

## Guidelines for Members of Programme Approval and Review Panels

### 1. Purpose of these guidelines

Through its Royal Charter, The Open University (OU) is able to validate the programmes of institutions that do not have their own degree awarding powers, or alternatively that wish to offer OU awards. This activity is managed within the OU by Open University Validation Partnerships (OUVP).

These guidelines have been prepared to assist you as a Panel Member for a programme (re)validation activity and to enable you to understand your role and responsibilities.

### 2. University procedures

Validation is the process by which the University approves proposals of programmes of study leading to OU validated awards. Validation and revalidation is undertaken as an iterative process, over a period of time, culminating in a final (re)validation event which brings together all participants and where a final recommendation on the outcome of the (re)validation is agreed by the panel. This recommendation is then considered by the University's Curriculum Partnerships Committee (CuPC), which has formal responsibility for approving the institutional approval or reapproval of an institution or the (re)validation of a programme.

The institution's own arrangements for validation and revalidation, including a preliminary (internal) (re)validation meeting are integral to the process.

### 3. Role of a Panel Member

You may have agreed to be one of one or two panel members nominated to assist the programme (re)validation prior to the final event date. In this capacity you will be invited at agreed points during the development to offer comments on the programme proposal and will be asked to confirm after the preliminary (internal) (re)validation meeting that:

- the programme documentation contains the specified requirements outlined in section D of the Handbook for Validated Awards, including a complete and appropriate draft programme specification;
- appropriate learning resources to support the programme have been properly considered;

- the proposal demonstrates how the programme is aligned with the UK Quality Code and the requirements of relevant professional, statutory or regulatory bodies where appropriate;
- that the regulations for the programme meet the University's requirements for validated awards;
- the programme should proceed to consideration at a final (re)validation meeting.

Alternatively, you may be joining the panel for the final (re)validation event, where you will be invited to consider the final programme proposal for validation or revalidation.

The key questions that all participants will need to consider for the (re)validation of a programme of study are listed below (sections A-J). The questions are intended as an analytical stimulus to support the scrutiny process. Programmes differ a great deal, so the importance of individual questions may vary.

## **A The rationale, aims and intended learning outcomes of the programme of study**

- What is the rationale for the programme, i.e. the background to the programme, its academic justification and potential demand? How does it relate to the institution's goals and mission?
- What are the aims of the programme and are they appropriate to the award to which the programme leads?
- What are the intended learning outcomes for the programme and are they appropriate to these aims? In the case of an apprenticeship, have employer needs been considered in their development and design?
- Do the aims and learning outcomes include the OU's general aims and learning outcomes for all validated programmes?
- How do they relate to external reference points including relevant QAA subject benchmark statements, the qualifications framework and any professional or statutory body requirements? In the case of apprenticeships, how do they address the QAA work-based learning advice and guidance document and align to the Higher Education in Apprenticeships Characteristics Statement published by the QAA?
- For awards which will be used for degree apprenticeship delivery, how do the aims and learning outcomes relate to the apprenticeship standard's knowledge, skills and behaviours? How do they also address the apprenticeship policy agenda to increase productivity and social mobility?

## **B The curriculum and structure of the programme of study**

- How do the curriculum content and structure of the programme enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes?
- Do the design and content of the curriculum encourage achievement of the intended learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and understanding, cognitive skills, subject specific skills, including practical and professional skills, transferable skills, progression to employment, research or further study, and personal development? In the case of awards

which will be offered as part of an apprenticeship, how do they also support the achievement of the knowledge skills and behaviours as articulated in the relevant standard?

- iii) Is there evidence that curriculum content and design are informed by recent developments in techniques of teaching and learning, by current research and scholarship, and by any changes in relevant occupational or professional requirements? Do mechanisms exist to maintain the necessary links? Employer links for all programmes which contain work-based learning elements are an important consideration to be explored, but especially important to those which will be delivered as part of an apprenticeship.
- iv) How are the following aspects covered?
- the appropriateness of the sequence and progression of content, its balance and coherence;
  - links with other programmes (e.g. common foundation year, common modular structure) and opportunities for transfer and progression;
  - adaptations of the structure to meet the needs of students following different modes of study and with different backgrounds at entry or special needs;
  - the appropriateness of any core and optional elements and any prerequisites or constraints on choice;
  - where relevant, the distinction between the Honours route and routes leading to other awards within the same scheme such as DipHE and unclassified degrees;
  - provision for supervised work experience, community experience or experience abroad, and the way it is proposed to integrate this with the rest of the programme; responsibility for finding placements;
  - where relevant, the role of practical or project work and how it is integrated in the programme;
  - the proposals for any dissertation or written project, including approval of chosen topics and arrangements for supervision.
- v) For degree apprenticeship programmes, all of the above items need to be considered in line with the degree apprenticeship. Whether the degree apprenticeship standard requires **fully** integrated assessment, or not and in what way this will affect how the above are considered.
- vi) For degree apprenticeship programmes:**
- is the programme flexible enough in terms of delivery and structure to accommodate both work and study demands?
  - What are the plans and arrangements in place for tripartite progress reviews and who will attend these?

## **C Teaching and learning**

- i) What are the teaching and learning strategies proposed, and are they appropriate to the aims, learning outcomes and diversity of the student intake?
- ii) Is there effective engagement with and participation by students? How are problems resolved? How are any changes implemented and communicated to students?
- iii) Is there an appropriate overall strategy for academic support, including written guidance, which is consistent with the student profile and the overall aims of the provision?
- iv) How effectively is learning facilitated by academic guidance, feedback and supervisory arrangements?
- v) Are the arrangements for academic tutorial support clear?
- vi) Are the arrangements for student support and supervision during any work placements or study abroad clear and potentially effective? For awards that will be delivered as part of a degree apprenticeship, are there additional staffing roles in order to support the apprentices in the work-place e.g. Practice Tutors?
- vii) Where common teaching with other programmes is proposed, is this a suitable arrangement for the programme under consideration?
- viii) Where Personal Development Planning is not embedded in the programme curriculum, are there suitable arrangements in place to support and monitor the activity for all students on the programme?
- ix) For awards which will be delivered as part of an apprenticeship, all of the above are important, but there will be additional considerations regarding how the teaching and learning is connected to the apprentice's work place, how the employer is involved and whether the roles and responsibilities of the: apprentice, institution and employer are clear and explicitly understood by all.

## **D Admissions and transfer**

- i) Are the criteria for admission appropriate in relation to the level, learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods and assessment of the programme?
- ii) Are the arrangements for admission appropriate and effective?
- iii) Do admissions procedures and selection criteria provide for equality of opportunity for all applicants, including those with special needs or with disabilities?
- iv) What is the scope for students to transfer from and into the programme at different stages? Are there any standing transfer or RPL arrangements?
- v) Are there any special arrangements for induction or bridging units and, if so, are they appropriate and effective?

**vi) For awards which will be offered as part of a degree apprenticeship:**

- how will the institution and employer liaise regarding admissions and assure themselves that apprentices are employed in appropriate job roles, for the apprenticeship?
- what are the institution's processes for initial assessment and RPL and how will apprentices be supported to meet the Maths and English requirements?

**E Assessment**

Institutions are required to have assessment policies which align to and are referenced within 'The regulations for validated awards of The Open University'. This document is approved and therefore falls outside the scope of the Panels validation. The document is submitted, along with any programme specific assessment procedures, to ensure that panel members have a full picture of programme assessment. The questions listed below are included to ensure that panel members have a full picture of programme assessment but will be outside the scope of the panel's validation remit. However, any comments the panel wishes to make on the institution-wide regulations can be taken up by OUVF at institutional level.

**The assessment strategy**

- i) How does the assessment process enable learners to demonstrate achievement of the intended outcomes? What are the criteria for success? How do the criteria relate to the intended learning outcomes? In the case of awards being used for degree apprenticeship delivery, how do they support the achievement of the knowledge, skills and behaviours as stipulated in the appropriate apprenticeship standard.
- ii) Is the assessment load appropriate to the nature of the programme and is it broadly comparable with that expected in other similar programmes. Is there a risk of over-or under-assessment?
- iii) Does the assessment strategy have an adequate formative function in developing student abilities?
- iv) Do the frequency and timing of the stages of assessment appropriately reflect the nature of the programme and its progression requirements? e.g. the timing of any division between parts in a degree programme, the timing for submission of a report in relation to supervised work experience or a period abroad.
- v) What evidence is there that the standards achieved by learners will meet the minimum expectations for the award, as measured against relevant subject benchmarks and the qualifications framework?
- vi) Is the passing of any practical component or placement compulsory, and is its weighting in the scheme appropriate? Are there any constraints on assessment deriving from a professional body's requirements for accreditation?
- vii) Where practical performance or other ephemeral work is to be assessed, e.g. in music, drama, dance, oral work in modern languages, interview based activities in speech

therapy, are there appropriate arrangements for the use of audio or video tape recordings, or other forms of record such as student log-books?

- viii) Are the provisions for assessment of coursework appropriate both in quantity and weighting compared with any formal examinations, and in relation to the objectives of the programme?
- ix) Does the assessment of individual elements within the programme take into account the requirements of students with disabilities, bearing in mind the learning outcomes of the programme and the need to assess the students on equal terms with the rest of the cohort?

**For programmes which will be used for degree apprenticeship delivery:**

- x) Does the assessment strategy support apprentices in being prepared for the End Point Assessment methodology?
- xi) Does the assessment presented allow the students to meet either the gateway for end point assessment (*none-integrated*), or, allow the students to fully meet the apprenticeship assessment plan requirements and therefore incorporate the end point assessment within it (*fully integrated*)?
- xii) How has the involvement of employers in assessment been considered and agreed? Has the need for formalised learning agreements for work-based projects been considered?

**Regulations**

- i) An approved copy of 'The regulations for validated awards of The Open University' are provided for the panel's information. This document references the institutions aligned policies.

Any programme specific regulations submitted in addition, should not contradict the principles outlined in this document. An example would include regulations and procedures for modular level compensation within a programme.

**The assessment process**

- i) Are there criteria that enable internal and external examiners to distinguish between different categories of achievement? Are the criteria for assessment clearly worked out and likely to be understood and applied by all the examiners involved?
- ii) Are there arrangements for the involvement of external examiners in the assessment process?
- iii) Is the composition of the assessments board appropriate? Where a complex scheme requires a tiered Assessments Board structure, are there adequate arrangements for the examiners to take an overall view of each student's performance?
- iv) Are there appropriate arrangements for double marking by internal examiners or for internal moderation?
- v) What arrangements are proposed to ensure the validity and objectivity of the assessment process? Is the scheme such that the internal examiners' assessment is accessible to appraisal by external examiners?

- vi) Can there be full confidence in the security and integrity of assessment procedures?
- vii) For programmes being used for degree apprenticeship delivery, have ethical areas and issues of confidentiality been considered? This is particularly pertinent for work-based projects and evidence that may be required for work-based portfolios.

## **F Staffing, staff development and research**

- i) Is the collective expertise of the academic staff suitable and available for effective delivery of the curricula, for the overall teaching, learning and assessment strategy and for the achievement of the intended learning outcomes? Is there a danger of over-reliance on one or two staff members?
- ii) Are both the teaching and support staff adequate in number and appropriately qualified for the aims and learning outcomes of the programme to be fulfilled? Where the number is less than adequate, are there reasonable assurances that deficiencies will be made good and that key staff will be replaced? In the case of support staff, this applies as much to technical and administrative support as it does to the staff involved in learning support services, including library and media services, computing and information technology.
- iii) Where the programme involves a period of work experience or residence abroad, will the staffing provide for adequate student contact with tutors or supervisors?
- iv) How effectively do staff draw upon their research, scholarship or professional activity to inform their teaching? What are the arrangements for supporting staff in these activities?
- v) Is the quality of teaching and learning maintained and enhanced through effective staff development, peer review of teaching, integration of part-time and visiting staff, effective team teaching and induction and mentoring of new staff?
- vi) Does staff development cover equal opportunity issues, and are development opportunities available to all full and part-time staff, irrespective of disability, ethnicity and gender?

### **For programmes that will be used for degree apprenticeship delivery:**

- vii) Has the induction, development and briefing of employers, academics and mentors been considered?
- viii) How and when will the institution and employer staff liaise?
- ix) How will the on-going development and quality assurance of mentorship be managed?
- x) How will the institution ensure that appropriately qualified practice tutors (or equivalent) are recruited and supported?

## **G Teaching and learning resources**

If you were appointed by the University to offer comments on the programme proposal or revisions during early stages of validation, you will be asked to confirm that any learning resources to support the programme have been properly evaluated. Where the existing

resources have been found to be insufficient, you will also be asked to confirm that a strategy and plan to meet the needs of the programme are in place and have full institutional support. Confirmation will be sought from you after the preliminary validation meeting, before the proposal goes forward to final validation.

Information about teaching and learning resources, and any plans to improve them, will be included in the programme submission documentation for the final validation meeting. Colleagues who join the panel for the final validation meeting will seek assurance that resources have been reviewed against the following criteria:

- i) Are the physical resources needed to sustain the programme adequate? These will include accommodation, relevant library and computer provision, media resources, specialist laboratory or studio facilities and specialist equipment, and facilities for students with disabilities. For distance learning programmes, the essential physical resources will include learning materials in print and other media, backed up by an efficient delivery system.
- ii) If not all resources are required at the start of the programme, are there appropriate plans for their implementation later?
- iii) If all of the necessary resources cannot be made available within the institution, what are the means proposed to secure access to resources elsewhere (e.g. through collaboration with other institutions) and are these acceptable?
- iv) Where the programme is to be offered part-time, by distance learning, apprenticeship or by other forms of individualised learning, are there arrangements for students to have adequate access to the institution's facilities and services or to comparable facilities and services elsewhere? Is there the opportunity for them to interact with tutors or supervisors, as well as with other students?
- v) If there are programmes in related fields or in feeder disciplines, will there be competition for resources which could have an adverse impact on the programme?
- vi) For programmes which will be used for degree apprenticeship delivery, are access arrangements formalised for students who require specific resources at the employer site?

## **H Other resources for students**

- i) Are there opportunities for students to mix with other higher education undergraduate or graduate students and to engage in group activities?
- ii) Is there provision for career counselling relevant to the programme?
- iii) Are students given information on facilities and resources available to those with special needs, and what to do if they experience discrimination or harassment?
- iv) For programmes which will be used for degree apprenticeship delivery, are students advised on where they can access support, both during their attendance at the institution and during time at work?

## **I Programme management and monitoring**

- i) What are the arrangements for programme management?
- ii) How are students represented?
- iii) How does the programme team review and seek to enhance standards, taking account of developments in techniques of teaching and learning, current research and scholarship, and any changes in relevant occupational or professional requirements?
- iv) What are the arrangements for monitoring the programme, taking account of the views of students, staff and external examiners and for implementing change? Specifically, how will WBL modules be regularly reviewed and evaluated?
- v) Is the effectiveness of equal opportunities policies monitored through collection and analysis of ethnic, gender and disability data?

### **For programmes which will be used for degree apprenticeship delivery:**

- vi) Has the Institution considered how they will differentiate the apprenticeship learners from traditional students? This is an important consideration if the award is to be used for both.
- vii) Has the institution considered how employers **and** apprentices will be involved in programme management and monitoring? Are there formalised mechanisms and agreements (tripartite) in place to achieve this?

## **J The programme specification and programme handbook**

- i) Is the programme specification clear and accurate?
- ii) Does this, together with the Draft Programme Handbook and relevant institutional regulations, include all the programme-related information needed by applicants, students, staff and external examiners?

### **For programmes which will be used for degree apprenticeship delivery:**

- iii) Do these documents also take account of the involvement of employers?
- iv) Do they make clear the roles and responsibilities of the employer, the institution and the apprentice? For instance, do they make it clear how an apprentice would escalate issues/complain/appeal and to whom?
- v) Is there appropriate advice and guidance for employers (mentors) as well as apprentices?