VALIDATION HANDBOOK FOR VALIDATION AND APPROVAL OF NEW AND MODIFIED ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES LEADING TO ARDEN UNIVERSITY AND EXTERNAL AWARDS

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PREFACE

These guidelines describe Arden University's requirements for the validation and approval of new academic programmes and of modifications to existing academic programmes. They cover all programmes leading to awards or credit conferred by Arden University either in its own name or in that of an external awarding body. Throughout these guidelines reference may be made to other publications concerning programme approval, monitoring and review which should be consulted and adhered to as appropriate. These include the Academic

Regulatory Framework and other policy documents associated with validation and review are available via https://arden.ac.uk/studying-with-us/about-arden/our-policies-standards

TYPES OF VALIDATION AND APPROVAL

Type of proposal	Documentation required
A1 Validation of New Programmes	Overview document
	Programme handbook including programme and module specifications.
	Staff CVs
	Student Handbook.
A2 Re-validation of existing Programmes	Overview document
	Programme handbook (including programme and module specifications).
	Staff CVs
	Student Handbook.
A3 Major Modifications	
I. Validation of new (not direct replacement) award title, programme or route, normally drawing upon **up to approximately two thirds** of existing programme(s).	Course Amendment Form – Rationale and revised resource analysis.
	Revised Programme handbook.
	Revised Student handbook.
II. Reconfiguration (typically involving significant structural or Type B changes) affecting **one third or more** of the credits required for a final award, over one academic year.	Course Amendment Form – Rationale and revised resource analysis.
	Revised Programme handbook inc module specifications.
	Revised Student handbook.

Minor Modifications

B1. New core or optional module **(including change of title)**	Revised programme handbook (including programme and module specifications).
B2. Core/optional status of existing module	Course Committee to consider and notify Head of Quality
B3. Credit rating of existing module	
B4. Pre-requisite rule for existing module	Report to the Quality and Standards Committee and Academic Board
B5. Level of existing module	
B6. Deletion of existing module	
B7. Type C changes above one-third threshold	
C1. Aims of existing module	
C2. Learning outcomes of existing module	
C3. Assessment criteria for existing module	
C4. Assessment methods for existing module	
C5. Assessment weightings for existing module	
D1. Teaching / contact hours	

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1.   OUTLINE OF THE VALIDATION PROCESS

Validation is the process that ensures that the academic standards of Arden University awards (or of external awards offered via programmes taught by Arden University) meet institutional and national expectations in respect of academic standards and the quality of the learning opportunities provided to students, as set out in the QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code) and the QAA's Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). The process involves the scrutiny of a proposal by an impartial approval panel of academic peers, including external representation.

Proposals for new programmes of study will be owned by the Senior Management Team (SMT) and must be approved by both the Board of Governors and Academic Board.

In the case of modification to an existing programme of study, approval of the Board of Governors will only be sought where any proposed modifications have resource implications. Where such modifications are in the interest of preserving and enhancing academic quality and improving the student learning experience, the Board of Governors will not unreasonably withhold permission.

Validation is undertaken for all proposed new programmes of study and modifications to existing programmes, whether they lead to an award of Arden University, an external awarding body, or to the award of credit in recognition of successful study. Prior to validation, proposed new programmes and major modifications to existing programmes must receive permission to proceed from the Academic Board. Academic Board has conferred powers to its sub-committee, the Quality and Standards Committee, to consider programme approval and the outcomes of the Quality and Standards Committee will be reported to the Academic Board.

Validation will normally be for a maximum fixed period of 5 years. During the final year of approval (or earlier with the agreement of the Academic Board) the programme team will present the programme for re-validation or closure. In the latter case an exit plan for existing students will be prepared for approval.

1.1.   VALIDATION CRITERIA

The following criteria should be adopted as an agenda by programme teams when developing new programmes and by panels when scrutinising new proposals submitted for validation:

- The programme entrance requirements in relation to a student's ability to complete the programme of study and achieve the intended learning outcomes.

- Validity of the proposal, in terms of its academic rationale and intended learning outcomes, with due consideration of the market it is intended to serve.

- Curriculum content and account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements, professional, statutory, regulatory and/or accrediting body requirements, the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications and Arden University's current strategic aims and policies.

- Effective learning and teaching strategies and their relation to the curriculum, learning outcomes and target audience.

- The assessment strategy and methods of testing student achievement against the intended learning outcomes.

- Academic and pastoral support strategies and mechanisms for ensuring that likely needs of the intended student profile can be successfully handled.

- Programme management and organisation.

- Human, physical and electronic resources of appropriate quality and quantity and which are subject to considered development and renewal over time.

- Conformance of the curriculum with relevant statutory requirements and Arden University policies in relation to, for example, accessibility to students with special educational needs and disabilities, health and safety imperatives, equal opportunities issues.

- Quality assurance procedures, conforming to Arden University's Regulatory Framework, and which are tailored to the programme and its students so as to provide effective means of monitoring, review and enhancement of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

All proposals are expected to be market-led and be informed by pertinent sections of the Quality Code; relevant QAA Benchmark statements; Professional, Statutory and/or Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements; and employer and student input.

1.2. EXTERNAL AWARDS

The validation process for programmes leading to external body awards will depend upon the precise requirements of the awarding body concerned. In the case of joint awards between Arden University and an external body, the Arden University validation procedures must be complied with as a minimum.

2. VALIDATION PROCESS

The validation process involves production of documentation to enable an independent panel to judge a programme proposal and its suitability for the award of the proposed title. Key to this process is the consideration of the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the relevant subject benchmarks relating to the proposed programme.

2.1. VALIDATION CYCLE

The stages of the validation cycle are set out below and illustrated diagrammatically overleaf.
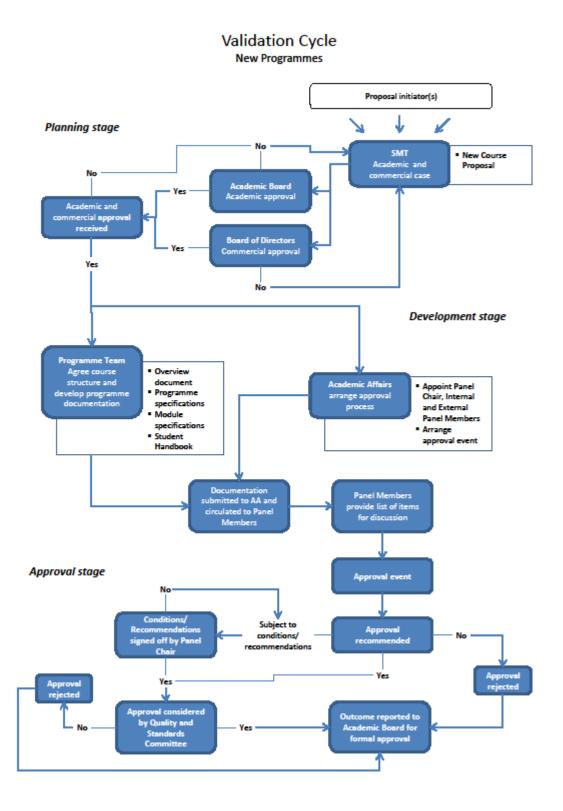
2.2. PLANNING STAGE

Suggestions for a new programme may be initiated anywhere in the organisation and a rationale for the programme to be put to the Senior Management Team for initial consideration. The Senior Management Team will determine whether to commit the further resources required to develop a formal New Course Proposal (QA55) which will be developed through the Product Working Group.

The New Course Proposal form will include a resource analysis, the extent of which is dictated by the risk involved in the proposal, and which must address:

- Rationale for the new programme.
- Potential student numbers.
- Market analysis and evidence of demand
- Proposed course structure and related development and staffing requirements
- Operational impact, e.g. system and process requirements,
- A financial risk analysis.

Proposals, via the New Course Proposal form, must receive approval from both Academic Board and Board of Governors before proceeding to the development stage.

Validation Cycle
New Programmes

Planning stage

Proposal initiator(s)

- New Course Proposal

SMT Academic and commercial case

Academic Board Academic approval

Board of Directors Commercial approval

Academic and commercial approval received

Programme Team Agree course structure and develop programme documentation

- Overview document
- Programme specifications
- Module specifications
- Student Handbook

Development stage

Academic Affairs arrange approval process

- Appoint Panel Chair, Internal and External Panel Members
- Arrange approval event

Documentation submitted to AA and circulated to Panel Members

Panel Members provide list of items for discussion

Approval event

Approval stage

Conditions/ Recommendations signed off by Panel Chair

Subject to conditions/ recommendations

Approval recommended

Approval rejected

Approval rejected

Approval considered by Quality and Standards Committee

Outcome reported to Academic Board for formal approval

2.3. DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

The key documentation to be produced by the programme development team is detailed below. Programme teams will be provided with guidance and templates for the production of these documents.

The table at the beginning of this document defines the document requirements for the respective categories of validation. The programme leader is responsible for the production of the documentation which must be approved by a programme development team or Course Committee, and its submission to the Head of Quality.

As a minimum, documentation will include:

- Programme Handbook
- Student Handbook
- Overview Document
- Staff CVs

2.3.1. PROGRAMME HANDBOOK

The Programme Handbook provides all key programme information for students and should be written according to the details and the template provided within Arden University's Regulatory Framework. The Handbook will include:

- Course structure overview
- Programme specification
- Module specifications

It is the contents of the Programme Handbook that the validation process will focus upon and the Handbook will ultimately become the definitive description of the programme as validated. In some circumstances the Programme Handbook provided to students may be less detailed than submitted for validation but as a minimum it should include the information as detailed within the regulatory framework. This must be agreed at Validation and the final programme handbook submitted to students must be agreed by the approval panel.

The Programme Specification is a concise description of intended learning outcomes and explains how the outcomes can be achieved and demonstrated. It is a QAA requirement for all HE programmes of study and should be produced in accordance with QAA guidelines http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Guidelines-for-preparing-programme-specifications.pdf . A template to guide the production of the Programme Specification as described within the Regulatory Framework.

2.3.2. STUDENT HANDBOOK
The student handbook will be produced according to the details and template provided within Arden University's Regulatory Framework.

2.3.3. (RE)VALIDATION OVERVIEW DOCUMENT

It is the duty of the Programme team to present as much evidence as possible to enable approval panel to make an informed and objective decision as to whether the programme should be approved and what conditions should be applied. The team are, therefore, encouraged to supply any supporting documentation as appropriate. Examples of other supporting documents which may be supplied for validation and review include:

- Rationale for the programme and its structure

- Sample learning material (Possibly guest access to components of Arden University's virtual learning environment ilearn).

- Evidence of engagement with employers.

- Evidence of engagement with students

2.3.4. REVIEW DOCUMENT

Programmes which are subject to re-validation, programme upgrades, and certain major modifications to existing programmes will normally require the submission of a review document as part of the normal validation documentation.

The review document should reflect on the operation of the programme since the last approval and in particular should address any issues raised by the panel at the previous review.

The review should address the validation criteria, the course rationale, its aims and learning outcomes, entry qualifications, curricula, learning and teaching, assessment and achievement, student support, management and organisation, learning resources, maintenance and enhancement of standards and quality – as dictated by the rationale for the modifications or the reasons for requiring a review specified by the original approval panel.

2.4. APPROVAL PANELS

Approval panels will have the responsibility for ensuring that the validation procedures referred to in this document are complied with and that the proposed programme of study or modification to an existing programme complies with the criteria referred to in Section 1.1 above.

2.4.1. PANEL RESPONSIBILITIES

The approval panel will ensure that:

- The proposed programme fulfils Arden University's expectations of academic standards and quality and meets any national and external body requirements.

- Students will have the opportunity to achieve the agreed learning outcomes of the programme.

- Good practice in programme design and delivery is identified and commented upon.

- Programme documentation is sufficient and adequate to support the student's learning experience.

- There has been consultation with external stakeholders and, where relevant, employers who may be providing career opportunities for graduating students.

The panel will produce a report and recommend approval or non-approval of the proposal with conditions and/or recommendations as judged appropriate. This report will be presented to the Quality and Standards Committee, which has the authority to accept the recommendation or to refer it back to the panel, with specific requirements.

2.4.2. COMPOSITION OF PANELS AND ROLES OF MEMBERS

The minimum constitution of an approval panel for new programmes and for major modifications to existing programmes will normally be:

- **The Chair**, who will normally be a senior member of Arden University staff or member of Academic Board not directly connected with the proposed programme of study and having had previous experience of validation.

- **External Members** (normally 2 nominated by the Programme Team). External Panel Member appointments will be subject to approval by the Registrar or appointed nominee. Eligible External Panel Members will be suitably experienced members of staff from other higher education institutions delivering similar programmes or industrialists with relevant subject expertise. For entirely new programmes and for major reconfigurations of existing programmes, there will normally be at least one external member to provide the necessary academic subject expertise and, where relevant, professional, industrial or other employment-related perspectives. At least one external member must have had previous experience of the role.

- **Internal Members** (normally 2 nominated by the Head of Quality). Members of Arden University staff not directly connected with the proposed programme of study, and at least one with experience of the validation process.

- **Head of Quality** or nominee, whose role will be, to ensure that the event operates efficiently and effectively, to provide advice and support to the panel on the protocols of

validation, to produce the draft version of the event report normally within two weeks of the event and the draft summary event report within three working days of the event.

- **Panel Secretary** whose role is to distribute documentation, take minutes of the meeting, produce a draft summary and final report, distribute relevant paperwork to the Quality and Standards Committee and ensure that timescales are complied with.

The role of the validation chair will be to guide and direct the panel in their identification of issues to be explored and in their discussion with the programme team and with the management team, as appropriate.

2.5. APPROVAL EVENTS

Approval events will normally be held for all programmes delivered by Arden University, including those programmes delivered jointly by professional bodies and those leading to external awards. In the case of external awards, however, validation arrangements may be organised by the awarding body if that is a condition of the collaboration.

The event will normally take place at Head Office, or a suitable venue where the panel is able to view learning resources and, where applicable, talk to students.

- Briefing papers and the proposal documentation will be distributed to the panel normally at least two weeks prior to the event.

- Panel members will be required to provide lists of issues to discuss with the development/programme team at least 2 working days in advance of the event. It is these issues that will form the agenda for the validation meeting. This agenda will be articulated by the Chair to the programme team at the beginning of the meeting.

- The panel initially meet with the programme management team to explore operational, support and administrative issues.

- The panel will meet with the programme delivery team to explore issues associated with programme delivery, assessment and curriculum content.

- The panel may also meet with students, arrange for a tour of facilities and request a demonstration of learning platforms and other associated learning support systems where relevant. In the case of distance or e Learning programmes it is acceptable to contact students via video conference, teleconference or other facility which will allow the panel to enter a meaningful discussion with students.

- Under the guidance of the Chair, the attention of the panel should be focussed on the validation criteria, in the context of the proposal before them.

- Approval events should be conducted through a process of professional dialogue and constructive, critical and intellectually challenging debate, with due courtesy and respect for other points of view.

- To facilitate the effective operation of the event, panel members should pay due acknowledgement to the authority of the Chair.

The programme/development leader may observe private panel meetings if they wish to do so and the panel agrees that they may.

2.5.1. DURATION OF EVENT

Normally approval events will take place in a single day but may be longer for large complex programmes or schemes. The event will be designed to incorporate sufficient time for the approval panel to meet with programme teams, to visit and review resources as appropriate, meet with students, where relevant, and to adequately discuss the proposed decisions and framework for completion of the final report. Approval panels will normally receive documentation at least 2 weeks in advance of the approval event.

2.5.2. JOINT VALIDATION WITH PROFESSIONAL, STATUTORY OR REGULATORY BODIES

Programmes, which are subject to accreditation by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PRSB), may have a joint approval event with the relevant body. In such cases the panel composition will be influenced by the professional body but as a minimum must comprise membership as described above. The format of the approval event will be agreed and event programme will be agreed between the PSRB and Arden University's Head of Quality. Reports and documentation, however, must comply with Arden University's validation process.

2.6. PANEL DECISION

At the end of the approval event the panel will formulate its conclusions and make a decision. These will be reported orally by the panel Chair to the programme team. This will be followed by a summary report and a final report for consideration by the programme team and the Quality and Standards Committee.

Conclusions drawn by the panel will normally consist of a summative review of the event and will identify any features of good practice worthy of commendation within the report. Decisions can be of the following form:

- to approve the proposal, with or without conditions and/or recommendations

- to approve the proposal for a fixed period, with or without conditions and/or recommendations

- to not approve the proposal, with detailed reasons.

The report and decisions are subject to approval by the Quality and Standards Committee. The Quality and Standards Committee has the power to overturn such decisions should it be deemed to be in the interests of preserving the standards and Academic quality of Arden University's academic provision. In such cases the Quality and Standards Committee will minute its decisions and through the Quality and Standards Committee Chair provide appropriate written feedback to the course team.

Only programmes in current approval may enrol students. Programmes submitted for validation may be advertised and included in a prospectus but must confirm that the enrolment of students onto the programme is "subject to validation".

Once approved continuing approval is subject to the programme team:

- satisfying the requirements of annual monitoring;

- participating in periodic review and in any other programme-related review and appraisal exercises.

Limited fixed term approval may be appropriate where the panel feels that a further review and re-validation is necessary to ensure that concerns raised have been addressed, or to align review periods for programmes falling into the same subject area.

Conditions are defined as points of action, which must be fulfilled within a timescale, set by the panel and signed off by the panel Chair as having been satisfactorily met before the course can be approved. Panels should avoid including any conditions which were not discussed with the team during the approval event.

Conditions should be specified in sufficient detail by the panel to enable the programme leader or others to be able to respond appropriately. The Programme team response should not only result in the revision of documentation but it should also include a written summary. In their response the programme leader or others should include a paper explaining how each condition has been met and referencing any (existing and/or revised/additional) documentation accordingly. Conditions are classified as either 'academic' or 'documentary'. Until academic conditions have been accepted, by whatever means the panel decides, then the programme is not approved and may not be delivered.

Recommendations are issues, which the panel considers the programme team or others should consider further. They are not a condition of approval and should not delay delivery.

Commendations are matters of good practice identified by the Panel that recognise design or development elements of the programme worthy of note and dissemination to aid future developments.

2.6.1. EVENT SUMMARY REPORT

A summary report will be published within three working days of the event. The summary report will identify the key conclusions drawn by the panel and will identify conditions and recommendations arising from the panel meeting together the timescale by which the conditions should be met. The panel Secretary will send the summary report to the panel Chair for comment on/amendment of factual accuracy.

The approved summary report will then be distributed to programme team representatives. The summary event report will be considered by Quality and Standards Committee whose receipt of the panel's recommendation will constitute Arden University approval of the same, unless the Quality and Standards Committee decides otherwise.

The summary report will normally contain: the award title(s), programme title(s), modes of study (single, joint, etc), modes of attendance, type of collaborative arrangement etc. of the programme(s) which were the subject of the proposal; the decision to be forwarded to Quality and Standards Committee; any conditions and/or recommendations, the date for submission of a response to the panel Secretary and any particular requirements relating to the method of

response; any good practice the panel wishes to highlight through commendations; the agreed means by which the panel will consider the response; the date(s) for production of the definitive version of the Student Handbook, following approval of the response to any conditions and/or recommendations.

2.6.2. FINAL REPORT

A complete report of the event should be produced normally within two weeks of the event. The draft report will be distributed to the panel Chair for comment, following which it is distributed to the other panel members and the programme leader, for comment on/amendment of factual accuracy. The report should give a clear account of the reasons for the conditions and recommendations applied to the programme as well as identifying any points worthy of commendation. It should be written in a manner which is supportive and which gives guidance to the programme team. The approved event report should be re-distributed to panel members and the programme team before it is submitted to the Quality and Standards Committee.

2.1. DEFINITIVE DOCUMENTATION

The final documentary outcome of the validation process is the Definitive Programme Handbook. This document will address any conditions and incorporate any changes imposed by the panel. It must be signed off by the approval event Chair following approval from Panel members. The final version of the documentation with evidence of Panel Chair approval must be submitted to Arden University's Head of Quality within one month of the approval event or of the date of confirmation being sent to the programme/development leader that any conditions of approval have been satisfactorily met.

3. MODIFICATIONS TO EXISTING PROGRAMMES AND OTHER ACADEMIC PROPOSALS

3.1. PURPOSE OF PROCEDURES

It is acknowledged that many programmes once operational will require modifications and revisions in order to respond to market forces and to accommodate changes arising from module review and feedback. These procedures are designed to allow such changes to take place speedily with recourse to a full approval event. It is an overriding principle, however, that the quality of Arden University awards must be maintained and preferably enhanced.

3.2. TYPES OF MODIFICATION AND OTHER PROPOSALS

As a general rule, modifications and proposals will normally belong to one (or more) of the categories which are shown at the beginning of this document with a description of the documentation requirements, Programme and Arden University -level approval processes and administrative tasks following approval.

3.2.1. TYPE A (MAJOR) MODIFICATIONS

Major modifications of types A2 – A3 normally require prior planning approval which is obtained as if for a new programme. Thereafter, documentation requirements are noted in the table at the beginning of this document.

3.2.2. TYPE B, C and D (MINOR) MODIFICATIONS

[Arden University Quality Assurance Document QA 54 – Minor Modifications to existing programme Pro-Forma]

The classification of modifications as minor follows the descriptions in the table at the beginning of this document. Any further information, which will assist the approval process, should be included as supporting documentation.

3.3. APPROVAL PROCESSES

Proposals for modifications should follow the approvals process and in the first instance be submitted to the Head of Quality who will give advice and guidance on the type of documentation required and the process for approval.

Any proposed modifications should be clearly documented and be accompanied by a revised set of course documentation incorporating all changes. The documentation must provide written confirmation that:

   i. the relevant Course Committee has considered and approved the proposed modifications;

   ii. the proposed modifications are in the interest of academic standards and will lead to an enhancement of the student learning opportunities;

iii. students have been consulted and their views considered before finalising the proposed modifications;

iv. the External Examiners have considered and approved the proposed modifications.

Current enrolled students who will be affected by modifications must be informed of the changes in writing and should have been consulted as above prior to the submission of any proposals.

Modifications to existing programmes will normally take effect from the next occasion when the module is due to be delivered.

Should a programme be the subject of a series of proposed modifications within its current approval period, which together materially affect more than fifty percent of the programme as experienced by students, then the programme will normally be subject to revalidation.

Whilst Course Committees must approve modifications prior to their submission, it is important to note that no change can be considered as validated until the Arden University -level process is completed. After following the above approvals, the relevant documentation can be submitted to Quality and Standards Committee for consideration and approval or otherwise.

3.3.1. MINOR MODIFICATIONS TO PROGRAMMES THAT HAVE NOT YET LAUNCHED

Where a programme has been validated, but a minor change is proposed before its launch, this will normally be considered by the chair of the relevant validation panel, who will determine whether it is appropriate to consult with the external subject expert validation panel members. The validation panel chair will then make a recommendation to the Academic Board as to whether the minor modification should be approved. The Academic Board has the authority to approve such changes.

3.3.2. MINOR MODIFICATIONS TO ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Where a change to programme entry requirements is proposed, the minor modification will be considered by the Admissions Committee who will make a recommendation to the Senior Management Team (SMT) as to whether the minor modification should be approved. The SMT have the authority to approve the change.

For programmes not yet launched, the Admissions Committee will instead make a recommendation to the chair of the validation panel. The chair will determine whether it is appropriate to consult with the external subject expert validation panel members, and has the authority to approve the change.