

# Chapter 4

## Programme and Module Approval and Modification

Updated October 2022

**Table of Contents**

INTRODUCTION.....	4
ACADEMIC PLANNING.....	4
Departmental Academic Planning Meetings .....	6
Table 2: ‘ <i>Departmental Planning Units</i> ’ (updated October 2022).....	7
Faculty Strategic Plans .....	8
Applications for Development Consent.....	8
VALIDATION .....	11
RE-VALIDATION.....	13
Consultation/Consent Requirements .....	13
INTENDED AND ALTERNATIVE (EXIT) AWARDS .....	14
Programme Learning Outcomes: Using the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements.....	15
Sandwich Year and Study Abroad routes.....	16
STEM Foundation Year.....	17
COMBINED PROGRAMMES.....	17
Joint Honours & Major/ Minor degrees .....	18
Integrated Single Honours degrees .....	19
‘Module Sharing’ .....	19
MODULE APPROVAL AND MODIFICATION .....	20
Module approval.....	20
Faculty Approval Panel Constitution .....	21
Year of Study Approval .....	22
Optional Modules .....	22
Minor Module Modification .....	23
Continuing currency of modules - module review and re-approval.....	25
Minor Modifications to Years of Study .....	26
Continuing currency of Years of Study - review and re-approval.....	28
PROGRAMME MODIFICATION .....	28
Material Changes .....	29
Entry standards and Entry Requirements.....	30
Minor Programme Modification – Modular Provision .....	30
Minor Modifications Review – Modular Provision .....	32
Minor Modifications Review – Non-Modular Provision .....	33
Major Programme Modification .....	34

Consultation/Consent Requirements .....	35
PROGRAMME CLOSURE .....	36
Procedures .....	37
PROGRAMME-SPECIFIC OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES.....	39
NON-CREDIT BEARING PROVISION .....	39
HIGHER AND DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS .....	39
Table 4: ‘Processes for Module and Programme Approval (simplified)’ .....	40
Appendix: Validation and Audit Standing Panel (VASP) .....	42
Articulations Approval Panel (AAP) .....	43
Major Modifications Panel (MMP) .....	44

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of **programme approval** is to ensure the academic standards and quality of student learning opportunities within a proposed programme of study leading to the award of an Edge Hill University qualification. **Module approval**<sup>1</sup> ensures the appropriateness of module content and approaches to teaching, learning and assessment for the award of academic credit. **Programme and module modification** enable validated curricula to be refreshed ahead of their next formal review/ re-validation.

The University's processes for the approval and modification of programmes and modules are fully aligned with the Quality and Standards Conditions B1 to B5 of the Office for Students' (OfS) Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England<sup>2</sup>. Processes are informed by the supporting Advice and Guidance on Course Design and Development contained within the UK Quality Code (published November 2018)<sup>3</sup>.

The University operates a standard cycle for programme development and approval which is also described below.

## ACADEMIC PLANNING

Edge Hill University's primary strategic aim is to remain a highly valued and financially-sustainable organisation that provides an exceptional student learning and living experience. A crucial factor in securing the Institution's future sustainability and success is the attractiveness, quality and effectiveness of its prospectus. This means that we must continually strive to achieve enhanced levels of forward-planning, communication and collaborative working across Faculties and professional services, underpinned by an effective, holistic and flexible academic planning process.

Academic Planning is based on two overarching principles:

- Faculties reflect upon their objectives and priorities in the context of the Institution's vision, strategic aims and priorities, and external drivers.
- Faculties and professional support services support the Institution's development by working together to facilitate systematic, appropriate and constructive collaboration and communication.

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<sup>1</sup> Or Year of Study Approval for non-modular curriculum (Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine) – see 'Module Approval and Modification', below.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/registration-with-the-ofs-a-guide/conditions-of-registration/>.

<sup>3</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/course-design-and-development](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/course-design-and-development).

Table 1: 'Academic Planning: Principles and Expectations'

<b>Principle 1:</b> Faculties reflect upon their objectives and priorities in the context of the Institution's vision, strategic aims and priorities and external drivers
<b>Expectation:</b> Faculties will
a) Re-assess the impact of external drivers upon the business of the Faculty and the strategies in place.
b) Review and evaluate each department's portfolio of programmes in the context of the University's Curriculum Strategy <sup>4</sup> and the Faculty's vision and priorities; and identify any current provision that needs to be modified, replaced or closed.
c) Identify scope for potential new programme developments for inclusion in the Faculty's Academic Development Plan which are supported by a Market Analysis Report <sup>5</sup> and an evaluation of likely resource requirements including staffing.
d) Remain cognisant of the agreed University timeline for curriculum development and modification, marketing and recruitment whilst remaining responsive to the respective sector needs and requirements.
e) Consider any limiting factors to recruitment such as specialist facilities or placement opportunities.
f) Review staffing and the allocation of resources, in line with the introduction of newly validated curriculum, and identify any additional requirements that are likely to impact financial planning to inform preparation of the Faculty's budget submission.
g) Consider resources required to support each department's strategies for staff development and the enhancement of learning and teaching and the student experience.
h) Consider how departmental strategies for research and knowledge exchange, enterprise and other external engagement activities will be taken forward.
i) Evaluate each department's progress against the Faculty Strategic Plan which will include a review and discussion of the department's agreed Quality Enhancement Plan <sup>6</sup> from the previous Annual Monitoring and Enhancement Report.
<b>Principle 2:</b> Faculties and professional support services support the Institution's development by working together to facilitate systematic, appropriate and constructive collaboration and communication.
<b>Expectation:</b> Faculties will
a) Exchange information and the outputs that emerge from the academic planning process with relevant stakeholders across the Institution (if applicable).
b) Signpost and consult on any resource and/ or support requirements that are likely to impact the financial planning of professional support services.
c) Highlight and consult on any proposed changes to administrative processes, approaches to assessment or delivery of the curriculum which may impact the future resources or service level agreements of the professional support services.
d) Prior to the refinement of the Faculty Strategic Plan, communicate and liaise with other Faculties to moderate proposed curriculum developments, identify opportunities for collaborative working and avoid potential internal competition.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/document/curriculum-strategy-2020-2025/>.

<sup>5</sup> Generated by colleagues in Marketing.

<sup>6</sup> This may also include other more detailed operational actions plans.

## Departmental Academic Planning Meetings

Faculties typically convene Academic Planning Meetings<sup>7</sup> with each of their departments during the spring term. During these meetings, detailed discussions take place about how departmental objectives and priorities, as outlined in their Quality Enhancement Plan<sup>8</sup> are being progressed, operationalised and measured. Additionally, Faculties also:

- Reassess the department's academic portfolio in the context of external drivers, in-year performance data and the Faculty's Strategic Plan (see below).
- Evaluate the department's current position, for example its capacity and capabilities including staffing and resources to support current and new provision.
- Identify and prioritises potential new programme developments for the medium to long-term for inclusion in the Faculty's Academic Development Plan (Faculty Strategic Plan, appendix 1).
- Provide feedback on any proposed new programme developments that will not be taken forward for validation.
- Identify any current provision that may require modification, replacement or closure.
- Consider the department's research strategy and identifies any support needs.
- Consider any implications for financial planning and uses this to inform preparation of the Faculty's annual budget submission.
- Identify any requirements for additional central support that may impact on professional support services' own planning.

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<sup>7</sup> The constitution of departmental planning meetings is determined by the PVC Dean of Faculty (Chair) or delegated alternate and may include representation from other Faculties and support services. Department representation is agreed with the Faculty and typically consists of the Head of Department and members of their senior management team, e.g. Assistant Head(s) and/ or programme leaders.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 3.

Table 2: 'Departmental Planning Units' (updated October 2022)

Planning Unit	Department
Faculty of Arts and Sciences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Biology</li> <li>2. Business School<sup>9</sup></li> <li>3. Computer Science</li> <li>4. English and Creative Arts<sup>10</sup></li> <li>5. Edge Hill Language Centre<sup>11</sup></li> <li>6. History, Geography and Social Sciences<sup>12</sup></li> <li>7. Psychology</li> <li>8. School of Law, Criminology and Policing<sup>13</sup></li> <li>9. Sport and Physical Activity</li> </ol>
Faculty of Health Social Care and Medicine <sup>14</sup>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adult Nursing and Primary Care</li> <li>2. Allied Health Professions</li> <li>3. Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Nursing</li> <li>4. Postgraduate Medicine</li> <li>5. Social Work and Wellbeing</li> <li>6. Undergraduate Medicine</li> <li>7. Women's &amp; Children's Healthcare</li> </ol>
Faculty of Education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Primary and Childhood Education</li> <li>2. Early Years Education</li> <li>3. Secondary and Further Education</li> </ol>

The outputs from the academic planning process are:

1. A revised **Faculty Strategic Plan** (where appropriate);
2. An updated **Faculty Academic Development Plan** (appended to Faculty's strategy); and,
3. The Faculty's budget submission.

<sup>9</sup> Also includes the PGCert Teaching in Higher Education delivered out of the Centre for Learning and Teaching.

<sup>10</sup> Merged with English / Creative Writing w.e.f. 2022-23.

<sup>11</sup> Current credit-bearing provision comprises the University Foundation Certificate International Foundation Programme, the Stem Foundation Year, the level 3 Fastrack programme and foreign Language Study modules.

<sup>12</sup> Formally the department of Geography and Geology. Merged with Social Sciences / History w.e.f. 2022-23.

<sup>13</sup> Formally the department of Law and Criminology.

<sup>14</sup> A new structure was introduced w.e.f 2022-23.

## Faculty Strategic Plans

Faculty Strategic Plans are refined each year using the intelligence gained from departmental planning meetings, however they are expected to remain relatively stable unless required to respond to government regulatory or funding initiatives.

Strategic Plans represent each Faculty's agreed position in relation to:

- Learning and teaching;
- Research;
- External engagement and enterprise; and
- Academic (curriculum) development, including any academic partnership activity, and its alignment with the University's Curriculum Strategy.

Strategic Plans are informed by:

- The University Strategic Plan<sup>15</sup> and its key underlying strategies;
- External drivers that are likely to impact the Institution;
- Individual departmental strategies for learning and teaching, and research;
- External engagement; and
- Staff development.

Each Strategic Plan includes a **Faculty Academic Development Plan (ADP)** which, as a minimum:

- Describes the Faculty's plans for curriculum development, thereby providing an indication of the anticipated size and shape of the future portfolio.
- Contains a prioritised list of medium and longer-term developments.
- Clearly identifies any programmes to be validated, modified or closed during the next academic session.

Faculty Strategic Plans are received by APC<sup>16</sup> which reviews them in the context of Institutional strategy and identifies any potential for additional cross-Faculty collaboration or curriculum exchange, where appropriate. Informed by further discussion with the University's Directorate, APC compiles and approves the **University's Academic Development Plan<sup>17</sup>** which is presented to the final meeting of Academic Board in July.

## Applications for Development Consent

Applications for Development Consent (ADCs) are outline programme proposals, usually individual to each programme and produced<sup>18</sup> by the proposing department, describing:

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<sup>15</sup> [Strategic Plan 2021-2025 - Documents \(edgehill.ac.uk\)](https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/strategic-plan-2021-2025-documents)

<sup>16</sup> Usually at its May meeting. For APC's constitution and terms of reference see QMH8.

<sup>17</sup> Typically at its June meeting.

<sup>18</sup> The ADC template can be found on the E-Val database which is accessed via [www.edgehill.ac.uk/services/E-Val/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/services/E-Val/).



- The proposed programme - its academic and vocational rationale (which includes an evaluation of the target market<sup>19</sup>) and its alignment with the University's Curriculum Strategy.
- The intended award and any alternative (exit) awards.
- Location and mode of delivery: Edge Hill University campus and/ or academic partner organisation<sup>20</sup>; full-time/ part-time<sup>21</sup>; classroom/ hybrid/ online/ blended<sup>22</sup>.
- Professional body accreditation (where applicable).
- Indicative programme content.
- Staffing and resource requirements based on projected recruitment<sup>23</sup>.
- How internal / external consultants will be used during programme design and development, including any specific support needs.

Before proceeding to Institutional scrutiny, ADCs and the accompanying Market Insight Report are considered at relevant committees (e.g., Programme Board/ Student-Staff Consultative Forum and/ or Faculty Board<sup>24</sup>) and approved at Faculty level. Such scrutiny also provides opportunity for consultation with, and input from, students.

The University has agreed a standard **curriculum development timeline**<sup>25</sup> for the design, development and formal approval of new undergraduate programmes (Table 3, below).

ADCs for undergraduate programmes are normally received by the June meeting of APC, with validation the following year and delivery a year later. ADCs for Masters-level programmes may be received up to and including the December APC for validation between January-April and delivery the following year. ADCs for commissioned (closed) programmes or new partner-

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<sup>19</sup> ADCs for new programmes are usually accompanied by a Market Insight Report produced by a member of the Marketing team.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>21</sup> Programmes are normally designated full-time when a student is required to attend the University or elsewhere (which may include online or blended learning) for a period amounting to **at least 24 weeks within the year** and during that time is expected to undertake periods of study, tuition, learning in the workplace or work placement which amount to an average of **at least 21 hours per week**. Full-time undergraduates will normally undertake a **minimum of 105 credits** (1,050 Notional Learning Hours) per annum, while full-time postgraduate students will normally undertake a **minimum of 150 credits** (1,500 Notional Learning Hours) per annum.

<sup>22</sup> QQASC have agreed the following definitions: **Classroom** Programme designed to be studied through attendance on site with teaching and learning in person, and supplementary asynchronous and/or synchronous elements to add value; **Hybrid** Programme designed to be studied both in-person or synchronously online. The tutor delivers the session on campus and teaches the remote and in-person learners at the same time using technology; **Blended** Programme designed to be studied through a combination of both sustained online delivery and on-site learning. Patterns of study will vary but will be through a combination of online and on-site teaching and learning; **Online** Programme designed to be studied online, with teaching and learning consisting of both synchronous and/or asynchronous online learning activities.

<sup>23</sup> Whilst noting any additional staffing or resources that may be associated with new programme proposals, APC does not authorise spending which is approved separately through the University's annual budget-setting process.

<sup>24</sup> Or delegated committee.

<sup>25</sup> The full version of the timeline including the approval of programme modifications may accessed at <https://go.edgehill.ac.uk/display/aqdu/Key+Guidance+Documents>.

delivered/ co-delivered provision may be received at any time of year, with validation scheduled as required.

**Table 3: The University's Curriculum Development Timeline**

Month	Process
June - Oct 2022:	Application for Development Consent approved by APC
July – December 2022:	Programme design and development
January – April 2023:	Faculty approval to proceed and Institutional validation
June 2023:	Final approval by Academic Quality Enhancement Committee (AQEC)
September 2023:	Programme recruitment opens (UCAS)
<b>September 2024:</b>	<b>Programme delivery commences</b>

Development consent may occasionally be sought outside the normal schedule<sup>26</sup> of APC meetings. In such circumstances the Chair will determine whether to:

- Convene an extraordinary meeting of the committee; or
- Circulate the ADC and Market Insight Report, and if applicable, the associated business case to members for comment by correspondence and subsequent approval by APC Chair's Action; or
- Approve the ADC by APC Chair's Action without further consultation.

APC Chair's Action is routinely reported to the next scheduled meeting where it is endorsed by the committee. Where Chair's Action has been used to give development consent, this is on the understanding that the Academic Quality Enhancement Committee (AQEC)<sup>27</sup> will consider the ensuing validation report in full session and in these circumstances the approval of the validation report by AQEC Chair's Action would normally be unacceptable.

Development consent is notified to key Institutional stakeholders via the Programme Validations and Modifications (PVM) email group<sup>28</sup> whereupon departments proceed to detailed programme development. ADCs have a maximum shelf life and where validation is

<sup>26</sup> The annual calendar of committee meetings is published on the Governance wiki which can be accessed at <https://go.edgehill.ac.uk/display/governance/Academic+Governance>.

<sup>27</sup> For AQEC's constitution and terms of reference, see Chapter 8

<sup>28</sup> Stakeholders typically comprise Faculties, GQASC, Academic Registry, Admissions, Careers Centre, Corporate Communications, International Office, Learning Services, Strategic Planning and Policy Unit and Student Recruitment.

deferred by more than eighteen months following development consent a fresh ADC will normally be required.

## VALIDATION

For a full description of the standard validation process and documentation, see Key Guidance Document [“Preparing for Validation: A Guide for Panels and Course Teams”](#) on the GQASC Wiki.

The University is ultimately responsible for the standards and quality of the qualifications it awards. All programmes of study which lead to the award of academic credit must be validated (approved). The validation process seeks to confirm that proposing teams have designed programmes of study that reflect [Sector Recognised Standards](#).

The University’s **validation schedule** is based on the University’s Academic Development Plan and individual Applications for Development Consent (see above). Responsibility for Institutional validation resides with AQEC through its **Validation and Audit Standing Panel**<sup>29</sup> (VASP). VASP is a body of suitably experienced academic and senior support staff from whom Institutional validation panels are convened. Membership of the Standing Panel is by application<sup>30</sup> to the Chair of VASP and additional criteria apply to the appointment of Panel Chairs. Standing Panel members receive appropriate training and development and all panels contain a majority of academic members.

Prior to Institutional validation, Faculties convene **Faculty Approval Panels** (FAPs) at which the programme documentation is reviewed in full and approved to proceed to validation. Panel constitution is determined by the Faculty, however panels must include an appropriate level of VASP representation which includes a VASP Chair.

As an exception, Faculties may adopt a **‘fastrack’ approach to Faculty approval** when they are required to be more responsive. Reasons for adopting this approach may typically include mitigation of potential academic risk, responding to changes in PSRB requirements or to make best use of presenting business opportunities. Plans to make use of the ‘fastrack’ approval process must be reported to APC as part of seeking development consent.

**As a minimum, fastrack Faculty Approval Panels must consider and formally record their confirmation of the following:**

- that all submission documentation<sup>31</sup> has been completed to a reasonable standard by the proposing team and made available to the panel in advance of the meeting.
- that proposals are compliant with the University’s Academic Regulations<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> See <https://go.edgehill.ac.uk/pages/viewpage.action?pagelId=71188453>, also **Appendix**.

<sup>30</sup> Using the form accessed from <https://go.edgehill.ac.uk/display/aqdu/VASP+Membership>.

<sup>31</sup> For a full description of the standard validation process and documentation, see Key Guidance Documents on the GQASC Wiki – [“Preparing for Validation: A Guide for Panels and Course Teams”](#).

<sup>32</sup> [www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/collection/academic-regulations/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/collection/academic-regulations/)

- that modules are appropriately mapped to Programme Learning Outcomes.
- that module content and its assessment strategy are appropriately aligned with the Module Learning Outcomes.

Regardless of the approach to Faculty approval, if FAPs conclude that any of the above have not been met, they may either:

- (Where the breadth and depth of revisions are substantial) Refer the proposal back to the proposing team for further work and development support;
- Set conditions of approval and / or recommendations. While recommendations are advisory, conditions must be met in full by the proposing team and verified<sup>33</sup> by the Faculty prior to proceeding to Institutional validation.

**Institutional Validation panels** are convened by the Governance, Quality Assurance and Student Casework unit (GQASC) and selected from the membership of VASP. External members (such as academic subject experts<sup>34</sup>, industry experts, PSRB representatives and, where applicable, Service Users and Carers<sup>35</sup>) and students also participate in validation panels.

Panels consider programme documentation in detail and judge whether academic standards have been set correctly and learning opportunities of appropriate quality put in place. This includes evidence of programme teams' engagement with national academic frameworks and benchmarks<sup>36</sup> and/ or professional standards, the [Academic Regulations](#), and Institutional guidance on programme design located within the [Taught Degrees Framework](#)<sup>37</sup>. Discussion of staffing and resources is based on APC's approval of the initial ADC, therefore any changes to projected intake numbers that have occurred since ADC approval should be clearly signposted.

Where an existing programme is proposed for delivery by an academic partner organisation<sup>38</sup> an abbreviated agenda<sup>39</sup> focuses on the partner's arrangements for student support, management of work-based learning (placements), staffing and learning resources, course organisation and quality assurance. Delivery approval is coterminous with 5-year partner

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<sup>33</sup> Ensuring also that only changes specified by the Faculty Approval Panel have been introduced into the document.

<sup>34</sup> Normally senior academic subject experts of other HEIs, who have no direct association with the proposing team e.g., as a consultant or external examiner, research collaborator or validation panel member within the previous three years. For more details see Key Guidance Documents on the GQASC Wiki – "[Preparing for Validation: A Guide for Panels and Course Teams](#)".

<sup>35</sup> See '[Quality Assurance Handbook](#)' (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2019), para. 109.

<sup>36</sup> Most notably the '[Framework for Higher Education Qualifications](#)' (QAA 2014), Degree Characteristics Statements and Subject Benchmark Statements [www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/the-existing-uk-quality-code/part-a-setting-and-maintaining-academic-standards](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/the-existing-uk-quality-code/part-a-setting-and-maintaining-academic-standards) (see also 'Programme Learning Outcomes', below).

<sup>37</sup> For example, the embedding of Graduate Attributes.

<sup>38</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>39</sup> See Proforma Agenda for Partner and Delivery Approval at <https://go.edgehill.ac.uk/display/agqa/Template+Documents>.

approval, and partners/ programmes are subject to review and re-approval during their final year of approval.

Validation outcomes comprise unconditional approval; approval with conditions and/ or recommendations; or referral for further development by the programme team. Panels do not set conditions around resources but may highlight significant matters for attention by the host Faculty or Directorate as part of the University's annual budget-setting process. Institutional validation culminates in a recommendation to AQEC which confers final programme approval on behalf of the Academic Board.

## RE-VALIDATION

Once validated, programmes normally remain in approval until their next scheduled Periodic Review<sup>40</sup> which confers continuing approval on evidence that the standards set at validation are being maintained, and the quality of student learning opportunities enhanced. Between scheduled reviews, programmes are typically kept up-to-date using the formal modifications process described below (see programme modifications below). However, where more widespread changes are proposed, a standalone re-validation is necessary. Programme teams are required to revalidate their programmes when **more than two thirds of the credit derived from Core and/or Compulsory modules<sup>41</sup> (at any FHEQ level) is to be changed simultaneously.**

The re-validation process mirrors that for new programmes. For a full description of the re-validation process and documentation, see Key Guidance Document [“Preparing for Validation: A Guide for Panels and Course Teams”](#) on the GQASC Wiki.

### Consultation/Consent Requirements

As with all programme modifications, **proposing teams are expected to consult with their external examiner(s) and with students.** In limited circumstances, student consent is also required (further details below).

Consultation with current students should start in the classroom, and at Student-Staff Consultative Fora and/ or Programme Boards where student representatives are in attendance, and later formalised by letter or email presented in a 'student-friendly' style. Written communication should include an overview of the proposed changes, the reason for making the changes and why they are beneficial to learners. In all cases, students should be allowed reasonable time to consider and respond to the proposed changes. Nil responses will usually be treated as tacit agreement, however, should a majority be achieved by this means the department will exercise caution and seek to obtain a more positive mandate for its proposals. **Validation panels expect to see evidence of the consultation and/or consent process undertaken by programme teams.** Typically, this includes letter or email

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<sup>40</sup> Periodic reviews take place on a five-yearly cycle – see Chapter 3.

<sup>41</sup> Modules designated **Core** to a programme do not permit condonement (compensation) of marginal failure. Modules designated **Compulsory** permit condonement within the limits prescribed by the Academic Regulations, section H11.

correspondence explaining the change and any corresponding minutes capturing the subsequent discussion and decisions made.

**When re-validating an existing programme, course teams should carefully consider the impact of any proposed changes on the balance between:**

- Tutor contact time and guided independent study
- Different types of learning activity including classroom-based and online learning, work placements, field trips; or,
- Different modes of assessment such as coursework, written examinations and practical skills tests.

Faculties/departments must remain alert to any significant shifts in the above, because these aspects of a programme of study are considered material to the choices made by students at the point of application, and to the contract entered into by them at entry for the lifetime of their programme.

Re-validated undergraduate programmes are normally 'phased in' commencing with the next level 4 intake, thereby not affecting current students, however simultaneous or 'block' implementation of two or more years / levels of study may occasionally be proposed. This typically affects current students, in which case written consent is also required as detailed below.

**For block implementation (no change to award titles) - departments must evidence individual written consent by a simple majority of all affected students.**

**For block implementation (including a change in award title) - departments must evidence written consent from all affected students (100%).**

Prospective students<sup>42</sup> are notified of changes through the University's designated communication channels<sup>43</sup>. Where block implementation of a re-validated programme is being considered, departments must make this clear in the application for development consent, to enable APC to confirm any additional operational or regulatory implications.

## INTENDED AND ALTERNATIVE (EXIT) AWARDS

Institutional validation panels are responsible for confirming the level and title of all University awards consistent with Section B of the Academic Regulations<sup>44</sup> and the [Sector](#)

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<sup>42</sup> The term **prospective students** may describe (i) potential applicants; (ii) individuals who have applied and received an offer; or (iii) individuals who have applied, received and accepted an offer.

<sup>43</sup> Communication with (i) and (ii) is normally via the online prospectus which is updated frequently to reflect any material course changes – See Student Recruitment and Marketing Wiki - [Communicating with prospective students](#). Offer holders are notified by Admissions.

<sup>44</sup> [www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/collection/academic-regulations/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/collection/academic-regulations/).

**Recognised Standards** - The national *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications* (FHEQ). **Intended Awards** are promoted in the course prospectus and equate to completion of a full programme of study. **Alternative Awards** are available to students who exit their programme prematurely and have completed the requisite number and level of credits for an award, e.g. (for undergraduate degree programmes) a 120 credit Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE), 240 credit Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) or 300 credit Ordinary (non-Honours) degree; and (for Masters degrees) a 60 credit postgraduate certificate or 120 credit postgraduate diploma. Alternative awards are also available for in-programme transfer, e.g., between an Integrated Masters and associated undergraduate Honours degree, or for students on PSRB-regulated programmes who have achieved the requisite number/ level of credits but have not met the requirements for professional registration, e.g., 'BSc (Hons) Health & Social Care Studies' as an alternative non-professional award for students of pre-registration nursing and midwifery degrees. Titles of Intended and Alternative Awards include the following component information:

- Target award, e.g. 'FdA', 'BSc (Hons)', 'MA', 'MComp'<sup>45</sup>.
- Named Award, e.g. 'Computer Science'.

Titles of Ordinary degree and DipHE alternative exit awards are usually consistent with the title of the associated Honours degree, nevertheless validation panels should confirm that these appropriately reflect the proportion of subject study undertaken at the exit stage of the programme. CertHE exit awards are normally unnamed unless specifically justified at validation.

### Programme Learning Outcomes: Using the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements

Programme Specifications define separate Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for each level of the national Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (levels 4-6 of an undergraduate degree, and level 7 for a Masters degree). PLOs are described under the following four headings:

- **Knowledge and Understanding**
- **Intellectual Skills** - e.g. skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation
- **Practical Skills** - subject-specific skills developed, for example, through lab or studio-based activity, fieldwork or placement
- **Transferable Skills** - general employability skills such as oral and written communication, literacy and numeracy, time management, and working independently and in teams.

In developing their PLOs course teams consult the relevant FHEQ qualification level descriptors<sup>46</sup> and QAA Subject Benchmark Statement(s)<sup>47</sup>. While the FHEQ descriptors are

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<sup>45</sup> Target awards are approved by the Academic Planning Committee as part of the process of Development Consent – see 'Academic Planning', above – and confirmed at validation. See Appendix 2 of the Academic Regulations, [www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/collection/academic-regulations/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/collection/academic-regulations/).

<sup>46</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements).

*generic* – describing the types of understanding and skills that students will have demonstrated, irrespective of their subject discipline – Subject Benchmark Statements describe the *specific* knowledge and skills that a student should have acquired on completion of their named award. The content of Subject Benchmark Statements is comprehensive, reflecting the full range of subject delivery across higher education providers, and for this reason it is not expected that programme teams will adopt them wholesale. **Validation panels seek evidence<sup>48</sup> of how subject benchmarks have been used critically and selectively to inform their curriculum choices.** Where applicable, teams also describe and illustrate their engagement with any relevant professional standards or other PSRB requirements.

Within Programme Specifications, PLOs are mapped by modules (or by ‘in-year learning outcomes’ where the curriculum is non-modular, e.g., medicine and nursing) to demonstrate how and where they are achieved. **Validation panels confirm that each PLO is mapped by at least one Core or two Compulsory modules which helps ensure that where condonement is applied, the relevant PLOs should still have been met.**

The description of PLOs within Programme Specifications is preceded by one of the following two generic statements:

- **(For undergraduate awards)** “The Programme Learning Outcomes shown here describe the knowledge, understanding and skills that students will have demonstrated on achievement of their intended qualification award. Students who do not complete their full programme of study may qualify for an alternative award and the validated exit awards for this programme are listed at the front of this Programme Specification. For an Honours degree, exit awards are available at level 4 (Certificate of Higher Education), level 5 (Diploma of Higher Education) and level 6 (Ordinary degree on achievement of 60 level 6 credits). The precise learning outcomes of an Ordinary degree are determined by the modules taken and passed at level 6 and can be identified from the table below.”
- **(For postgraduate taught awards)** “The Programme Learning Outcomes shown here describe the knowledge, understanding and skills that students will have demonstrated on achievement of their intended level 7 qualification award. Students who do not complete their full programme of study may qualify for an alternative award and the validated exit awards for this programme are listed at the front of this Programme Specification. The learning outcomes of level 7 exit awards are determined by the combination of modules taken and passed and can be identified from the table below.”

## Sandwich Year and Study Abroad routes

The University has validated generic one-year Sandwich and Study Abroad routes which can be incorporated within any undergraduate degree programme. The **Sandwich Year** is scheduled following the second year of normal full-time study (FHEQ level 5) and delivers 120

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<sup>48</sup> For example, through a narrative statement and accompanying matrix that maps Programme Learning Outcomes to the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement(s).



additional level 5 credits that contribute to the student's degree classification<sup>49</sup>. Degree award titles do not typically reflect the sandwich year which is acknowledged within students' transcripts, however some law and business-related programmes have adopted the nomenclature 'BA/BSc (Hons) [X] [Sandwich]' or similar in their award titles as justified at validation.

In respect of **Study Abroad**<sup>50</sup> including the Turing Scheme<sup>51</sup>, undergraduate students may either substitute 60 level 5 credits (one semester) of their second year<sup>52</sup> with overseas study, or undertake an additional overseas year between their second and final year which delivers 120 supernumerary credits at level 5. Unlike the Sandwich Year, Study Abroad credit is ungraded and does not contribute to students' degree classification but is recorded on their final transcripts.

The addition of Sandwich Year or Study Abroad routes to existing programmes is delegated to Faculties using approval processes described in their Faculty Quality Statements<sup>53</sup>.

### STEM Foundation Year

The University has validated a generic one-year, level 3 STEM Foundation Year route which can be studied as part of any undergraduate STEM subject degree programme. Students automatically progress to level 4 of their chosen STEM subject on successful completion<sup>54</sup>. The addition of the STEM Foundation Year route to existing STEM programmes is delegated to Faculties using approval processes described in their Faculty Quality Statements.

## COMBINED PROGRAMMES

The University will occasionally validate programmes comprising more than one academic subject, either as **Combined Honours (Joint or Major/ Minor)** or **Integrated Single Honours** awards. The difference between these is mainly one of credit structure (distribution) and all combined programmes require the contributing subjects to collaborate closely in relation to the following (which are scrutinised closely at validation):

- Programme design – culminating in a set of integrated Programme Aims and Programme Learning Outcomes.
- Programme organisation and management – overseen by a dedicated Combined Honours Tutor such that students may develop a sense of identity and 'belonging,' receive clear contact information and communications, and have access to support such as Personal Tutors and opportunities for Personal Development Planning.

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<sup>49</sup> For the contribution of supplementary level 5 credit to degree classification see the Academic Regulations, section J3.10.

<sup>50</sup> For details of the approval process for Study Abroad, see Chapter 5.

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.turing-scheme.org.uk/>

<sup>52</sup> Subject to the programme structures facilitating semester 1 study abroad.

<sup>53</sup> Available at <https://go.edgehill.ac.uk/display/aqdu/Faculty+Quality+Processes+and+Responsibilities>.

<sup>54</sup> The target award will only be available to students who successfully complete the year but choose not to progress to an undergraduate programme. Students who do progress to an undergraduate programme will have the STEM Foundation Year modules added to their transcript.

- Administrative arrangements for student engagement and representation, Programme Boards and Student-Staff Consultative Fora<sup>55</sup>.

When developing new Single Honours programmes course teams may wish to identify the modules that would be utilised in any future combined honours programme.

### Joint Honours & Major/ Minor degrees

**Joint Honours degrees** are made up of modules from two different Single Honours degrees<sup>56</sup> in which each subject accounts for **precisely 50% of study**, i.e., 60 credits per FHEQ level<sup>57</sup>. The contributing subjects are normally shown in alphabetical order<sup>58</sup> in the award title, e.g., '*BA (Hons) Drama and English*', and programme responsibilities relating to organisation and management, personal tutoring and the operation of Personal Development Planning usually reside with the first subject, i.e., Drama in the above example. The first subject is also responsible for providing the Combined Honours Tutor and for producing and maintaining the Programme Specification and managing programme modifications.

**Major/ Minor degrees** are usually derived from modules of two Single Honours programmes<sup>59</sup> in the **ratio of 80/40 credits per FHEQ level**. Programme management responsibilities reside with the Major subject. Award titles use the formula '*BA (Hons) [Major subject] with [Minor subject]*' to reflect the balance of subjects/ credit. The Major subject is responsible for providing the Combined Honours Tutor and for producing and maintaining the Programme Specification and managing programme modifications.

Proposals to validate new Joint and Major/ Minor degrees require Faculty submission of an Application for Development Consent to APC. The validation process is summarised below:

#### For combinations derived from *two existing Single Honours degrees*:

- Application for Development Consent to APC.
- Programme Specification produced by the first subject (for Joint Honours awards), or Major subject (for Major/Minor awards).
- Validation delegated to Faculties using processes described in their Faculty Quality Statements. The normal requirement for externality in validation is waived because the contributing modules are already in approval.
- Faculty minutes of approval are received by the next available meeting of AQEC which confirms final approval of the award.
- AQEC Secretary notifies award approval via the PVM email group.

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<sup>55</sup> See Chapter 6.

<sup>56</sup> It is however possible to validate half of a Joint programme where there is no associated Single Honours programme.

<sup>57</sup> Tolerance for 'free electives' - 20 credits per level, provided there is approximately equal balance between the joint subjects across levels. See Academic Regulations C5.2.

<sup>58</sup> Where it is intended to vary the usual order of subjects in the award title, this should be highlighted in the Application for Development Consent for consideration and approval by APC.

<sup>59</sup> It is possible to validate a standalone Minor where there is no associated Single Honours programme.

For combinations derived from two Single Honours degrees where *at least one of the subjects is new*:

- Application for Development Consent to APC.
- Programme Specification produced by the first subject (for Joint Honours), or Major subject (for Major/Minor).
- Standard Institutional validation process with report to AQEC and notification of approval via the PVM email group.

Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for Joint and Major/ Minor awards are 'mapped' by modules of both subjects and should as far as possible reflect their integration, particularly in the definition of Intellectual and Transferable Skills. Programme Specifications also contain integrated statements of programme aims, teaching, learning and assessment.

#### Faculties

- **Remain alert to the impact of modifications to the Single Honours programmes on which they are based.**
- **Ensure that proposals to modify joint and major/ minor awards do not distort the required balance of subject credit.**

## Integrated Single Honours degrees

Integrated Single Honours programmes facilitate bespoke combinations of subjects at the point of design and are not constrained by the assignment of fixed credit values/ ratios to each subject. The approximate balance of subjects is reflected in the award title, e.g. 'A' & 'B' (around half) or 'X with Y' where X is the lead subject and may be varied between FHEQ levels which should also be considered when determining the titles of any intermediate alternative (exit) awards. Integrated Single Honours programmes are approved using the standard processes for Development Consent and Institutional validation.

### 'Module Sharing'

Where appropriate and practical, programme developers may seek to re-use modules from different programmes, subjects, departments or even Faculties, or work together to develop new modules. As well as providing efficiencies in how programmes are delivered, module-sharing between different cohorts can enrich the overall student learning experience however the necessary permissions<sup>60</sup> must have been obtained from the module 'owners' before their adoption in any new programme proposal.

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<sup>60</sup> As evidenced by the signatures of collaborating PVC Deans of Faculty in Applications for Development Consent (see 'Academic Planning', above).

## MODULE APPROVAL AND MODIFICATION

### Module approval

Modules exist both as standalone units of learning and as constituent parts of larger programmes of study. New modules may be approved either individually by a Faculty (see below), or through Institution-level validation as part of a complete programme/ award. In either case, module approval is governed by similar principles to programme approval on the basis that successful completion of a module:

- Demonstrates the achievement of Intended Learning Outcomes that lead to the award of academic credit; and
- In a programme context, demonstrates the achievement of one or more Programme Learning Outcomes that lead to a full qualification award.

**The module approval processes, carried out by a Faculty or through Institution-level validation must therefore ensure that:**

- Credit is assigned at the appropriate level (in relation to national credit level descriptors<sup>61</sup>) and volume (in relation to learning and assessment activities and Notional Learning Hours<sup>62</sup>);
- Module learning outcomes are described at the appropriate FHEQ level;
- Learning and teaching activities are described within the following categories: (i) scheduled learning activities, e.g., lectures, seminars and tutorials, including synchronous 'real-time' delivery of online learning activities; (ii) asynchronous online tutor-supported learning; (iii) external visits and Work-Based Learning; and (iv) guided independent study<sup>63</sup>;
- An assessment strategy, mapped directly to the module learning outcomes enables them to be demonstrated by students. Assessment tasks are described within the following broad categories: (i) coursework, (ii) examination, and (iii) practical;
- Indicative module content and learning resources (including teaching staff<sup>64</sup> and up-to-date reading lists) are appropriate to the module's rationale and support students' achievement of the learning outcomes;
- Any pre- or co-requisites for study of the module are clearly stated<sup>65</sup>;
- For joint and major/ minor awards, the addition of a new module does not undermine the required division of credit; and,

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<sup>61</sup> 'Higher Education Credit Framework for England' (QAA, 2021) <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/higher-education-credit-framework-for-england>

<sup>62</sup> Where one academic credit equates to 10 Notional Learning Hours.

<sup>63</sup> Further detail is provided in the Module Specification template at [www.edgehill.ac.uk/services/E-Val/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/services/E-Val/).

<sup>64</sup> Appropriateness of staffing is confirmed via receipt and consideration of the module leader's CV.

<sup>65</sup> Which may include completion of an associated module at the same or a different level or Recognition of Prior Certificated or Experiential Learning. Note: pre-requisite modules identified at the point of module approval must be undertaken prior to students undertaking linked modules, however condonement of marginal failure remains available unless the pre-requisite has been specified as Core.

- (For a module contributing to an existing programme) There is sufficient evidence of appropriate consultation with students, typically via minutes from a Programme Board or Student- Staff Consultative Forum.

New modules for standalone delivery, or for addition to an existing programme, do not require APC Development Consent; however, modules to be delivered as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)<sup>66</sup> must be notified to APC before proceeding to Faculty approval.

### Faculty Approval Panel Constitution

Where module approval takes place in Faculties, **Panels must include (as a minimum):**

1. An external academic subject expert<sup>67</sup> as follows:
  - (For standalone modules or modules for use in new programmes or in new subjects) an independent external subject expert<sup>68</sup>; or
  - (For a module contributing to an existing programme or portfolio of cognate subject modules) the current external examiner.
2. An appropriate level of VASP representation which must include a VASP Chair.
3. One VASP member of another Faculty, typically as a standing member of a Faculty module approval panel.
4. (For a module to be delivered in blended or online mode) Internal specialist expertise in learning technologies<sup>69</sup>

For standalone modules delivered in partnership with other organisations such as NHS or private training providers, additional approval requirements<sup>70</sup> apply and proposers should consult the Faculty's lead for academic partnerships.

On completion of the approval process, the module is:

- Approved unconditionally; or
- Approved with conditions and/ or recommendations; or
- Referred for further development by the proposing department.

**A report is produced by the Panel secretary, which details the key considerations of the Panel (as noted in the previous section), the agreed outcome and confirmation that any conditions of approval have been met.** The Chair's approved report is submitted to the Faculty Board (or designated committee), which retains oversight of the process on behalf of

<sup>66</sup> MOOCs are aimed at large-scale interactive participation and open access via the internet. Courses are typically free and tend not to offer academic credit. See Chapter 6 for further details.

<sup>67</sup> Normally senior academic subject experts of other HEIs.

<sup>68</sup> Independent external experts have no direct association with the proposing team e.g., as a consultant or external examiner, research collaborator or validation panel member within the previous five years. For more details see Key Guidance Documents on the GQASC Wiki – "[Preparing for Validation: A Guide for Panels and Course Teams](#)". The subject expert would be eligible to later serve as an external panel member for any associated programme validation.

<sup>69</sup> Typically, a University SOLSTICE Fellow [www.edgehill.ac.uk/solstice/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/solstice/) or a Learning Technologist based in Learning Services, these may be existing VASP members or co-opted specifically for the event.

<sup>70</sup> See Chapter 5.

the Faculty. Institutional oversight is by AQEC through receipt of the relevant Faculty committee minutes. Module approval is notified by the Faculty via the PVM email group, and to partner organisations where applicable, and the module's status is changed from University Draft to Approved on the E-Val database<sup>71</sup>. **Once approved, modules are subject to Faculty review and re-validation aligned with the Periodic Review<sup>72</sup> of the host department's programmes.** If, Faculty approval is time-limited and a module's expiry date is before the next scheduled periodic review, separate arrangements for review/ re- validation will be made. Any variations in approval period must be clearly recorded in the report and notified by the Faculty via the PVM e-mail group.

**Technical Note:** The addition of a module to an existing programme, either as an option or in substitution for another module, will necessitate modification of the receiving programme. This is usually a **Minor Programme Modification**. The minor modification process is delegated to Faculties, therefore the approval of new modules resulting in a minor programme modification are often conflated within a single Faculty process. However, if the addition of a new module requires a change to the validated Programme Learning Outcomes, the proposal must be referred for **Major Programme Modification** (which is carried out centrally). Processes for Minor and Major Programme Modification are described in a later section.

## Year of Study Approval

Medicine, Nursing and certain other subjects in the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Medicine utilise a non-modular structure in which student learning is developed thematically within 120-credit Years of Study. Year of Study Specifications contain In-Year Learning Outcomes which are mapped directly to assessments. Programme structures based on Years of Study, rather than modules, **must be approved through Institution-level validation** as part of a complete programme/ award.

## Optional Modules

Optional Modules are offered within most programmes to provide an element of choice and variety and do not form part of the compulsory curriculum requirements for the award. Where they are available, students select their options annually for each academic year of study. Optional Modules may be either:

- **'Defined Options'** – elective subject modules listed by name within Programme Specifications and **mapped by code to the Programme Learning Outcomes**. Where defined options include Core (unconsonable) modules, this should be flagged in the Programme Structure pathway column of the programme specification and explained within the Student 'Learning Journey' narrative.
- **'Flexible Options'** – sourced from a 'pool' of modules that extends beyond the immediate subject area but has some affinity with it, for example a selection of

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<sup>71</sup> Accessed via [www.edgehill.ac.uk/services/E-Val/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/services/E-Val/).

<sup>72</sup> See Chapter 3.

Continuing Professional Development modules with general application to health and social care practitioners<sup>73</sup>. **Flexible Options are not listed by name within Programme Specifications** and may be block-mapped to a generic Programme Learning Outcome related to the 'enhancement of (professional) practice through the development of additional knowledge or skills'.

- **'Free Electives'**<sup>74</sup> – up to 20 credits per FHEQ level, sourced from the same or another subject area in substitution for a Defined Option (above). At **level 4, choice is restricted to foreign language study modules** which may be defined in Programme Specifications and mapped to the main Programme Learning Outcomes<sup>75</sup>. **Free Electives at levels 5 and 6 are not normally defined in Programme Specifications** due to the potentially wide choice available, and Programme Specifications contain a standard statement on the permitted number of credits that may be substituted. Students complete a **Free Elective Application Form**<sup>76</sup> which enables consideration of any pre- or co-requisites as well as other potential restrictions such as Disclosure and Barring Service clearance; issues with timetabling or non-standard delivery modes/patterns; impact on subject balance within combined honours programmes; timing of assessment boards, and availability of in-year re-assessment; or any PSRB-related matters<sup>77</sup>. Approval of a student's choice of Free Elective is normally the responsibility of their programme leader following consultation with the 'receiving' module leader.

**Note:** The availability of Optional Modules varies from year to year and is subject to achieving the minimum student numbers. This means that not all options may be available in any given year which is notified to prospective and current students in line with Competition and Markets Authority guidelines<sup>78</sup>.

### Minor Module Modification

Faculties may make minor modifications to existing modules using processes described in their Faculty Quality Statements<sup>79</sup>, which **as a minimum** will require:

- Supporting comments from the current external examiner (at FHEQ level 5 and above<sup>80</sup>).
- (For a module contributing to an existing programme) Evidence of consultation with student representatives, typically via a Programme Board or Student-Staff

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<sup>73</sup> [www.edgehill.ac.uk/health/cpd-modules/?tab=search-for-a-cpd-module](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/health/cpd-modules/?tab=search-for-a-cpd-module).

<sup>74</sup> See Academic Regulations section C5.2.

<sup>75</sup> Typically, those associated with 'employability'.

<sup>76</sup> Available from the Faculty Quality Officer.

<sup>77</sup> For example, specific requirements pertaining to the assessment of PSRB standards and competencies or potential impact on PSRB-monitored Student-Staff Ratios (SSRs).

<sup>78</sup> See '[UK higher education providers – advice on consumer protection law](#)', Competition and Markets Authority (2015).

<sup>79</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>80</sup> Also level 3 STEM Foundation Year, Fastrack: Preparation for HE and International Foundation Programme, and level 4 of Foundation Degrees.

Consultative Forum<sup>81</sup>. This should include minutes capturing the subsequent discussion and decisions made.

- A report of the modification's approval to the Faculty Board (or designated committee).

**Minor modifications to modules may include:**

- a) A minor change to the module's title<sup>82</sup> (on condition that it remains appropriate to the module's rationale and learning outcomes); or
- b) Changes to module pre-/ co-requisites; or
- c) Changes to Intended Learning Outcomes; or
- d) Changes to the described teaching and assessment strategies, including individual assessment tasks.

**The following changes normally require validation of a new module:**

- Any change to the module's academic rationale; or
- Change of FHEQ level and/ or credit value; or
- Significant change to the module's title, learning outcomes or teaching and assessment strategies such that the external examiner and/ or module approval panel deem this to warrant the validation of a new module<sup>83</sup>.

Minor module modifications are notified by the Faculty via the PVM email group, and to partner delivery organisations where applicable, and the module's status on E-Val is changed from University Draft to Approved. Institutional oversight is by AQEC via receipt of the relevant Faculty committee minutes.

**Note:** The following changes do **not** require formal module modification:

- Names of module leaders and staff involved in delivery (recognising that beyond module approval, teaching staff allocations will change over time and be managed by the host department with appropriate Faculty oversight).
- Balance of scheduled learning activities, placement and guided independent study hours (**however** see 'cumulative impact of module changes', below).
- Indicative content (as long as it remains consistent with the module's academic rationale and learning outcomes).

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<sup>81</sup> Where no Programme Board or Student-Staff Consultative Forum is scheduled consultation with students should be undertaken through alternative means, e.g. by email or the Learning Edge Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

<sup>82</sup> Requires a new module code, available from the Academic Registry. Changes of module title and code resulting from minor module modification do not count towards the credit threshold for triggering a Minor Modifications Review (see below) **except** where the module's academic rationale or intended learning outcomes have also changed such that the module could be considered 'new'.

<sup>83</sup> In the **Faculty of Arts & Sciences** all changes to module titles follow the process for new module approval as described earlier.



- Books, journals and other learning resources (which are updated annually in module handbooks and/ or online reading lists, or when modules are next formally modified or re-validated).

Minor module modifications will normally have been completed before the end of the academic session (year) preceding their implementation, and module leaders should consult the University's timeline for curriculum development and modification and refer any queries to their Faculty Quality Officer. Only in exceptional circumstances<sup>84</sup> will Faculties consider in-year modifications to modules which in all cases must have been finalised no later than the end of the semester preceding the module's delivery.

Faculty approval panels consider the **cumulative impact of module changes** on the balance between different types of learning activities including classroom-based and online learning, work placements or field trips, and guided independent study; or different modes of assessment such as coursework, written examinations and practical skills tests. These aspects of a programme of study are considered material to the choices made by students at the point of application, and to the contract entered into by them at entry for the lifetime of their programme. Faculties remain alert to any significant shifts, particularly in the ratio of tutor contact time to independent study, a reduction or removal of placements, or increased use of assessment by examination, which are consulted on with current students and notified to prospective students through the designated communication channels<sup>85</sup>.

#### **Continuing currency of modules - module review and re-approval**

Every validated module is subject to Faculty review and re-validation which is synchronised with Institution-level Periodic Review<sup>86</sup> of the host department's programmes. Processes for module review and re-approval must enable a judgement to be made regarding continued currency.

#### **Faculty module review and re-approval processes<sup>87</sup> must include as a minimum:**

- Consultation with external examiners<sup>88</sup>,
- Consultation with current students using the methods described above, typically via Programme Boards or Student-Staff Consultative Fora. This should include letter or email correspondence explaining the change and any corresponding minutes capturing the subsequent discussion and decisions made; and,

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<sup>84</sup> For example, in response to external examiner recommendations.

<sup>85</sup> The term 'prospective students' describes (i) potential applicants, (ii) individuals who have applied and received an offer; and (iii) individuals who have applied, received and accepted an offer. Communication with (i) and (ii) is normally via the online prospectus which is updated frequently to reflect any material course changes – See Student Recruitment and Marketing Wiki - [Communicating with prospective students](#). Offer holders are notified by Admissions.

<sup>86</sup> See Chapter 3. If, Faculty approval is time-limited and a module's expiry date is before the next scheduled periodic review, separate arrangements for review/ re- validation will be made.

<sup>87</sup> Described in Faculty Quality Statements – See Chapter 1.

<sup>88</sup> External examiners identify any modules requiring possible modification or replacement in their annual reports – see Chapter 2.

- Consideration of the history of modifications made during the previous approval period.

On the basis that modules are reviewed as part of annual programme monitoring<sup>89</sup> and that changes are made during the lifetime of the module using the modifications procedures described above, re-approval is likely to be 'light-touch'.

### Minor Modifications to Years of Study

The type and volume of change to a 120-credit Year of Study (YoS) can vary from minor to more substantial. Due to the amount of credit involved, delegated authority to make minor modifications is restricted.

Faculties may make selected minor modifications to one Year of Study (YoS) per validated programme using processes described in their Faculty Quality Statements<sup>90</sup>. **As a minimum the process will include:**

- Supporting comments from the current external examiner (at FHEQ level 5 and above<sup>91</sup>).
- Evidence of consultation with student representatives, typically via a Programme Board or Student-Staff Consultative Forum<sup>92</sup>. This should include letter or email correspondence explaining the change and any corresponding minutes capturing the subsequent discussion and decisions made.
- A report of the modification's approval to the Faculty Board (or designated committee).
- Updating of the Year of Study Specification

**The Faculty may carry out the following minor modifications to an existing Year of Study:**

- a) A minor change to the YoS title<sup>93</sup> (on condition that it remains appropriate to the rationale and learning outcomes); or
- b) **Simultaneous changes of up to and including half of the in-year learning outcomes or validated assessment tasks associated with each FHEQ level** (on condition that the PLOs remain unaffected). Note: Except for the MBCHB<sup>94</sup>, in most cases this will be simultaneous changes to one YoS;
- c) Minor changes to the described teaching and learning strategies.

**The following changes require Institutional-level approval<sup>95</sup>:**

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<sup>89</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>90</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>91</sup> Also, level 4 of Foundation Degrees.

<sup>92</sup> Where no Programme Board or Student-Staff Consultative Forum is scheduled consultation with students should be undertaken through alternative means, e.g., by email or the Learning Edge Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

<sup>93</sup> Requires a new year of study code, available from the Academic Registry. Changes to YoS title and code only do not count towards the credit threshold for triggering a Minor Modifications Review (see below).

<sup>94</sup> MBCHB comprise two YoS at FHEQ level 6 totalling 240 credits.

<sup>95</sup> Either a major modification or re-validation depending on the volume and type of change required.

- Approval, and subsequent replacement, of a YoS at any FHEQ level;
- Any change to the academic rationale of a YoS;
- A change of FHEQ level and/ or credit value;
- Significant changes to the title, in-year learning outcomes (>50%), validated assessment tasks (>50%) or teaching and learning strategies of one YoS, such that the external examiner and/ or faculty approval panel and /or the Head of Quality deem this to warrant the validation of a new YoS or if any proposed changes will affect the PLOs;
- Except for Level 6 of the MBCHB<sup>96</sup>, simultaneous changes to more than one YoS per validated programme;
- **Accumulated changes to in-year learning outcomes or validated assessment tasks** associated with each FHEQ level that reach a total of more than 50% since the programmes most recent scrutiny by VASP (see **Minor Modifications Review – Non-Modular Provision** below).

Minor modifications to YoS are notified by the Faculty via the PVM email group, and to partner delivery organisations where applicable, and the YoS's status on E-Val is changed from University Draft to Approved. Institutional oversight is by AQEC via receipt of the relevant Faculty committee minutes.

**Note:** The following changes do **not** require formal YoS modification:

- Names of YoS leader/s and staff involved in delivery (recognising that beyond approval, teaching staff allocations will change over time and be managed by the department with appropriate Faculty oversight).
- Balance of scheduled learning activities, placement and guided independent study hours.
- Indicative content (as long as it remains consistent with the YoS's academic rationale and in-year learning outcomes).
- Books, journals and other learning resources (which are updated annually in handbooks and/ or online reading lists, or when YoS are next formally modified or re-validated).

Minor modifications to YoS will normally have been completed before the end of the academic session (year) preceding their implementation.

All YoS leaders should refer any queries relating to proposed changes to YoS to their Faculty Quality Officer at their earliest convenience, who will provide expert advice and liaise with GQASC regarding process, if required.

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<sup>96</sup> MBCHB comprise two YoS at FHEQ level 6 totalling 240 credits.

### Continuing currency of Years of Study - review and re-approval

As with modules, all Years of Study are subject to Faculty review in advance of Periodic Review<sup>97</sup> and make any minor adjustments using the processes for minor modification described above. If more substantial changes are necessary, YoS are referred for VASP consideration and Institutional approval<sup>98</sup> in advance of Periodic Review. The Faculty review and reapproval process<sup>99</sup> must enable a judgement to be made regarding continued currency.

#### Faculty review must include as a minimum:

- Consultation with external examiner(s)<sup>100</sup>,
- Consultation with current students using the methods described above, typically via Programme Boards or Student-Staff Consultative Fora; and,
- Consideration of the history of modifications made during the previous approval period.
- A report of the review and reapproval to the Faculty Board (or designated committee).
- Updating of the Year of Study Specification (if applicable).

On the basis that YoS are reviewed as part of continuing PSRB accreditation (where applicable) and via annual programme monitoring;<sup>101</sup> and that changes are made during the lifetime of a YoS, re-approval is most likely to be 'light-touch'.

## PROGRAMME MODIFICATION

Once validated, programmes/ awards remain in continuous approval until their next scheduled Periodic Review (or standalone re-validation). Modification processes enable established<sup>102</sup> curricula to be refreshed or otherwise adjusted between formal review points to enhance the learner experience and maintain currency and continued alignment with academic subject benchmarks and professional standards. **However**, such 'in-cycle' changes must also be monitored and controlled to ensure they do not compromise the validated programme aims and learning outcomes (sometimes referred to as 'incremental drift') or undermine the contract entered into with students at the point of entry<sup>103</sup>. The University has categorised the modifications that may be made to a programme during its lifetime with associated procedures designed to safeguard the integrity of the validated qualification

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<sup>97</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>98</sup> Either a major modification or re-validation depending on the volume and type of change required. Modification / re-validation may be conflated within Periodic Review – See Chapter 3.

<sup>99</sup> Described in Faculty Quality Statements – See Chapter 1.

<sup>100</sup> External examiners identify any modules requiring possible modification or replacement in their annual reports – see Chapter 2.

<sup>101</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>102</sup> That is, programmes that are already in delivery and have been evaluated via annual monitoring. Only exceptionally will validated programmes be modified prior to their first delivery.

<sup>103</sup> See 'UK higher education providers – advice on consumer protection law', Competition and Markets Authority (2015), [HE\\_providers\\_-\\_advice\\_on\\_consumer\\_protection\\_law.pdf](#).

award. Faculties notify all material programme changes to current and prospective students through the designated communication channels<sup>104</sup>.

## Material Changes

The following aspects of a programme of study are considered material to the choices made by students at the point of application, and to the contract entered into by them at entry for the lifetime of their programme:

- Course title and final award
- Awarding body/ institution (normally Edge Hill University)
- (For prospective students) Entry standards or entry requirements (see also below)
- Course length
- Location and mode of study (Edge Hill University or academic partner organisation; delivery via classroom, hybrid, online or blended learning<sup>105</sup>)
- Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body accreditation (where applicable)
- Core/ Compulsory modules
- Any advertised Optional modules<sup>106</sup>
- Modifications to Years of Study (for non-modular curricula)
- Overall method(s) of course delivery including balance of face-to-face learning (lectures, seminars, tutorials), online learning, placements and guided independent study
- Overall method(s) of course assessment including balance of coursework, written examinations and practical skills tests

The following sections describe the processes for effecting changes to any of the above which are differentiated by (i) **locus of approval**, i.e., in Faculties or by an Institution-level validation panel; and (ii) **student consultation and, in limited circumstances, individual written consent** which must be evidenced before the modification may proceed to approval. In respect of major programme modifications or re-validations affecting current students, APC formally records the requirement for student consultation and/ or consent as described elsewhere in this chapter while Institutional validation panels receive explicit evidence and provide assurance of same via their reports to AQEC.

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<sup>104</sup> The term **prospective students** may describe (i) potential applicants; (ii) individuals who have applied and received an offer; or (iii) individuals who have applied, received and accepted an offer. Communication with (i) and (ii) is normally via the online prospectus which is updated frequently to reflect any material course changes – See Student Recruitment and Marketing Wiki - [Communicating with prospective students](#). Offer holders are notified by Admissions.

<sup>105</sup> QASC have agreed the following definitions: **Classroom** Programme designed to be studied through attendance on site with teaching and learning in person, and supplementary asynchronous and/or synchronous elements to add value; **Hybrid** Programme designed to be studied both in-person or synchronously online. The tutor delivers the session on campus and teaches the remote and in-person learners at the same time using technology; **Blended** Programme designed to be studied through a combination of both sustained online delivery and on-site learning. Patterns of study will vary but will be through a combination of online and on-site teaching and learning; **Online** Programme designed to be studied online, with teaching and learning consisting of both synchronous and/or asynchronous online learning activities.

<sup>106</sup> See 'Optional Modules', above.

## Entry standards and Entry Requirements

**Entry standards** for admission to an undergraduate programme are defined typically by previous level 3 qualifications that applicants must have successfully completed prior to entry (A-level, BTEC National Diploma, Access to HE Diploma) and the UCAS entry points range agreed at validation by which offers are made to applicants during the standard UCAS recruitment cycle, i.e., prior to Clearing. Entry standards also comprise GCSE English Language at minimum Grade 4 (or equivalent level 2 qualification), and IELTS<sup>107</sup> scores for non-native speakers of English. **Changes to entry standards constitute major programme modifications which require summary approval by the Academic Planning Committee (APC).**

**Entry requirements** for both undergraduate and taught post-graduate programmes are described in Programme Specifications, such as desirable<sup>108</sup> level 3 subject knowledge and skills, evidence of previous work-related learning, e.g., a portfolio, or additional admissions arrangements such as selection tests, auditions and interviews. These may be modified without reference to APC on condition that the Programme Specifications are updated to reflect them.

In line with age discrimination legislation the University makes no stipulation with respect to the age of candidates for entry, however the admission of students under 18 at the time of enrolment may be prohibited where it is a requirement of a professional body which is exempted under age discrimination legislation<sup>109</sup>, or where a programme team exceptionally demonstrates at validation that the curriculum and/ or available support make it inappropriate. Any proposed age restriction should be clearly indicated in the Entry Requirements section of the Programme Specification and a detailed justification provided in the Programme Rationale section of the Part B validation document (to include a link to the University's under-18 policy<sup>110</sup>).

## Minor Programme Modification – Modular Provision<sup>111</sup>

Using processes defined in their Faculty Quality Statements, Faculties may make the following minor modifications to existing **modular** programmes/awards:

- Add or replace Optional Modules without limit; and/or

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<sup>107</sup> International English Language Testing System [www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org) - see Academic Regulations F2.4.

<sup>108</sup> 'Desirable' or 'preferred' level 3 qualifications are validated by exception and only when accompanied by a strong rationale. Applicants are equally as likely to be considered with or without these preferred subjects at Level 3.

<sup>109</sup> Academic Regulations F2.9

<sup>110</sup> Appendix 5 of the Admissions Policy [www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/admissions-policy/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/admissions-policy/).

<sup>111</sup> Excludes Years of Study– see 'Minor Modifications to Years of Study' (above).

- Replace up to **half** of the credit derived from Core and Compulsory Modules<sup>112</sup> at each FHEQ level of the programme since its most recent scrutiny by VASP<sup>113</sup>.

Faculty processes for the approval of minor programme modifications will require **as a minimum**:

- An initial proposal containing a written justification (rationale) evidencing the demonstrable benefits of the modification to students and any associated drivers, e.g. changes to national subject benchmarks or professional body (PSRB) standards or feedback from students and/or industry or individual employers.
- Supporting comments from the programme's external examiner.
- Engagement of at least one VASP member of another Faculty, typically as a standing member of the Faculty's approval panel/ committee.
- Evidence of consultation with students, typically via a Programme Board or Student-Staff Consultative Forum<sup>114</sup>. This should include letter or email correspondence explaining the change and any corresponding minutes capturing the subsequent discussion and decisions made
- A review of the draft revised Programme Specification to confirm that:
  - the validated Programme Learning Outcomes remain achievable (typically evidenced by the 'mapping' of modules to PLOs).
  - that modifications to joint and major/ minor awards do not undermine the required division of credit.
- A report of the modification's approval to the Faculty Board (or designated committee).
- Updating of the Programme Specification.

Minor programme modifications are notified by the Faculty via the PVM email Group and where applicable to partner delivery organisations, and the status of the updated Programme Specification on E-Val is changed from Validation Draft to Approved. Institutional oversight is by AQEC via receipt of the relevant Faculty committee minutes. Once completed, Faculties notify prospective students of any changes to advertised modules using the designated communication channels<sup>115</sup>.

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<sup>112</sup> Changes of module title and code that result from Minor Module Modification do not count towards the credit thresholds noted above except where the academic rationale or intended learning outcomes have also been changed.

<sup>113</sup> Which may have been via Institution-level Periodic Review, Major Programme Modification, standalone re-validation or Minor Modifications Review (see below).

<sup>114</sup> See Chapter 6. Where no Programme Board or Student-Staff Consultative Forum is scheduled, consultation with students should be undertaken through alternative means e.g., by email or the Learning Edge Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

<sup>115</sup> The term **prospective students** may describe (i) potential applicants; (ii) individuals who have applied and received an offer; or (iii) individuals who have applied, received and accepted an offer. Communication with (i) and (ii) is normally via the online prospectus which is updated frequently to reflect any material course changes – See Student Recruitment and Marketing Wiki - [Communicating with prospective students](#). Offer holders are notified by Admissions.

## Minor Modifications Review – Modular Provision

Faculties are responsible for ensuring that the credit limit<sup>116</sup> placed upon minor programme modifications is strictly observed. Where this limit is about to be breached and further modifications are proposed, the Faculty requests that QASC convenes a **Minor Modifications Review (MMR)** which considers the totality of modifications made since the programme's previous scrutiny by the Validation and Audit Standing Panel. MMR confirms that the validated award and Programme Learning Outcomes remain intact, valid and achievable. The MMR process, which does not require direct involvement of the programme team, is conducted by two members of VASP nominated by Chair of VASP and may be undertaken via correspondence. The Faculty must provide the following evidence:

- A list of all in-cycle minor modifications to the programme summarising their nature and dates of Faculty approval.
- Cumulative total of the volume of changed credit and the type of module from which it is derived, i.e., Core, Compulsory or Optional, during the period under consideration.
- Confirmation that students were consulted about the proposed modifications, e.g., via Programme Boards or Student-Staff Consultative Fora. This should include letter or email correspondence explaining the change and any corresponding minutes capturing the subsequent discussion and decisions made.
- Confirmation that the programme's external examiner was consulted about and agreed the proposed modifications.
- The version of the Programme Specification that was in approval at the last formal review point (sourced from E-Val).
- The current Programme Specification (E-Val).
- Relevant Minutes of Faculty approval panels/ committees, Programme Boards and/ or Student-Staff Consultative Fora.
- The most recent external examiner report.

Following consideration by the MMR panel the Secretary (Academic Quality Officer) produces a report for the next available meeting of the Faculty Board (or designated committee) which either:

- I. Confirms that all modifications completed since the previous formal review point have followed due process and that the programme aims and learning outcomes remain consistent with the validated award; or
- II. Refers the programme for Faculty review and subsequent major modification or standalone re-validation (see below).

Where the outcome is (i), the Faculty may resume making minor modifications to the programme up to the permitted credit threshold of 50% of Core/ Compulsory credit per FHEQ level.

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<sup>116</sup> Replacement of up to half of the credit derived from Core and Compulsory Modules at each FHEQ level of the programme since its most recent scrutiny by VASP.



## Minor Modifications Review – Non-Modular Provision

Due to the amount of credit involved, delegated authority to make minor modifications to Years of Study is restricted. The Faculty is permitted to make **simultaneous or accumulated minor changes of up to and including half of the in-year learning outcomes or validated assessment tasks associated with each FHEQ level** (on condition that the PLOs remain unaffected).

Where this limit is about to be breached and further modifications are proposed, the Faculty requests that GQASC convenes a Minor **Modifications Review (MMR)** which considers the totality of modifications made since the programme's previous scrutiny by the Validation and Audit Standing Panel. MMR confirms that the validated award and Programme Learning Outcomes remain intact, valid and achievable. The MMR process, which does not require direct involvement of the programme team, is conducted by two members of VASP nominated by Chair of VASP and may be undertaken via correspondence. The Faculty must provide the following evidence:

- A list of all in-cycle minor modifications to the programme summarising their nature and dates of Faculty approval.
- Confirmation that students were consulted about the proposed modifications, e.g., via Programme Boards or Student-Staff Consultative Fora. This should include letter or email correspondence explaining the change and any corresponding minutes capturing the subsequent discussion and decisions made.
- Confirmation that the programme's external examiner was consulted about and agreed the proposed modifications.
- The version of the Programme Specification that was in approval at the last formal review point (sourced from E-Val).
- The current Programme Specification (E-Val).
- Relevant Minutes of Faculty approval panels/ committees, Programme Boards and/ or Student-Staff Consultative Fora.
- The most recent external examiner report.

Following consideration by the MMR panel, the Secretary (Academic Quality Officer) produces a report for the next available meeting of the Faculty Board (or designated committee) which either:

- III. Confirms that all modifications completed since the previous formal review point have followed due process and that the programme aims and learning outcomes remain consistent with the validated award; or
- IV. Refers the programme for Faculty review and subsequent major modification or standalone re-validation (see below).

Where the outcome is (i), the Faculty may resume making minor modifications to the programme up to the permitted threshold.

## Major Programme Modification

The process of Major Programme Modification is reserved for the consideration of proposed changes to:

- Programme title and award title(s)
- Programme aims
- Programme Learning Outcomes
- Mode of delivery<sup>117</sup>
- Entry Standards, i.e. any change to validated level 2 or 3 entry qualifications<sup>118</sup> (which includes UCAS tariff point ranges<sup>119</sup>) or overall IELTS score<sup>120</sup>
- For non-modular curricula<sup>121</sup>:
  - Significant changes to the title, in-year learning outcomes (>50%) and validated assessment tasks (>50%);
  - Significant changes to the teaching and learning strategies such that the external examiner and/ or faculty approval panel and /or the Head of Quality deem this to warrant the validation of a new YoS;
  - Except for Level 6 of the MBCHB<sup>122</sup>, simultaneous changes to more than one YoS per validated programme;
- For Modular curricula:
  - Simultaneous replacement of between half and two-thirds of the Core/Compulsory credit at any FHEQ level<sup>123</sup>.

<sup>117</sup> For example, a change from full-time to part-time delivery, or from Present in Person (classroom-based) to blended or distance learning. Changes to *delivery pattern*, e.g., moving a module from one semester to another or changing the pace of module delivery from 'short-fat' to 'long-thin' do not require formal modification. For additional guidance, please consult GQASC.

<sup>118</sup> For example, those justified at validation in addition the minimum entry qualifications specified in section F2 of the Academic Regulations.

<sup>119</sup> **Entry tariff ranges**, in which offers can be made at any point in the UCAS cycle, are set at validation. Once validated, UCAS points ranges may require adjustment, for example to take account of current market conditions. Proposed changes to entry tariff ranges constitute a major modification requiring the approval of APC. Proposals to reduce entry points consider any implications for student induction and academic support, while increases are justified by a suitable market rationale. Heads of Department may use discretion to vary entry requirements during Clearing, based on (i) whether applicants are existing offer-holders requiring compensation or are entering via Clearing; and (ii) any additional support to be put in place by the department.

<sup>120</sup> Any proposed change (increase or decrease) to a validated overall IELTS score is a change to entry standards and therefore constitutes a major modification requiring the approval of APC (following the submission of a rationale and information on student support arrangements). No IELTS score can be lower than the minimum stated in Academic Regulations (see F2.4).

<sup>121</sup> Proposals for major modifications to Years of Study are triaged by the Head of Quality in advance of APC, and any requirement for an Initial Proposal determined on a case-by-case basis. APC is advised of the recommended process of approval which may include granting Faculties permission to carry out the modification and report the outcome directly to AQEC.

<sup>122</sup> MBCHB comprise two YoS at FHEQ level 6 totalling 240 credits.

<sup>123</sup> Proposals to change more than two-thirds of the Core/ Compulsory credit at any FHEQ level are managed through standalone re-validation – see 'Re-validation', above.

- The addition of a new pathway award formed out of alternative modules that constitute no more than a third of the credit at any FHEQ level<sup>124</sup>.

The host department completes an Initial Proposal for Major Modification of an Existing Programme (IPM)<sup>125</sup> which the Faculty submits to APC for approval to proceed to the next available Major Modifications Panel (MMP). Supporting documentation is dependent on the nature and scale of the modification and precise requirements will be advised by GQASC, however in all cases it should include:

- The IPM form, containing a justification (rationale) evidencing the demonstrable benefits of the modification to students and any associated drivers, e.g., changes to national subject benchmarks or professional body (PSRB) standards or feedback from students and/ or industry or individual employers.
- The current and draft revised Programme Specification – to confirm that the validated Programme Learning Outcomes remain achievable (typically evidenced by the ‘mapping’ of modules to PLOs).
- Any new or amended Module/Year of Study Specifications requiring approval as part of the Major Programme Modification.
- Supporting comments from the programme’s external examiner.
- Evidence of consultation with students through a Programme Board or Student-Staff Consultative Forum<sup>126</sup>. This should include letter or email correspondence explaining the change and any corresponding minutes capturing the subsequent discussion and decisions made (see also below).

### Consultation/Consent Requirements

Consultation with current students should start in the classroom, and at Student-Staff Consultative Fora and/ or Programme Boards where student representatives are in attendance, and later formalised by letter or email presented in a ‘student-friendly’ style. Written communication should include an overview of the proposed changes, the reason for making the changes and why they are beneficial to learners. In all cases, students should be allowed reasonable time to consider and respond to the proposed changes. Nil responses will usually be treated as tacit agreement, however, should a majority be achieved by this means the department will exercise caution and seek to obtain a more positive mandate for its proposals. **MMPs will expect to see, upon request, evidence of the consultation and/or consent process undertaken by programme teams.** Typically, this includes letter or email correspondence explaining the change and any corresponding minutes capturing the subsequent discussion and decisions made.

Major modifications to undergraduate programmes are normally ‘phased in’ commencing with the next level 4 intake, thereby not affecting current students, however simultaneous or ‘block’ implementation of two or more years / levels of study may occasionally be proposed.

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<sup>124</sup> New pathways formed out of alternative modules that constitute **more than** a third of the credit at each FHEQ level require standalone re-validation – see ‘Re-validation’, above.

<sup>125</sup> Via E-Val at [www.edgehill.ac.uk/services/E-Val/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/services/E-Val/) (EHU staff login required).

<sup>126</sup> Where no Programme Board or Student-Staff Consultative Forum is scheduled consultation with students should be by alternative means, e.g. by email or the Learning Edge Virtual Learning Environment.

This typically affects current students, in which case written consent is also required as detailed below.

**For block implementation (no change to award titles) - departments must evidence individual written consent by a simple majority of all affected students.**

**For block implementation (including a change in award title) - departments must evidence written consent from all affected students (100%).**

The MMP considers the proposed modification and its impact on the validated programme and either:

- Approves it unconditionally; or
- Approves with conditions and/or recommendations; or
- Refers back to the Faculty for further development. Where the extent of the modification is judged to have exceeded the scope of Major Programme Modification as defined above, standalone re-validation is likely to be advised.

A report of the MMP is produced by the Secretary and received for approval by AQEC at the next available meeting. Approval is notified by the AQEC Secretary via the PVM email group (and by Faculties to partner delivery organisations, where applicable) and the status of the revised Programme Specification on E-Val changed from Validation Draft to Approved. Faculties notify prospective students of any changes to the advertised programme/ award title, entry standards, modules/ year(s) of study, balance of learning and assessment activities<sup>127</sup>, course duration or mode or location of study using the designated communication channels<sup>128</sup>.

## PROGRAMME CLOSURE

Programme closure is defined as the complete withdrawal of a named award or study route. The decision to close a programme is ultimately an executive matter, guided by collegial and consultative processes and having due regard to the interests of current students. Programme closure may legitimately be preceded by a period in which the programme remains 'live' but has been unable to recruit, or where recruitment has already been suspended<sup>129</sup>. The basis of proposals for programme closure may typically be one or more of the following:

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<sup>127</sup> Any significant shift in the ratio of tutor contact hours to independent study, reduction or removal of student placements/ exchanges or increased use of assessment by written examination.

<sup>128</sup> The term **prospective students** may describe (i) potential applicants; (ii) individuals who have applied and received an offer; or (iii) individuals who have applied, received and accepted an offer. Communication with (i) and (ii) is normally via the online prospectus which is updated frequently to reflect any material course changes – See Student Recruitment and Marketing Wiki - [Communicating with prospective students](#). Offer holders are notified by Admissions.

<sup>129</sup> Where recruitment has been suspended for two complete academic cycles the host Faculty instigates a review before enrolment can re-commence – see Chapter 1, 'Faculty Quality Statements'.

- A decline in student demand over a period of time to the point where the programme's continued viability is at risk;
- A reduction in funding or funded student numbers;
- Documented concerns over academic standards or quality that pose a long-term risk to the programme beyond any immediate action taken to mitigate them.

The full programme closure procedure is described below and culminates in a formal application to the Academic Quality Enhancement Committee (AQEC).

## Procedures

Programmes will normally be closed on a phased basis which enables all current students to complete. In such circumstances AQEC will expect to see details of the arrangements and support to be put in place for students. In the rare event that provision is withdrawn while students remain on programme – for example, in the event of early exit by an academic delivery partner – the University will apply a suitable 'teach-out' strategy. Formal closure procedures are not applied to a programme that is being replaced by new cognate provision which is identified clearly in the successor programme's ADC and confirmed at validation.

A proposal to close a programme<sup>130</sup> may originate from discussions during Institutional Periodic Review<sup>131</sup> or Faculty academic planning, or at any stage during the programme's lifecycle. Programme closure normally entails the cessation of recruitment while current students are supported to completion of their studies during a defined teach-out period. The responsible Faculty submits a formal Programme Closure Request Form<sup>132</sup> to AQEC that includes an exit plan demonstrating how it will preserve the continuity of study for affected students and how it will ensure those students continue to receive a high-quality learning experience. Programme closure procedures consist of the following:

- a) Completion of a Programme Closure Request Form by the Head of Department, containing:
  - Programme title and programme code.
  - Year of original validation.
  - Rationale for the programme's closure.
  - Expected end-date, i.e., completion of the final cohort (full and/ or part-time)<sup>133</sup>.
  - Evaluation of impact on the University's portfolio (where student choice is being reduced).
  - Description of measures to be taken to safeguard programme quality and standards during any teach-out period, including staffing and resources.
  - Implications of closure on the external examiner's period of appointment.<sup>134</sup>
  - Evidence of student and staff consultation (see below).

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<sup>130</sup> Specific requirements for the closure of programmes delivered by or with academic partner organisations are detailed in Chapter 5.

<sup>131</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>132</sup> Available on the [Templates](#) page of the GQASC Wiki.

<sup>133</sup> Not including interruptions to study or repeat years without attendance.

<sup>134</sup> A programme may close before the end of an external examiner's period of appointment. In such cases, the examiner will be formally notified by the External Examiners Administrator, acting on advice from the relevant Faculty.

- a) Wider consultation as necessary, e.g., with GQASC or Academic Registry.
- b) Consideration of the proposal by the Faculty Quality Committee and/ or Faculty Board with Chair's signature of approval.
- c) Consideration and approval of the closure proposal at a full meeting of AQEC.
- d) Notification of the programme's closure to new admissions via the PVM email group.**
- e) Removal of the programme from the University prospectus and UCAS listings.
- f) Clear communication to current students of the decision to close the programme to new entrants and how programme standards and quality will be maintained during the teach-out period.

In its closure proposal and exit plan the Faculty must also include:

- Consideration of the University's Student Protection Plan<sup>135</sup> and whether the circumstances of the proposed closure will trigger its implementation – where this is the case, the Faculty must provide a details of how the Plan will be implemented including relevant timeframes and student communication plans.
- An assessment of the likelihood of the University's Refunds and Compensation Policy being triggered.

In order to permit sufficient discussion and consultation the minimum time that should elapse between (a) and (d) above is usually four weeks. In normal circumstances, a proposal to close a programme will not be made less than eighteen months before the date when recruitment is intended to cease so that the print prospectus reflects the University's position accurately. However, in exceptional circumstances it may be necessary to propose closure of a programme within a shorter timescale.

**'Closed' programmes continue to undergo Annual Monitoring/ Periodic Review** during teach-out until the final cohort has completed, and Faculties ensure their continuing currency by enacting module or programme modifications as necessary. Where an assessment board has required that a student repeat a year without attendance and their programme has since closed, the relevant modules will remain available for assessment towards the student's intended award. Where a student repeats a year with attendance or returns to study following a period of interruption and their original modules are no longer in delivery, the Faculty ensures that suitable alternative modules<sup>136</sup> are available for the student to complete their intended award. **Faculties keep copies of all written communications about the closure sent to affected students.**

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<sup>135</sup> [www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/student-protection-plan/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/student-protection-plan/).

<sup>136</sup> Which may involve the use of Student-Initiated Credit – see Chapter 7.

Closed programmes are removed from the University's List of Named Awards<sup>137</sup> once the final cohort has completed. Where necessary, prospective students are notified of the programme's closure through the designated communication channels<sup>138</sup>.

## PROGRAMME-SPECIFIC OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

In certain circumstances validation panels are required to approve programme-specific operational procedures that are guided by, and consistent with, the Academic Regulations; for example, procedures relating to student registration, assessment and progression as described in the operational annexe to the Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB) Student Handbook. Such procedures will be included with the validation report and may subsequently be modified using the process described in the Faculty Quality Statement.

## NON-CREDIT BEARING PROVISION

All credit-bearing programmes and modules are subject to the procedures for approval described elsewhere in this Chapter. The University may also seek to approve non-credit bearing provision, e.g. uncertificated bespoke training courses developed on behalf of employers. Faculties design and implement their own approval processes for such provision without reference to APC or AQEC, on condition that:

- The approval process is described in the Faculty Quality Statement;
- It contains explicit consideration of course content, aims and outcomes; teaching and learning; student support; staff and resources; organisation and quality assurance; and,
- The Faculty maintains a register of all non-credit bearing provision approved through this process.

## HIGHER AND DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS

Approval processes for Higher and Degree Apprenticeships do not differ significantly from those utilised for 'mainstream' degree provision as described in this chapter. However, in addition to national academic and professional reference points and the University's own Academic Regulations, apprenticeship programmes must also comply with the wider regulatory frameworks that govern them, most notably the relevant Apprenticeship Standards and Assessment Plan and requirement for independent End-Point Assessment (EPA). Detailed guidance on the approval of Higher and Degree Apprenticeships is provided in Chapter 5 of this Handbook.

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<sup>137</sup> See Academic Regulations Appendix 3.

<sup>138</sup> The term **prospective students** may describe (i) potential applicants; (ii) individuals who have applied and received an offer; or (iii) individuals who have applied, received and accepted an offer. Communication with (i) and (ii) is normally via the online prospectus which is updated frequently to reflect any material course changes – See Student Recruitment and Marketing Wiki - [Communicating with prospective students](#). Offer holders are notified by Admissions.

Table 4: 'Processes for Module and Programme Approval (simplified)'

Approval of a new module	Minor Module Modification	Addition or replacement of a module(s) in an existing programme (Minor Programme Modification) <sup>139</sup>
Initial proposal (Faculty)	Proposal for 'Minor Modification to an Existing Module' (Faculty)	Initial Proposal (Faculty)
Documentation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Module Specification</li> <li>• Module tutor CV(s)</li> <li>• External comments<sup>140</sup></li> </ul>	Documentation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Module Specification</li> <li>• External examiner comments (level 5 and upwards)<sup>141</sup></li> <li>• Evidence of consultation with current students<sup>142</sup></li> </ul>	Documentation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Module Specification(s)</li> <li>• Programme Specification</li> <li>• External examiner comments</li> <li>• Evidence of consultation with current students</li> </ul>
Faculty validation	Faculty validation	Faculty validation
Final approval (Faculty) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E-Val updated</li> <li>• PVM email</li> </ul>	Final approval (Faculty) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E-Val updated</li> <li>• PVM email</li> </ul>	Final approval (Faculty) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E-Val updated</li> <li>• PVM email</li> <li>• Notification to prospective students</li> </ul>

<sup>139</sup> Where a new module is being approved for addition to an existing programme the processes for (1) and (3) may be conflated.

<sup>140</sup> An independent subject expert for new provision, or the current external examiner where the module will contribute to an existing programme or portfolio.

<sup>141</sup> Also FHEQ level 3 for STEM Foundation Year, Fastrack: Preparation for HE and the International Foundation Programme and level 4 of Foundation Degrees.

<sup>142</sup> Typically through a Programme Board or Student-Staff Consultative Forum attended by student course representatives. Where no Programme Board or SSCF is scheduled, consultation with students should be undertaken through alternative means e.g. by email or the Learning Edge Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).



Module re-approval	Approval of a new programme/re-validation of an existing programme	Major Programme Modification
Faculty review/re-validation	Application for Development Consent <sup>143</sup> (Faculty to APC)	Initial Proposal for Major Modification (Faculty to APC)
Documentation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Module Specification, including any proposed changes based on student and stakeholder feedback</li> <li>External examiner comments</li> </ul>	Documentation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Part A Programme Specification; Part B Development &amp; Delivery; Part C Module Specifications</li> <li><u>Appendices - to include:</u></li> <li>Staff CVs (all modules)</li> <li>Inventory of course-specific resources (where applicable)</li> <li>Most recent Periodic Review report</li> <li>Mapping matrix of PLOs to Subject Benchmark Statement</li> <li>Evidence of student and employer involvement in development</li> <li>Sample Marking Criteria</li> <li>(For partner-delivered provision) Partner Audit Document; Delivery Agreement</li> </ul>	Documentation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Programme Specification</li> <li>Module Specifications (if applicable)</li> <li>External examiner comments</li> <li>Evidence of consultation with current students</li> </ul>
	Faculty approval	Faculty approval
	Institutional Validation (VASP)	Major Modifications Panel
Final approval (Faculty); E-Val updated, PVM Email	Final approval (AQEC); E-Val updated, PVM Email, Notification to prospective students.	Final approval (AQEC); E-Val updated, PVM Email, Notification to prospective students.

<sup>143</sup> Including (for re-validation) a written rationale, e.g. to align with changes to national subject benchmarks or professional standards, and justification of the benefits to students.

## Appendix: Validation and Audit Standing Panel (VASP)

Overseen by AQEC, VASP supports processes across the university's quality assurance activities such as validations, periodic reviews and internal audits.

Eligibility to serve on the Standing Panel is through self-nomination supported by the Head of Department's<sup>144</sup> endorsement and subject to evidence of the following:

- (i) For academic staff, experience (at the University or elsewhere) of:
  - Curriculum development and programme management/design, and
  - Curriculum or teaching-related research and consultancy, and/or
  - Reviewing and enhancing the student learning experience, and/or
  - Operating quality assurance processes for taught academic provision.
  
- (ii) For academic-related support staff, experience (at the University or elsewhere) of:
  - Relevant management responsibility, and
  - Reviewing and enhancing the student learning experience, and/or
  - Operating quality assurance processes for taught academic provision.

Panel Chairs are appointed on the additional demonstration of:

- Experience of academic quality assurance out with the University, typically gained by validation and review experience in another UK Higher Education Institution, appointment as an external academic reviewer, engagements with or on behalf of PSRBs, external examining or Ofsted inspection.

Applications are considered for approval by the Chair of VASP and those progressed are required to complete the following:

- Attendance at a Standing Panel Induction session, or appropriate Chair training.
- Observation at a validation event, or for prospective Chairs, shadow an existing Chair at an event.

The terms of membership of the Standing Panel are as follows:

- 1) The standard period of membership to the Standing Panel is two years.
- 2) All members of the Standing Panel are expected to actively engage and participate in validation and review activity for the duration of their membership. In practice, this entails making themselves available for a minimum two validation panels or one periodic review panel per academic year.
- 3) Attendance at the annual Standing Panel Conference is not compulsory, however all members of the Standing Panel are expected to attend where possible to ensure that their knowledge of sector expectations and Institutional practice remains current.

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<sup>144</sup> Heads of Department are expected to seek Standing Panel membership as part of their academic leadership role and continuing professional development.

Panels for validation and periodic review are assigned by GQASC and are normally constituted as follows:

- Panel Chair – selected from eligible members of the Standing Panel on the basis of expressions of interest ensuring no conflict with the proposal under consideration.
- Secretary/Review Manager – Academic Quality Officer.
- 2 internal panel members - selected from eligible members of the Standing Panel on the basis of expressions of interest ensuring no conflict with the proposal.
- (For validation) One external academic subject expert who will be employed by a recognised UK higher education provider (see also below).
- (For periodic review) Two external experts of whom at least one will be an academic subject expert employed by a recognised UK higher education provider and one may represent professional or employer interests.

Panels for validation, periodic review or internal audits may be constituted according to specific knowledge and experience<sup>145</sup> and may also include internal co-options and external representation.

External panel members are nominated by proposing departments and approved by the Academic Quality Officer (on behalf of the Chair of VASP) on the basis of a written nomination which describes their employment and experience and affirms no conflict of interest with the proposal under consideration. Academic staff of Republic of Ireland higher education institutions may be considered on evidence of their knowledge and experience of the UK higher education system and familiarity with OfS's Conditions of Registration.

An annual report of VASP membership and activity is provided to AQEC in order to fulfil its oversight responsibility for these processes and procedures.

### **Articulations Approval Panel (AAP)**

The Articulations Approval Panel (AAP) is responsible to AQEC for:

- 1) Receiving and considering proposals for qualifications/programmes of external awarding organisations to be recognised for the purpose of providing articulation (entry with advanced standing) to Edge Hill University programmes according to procedures described in Chapter 5 of the University's Quality Management Handbook<sup>146</sup>.
- 2) Recommending approval of such proposals based on evidence of curriculum mapping and consideration of the external body's processes for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its own awards.

#### **Constitution:**

- Chair – Chair of VASP
- Secretary – GQASC

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<sup>145</sup> E.g., experience of digital learning or academic partnerships.

<sup>146</sup> <https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/documents/files/05-academic-partnerships.pdf>

- Up to three members of the Standing Panel - one from each Faculty of whom one may deputise for the Chair. At least two must have previous knowledge and experience of the approval of articulation arrangements.

A maximum of three AAP meetings per year are held, timed to report to the next available meeting of AQEC. Because entry with advanced standing is based on the principle of credit exemption rather than the award of credit, no externality is involved in the approval of articulation arrangements.

### **Major Modifications Panel (MMP)**

The Major Modifications Panel (MMP) is responsible to AQEC for:

- 1) Receiving and considering proposals for major modification of existing validated programmes according to procedures described in Chapter 4 of this Handbook.
- 2) Recommending approval of such proposals based on close scrutiny of programme specifications and other evidence to ensure that the standards set at validation are being maintained.

#### **Constitution:**

- Chair – selected from eligible members of the Standing Panel on the basis of expressions of interest ensuring no conflict with the proposal under consideration.
- Secretary – GQASC.
- Two members of the Standing Panel - selected on the basis of expressions of interest and ensuring no conflict of interest.

One MMP meeting will be held termly although this does not preclude the scheduling of further meetings to manage additional business. Externality is provided through the submission of written comments of external examiners.