for preliminary scrutiny before sending to the panel to review. The panel must be allowed 10 working days to review the documentation.

There may be instances where further documentation is required for (re)validation, i.e. work-based or distance learning delivery, or inclusion of a work placement or international study opportunity. These are detailed in individual appendices to this Quality Assurance Manual.

Where additional documentation is required by PSRBs, the programme team should liaise with OQSP to determine the exact documentation to be provided to the internal (re)validation panel members.

Programme teams are encouraged, in preparing for (re)validations, to contact their College Digital Education Developer to discuss digital education, how it can support and enhance the provision, and contribute to the overall student experience.

Where programme teams wish to (re)validate a number of related programmes at the same time, the above timescales must be extended. Here programme documents must be received by the Quality,

Standards and Partnerships Officer at least 15 working days before the date of the (re)validation meeting, in order for panel members to have an increased amount of time to read multiple approval documents.

Where the timescales for events are not met, the Director of Quality, Enhancement and Standards has the discretion to cancel the event. The event will be rescheduled and the introduction of the proposed changes delayed. This may result in delayed recruitment.

Stage 3 – (Re)Validation Event

It is standard practice to run (re)validation events over half a day, unless they are particularly large or involve a PSRB that has additional requirements. This is predicated on the expectation that panel members will comment on programme documents prior to the event, to allow for a more structured, efficient meeting.

A (re)validation panel will consist of the following full members:

- A Chair, from outside the School in which the provision resides
- An internal member, from outside the College
- An external member with academic subject expertise, and familiar with UK academic standards in relation to the programme
- An external member with industry related subject expertise
- A current student, who will normally be from outside the School/Department developing the provision
- A Quality, Standards and Partnerships Officer who is a full member of the panel

PSRBs may also have specific panel member requirements such as service users or specialist practitioners. This will normally be the responsibility of the programme team.

The University recognises the importance of external participation in the (re)validation process for ensuring programmes are designed, developed and approved in the light of independent advice and for ensuring both transparency of process and confirmation of standards.

For programme validations and revalidations, OQSP will source all internal panel members. Programme teams will be asked to initially identify potential external academic subject and industry specialists to join the (re)validation panel.

The criteria for appointing external panel members are of a similar consistency and strength to the criteria used for the appointment of External Examiners for the University. These principles are as follows:

- Panel members should have appropriate levels of academic and/or professional expertise in relation to the subject area
- They should be able to contribute effectively to the (re)validation process, and to provide impartial and objective advice
- Individuals acting as External Examiners to the University (or applying for appointment), should not act as an External Panel Member, as this may be perceived to reduce impartiality.
- Any potential conflicts of interest must be declared by the external member or University

Academic external panel members, who may include representatives of PSRBs, should have had no substantial professional contact with the University or any member of the development team for the previous five years, e.g. they should not have been an External Examiner for the University, be engaged in guest lecturing, or undertaken any collaborative research or other initiatives with any member of the development team.

Potential external panel members are required to provide a current outline CV or link to their online profile. OQSP has the responsibility for confirming that external panel members are appropriate and that there is no conflict of interest. Where a proposed external panel member has both sufficient academic and industry related subject expertise, at the discretion of OQSP only one external panel member may be required.

Programme teams must not appoint external panel members, or agree timescales or agenda items, without prior consultation with OQSP. In the event of complex events involving PSRBs, this would usually involve discussion with the validation event Chair.

The programme team must be appropriately represented at the (re)validation meeting. They must also invite their Academic Subject Librarian to attend or submit a written statement of support.

The decision regarding the outcome of the programme (re)validation will be made in a private meeting of the panel, and verbal feedback will be provided to the programme team at the close of the meeting.

Panels will have three options available to them:

1. To recommend approval

2. To recommend approval subject to conditions and/or recommendations

3. To not recommend approval until further development work has been undertaken and a subsequent (re)validation event held

If the panel form a view that the proposal has deviated significantly from the initial proposal approved by POG and AAC, it will not be validated and returned to CLT and/or POG for clarification.

Costs of (re)validation, such as external panel member fees, and costs associated with the (re)validation event itself, will be met by the College. Right to Work checks for external panel members need to be undertaken by the School/Department ahead of the event and in line with University process. If you have any questions or queries on this process, please contact the Operations Team in HR.

Stage 4 – Report and Production of Definitive Programme Documents and Responses to Conditions and Recommendations

The Quality, Standards and Partnerships Officer will produce a report of the meeting including, where necessary, a list of conditions and recommendations with timescales, for the team to act upon in preparing the definitive version of the programme and module specifications.

The final definitive programme documents should be presented to the Quality, Standards and Partnerships Officer using the institutional templates held in APMS. In addition, the (re)validation report form detailing how conditions and recommendations have been addressed, must be returned.

Any conditions set by the panel must be completed before the programme can be validated. Any recommendations made by the panel must be responded to by the programme team, but do not necessarily have to be incorporated into the programme.

For events involving PSRBs, there may be a request for the School/Department to provide an official minute taker. Where PSRBs also set conditions, and the final validation of the programme may be dependent upon achievement of those conditions, OQSP will advise.

After the panel have examined the response and updated documentation, the Chair will sign off the proposal. The Head of College will sign to confirm that they are satisfied that the programme as (re)validated fits with the College's Strategic Plan and that all resource requirements, including staffing, will be met. Where the proposal involves an approved Partner delivering part, or all, of the programme, they too should sign to confirm the resource requirements will be met and that the University quality assurance and other agreed procedures will be followed. Following this, the Quality, Standards and Partnerships Officer signs the form to confirm that the correct processes have been followed and that suitable evidence has been produced. Without these signatures the proposal cannot be presented to Academic Affairs Committee for final approval. Electronic signatures are acceptable when accompanied by an email from the delegate.

Stage 5 – Final Institutional Approval

The confirmed (re)validation report must be approved by the Academic Affairs Committee. Following this, the programme is validated and students can be enrolled.

Definitive programme documentation produced at (re)validation will act as the authoritative source of information for the programme. Any subsequent changes to the programme will require either programme modification or revalidation. The definitive programme documents represent part of our contract with students and must at all times reflect the programme being delivered. Programme teams should ensure the programme and module specifications are compliant with the requirements of the Consumer Rights Act 2015 and the guidance of the Competition and Markets Authority on the application of consumer law to the HE sector in the United Kingdom, and that all associated information about the programme, in any form, reflects the validated content.

Where programme teams wish to suspend delivery, delete, transfer or change the name of an existing programme, SMT and AAC approval is required. In the first instance, CLT should approve the proposal in line with their strategic plans. The proposal will then be considered by POG, who will make recommendations for approval to SMT and AAC.

The processes illustrated within this Quality Assurance Manual may be varied at the discretion of the Director of Quality, Enhancement and Standards to respond to particular circumstances, and using a risk-based approach.