



**University of
Leicester**

ACADEMIC OFFICE

Code of Practice on Programme Approval

2004/05

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

CODE OF PRACTICE ON PROGRAMME APPROVAL

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CODE OF PRACTICE ON PROGRAMME APPROVAL

Preface

This Code of Practice sets out current procedures for programme approval, taking account of recommendations of good practice contained in the section of the QAA's Code of Practice on Programme Approval, Monitoring and Review.

Copies of the Code are sent to senior University Officers, Deans, Sub-Deans, the Associate Dean (Combined Arts), Heads of Department, Faculty Board Secretaries, and the Secretary of the Board of Graduate Studies, the Secretary of the Academic Review Committee. It can be found on the Academic Office website at <http://www.le.ac.uk/academic/quality/Codes/index.html>, where there is also an on-line programme approval form. Any comments on the operation of the Code should be addressed to Faculty Board Secretaries or the Academic Registrar.

The Code is revised and re-issued annually by the Standing Committee of Deans. Each edition takes account of procedural issues arising from each year's programme approval process, and of relevant national developments, and in particular of recommendations of good practice arising from past QAA reviews and audits and contained in QAA publications.

The Academic Review Committee is responsible through its academic reviews of departments for monitoring overall compliance with the Code.

Kathy Williams
Academic Registrar
2004/05

Programme approval panels will meet in 2004/05 on:

Thursday 11 November
Friday 18 February
Friday 13 May
Friday 3 June (if required)

CODE OF PRACTICE ON STUDENT PLACEMENTS

Equal opportunities and risk management statements

***Equal opportunities:** The programme approval process provides the opportunity for the assessment of new academic developments against a wide range of national and local requirements and benchmarks, including their general compliance with equality legislation (as reflected in the University's equality codes and guidelines).*

***Risk Management:** Programme approval involves a process of risk assessment at departmental level in order to ascertain:*

- *the likelihood of success and the danger of failure*
- *the impact on the department and a range of other interested parties*
- *the benefits and costs of the new development.*

The involvement of senior staff in programme approval panels, and the application by the panels of conditions and controls, contribute to the management (and reduction) of the risks of engaging in new ventures.

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

CODE OF PRACTICE ON PROGRAMME APPROVAL

1. Introduction and overview

- 1.1 This Code applies to all University provision which is one year or more in length (full-time equivalent). Separate procedures apply in relation to the approval of programmes at Bishop Grosseteste College and Newman College validated by the University.
- 1.1 There are three approval schemes (1, 2 and 3). Scheme 1 is for new programmes (unless the new programme is a variation on an existing programme as defined in 1.5 below or is at certificate level) or for the substantial reconfiguration of a department's undergraduate or postgraduate programmes (for example, where a department has conducted a major curriculum review and wishes to change all, or a considerable proportion, of the content and/or structure of its programmes). Scheme 1 incorporates a face-to-face meeting with a panel which includes an external advisor. Scheme 2 is for a change in the mode of delivery or a curriculum change which is being amended to an extent which requires University-level scrutiny, but where the central features of provision remain unchanged. Scheme 2 involves a face-to-face meeting with a panel, but no external advisor. Scheme 3 is for certificate-level provision (undergraduate first-year equivalent), where there is no requirement for face-to-face meeting or direct external participation; the panel review is by means of scrutiny of the documentation.
- 1.2 Programme approval procedures are designed to ensure that:
 - new academic developments are consistent with the University's overall strategies for development and growth, and are viable in terms of sustainable market appeal
 - new programmes meet externally-imposed academic standards (the requirements of professional bodies, the QAA's qualifications framework, subject benchmarks, the recommendations of external examiners reporting on cognate programmes)
 - new programmes comply with internal requirements relating to structures (modules, credits, levels) and to the general provisions of the Learning and Teaching Strategy relating to skills
 - there is appropriate externality embedded in the review process to provide any necessary assurance to the University that quality and standards are being maintained and enhanced by reference to known best practice in the discipline.
- 1.3 The programme approval process is not used for the regular 'revalidation' of existing provision. The periodic departmental reviews conducted by the Academic Review Committee are the vehicle for providing confirmation of the current quality and standards of the programmes offered by the department under review. In exceptional circumstances, however, programme re-approval can be requested by a head of department in order to ensure that changes being made in response to recommendations by a departmental review, an external examiner or a professional body have been appropriately implemented.

1.4 Scheme 1 is the default scheme. Scheme 2 (appearance before a panel but no direct external involvement) may only be used with the agreement of the Principal Assistant Registrar (Quality and Standards). Scheme 2 is broadly applicable to the following circumstances:

- where existing modules are being combined into a new programme or a new suite of programmes
- where an existing programme is being altered by the addition (or deletion) of a distinctive element (for example, a year abroad)
- where proposed amendments to an existing programme will lead to the replacement of more than one-third of the programme's core modules, but where the amendments do not constitute the 'substantial reconfiguration' which requires full programme approval under Scheme 1 (an example might be where staff changes lead to a department altering the content of a Master's course without changing its broad field of study, its title or its intended learning outcomes).

1.6 Amendments to programme titles with no associated content change, and the annual review and minor amendments of modules to refresh and reinvigorate the curriculum are the responsibility of the Faculty Boards and their Learning and Teaching Committee. In this context, the advice of the Director of Marketing should be sought on title changes prior to submission to the Faculty Board.

2. General advice

2.1 Responsibility for the approval of the introduction of new degree programmes lies with the Boards of the Faculties and the Board of Graduate Studies, reporting to Senate. In reaching decisions about approval, the boards are advised by Programme Approval Panels (see below).

2.2 All programmes must have a lead department*. For joint and major/minor degrees, the lead department must be the first-named in the programme title. It is the responsibility of the lead department to prepare programme proposal documentation, sign off recruitment literature, appoint admissions staff and, in due course, run the programme in collaboration with partner departments. The University's quality assurance processes also hold the lead department accountable for quality management.

*[The only exceptions are the B.A. degree in Combined Studies and the M.A. Humanities, where co-ordination is at Faculty level, through the Associate Dean (Combined Arts) and the Sub-Dean (Graduate Studies) respectively. For other multi-disciplinary degrees, the lead department will normally be the department in which the programme director is based.]

2.3 The process of programme design, development and approval must be undertaken in time to recruit students to the new programme. In most cases this will be determined by the need to have an entry in the undergraduate or postgraduate prospectus. These are published according to a schedule that reflects applicant demand. In the case of the undergraduate prospectus, publication is approximately twenty months before the date of admission. In the case of the postgraduate prospectus, publication is approximately fourteen months before the date of admission. The arrangements therefore entail the initiation of approval procedures more than two years in advance of the first admission to the programme, or the approval of a plan for recruiting students without the assistance of a prospectus entry.

- 2.4 A prospectus entry, with suitable disclaimers, will be permitted for any proposal which under Scheme 1 has been considered by the Budgets and Resources Committee in the context of departmental planning statements (see 4.1 below), and has obtained Faculty Board approval in principle, or for schemes 2 and 3 only, has obtained Faculty Board approval in principle.

3. The development of new proposals

- 3.1 When contemplating the introduction of new provision or discussing significant amendments to existing programmes, account must be taken of the following features of programme design (these closely follow the recommendations contained in the relevant section of the QAA's Code of Practice):

- the University's mission and strategic objectives (see Strategic Plan 2004/05 to 2007/08)
- the intended aims of the programme
- the level of the programme – its intellectual challenge and value – and its place in the national qualifications framework
- external reference points, including any relevant subject benchmark statements, national qualifications frameworks for higher education and, where appropriate, the requirements of professional and statutory and employers
- the concept of progression, so that the curriculum imposes an increasing level of demand on the learner during the course of the programme
- opportunities potentially available to students on completion of a programme
- the balance of the programme, for example in relation to academic and practical elements, personal development and academic outcomes, breadth and depth in the curriculum
- the coherence of the programme, to ensure that the overall experience of a student has a logic and an intellectual integrity that are related to clearly defined purposes
- the award title, to ensure it reflects the intended learning outcomes of the programme
- how the intended learning outcomes of the programme will be promoted, demonstrated and assessed
- the resources necessary and available to support the programme, both within the department and outside it.

- 3.2 In the light of the requirement during the period 2004/05 to 2006/07 to reduce HEFCE-funded student numbers to within the approved limits of the University's funding contract, the following criteria will normally be applied to the consideration of new proposals, and these should be born in mind by departments during the initial consideration of ideas for new provision.

- The proposal should assist in meeting (but not exceeding) agreed home/EU targets or
- it should improve the number and/or quality of applicants (to the agreed home/EU target) or
- it should replace another course or
- it should fall outside the HEFCE range (i.e. the fee should be set at or above the relevant independently-funded level).

4. Approval Process

4.1 The process of programme development and approval should be undertaken in the following order:

- Discussions in department
- Discussion between the Head of Department and the Dean (and with other departments in respect of multi-disciplinary provision)
- In the case of a postgraduate proposal, discussion between the Head of Department, the Dean, the Sub-Dean (Graduate Studies) and the Graduate Dean
- Early informal discussions with the Library and other relevant academic and support services are encouraged at this stage
- Inclusion of new programme in departmental planning statements presented to Budgets and Resources Committee*
- Decision taken by BRC as to whether programme can be offered within existing resource levels or whether (and at what stage) an application could be made for additional staffing or non-pay resources*
- Notification to Faculty Board Secretary to agree timetable for implementation
- Completion of initial proposal for submission to Faculty Board. This should comprise sections (A) to (I) of the programme approval form (see section 5 below)
- Referral to Faculty Board for approval in principle (at this stage Faculty Board should identify any concerns it may have, in principle, about the new development)
- Preparation in the department of programme documentation:
 - programme proposal form (section (J) onwards)
 - draft programme specification
 - existing and draft module specifications
 - draft scheme of assessment
- Submission of documentation to Faculty Board Secretary or, for postgraduate programmes, to the Secretary of the Board of Graduate Studies
- Compilation and review of relevant support documentation by the panel Secretary. This will include external examiners' reports for cognate provision offered by the department, departmental review reports and the relevant subject benchmark statement. The Secretary will notify the department of any relevant issues arising from this documentation

*Not normally applicable to Scheme 2

- Circulation of programme proposal form to Librarian, Director of Computer Centre, the Director of the Educational Development and Support Centre, the Director of Estates and Buildings and the Timetable Officer, with a request for written comments, which should be attached to the proposal form
- Consideration of proposal by a Programme Approval Panel (or for Scheme 3, by two members of a panel)
- Panel recommendation approved by Faculty Board and, for postgraduate programmes, by Board of Graduate Studies
- Fulfilment of conditions arising from panel's recommendations
- Finalisation of programme and module specifications
- Submission of programme and module specifications to Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee in order to confirm compliance with University Learning and Teaching Strategy
- Preparation of formal Regulations
- Subject to fulfilment of approval conditions, approval of Regulations by Faculty Board and Board of Graduate Studies
- Preparation of Prospectus/website entry and other promotional material
- Appointment of programme co-ordinator, external examiner, and establishment of a board of examiners, board of studies etc.
- Preparation of reading lists, new learning resources, teaching timetable, induction material, etc.

5. Programme proposal

- 5.1 Each section of the programme proposal form is listed below, with detailed instructions as to the completion of the section.
- 5.2 For programmes which are variations of existing provision only by virtue of the fact that the proposal incorporates the addition of a year abroad or in industry, departments need only complete the sections of the form required for initial Faculty Board approval (see below) together with sections J, M, N, O and P, in which specific attention should be drawn to the impact of the year out in terms of learning outcomes, progression into and from the year out, and the consequences for the scheme of assessment.

FIRST SECTION

(This constitutes the outline proposal, on the basis of which Faculty Board approval in principle may be granted. Proposals which bring together elements of existing provision, or which are designed to add a new feature to an existing course should focus on the added value of the new provision in terms of recruitment potential, students' educational experience and employability.)

- (A) **Programme details:** Faculty, lead department, collaborative departments, title of programme, programme co-ordinator, proposed date of commencement, proposed intake in first year, steady-state intake, minimum viable intake.
- (B) **Interdisciplinary programmes:** If the programme involves collaboration between two departments (for example, in a new joint degree), or brings together significant contributions from a number of different departments, the way in which this arrangement will be managed should be set out. For joint degrees, a lead department should be identified, which must be the first-named in the programme title, and for more complicated arrangements, a board of studies should normally be established.

- (C) **Reasons for introducing the programme:** Summarise the academic justification for the introduction of the new programme and explain its place within the range of programmes already offered by the department. Explain how the introduction of the programme will enhance the department's overall position and how it complies with the University's Mission Statement and Strategic Plan (web link to be inserted here).
- (D) **(1) Status of students on the programme:** Provide information on the extent to which the students recruited to the programme will be additional to the department's current student profile, or will constitute a substitution for existing provision. 'Additional' in this context should be broadly interpreted in order to highlight the implications not only for the department's teaching arrangements, but also its physical environment and for the University's support services (a programme in a new area might, for example, not lead to additional student load, but might require the purchase of new library holdings or have an impact on laboratory provision). Sufficient information should be provided here to enable the Librarian, the Director of the Computer Centre, the Director of EDSC and the Director of Estates and Buildings to provide the approval panel with a commentary on the broader implications of the new development.
- (2) Funding:** Indicate if you expect the programme to attract any sources of external funding (other than fees and HEFCE block grant) and explain how you anticipate students will fund their studies. (For full-time undergraduate programmes, the answer in relation to student funding will normally be Self/LEAs/Student Loans Company, but for postgraduate provision, the panel will wish to see evidence that consideration has been given to the issue of whether, if there is no source of external funding for either the programme or prospective students, the proposal has sufficient recruitment potential.)
- (E) **Market analysis:** Provide details of the research which the department has undertaken into the viability of the new programme. Statistical evidence and other supporting documentation should be included. The panel will accept evidence from sources such as past or current students, applicants, external examiners, employers, professional bodies, government policy documents, national admissions statistics, national or local initiatives, etc. The panel reserves the right to reject proposals which are not accompanied by convincing evidence that a market for the programme exists. The Director of Marketing can advise on the completion of this and the following section.
- (F) **National position:** Brief details (i.e. programme title and institution) should be provided of similar programmes offered elsewhere so that the panel can gain an impression of the likely competition for recruitment, and also assure itself that the programme is a suitable addition to this University's profile. The Academic Office and the Marketing Office can provide information about programmes offered elsewhere. Details should also be provided of the extent to which the proposal arises from, or is supported by, external examiners, professional or statutory bodies, or other experts independent of the University.

- (G) **Longer-term strategic issues:** An analysis of future capacity for growth beyond the steady state indicated in (A) above should be provided (taking into account current restrictions on HEFCE-funded growth, but commenting on long-term sustainability), together with an assessment of the implications of this in terms of the way the department intends to develop, the academic and structural impact of an expansion of the activity, and the links with existing or emerging teaching and research strategies.
- (H) **Programme aims:** Set out the overall aims of the programme, i.e. the department's broad academic purposes in offering the programme. The aims should be expressed in terms of what a graduate of the programme will be able to offer one or more of the stakeholders in higher education and should therefore be expressed in terms of some mixture of:
- meeting local, regional or national needs
 - preparation for the prosecution of research
 - preparation for the world of work, including satisfaction of professional body requirements
 - social goals, such as widening access to higher education or increasing the degree of student control over programme selection or pattern of study
 - enabling students to continue to appreciate or pursue independent study in the subject.
- (I) **Programme graduates:** If the programme is designed to meet any specific local, national or international employment needs, or if it is being introduced in response to any other external initiative which is likely to affect the employment prospects of programme graduates, details should be provided. Supporting evidence should be attached where available.

SECOND SECTION

(To be completed after Faculty Board approval in principle has been granted)

- (J) **Programme specification and learning outcomes:** A programme specification should be prepared in line with the requirements of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. Advice may be sought from the Chair of the relevant Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee or from the Assistant Secretary of the University's Learning and Teaching Committee (Amanda Potter – ap105@le.ac.uk). Any special features of the curriculum, including any interesting or innovative teaching or learning methods associated with the programme, or any aspect of provision which the department might feel is worthy of note can be recorded here.
- (K) **Proposed regulations entry:** If not incorporated in the programme specification, the formal regulations for the programme should be provided, broken down by year and semester and, for undergraduate programmes, complying with the requirement that modules should normally be of 10, 15 or 20 credits in length, that each semester should normally comprise 60 credits, and that one full-time year should constitute 120 credits. The titles of core modules should be provided, together with as much detail as possible about optional elements. The level of each module should also be provided.

- (L) **Entry requirements:** For undergraduate programmes, give the proposed entry grade profile for the programme, highlighting any acceptable alternatives to A levels (Access courses, etc). Specify any A level subjects which are a requirement for entry. For postgraduate programmes, give details of any non-standard entry requirements and the criteria by which applicants apparently meeting these will be assessed, and any provision for the accreditation of prior certificated learning.
- (M) **Progression rules:** It will be assumed that the scheme of assessment for the first and second years of undergraduate programmes will comply with normal Faculty rules on examination, compensation and progression. Details should be provided about any aspects of programme assessment which do not comply with standard procedures (e.g. where rules of compensation do not apply to core modules or where laboratory work must be passed at the first attempt). Any aspects of the programme which encourage progression should also be provided (e.g. if the programme overlaps with others to facilitate transfers of degree programme, or if there is any streaming of students to allow for the remedial teaching of subjects such as Mathematics).
- (N) **Scheme of assessment:** Details of the proposed scheme of assessment should be provided, with confirmation that the scheme itself, the levels of attainment within the programme, and the final award (including degree classifications for undergraduate degrees) comply with the Codes of Practice on Examining and their appendices (see <http://www.le.ac.uk/academic/quality/Codes/>). Cross-referral to QAA benchmarking requirements is also relevant here.
- (O) **External verification of standards:** For Scheme 1 proposals, a nomination for an external advisor should be provided, who should not be a current external examiner. For Scheme 2 and 3 proposals, the name of an external examiner (or other external expert) should be provided in case the panel wishes to seek external verification of programme standards during the approval process. See section 6.4 above for further details.
- (P) **Student placements:** Provide details of departmental arrangements for the administration of any off-campus periods of registration associated with the programme (sandwich years, exchange programmes, etc). Details of support to be given to students before and during the placement should be provided, together with information about specific entry requirements and prerequisites such as language training. The method of assessment for the placement should also be given, and its place within the overall scheme of assessment for the degree. In addition, mechanisms for retrieval of failure both immediately before and following the period away from the University should be given. The panel will utilise the University's Code of Practice on Student Placements to assess proposals incorporating a year out (see <http://www.le.ac.uk/academic/quality/Codes/>), and proposers should ensure that they are familiar with this document.

- (Q) **Timetable implications:** Any adverse (or beneficial) implications for the central timetabling and room bookings systems should be provided. Advice should be sought if necessary from the Timetable and Room Bookings section of the Academic Office.
- (R) **Staff Development requirements:** If the introduction of the programme requires staff training or development in new teaching/learning techniques, or in the management of new equipment or facilities, details should be provided, particularly where such training might require an input from the Staff Development Centre.
- (S) **Impact on academic services, student support services and estates:** The information provided above should be sufficient to permit those responsible for providing support to students on the programme and for providing a suitable study environment to assess the implications of the proposal. If not, further information should be provided below as to any new demands on existing systems. It is particularly important to note whether the students are additional, leading to extra demands on all systems, and in terms of Library needs, whether the new programme includes subject areas where new Library holdings will be required, or where extra demands on existing book/periodical provision will be created. Before its submission to the programme approval panel, this proposal should be circulated to the Librarian, the Director of the Computer Centre, the Director of the Educational Development and Support Centre, the Director of Estates and Buildings and the University Timetable Officer for comment. If the proposal is approved, it is the responsibility of the Head of Department to ensure that those responsible for departmental liaison with the Library, the Computer Centre and the Timetable Officer are fully briefed as to any new requirements, and that these are implemented before the programme commences.
- (T) **Distance Learning Programmes:** The following information should be provided for all programmes which are to be offered by distance learning: course administration arrangements in place to promote and facilitate its delivery, including the role of agents; the role of part-time tutors and the department's policy on their appointment, training and monitoring; student support arrangements, e.g. student support groups and networks; the use of residential schools on the programme; policy on dissertation supervision; methods of obtaining and disseminating student feedback. The panel will utilise the University's Code of Practice on Distance Learning to assess proposals involving delivery by distance learning (web address <http://www.le.ac.uk/academic/quality/Codes/>).

6. Proposal Authorisation

- 6.1 The final version of the proposal form should be signed by the Head of the lead department and by the heads of any other contributing departments before its submission to the relevant panel secretary.

- 6.2 Programme Approval Panels meet four times a year. The dates for the current year are set out in the preface to this Code. All programme proposals must be submitted in time to be considered on the scheduled day. Programme approval panels comprise:

A Pro-Vice-Chancellor (in the Chair)

The Dean of the Faculty (or his or her representative)

The Graduate Dean (in the case of a postgraduate programme)

Two members drawn from a Senate-approved list (see below), neither of whom should be from the proposed programme's home department

An external adviser

A member of staff from the Academic Office as secretary

- 6.3 Once each year, Senate approves (*via* the Standing Committee of Deans) a list of potential panel members based on two nominations per Faculty. The nominations are normally made by the Dean from members of the Faculty with relevant expertise (for example, the Chair of the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee or the Sub-Dean (Graduate Studies)).

- 6.4 Under Scheme 1, the Head of Department should nominate (utilising section O of the approval form) an external adviser, who should normally be a senior member of staff working in the subject area of the new programme, in a university of similar mission. In order to avoid any conflict of interest, the external adviser should not be a current external examiner. Any informal discussions with suitable individuals should include information about the dates fixed for panel meetings. The nomination must be approved by the Chair of the panel.

Under Schemes 2 and 3, the Head of the Department should nominate a current external examiner or other expert external to the University, whom the panel may at its discretion consult about the academic standards of the programme. The individual should be informally contacted by the Head of Department in advance of being nominated to confirm his or her willingness to be consulted. The panel secretary will conduct consultations on behalf of the Chair, and will also notify individuals should the panel not wish to utilise their services.

- 6.5 The Panel will meet privately to consider potential issues arising out of the proposal, and then will meet with the Head of Department, the co-ordinator of the new proposal, representatives from contributing departments and any others the department may wish to have present. If a programme is to be delivered in collaboration with an external institution then one or more members of that institution should also be present. Members of the panel will question those present about the proposal before reaching a decision in private.

- 6.6 The panel's report to the Faculty Board or the Board of Graduate Studies must include:
- a record of those in attendance
 - a record of the material considered by the panel
 - a summary of the proposal
 - a record of the panel's deliberations and recommendations
 - a record of missing information, matters to be addressed and areas of concern (if any)
 - a timetable for the reconsideration of the proposal (if necessary)
- 6.7 For undergraduate certificate-level provision being considered in paper form (Scheme 3), two panel members will be assigned to scrutinise the submission. Their report will be as in 6.6 above, with the names of the panel members recorded instead of those in attendance at a meeting .
- 6.8 Where the panel's approval is conditioned on the completion of additional requirements, these must be approved by the panel Chair before formal approval of the proposal can be granted by the Faculty Board or Board of Graduate Studies.
- 6.9 At the conclusion of the approval process, departments will be provided with a copy of the report, additional feedback or information deemed necessary by the panel Chair in the light of any post-meeting discussions, and a checklist of actions required before the programme can commence. These will vary from programme to programme, but will always include the requirements set out in the last three bullet points of 4.1 above.