

Code of Practice: Programme Design, Development and Approval

Academic Governance Approval

Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC)

Academic Sponsor

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students)

Professional Services Owner

Head of Academic Quality
Head of Registry

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Aims

The Royal Agricultural University (RAU) takes a strategic approach to programme design, development and approval in order to ensure all programmes and modules of its provision reflect institutional priorities, vision and goals.

1.1.2 This Code of Practice describes the University's approach to the development of new programmes and modules that complement its programme offering, and their subsequent approval. It confirms the criteria and timescales that a new programme must meet to be considered for approval.

1.1.3 The aim of the design, development and approval process is to ensure that the University meets the obligations and expectations of its staff, students and regulators by:

- Engagement of internal and external expertise to design programmes and module to ensure these provide a high-quality academic experience (e.g. External Academic Advisors, Industry Advisory Boards, Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), internal pedagogic and technological expertise).
- Engagement of current and past students – individually and collectively – to encourage discussion between expert peers, students and wider stakeholders on improving the educational experience within the University and its partners.
- Ensuring clarity of each phase in the process and its direct impact on the development and approval of programmes and module.
- Responding to Programme Teams and individual circumstances of each programme development and approval to ensure that all quality requirements are proportionate to the assessed risk being managed.

1.2 Scope

1.2.1 This Code of Practice applies to the following awards from the Royal Agricultural University taught at its campuses in Cirencester and Swindon, as well as its Joint Institute for Advanced Agritechology at Qingdao Agricultural University (RAU at QAU) Joint Institute; franchised and validated provision taught at providers in the UK and international:

- Level 4 Certificates
- Level 5 Diplomas
- Level 6 Honours
- Level 7 Masters
- Level 8 Doctoral

1.2.2 In the event of a programme being developed at an academic partner institution-, the subject area in which the partnership sits, will lead and work with the partner/s to

ensure that the programme and modules adheres to the Code of Practice I: Collaborative Provision.

1.3 Regulations relevant to this Code of Practice

1.3.1 The following conditions of registration set by the Office for Students (OfS) are relevant:

B1	The provider must ensure that the students registered on each higher education course receive a high- quality academic experience which includes but is not limited to ensuring that each course: a) is up-to-date; b) provides educational challenge; c) is coherent; d) is effectively delivered; and e) as appropriate to the subject matter of the course, requires students to develop relevant skills.
B2	The provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure students receive resources and support to ensure a high-quality academic experience for those students, and those students succeed in and beyond higher education; and that effective engagement which each cohort of students takes place.
B4	The provider must ensure that qualifications awarded to students hold their value at the point of qualification and over time, in line with sector recognised standards. The provider must ensure that a) students are assessed effectively; b) each assessment is valid and reliable; c) academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible; d) academic regulations are designed to ensure the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English language in a way which appropriately reflects the level and content of the course; e) relevant awards granted to students are credible at the point of being granted and when compared to those granted previously.
B5	The provider must deliver courses that meet the academic standards as they are described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications at Level 4 or higher. The provider must ensure that, in respect of any relevant awards granted to students who complete a higher education course provided by, or on behalf of, the provider (whether or not the provider is the awarding body): a) and standards set appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards; b) awards are only granted to students whose knowledge and skills appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards.
C1	The provider must demonstrate that in developing and implementing its policies, procedures and terms and conditions, it has given due regard to relevant guidance about how to comply with consumer protection law.
E1	The provider's governing documents must uphold the public interest governance principles that are applicable to the provider.

E2	<p>The provider must have in place adequate and effective management and governance arrangements to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) operate in accordance with its governing documents. b) deliver, in practice, the public interest governance principles that are applicable to it. c) provide and fully deliver the higher education courses advertised. d) continue to comply with all conditions of its registration.
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1.3.2 The Code of Practice should be read in conjunction with the Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes, the QAA Advice and Guidance: Course Design and Development (Nov 2018) and the QAA Advice and Guidance: Assessment (November 2018).

1.4 Responsibilities

- 1.4.1 Academic Board is responsible for confirming that the University's named awards and their curricula are appropriate, dynamic and challenging and that the quality and standards of provision is appropriate to the level of award offered. It devolves responsibility for approval of programmes to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC).
- 1.4.2 AQSC is responsible for ensuring programmes meet high-quality design principles, qualification frameworks, and that all programmes meet the relevant OfS Conditions of Registration. AQSC has responsibility for the approval and re-approval of programmes and modules of the University, with subsequent recommendation to Academic Board for final sign off.
- 1.4.3 The validation process and reporting to Academic Board provides the University's Governing Council with the information it needs to underpin the required assurances to the Office for Students (OfS) (Condition E).
- 1.4.4 Academic Quality is responsible for organising and managing the approval process for programmes and modules, and will work closely with Programme Teams in the development phase and until such time that programmes and modules have received AQSC and Academic Board approval.
- 1.4.5 Programme Leaders are responsible for developing well-designed programmes by engaging with appropriate stakeholders to help them to determine the design of the programme (i.e. students, industry/academic experts and employers) and that the programmes meet the requirements of the Conditions of Registration.

1.5 Further Guidance

- 1.5.1 For further guidance on this section please contact the Academic Quality team by emailing quality@rau.ac.uk or your allocated Academic Quality Officer for your subject area.
- 1.5.2 For proposals involving UK and international partnerships, please contact both the

Academic Quality team and the Academic Quality Officer (Partnerships) by emailing collaborative.provision@rau.ac.uk

2. Overview and Requirements

2.1 Stages of the Process

2.1.1 There are three phases of the design, development and approval process for all new programmes and modules for awards offered by the University:

a) **Stage 1: Portfolio Planning and Business Case**

Completion of a Business Case for a new programme and approval to proceed from the Academic Strategy and Planning Committee (ASPC)

b) **Stage 2: Programme Design and Development**

Programme design and development within the subject area led by a designed Programme Team with input from student feedback, the designated External Academic Advisor and/or Industry Advisory Board for approval by the Dean of Subject.

c) **Stage 3: Programme Scrutiny and Final Documentation for Validation Approval**

Undertaken by Academic Quality and panel members (section 6) with feedback for improvement and enhancement communicated to the Programme Team. The Programme Team engages with the feedback provided from the scrutiny process and updates documentation as appropriate, prior submission of the final documentation to Academic Quality for validation.

e) **Stage 4: University Validation Approval**

Consideration of programme and module documentation by the Validation and Programme Review Panels for approval of validations and recommendation to AQSC and Academic Board, subject to the Programme meeting conditions of validation. Further details are set out under Stage 4 of the process.

2.2 Criteria for a well-designed programme

2.2.1 By approving a programme, the Validation Panel and Academic Quality provide assurances to AQSC and Academic Board that the approved qualification and curriculum:

a) has been designed with the most up-to-date theoretic, practical, industrial and subject-specific considerations in mind which align with the University vision and strategic objectives;

b) provides academic rigour and intellectual challenge and demonstrates to students, regardless of their background or previous academic standing, how they can achieve standards above the threshold level in line with similar qualifications;

- c) has content which is clearly written and understandable by all stakeholders in the context of the subject area, demonstrating coherence and clarity of appropriate levels, outcomes and completion, moving from one module to another whereby students can be secure in the knowledge of mastering foundational areas before moving into more advanced learning;
- d) has been informed by internal and external stakeholder input (e.g. current and past students, external academic expertise, PSRBs, etc.) in the design of the programme and modules including the setting of standards as set out in the [QAA The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#) (FHEQ);
- e) provides students, with a range of relevant and effectively delivered fair assessment methods, including formative assessments and access to learning outside of their own programmes and opportunities for experimentation, which support students - regardless of background or previous academic standing - to achieve successful outcomes in line with similar qualifications;
- f) will provide the resources and appropriately qualified staff team necessary for delivery of a high-quality academic experience and skills relevant to the subject matter and level of the programme and that it will prepare students for success in and beyond the course including for employment;
- g) explains clearly the criteria for admission to the programme which provide all students - regardless of background and previous academic standing - with the opportunity to achieve the intended outcomes of the programme within the set study hours and mode of delivery;
- h) will adopt the most recent industry or professional standards, and that appropriate PSRB accreditation has been sought and will be secured as part of the programme approval process;
- i) will engage with students effectively to ensure that they have the opportunity to contribute to the development of their programme, either through direct feedback or participation in student panels at the validation event;
- j) describes the appropriate outcome and exit qualification which meet the Sector Recognised Standards set by the OfS.

2.3 Programme Documents and Module Templates

2.3.1 The expectation is that each programme specification, module template and supporting information must be completed and presented by the Programme Team for consideration at validation.

2.3.2 These documents include:

- a) Programme specification and module templates;
- b) Provision of Information for Prospective Students providing accessible marketing information;
- c) CVs of staff teaching the programme;
- d) Resource statement;

- e) Programme assessment mapping sheet;
- f) UG/PG EDI and UN SDG mapping;
- g) Post-scrutiny Dean of Subject documentation sign off form.

2.3.3 The following documentation is provided by Academic Quality for validation events:

- a) Subject Benchmark Statements (as appropriate);
- b) External Examiner Reports (for the past two years);
- c) Annual Programme Monitoring Reports (for the past two years).

2.3.4 All Programme documentation provided to future and current students must comply with the OfS Condition C1 and have due regard to guidance from the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)

[UK Higher Education providers - advice on consumer protection law](#) to ensure that:

- a) the University provides students with accurate information about our programmes or modules and any associated costs at each stage of our dealings with them. This includes when students research a programme prior to application, at the offer stage, and when they enrol and re-enrol with the University.
- b) the University ensures that programme and module information remains accurate and up to date, so that once a student has applied for a place any changes to programme or module information has the express consent of all students affected;
- c) the University specifically indicates to offer holders and current students any terms and conditions that are of particular importance.
- d) The latest templates must be used as older templates may not incorporate the most up to date and relevant information. Contact quality@rau.ac.uk for further advice.

2.4 Variants of Existing Programmes

- 2.4.1 At the RAU several programmes share modules to facilitate learning across different cohorts of students, and a number of elective modules are available to choose from. Variants provide a mechanism for expediting the creation of new programmes where much of the content has been scrutinised as part of an earlier approval process. There should be a single module template shared between parent programmes and their variants. All variants must be listed on the module template.
- 2.4.2 Most variants are treated as minor material changes to an existing programme, with the requirements for approval stipulated in Section 7 of this Code of Practice.
- 2.4.3 Academic Quality will arrange for a notification of changes to all stakeholders as appropriate (e.g. Students, Registry, Timetabling, Exams Administration, Learning Technology), to make appropriate amendments to the University's information management and student record systems. Academic Quality will inform other professional services as appropriate (e.g. Strategic Planning, Admissions, Marketing & External Relations).

2.5 Periods of Approval and Re-approval process

- 2.5.1 The University operates a rolling approval period. No programme can continue to enrol students without undertaking periodical programme review (see Code of Practice G). Programmes will automatically be suspended and enter teach-out unless a programme review is undertaken or an extension to the validation period is agreed. A request to extend a validation period needs to be submitted to ASPC for approval. For details of forthcoming committee dates please contact quality@rau.ac.uk.
- 2.5.2 Approval periods are set at the final point of validation a programme and are usually between 3 years (new partner programmes) to 5 years (existing programmes). To agree the period, the University will consider if:
- a) the programme is in a new or rapidly developing field of study meaning the programme is unlikely to maintain currency over the period of approval, for example due to changes in PSRB standards;
 - b) specific quality circumstances or identified risks to the student experience (e.g. annual programme monitoring, completion data or student feedback) and require closer monitoring of the programme over a shorter period of time than the approval period;
 - c) the programme is in a subject discipline new to the University;
 - d) the provision is being validated for or franchised to a partner which is new to the University.

2.6 Timings

- 2.6.1 The aim is to allow for maximal exposure of programmes in University publicity materials as this will be important for recruitment activities.
- 2.6.2 Unless alternative arrangements have been agreed in the Portfolio Planning stage with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning & Resources) Business Cases with the Provision of Information for Prospective Students and Financial Planning document should be submitted to the Secretary to ASPC no later than:
- a) End of November for undergraduate courses commencing in the next recruitment cycle (e.g. by 31 October 2024 for courses beginning in September 2026). This would allow ASPC to approve/reject in November to inform the January opening of the programme marketing and recruitment activities cycle.
 - b) End of November for postgraduate courses commencing in the next recruitment cycle (e.g. by 31 October 2024 for courses beginning in September 2025). This would allow ASPC to approve/reject in November to inform January opening of the course marketing and recruitment activities cycle.
- 2.6.3 As the Business Case template requires Programme Teams to obtain information from across the University, e.g. market research, employer engagement, staffing implications, resource requirements, financial planning etc, work on the Business Case phase needs to begin well in advance of these deadlines.

- 2.6.4 There may be instances when the process of approving a new programme can be completed quicker than the timescales indicate but this must be on the agreement of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Planning & Resource) and Chair of ASPC. For instance, where a programme has identified a ready-made market to recruit from, or where inclusion in the University Prospectus and/or UCAS listings may not be critical to successful recruitment.

3. Stage 1: Portfolio Planning and Business Case

3.1 Overview

3.1.1 Portfolio Planning and Business Case Approval ensures:

- a) the programme is a strategic fit to the University's current programme portfolio;
- b) relevant information on PSRB, or other external requirements are known prior to the commencement of the programme design and development, and PSRB approval can be planned for;
- c) the information that is needed to market and admit students to the course (subject to programme approval); and
- d) compliance with regulatory, or legislative requirements can be clarified in advance (e.g. immigration and consumer protection).

3.2 Business Case Approval

3.2.1 Business Case approval consists of two steps:

- a) Step 1: Completion of the proposal (Business case, costings and Provision of Information for Prospective Students)
- b) Step 2: Approval by the Academic Strategy and Planning Committee (ASPC)

3.2.2 Following the approval of a successful Business Case:

- a) The programme can be marketed on the University's website, in its prospectus, and students can be offered places on the course. The course remains "subject to validation" and this message must be conveyed in all materials until approval is confirmed.
- b) The Dean of Subject can commit the allocated staff and financial resources in order to undertake the full programme development and approval process; and
- c) The Academic Planning Manager can include the programme in planning processes;

d) Where appropriate, the Programme Leader, in consultation with the Academic Quality, can approach the relevant PSRB to discuss arrangements for an accreditation process to be undertaken.

3.2.3 Approved Collaborative Partners (Code of Practice I) may proceed similarly, although any publicity materials should be approved by the University prior to advertisement and/or recruitment. Completion of Business Case approval at ASPC signifies that the University is committed to offering the programme at the partner institution.

3.3 Operational Endorsement

3.3.1 As part of the Business Case development, Directors and Heads of Professional Services departments, i.e. Registry, Library, Learning Technology, IT Services, are consulted on the resource implications the development of the new programme has on their service provision. They will be asked to discuss and endorse the new proposal and by doing so, they agree that:

- a) The proposal is consistent with professional service business plans.
- b) The proposal states all necessary impacts on professional service areas.
- c) There are the resources within their services to deliver a high-quality experience for students on the proposed new programme.
- d) In their professional service area there are no unstated risks to the recruitment to or delivery of a high-quality experience (for example, an area of study which is known to attract students with high demand for well-being services, or that the title of the programme is less attractive than alternatives in the market.)
- e) There are no clashes with plans for new programme proposals in other areas of the University.

3.4 Business Case approval at ASPC

3.4.1 The fully endorsed Business Case should be confirmed as approved by the Secretary to ASPC.

3.4.2 The approval confirms that the following points have been discussed and confirmed at both Strategic and Operational level:

- a) The proposal is consistent with University and Subject Area business plans.
- b) The fee level is appropriate, and there is strong and sustainable demand for the proposal.
- c) There are (or will be) adequate resources, which can and will be used to deliver the proposal to acceptable standards.
- d) The proposal compares favourably with competing offerings at other HEIs.
- e) The proposal is consistent with supporting the research activity within the Subject Area.

3.4.3 Where a proposal involves one or more a collaborative partnerships, a senior officer from each partner institution must also sign the Business Case to indicate approval.

- 3.4.4 Should submissions have incomplete fields or missing signatures, they should be returned by the Secretary of ASPC to the relevant Dean of Subject for completion, prior to further processing.

3.5 Actions following Business Case Approval

- 3.5.1 The Secretary to ASPC will circulate the approved Business Case and Provision of Information for Prospective Students to key stakeholders including:
- Strategic Planning
 - Marketing and Communications
 - Student Recruitment
 - Admissions
 - Registry.
- 3.5.2 Once approved, Business Case approval is valid for 12 months. After 12 months, fresh Business Approval may be requested by the Chair of Academic Planning and Strategy Committee (ASPC) in recognition that the prevailing market and resources could have changed.
- 3.5.3 Until full programme validation is complete, applicants must not enrol on the programme and must not attend scheduled sessions.

4. Stage 2: Programme Design and Development

4.1 Overview

4.1.1 Programme Design and Development ensures that programmes leading to an award by the University are:

- Designed in accordance with the academic standards for the designated award;
- Designed in accordance with University approved strategic objectives, principles and regulations as approved by Academic Board;
- Resourced for delivery by appropriately qualified and skilled staff to ensure all students experience a high-quality learning experience;
- Able to access sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resource and student support services, enabling all students to experience a high-quality learning experience;
- Compliant with regulatory or legislative requirements, e.g. meets OfS conditions of registration, consumer law, visa and immigration.

4.2 Engagement of the Programme Team

4.2.1 The Dean of Subject should convene a Programme Team for the development of the programme as approved by ASPC. Membership should include:

- Programme Leader
- Module Leaders with subject expertise for the modules to be developed
- Module Leaders from modules that are variant with other programmes
- At least one External Academic Advisor

4.2.2 Academic Quality will assign an Academic Quality Officer (Validating Officer) to each validation that is taking place and early engagement with Academic Quality is advisable. Academic Quality Officers can advise on internal and external regulatory requirements as well as processes guiding the validation.

4.2.3 Once ASPC approval has been achieved and a Programme Team is in place, the assigned Validating Officer will contact the Programme Leader to establish a validation timeline which covers all aspects of the process from ASPC approval to final sign off by AQSC and Academic Board.

4.2.4 The Programme Team is responsible for nominating the External Academic Advisor who must meet the following criteria:

- Nominees must have the Right to Work in the UK
- Nominees must have current academic experience and subject expertise to be able to advise on the appropriateness of new modules/programmes, and comparability nationally

- Nominees must hold an academic qualification that is at least of the same FHEQ level as the module/programme to be validated/reviewed
- Nominees must be independent of the programme validated/reviewed
- Nominees must not be appointed more than twice in a five year period
- Nominees must not be former employees/students of the University within the last five years

Completed nomination forms must be submitted to quality@rau.ac.uk and the Validation Officer for processing. All appointments require approval by the Head of Academic Quality and the Chair of AQSC.

4.3 Programme Design and Development

- 4.3.1 The Programme Team will agree a schedule and undertake an iterative design process based on testing, analysing and refining their proposal, in consultation with appropriate stakeholders. Through consultation, the Programme Team will complete:
- a) Programme specification and module templates;
 - b) Provision of Information for Prospective Students providing accessible marketing information;
 - c) Resource statement;
 - d) Programme assessment mapping sheet;
 - f) UG/PG EDI and UN SDG mapping.
- 4.3.2 The design activities will offer participants the opportunity to engage in subject specialist discussions including the latest research outcomes; share good practice; test design pedagogies and explore the use of the latest learning technologies.
- 4.3.3 Programme Teams should not hesitate to seek advise from professional services staff including but not limited to Academic Quality, Registry, Library and Learning Technology.
- 4.3.4 The External Academic Advisor must be involved from the beginning of the design process and complete an External Academic Advisor Report which should be submitted to quality@rau.ac.uk and the Validation Officer.
- 4.3.5 It is recommended that the Programme Team seeks feedback from current or past students on their study experience, aspects they liked and recommendations for change.
- 4.3.6 Payments to External Academic Advisors are facilitated by Academic Quality upon engagement with the Programme Team, participation and contribution to the validation event and completion of the report.

5. Stage 3: Scrutiny Process

- 5.1 The scrutiny stage has been introduced to resolve programme design and development related queries in advance of the validation event. The scrutiny process is carried out by the Validation Officer and Validation Panel Members upon receipt of the first set of documentation as set out under 4.3.1. at least seven weeks in advance of the date for the programme validation meeting.
- 5.2 Academic Quality will collate feedback from panel members into Annex A covering the programme specification, modules, mapping exercises, and will include an overview of the types of assessments used, their wording and weighting to ensure comparability across the modules taught in one programme.
- 5.3 The collated feedback will be returned to the Programme Team within two weeks upon receipt of the first set of documentation and where desired by the Programme Team, will convene a Scrutiny Feedback meeting with the Validation Officer during which additional queries can be addressed.
- 5.4 Upon carrying out further work, the Programme Team will submit the final set of documentation for validation at least two weeks prior the validation event to Academic Quality at quality@rau.ac.uk and the Validating Officer for distribution to the Validation Panel.
- 5.5 Prior to submitting the final set of documentation to Academic Quality, the Dean of Subject is required to check the documentation and confirm readiness for approval by signing and submitting the 'Dean of Subject Documentation Sign Off form'.
- 5.5 During the scrutiny process, the Validating Officer will collate queries that have been raised by Academic Quality and Validating Panel members into an indicative agenda which will be shared with the Programme Team 2-3 days in advance of the validation event so they can prepare responses to queries and seek advice from appropriate sources.

6. Stage 4: University Validation Approval

6.1 Overview

- 6.1.1 Validation and Programme Review Panels, as part of the quality assurance process, ensure that academic programmes delivered by the University, or its collaborative partner institutions, meet or exceed the threshold standards appropriate to the level of the provision and ensure the quality of the student experience. Validation/revalidation approval draws on the evidence presented by the Proposing Team to demonstrate how the proposed provision addresses Institutional Policies, Regulations and Guidelines, appropriate reference points such as the OfS and QAA and, where appropriate, the requirements of Public, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). Academic Board has delegated authority (through Academic Quality and Standards Committee, AQSC) to appropriately constituted Validation Review Panels to assess whether or not the proposal meets the threshold standards.
- 6.1.2 Validation and Review Panels are also part of the process of continuous improvement and enhancement and as such, the meeting between Panel and the Proposing Team is supportive rather than adversarial. A secondary aim of the Panel is to identify good practice in programme design or learning, teaching and assessment that could be shared more widely.
- 6.1.3 As a minimum, Programme Validation Panels will consist of:
- A Chair
(Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education & Students), Dean of Subject, a trained senior member of academic staff with experience of chairing programme validations, Director of Academic Services)
 - Internal Panel Member
(Academic staff member from another subject area)
 - External Academic Advisor / Industry Representative
 - Head of Academic Quality
 - Academic Quality Officer (Validating Officer)
- 6.1.4 In addition, the Programme Team and respective Dean of Subject will be invited to present their programme proposal to the Programme Validation Panel.

6.2 Student Representation

- 6.2.1 To support stakeholder engagement, consultation with students should take place when developing and validating new programmes for award. The Programme Team should work with Academic Quality to set up a Student Panel that forms part of the formal validation process. Students are invited to meet with the Programme Validation Panel to discuss their study experience, areas for improvement and areas that work well. The Programme Team does not attend this meeting.

6.3 Outcomes

- 6.3.1 The outcomes of a Validation and Review Panel can be:
- Recommend approval to the AQSC (no conditions; with/without recommendations)

- Recommend approval (subject to conditions; with/without recommendations)
- Fail to approve (proposal requires significant work before being re-presented)

6.3.2 In a private panel meeting at the end of the validation event, the validation panel will consult on commendations, conditions and recommendations for the Programme Team to complete. These will be notified via email the following day, in advance of the Programme Team receiving the full validation report.

6.3.3 Normally conditions **must** be met before the proposal can be submitted to AQSC for approval. However, where conditions are based on securing additional resources such as staff or equipment with a long procurement time, approval may be made subject to the conditions being met before the programme commencement date. Normally the Chair of the Panel in conjunction with the Secretary is sufficient to confirm that the conditions have/have not been met. Conditions can be set at Programme, Subject area or University Level.

6.3.4 Recommendations **do not** have to be met in order for the programme to gain approval but can be considered for further action by the programme leader in the first Annual Programme Monitoring report.

6.3.5 Validation of a programme will run from the start of the relevant academic period as specified. For RAU campus-based programmes the period between programme revalidations is normally five years. For collaborative partners the programme validation period is usually three years in the first instance, and five years thereafter. The validation period for partners may be reduced if:

- new areas of provision are proposed;
- there is a change of status to the partner, e.g. organisational change, change in ownership, change in significant activities or staffing changes;
- evidence emerges to suggest partners do not meet the University's quality assurance standards.

7. Changes to Validated Programmes and Modules

7.1 Regulatory Implications

7.1.1 Changes to programme and module information can impact on requirements set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies. These include:

- Compliance with the [General Ongoing Conditions of Registration](#) with the Office for Students (OfS)
- Compliance with Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations (2008) and Consumer Contracts (Information, Cancellation and Additional Charges) Regulations (2013) in accordance with the [UK Higher Education Providers – Advice on Consumer Protection Law](#) published by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)
- Alignment with the [UK Quality Code, Advice and Guidance: Course Design and Development](#) published by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)
- Completion of the [Student Return](#), [Aggregate Offshore Return](#) and [Unistats Return](#), according to the specifications published by the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA)
- Alignment with programme-level accreditation requirements

7.1.2 The process for making changes to programmes and modules, including oversight, approval and deadlines, are designed to ensure compliance with these requirements.

7.2 Types of Change

7.2.1 Material Changes

Material changes are changes which will have a significant impact on the nature of the student learning experience. Material changes are subject to consumer protection legislation.

Where material changes affect registered students (including students who are suspended or interrupted), the university must consult with students, communicate the change and obtain their consent.

Where material changes affect offer holders, the university must consult with offer holders, and communicate the changes.

Changes to the following information is material:

- Programme title
- Professional accreditation
- Programme description
- Programme learning outcomes
- Programme learning and teaching strategy
- Programme assessment strategy
- Entry requirements

- Module delivery location
- Module Location

The following **changes to the relationship between modules and programme are material:**

- Changing a module from core to elective (or vice versa)
- Removing a module from a programme
- Introducing a new core module to a programme
- Introducing a new elective module to a programme
- Withdrawing a module

The following changes to modules are material:

- Module title
- Module semester

In addition, the Head of Academic Quality has discretion to require any proposal for non-material (as set out under 7.2.2) or operational changes (as set out under 7.2.3), to be approved as a material change. This discretion will be used where the Head of Academic Quality determines that a proposal may meet the threshold for material change under consumer protection regulations.

Where material changes affect offer holders, the university must communicate the changes.

7.2.2 Non-material changes

Non-material changes are changes which affect the quality of the programme but that will have a limited impact on the overall student learning experience. Non-material changes are not generally subject to consumer protection regulations, however proposals to make multiple changes may meet the threshold for material change.

Where non-material changes affect registered students (including students who are suspended or interrupted), the university must consult with students and communicate the change.

Changes to the following information is non-material:

- Module description
- Module learning outcomes
- Module learning and teaching strategy
- Module study hours (including the proportion of hours by type)
- Module assessment strategy
- Summative assessment components
- Formative assessment components
- Associated modules

7.2.3 Operational changes

Operational changes are changes which will have a limited impact on the overall

student learning experience. Operational changes are not generally subject to consumer protection regulations, however proposals to make multiple changes may meet the threshold for material change.

Where operational changes affect registered students (including students who are suspended or interrupted), the university must communicate the change.

Changes to the following information is operational:

- Programme subject area
- Programme leader
- Module subject area
- Module leader
- Assessment submission deadline
- Module reading list

7.2.4 Approval Process and Deadlines

Proposals to make changes for the **Academic Year 2025/26** will be considered as follows:

Type of Change	Paperwork required	Approval by	Submission deadline
Material Changes	Programme/Module Specification(s) with tracked changes AND A Programme and Module Change Form	Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC)	10 February 2025 (for Sept 25)
Non-material Changes	Programme/Module Specification(s) with tracked changes AND A Programme and Module Change Form	Head of Academic Quality	Semester 1A/2W 06 May 2025 (for Sept 25)
Operational Changes	Programme/Module Specification(s) with tracked changes	Programme Leader AND Dean of Subject (changes to be emailed to quality@rau.ac.uk)	Semester 2A/1W 29 September 2025 (for Jan 26)

A = Autumn entry

W = Spring entry

All proposals to make changes (including approved operational changes) must be submitted to quality@rau.ac.uk by the submission date.

Changes submitted after this date will not be accepted.

In exceptional or unforeseen circumstances, late changes may be considered at the discretion of the Head of Academic Quality. Programme Leaders should discuss the proposal with the Head of Academic Quality in the first instance.

7.3 Changes which require approval as a new programme

7.3.1 In some instances, making changes to a programme will affect the nature of the programme as a whole. In these cases, the proposal should be approved as a new programme and, if required, the original programme should be closed.

7.3.2 The following changes must be approved as a new programme:

- Creating a new award within an existing programme
- Creating a new mode of study within an existing programme
- Changing the duration of a programme
- Changing the location from which a programme is delivered
- Creating a new location for an existing programme

7.3.3 In addition, the Head of Academic Quality has discretion to require any proposal to make multiple material, or non-material changes, to be considered as a new programme.

7.4 Changes which require approval as a new module

7.4.1 In some instances, making changes to a module will affect the nature of the module as a whole. In these cases, a new module should be approved and, if required, the original module should be withdrawn. New modules can still be approved through this process.

7.4.2 The following changes must be approved as a new module:

- Changing the module type
- Changing the FHEQ level of a module
- Changing the credit value of a module

7.4.3 In addition, the Head of Academic Quality has discretion to require any proposal to make multiple material, or non-material changes, to be considered as a new module.

7.5 Post approval

7.5.1 Once a change is approved Academic Services will be responsible for:

- Updating the definitive programme and module specification(s)
- Communicating the change to relevant Programme Leaders and Module Leaders
- Updating information in the student record system (Quercus) and timetabling system (Celcat)
- Liaising with Marketing and Recruitment with regards to information published online and in the print prospectus
- Liaising with Digital Innovations with regards to learning resources (including Gateway and the library)
- Consulting and communicating with offer holders
- Consulting and communicating with students who are interrupted or suspended

7.5.2 Once a change is approved the Programme Leader will be responsible for:

- Ensuring changes are embedded into the delivery of the module/programme
- Communicating the change to affected students (excluding students who are interrupted or suspended)

7.6 Completing a Programme/Module Change Form

7.6.1 Description of Changes

The description of changes should be a brief, factual statement of the changes proposed, for example;

Changing assessment component of module XXXX from A to B

7.6.2 Where multiple changes of a similar nature are proposed these can be included on the same form. For example, changes to the learning and teaching approach for a suite of modules can be submitted with one form.

7.6.3 Rationale for change

The rationale should provide a brief explanation for why the changes are required including the impact on the programme as a whole.

When submitting and reviewing proposals, Deans of Subject and Programme Leaders should consider the overall impact to ensure that individual changes won't have an adverse impact on the programme or associated programmes, for example, where changing the assessment components of one module might reduce the variety of assessment types across the programme.

7.6.4 Module Specifications

Programme and module change forms should be submitted with a Module Specification showing tracked changes.

Module Specifications should refer to the relevant QAA Benchmark Statement. Subject Benchmark statements are available online at:

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements>

Intended Learning Outcomes should be aligned to the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement and the Qualification Descriptors outlined in the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies (FHEQ). The FHEQ, including Qualification Descriptors is available online at:

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks>