HE Programme Proposal and Amendment Policy

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1. Purpose

University Centre Quayside (UCQ) welcomes initiatives to improve the learner experience and widen the scope of the programmes it offers. To ensure high quality and consistency of its provision, all new programmes and existing programme amendments need to be approved in line with this policy and approval process. This approval process is based on best practice guidance published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

The purpose of this policy and approval process is to ensure:

- the proposed programme or programme changes meets UCQ's requirements for quality and standards, and with any requirements of the Office for Students, Ofsted, DfE, professional, regulatory and statutory bodies (PRSBs) and with the programme's validating body
- the proposed programme or programme changes is consistent and constructively aligned with the UCQ Strategic Plan and learning and teaching strategies conducted within UCQ
- the proposed programme or programme changes have financial viability
- the proposed programme changes continue to meet the aims and objectives of the existing programme (where applicable)
- the proposed programme changes adhere to principles of due regard for consumers under the Consumer Rights Act 2015

This policy is intended to guide proposers of new programmes and programme changes to the simplest way of ensuring that the proposal is fully considered. The amount of detail required and the degree of scrutiny it will receive depends on the complexity of the proposal.

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) are responsible for the operational management of all new programme proposals; ensuring that timescales are adhered to and documentation is presented in accordance with approved templates. Any queries related to this Policy should be directed to slt@ucq.ac.uk.

2. New programme approval

2.1 Approval: Stage 1 – within 3 months

Approval in principle: The Senior Leadership Team approves the principle of developing a new programme. This is based on whether there is a robust and sustainable business case for the programme and whether this rationale fits with the UCQ Strategic Plan.

2.2 Approval: Stage 2 – within 6 months

Curriculum Review Board development and approval: The Curriculum Review Board develops and approves TLA-012 Appendix A: Programme Proposal Form and the draft programme definitive records ready for review. The Board must ensure that academic integrity and governance has been maintained throughout this process. All programme definitive records must be drafted on the approved templates, available upon request from SLT: slt@ucq.ac.uk .

2.2.1 Programme definitive records

The Programme Specification acts as a definitive record of study content at programme level. This record serves as a programme delivery reference point for students, employers, academic and support staff, internal moderators, external examiners and regulatory reviewers. The Programme Specification should stipulate:

a) the level on the FHEQ at which the qualification is located
b) how the overall programme learning outcomes are constructively aligned with the qualification descriptors in the FHEQ and how in turn, modular content has been developed to reflect these
c) shows how the programme structure is consistent with the relevant UK credit frameworks where UK credit is awarded
d) show clearly how the content and structure of the programme and its assessment strategy provide students with the opportunities for learning and assessment they need to enable them to demonstrate that they have achieved the programme learning outcomes at the requisite level
e) evidence that, in designing the programme, account has been taken of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and the requirements of PSRBs, where applicable
f) demonstrates compliance with the academic framework and regulations of the degree-awarding body
g) include any approved major variations or subsequent changes necessitating review and whether this constitutes the need for revalidation or programme modification

The individual Module Specifications provide a definitive record of study at modular level. Any minor, moderate or major updates made to the Module Specifications is completed through a strict authorised approval process. The Specifications provide an up-to-date record of the content and structure of each module, including its constituent parts, assessment scheme and intended learning outcomes, which, as stated earlier, are aligned with the overall programme learning outcomes.

The Programme Specification and Module Specifications are published on the UCQ website; supporting Assessment Guides are made available to staff through the internal staff directory and to students as an iterative process through a staggered approach throughout their modular programme.

2.3 Approval: Stage 3 – within 3 months

Programme Approval Panel approval: Following approval from the CRB, the Programme Approval Panel, a sub-committee of the HE Academic Board using input from an External Reviewer, reviews the proposal and definitive records and, if suitable, approves the programme in full, or recommends changes be made by the CRB and then returned for further review.

During the decision-making process, the Programme Approval Panel considers rationale for both the academic merit and business case for the new programme. These considerations are informed by a body of evidence, such as feedback from the External Reviewer, market research and information from UCQ's various committees that inform resource and quality considerations. To ensure objectivity in the decision-making process, the Programme Approval Panel does not include members of academic staff who are involved in the initial authoring of the submission documents. However, academic staff may be granted approval to attend Panel meetings as an observer only. This facilitates support for staff members who are unfamiliar with programme design and the equitable principles underpinning all UCQ programmes.

The Programme Approval Panel must conduct a rigorous formal programme approval process whereby they must review appropriateness and accuracy of:

a) the use of national and UK-wide reference points including:

- ensuring that the proposed learning outcomes are aligned with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications;
- taking account of guidance on qualification characteristics;
- assigning credit values, where UK credit is awarded, in alignment with the applicable UK credit framework;
- taking account of any relevant Subject Benchmark Statements

b) The potential need for recruitment, academic development and skills training of staff for the proposed new programme
c) The formulation of design and development processes that have been used
d) The definitive programme documentation submitted
e) The capturing and use of feedback within the proposal
f) The programme alignment with UCQ's academic framework, governance processes and academic regulations
g) The process to apply for iterative monitoring and evaluation of the new programme

2.4 Approval: Stage 4 – within 6 months

HE Academic Board approval: Final sign-off by the HE Academic Board following the recommendation of the Programme Approval Panel.

If the HE Academic Board is satisfied, approval is granted for an initial pilot of students whereby the new programme can be tested and benchmarked to ensure it meets the requirements of UCQ's academic framework and exceeds the UK threshold standards for qualifications. During this Pilot, the Curriculum Review Board will monitor closely whether the assessment scheme adequately tests the stated learning outcomes. Once the programme is formally approved it is subject to an annual monitoring and review process.

Once formal approval is granted, the draft definitive records submitted during the application stage are finalised and become the point of reference for programme delivery. Sufficient mechanisms will be in place for suitable oversight of programme decisions, including where conditions or recommendations accompany a decision with associated timeframes.

2.5 Approval: Stage 5 – within 18 months

Validating Body approval (where applicable): The validating body responsible for awarding the programme qualification reviews and approves the new programme. In instances where this involves a PRSB, then national standards will be mapped and benchmarked to ensure the validity and reliability of proposed programme content.

3. Programme changes

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) delineate the consumer rights applicable to students. Specifically, alterations to courses and programmes directly influence the issue of 'information provision,' necessitating higher education providers to furnish upfront, lucid, understandable, unequivocal, and timely information to students.

Modifications to courses and programmes may impact 'material information,' defined by the CMA as information enabling students to make well-informed decisions about their choice of universities and courses. This encompasses details such as programme titles, core modules, programme structure, and assessment methods.

Any proposals for course and programme modifications should adhere to the CMA guidelines. Consumer law is considered as part of Appendix B Module and Programme Amendment Form.

Full details of the CMA guidance can be found in the Higher education: guide to consumer rights for students

For programmes validated by The Open University (OU), changes to approved programmes of study may be made in between formal revalidation. The OU expects partner institutions to review and adapt approved programmes in response to the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation and in accordance with their commitment to continuous improvement.

UCQ recognises three types of change: minor changes, moderate changes and major changes. This guidance is modelled on The Open University's process for considering minor, moderate and major changes to programmes.

3.1 Minor changes

Minor changes to programmes of study are those which do not change either singly or incrementally the basis on which the validation of the programme was made. They will usually not involve any significant change to the Programme Specification, in particular the overall programme learning outcomes and how these are consequently reflected within modular design and delivery.

Where experience of running a programme, developments in the subject area or advice from External Examiners lead to minor changes, these must be approved in accordance with the agreed procedures of UCQ, and in consultation with the Open University for validated programmes. The OU SQPM may wish to consult the Academic Reviewer before allowing minor changes to be implemented. The OU expects that programme teams will make full use of the ability to make minor changes in the interests of keeping programmes relevant and up-to-date, and in response to the outcomes of quality monitoring.

UCQ must provide a brief account of such changes (Appendix B: Module and Programme Amendment Form) and the approval process for these changes to be given in the subsequent annual monitoring report for the programme in question.

Some examples of minor changes are:

- Changes to the bibliography for a module or programme
- Change of module title
- Replacement of a module in a pathway with another OU-approved module where this does not change the overall learning outcomes for the pathway
- Minor changes to teaching or delivery methods

Student consultation

Changes will not be implemented part-way through a module. UCQ will seek **implied** consent from all students impacted by a minor change to programme at the earliest opportunity. Implied consent will be sought via email; students will be notified of the proposed change and be given two working weeks to object. If no objections are received, the programme change will be implemented as scheduled.

3.2 Moderate changes

Moderate changes may concern minor curriculum adjustments, or teaching and assessment matters, but are of a type and extent that are unlikely to conflict with the decisions of the original validation panel.

Moderate changes to a validated programme will require formal approval by the OU. The request should be submitted at least 6 months prior to the date on which the change is expected to come into effect. The form that the approval process takes will depend on the scale of the changes, but a rationale for the changes must always be provided (Appendix B: Module and Programme Amendment Form). In most cases, consultation with external advisors will be required. The OU SQPM will decide the level of academic scrutiny required and then obtain approval from the Quality Management Group. CuPC will be informed of the changes made under this category.

Some examples of moderate changes are:

- Change of programme title (without changing curriculum)
- Change of pathway title (without changing curriculum)
- Change to module learning outcomes (not overly significant), providing these remain constructively aligned with programme learning outcomes.
- Minor change in assessment
- Change to teaching and learning strategy

Student Consultation

Changes will not be implemented part-way through a module. Unless the changes are likely to impact the main characteristics of the programme, the programme duration or total price payable, UCQ will seek **implied** consent from all students impacted by a moderate change to programme at the earliest opportunity. Implied consent will be sought via email; students will be notified of the proposed change and be given two working weeks to object. If no objections are received, the programme change will be implemented as scheduled.

3.3 Major changes

A change categorised as ‘major’ is one that materially and significantly alters the curriculum content, or the way it is taught or assessed, and is of a type that would probably have been a topic of some discussion when the programme was validated.

Major changes to a validated programme will require formal approval by the OU. Proposals for changes should be submitted as part of the OU’s Annual Workload Request. If this is not possible for any reason the request should be submitted at least 6 months prior to the date on which the change is expected to come into effect. The form that the approval process takes will depend on the scale of the changes, but a rationale for the changes must always be provided. In most cases, consultation with external advisors will be required.

Major changes are generally approved by correspondence. The documentation required to support the change should be discussed with the OU SQPM, where applicable. The OU SQPM will send the proposal for changes electronically to a panel of usually 3 academics, one of whom will usually be an OU Academic Reviewer and one of whom will usually have been a panel member during the most recent (re)validation. The outcomes will be the same as for a (re)validation event, i.e. a recommendation of either approval or not, which may be with or without conditions and recommendations.

Where the changes being proposed are of such a magnitude that the Programme Specification requires significant revision, a full programme revalidation will be required. It is also possible that several smaller changes made to the programme during the approval period could also lead to a full programme revalidation. Changes affecting the assessment or progression of students must receive the explicit written consent of the approved External Examiners for the programme.

All changes will be incorporated into definitive programme records which must be sent to the Open University, for validated programmes only, before the start of the academic session to which they will apply.

It is essential that plans for how the changes, if approved, will be communicated to students are included in documentation submitted as part of the change process.

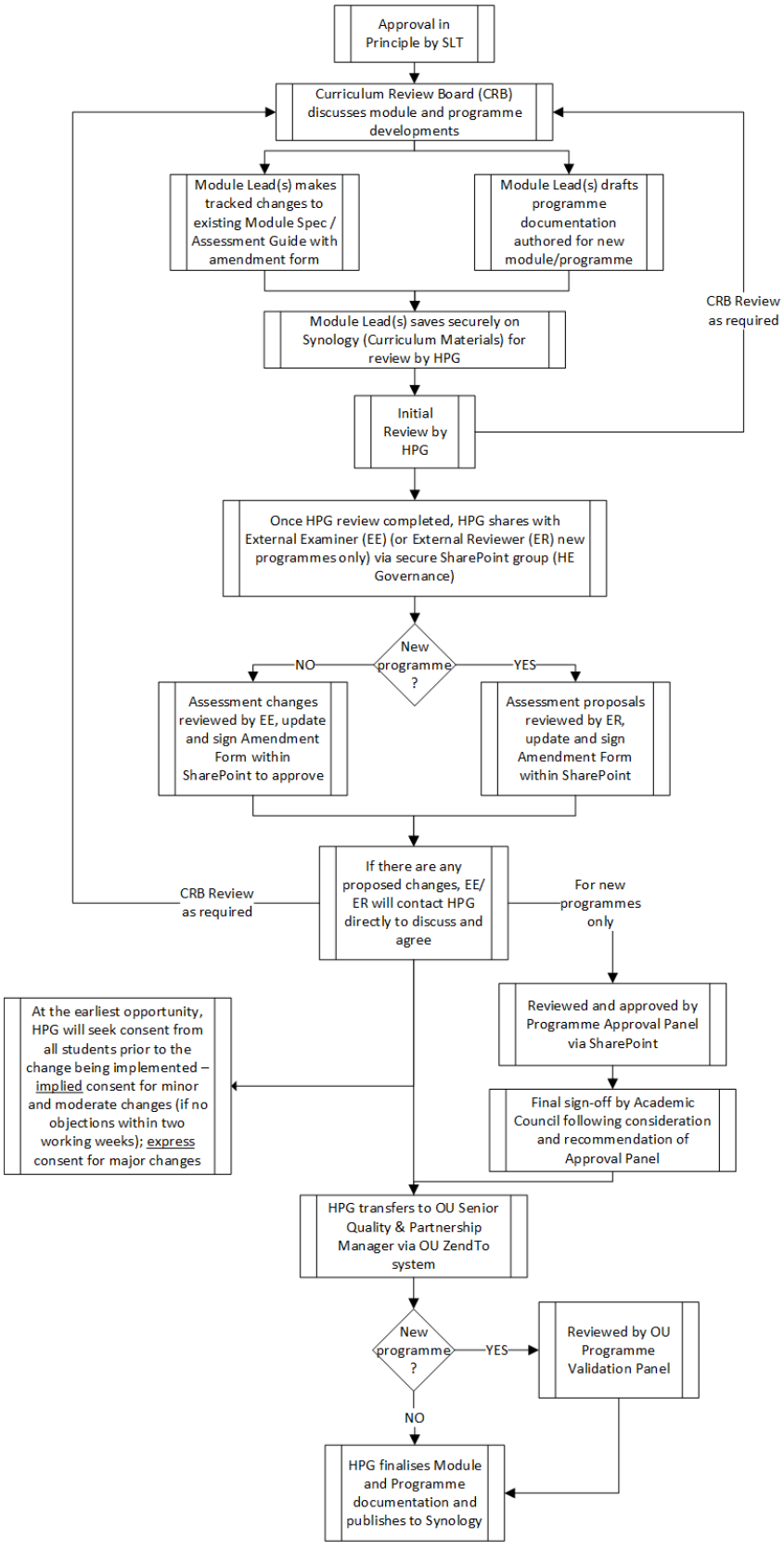
Some examples of major changes are:

- Change title of degree
- Introduction of new modules or pathways within a programme with changes of syllabus content which significantly affect learning outcomes so that is becomes a new module or pathway
- Significant changes to assessment or other programme relations
- Significant changes to learning outcomes and change to programme learning outcomes

Student consultation

Changes will not be implemented part-way through a module. For all major changes or changes that are likely to impact the main characteristics of the programme, the programme duration or total price payable, UCQ will seek **express** consent from all students impacted by the change to programme at the earliest opportunity. Express consent will be sought via email, an online form or paper-based form. Where objections or complaints are received from students, all will be considered by Academic Board and the outcomes of these considerations reported back to them within four weeks, Students will be treated favourably in instances where changes are seen to have had a potential detrimental impact on student outcomes.

4. Approval process flowchart



5. Document history

ISSUE NO.	DATE	PAGE	REVIEWER	DETAIL OF AMENDMENT
8	22/05/2026	All	Tara Henderson	Periodic review conducted; Clarification added throughout; Academic Council updated to HE Academic Board throughout. S5 Document history added

6. Initial equalities impact assessment

Department: All	**Completed by:** Tara Henderson, Head of Policy & Governance	**Date of initial assessment:** 15/06/2021
Area to be assessed:	TLA-012 – HE Programme Proposal and Amendment Policy	
Existing or new policy/procedure:	Existing	
What evidence has been used to inform the assessment and policy? (please list only)		
External guidance and requirements: ➢ Regulations for Validated Awards of the Open University ➢ UK Quality Code for HE **Internal guidance and requirements:** ➢ Consultation with SLT		

1. Describe the aims, objectives or purpose of the policy/procedure		This policy is intended to guide proposers of new programmes and programme changes to the simplest way of ensuring that the proposal is fully considered. The amount of detail required and the degree of scrutiny it will receive depends on the complexity of the proposal.		
2. Which stakeholders/groups are intended to benefit from this policy/procedure?		All higher education staff		
The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to have 'due regard' to the need to:- (1) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization (2) Advance equality of opportunity between different groups; and (3) Foster good relations between different groups		**3. Could the policy/procedure have a disproportionately negative effect impact in terms of the aims set out in (1) to (3) of the Act on any of the protected characteristics?:-** **High** **Medium** **Low** **No effect**	**4. Briefly explain how the policy/procedure furthers or prevents the aims set out in (1) to (3).**	**5. If there is a disproportionately negative impact on any protected characteristics, can it be justified on the grounds of promoting equality or any other reason? If yes, please explain.**
Protected characteristics	**Age**	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Disability	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Gender	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Gender reassignment	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Marriage and Civil Partnership	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Pregnancy and Maternity	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Race	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Religion or Belief	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Sexual Orientation	No effect	Not applicable	Not applicable

6. Has there been any consultation/engagement with the appropriate protected characteristics?		Not applicable as no negative PC impact identified
7. What action(s) will you take to reduce any disproportionately negative impact, if any?		None required
8. Based on the information in sections 1 to 7, should this policy/procedure proceed to Full Impact Assessment? (recommended if one or more 'High' under section 2)		No
Assessor signature:	**Approved by:** **Michelle Elliott**	**Date approved:** 15/06/21