

## Section 7: BIMM Institute Higher Education Validated Course Approval & Modification Procedures

### Objectives

In line with the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education (UK) and the National Framework of Qualifications (Ireland) BIMM Institute will:

- Make clear the criteria against which course proposals are assessed;
- Define processes, roles and responsibilities for course design, development and approval and communicate them to those involved;
- Make use of reference points and external expertise in course design;
- Involve students in course design and in processes for course development and approval.

### Course & Module Approval

All curriculum development is planned at the BIMM Institute Academic Board (AcBd) – with approval development and review activities delegated to its sub-committee the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee (LTEC) and are aligned with strategic planning and objectives set by the BIMM Institute Board of Directors.

New courses and modules are written by BIMM Institute course development teams, which will include Course Leaders, Module Leaders and external advisors and will be led by a senior member of staff.

The development and approval process will be supported by the Academic Development and Quality Assurance (ADQA) team.

The process for approval has four stages as follows:

1. Outline Stage One Course Proposal is submitted for approval to LTEC (signed by College Principal, BIMM Group Finance Director and BIMM Group Managing Director);
2. Outline proposal is then submitted to the awarding body for approval;
3. An internal course approval event (stage three) is held to scrutinise the proposed course (run by ADQA using staff appointed by the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee (LTEC));
4. The proposal proceeds to an external approval/validation event (awarding institution run).

### Stage Two & Stage Four Approval Events

Stage two and stage four events are convened by the awarding institutions – stage two is normally a paper-based exercise conducted by committee, but stage four involves attendance at an approval event which is conducted by a panel of experts appointed by the awarding institution including the following indicative roles:

- Chair – a senior academic from the institution
- Subject expert(s) – academics with expertise in the area of the proposed course
- Quality expert – a member of institutional staff with expertise in regulations and quality assurance
- External assessors – often up to two external experts academic and industry based
- A secretary and note taker

Panels will also want to meet with BIMM Institute students and a range of staff from BIMM Institute including teaching and support staff. They may also wish to have a tour of the BIMM Institute College delivering the proposed course.

The BIMM Institute course development team will normally be invited to give a short presentation on the context and proposed provision at the beginning of the meeting.

Validation panels will relay their findings at the end of the meeting and decisions will fall into the following broad categories:

- Course approved (with conditions (which must be addressed by a specific timescale) and recommendations (which BIMM Institute should consider and respond);
- Course to be re-submitted with conditions and recommendations;
- Course not approved (a reason will be given)

### **Stage Three Approval**

Stage three events will be run along the same lines as stage four, a panel will be convened by LTEC, chaired by a senior member of ADQA with two internal academics, and a Student Representative. An external assessor will also be appointed to the panel, proposed by ADQA and approved by the chair of LTEC.

For each course being approved there will be a half-day meeting between the panel and the course development team. Where the panel is considering a course that already exists the panel will want to meet with BIMM Institute students from the existing course.

### **Roles of Members of Stage Three Approval Panels**

#### **The Chair**

The role of the Chair is to regulate the conduct of the event. The Chair will open proceedings by introducing members of the Panel and explaining the purpose of the event. Throughout the event, the Chair will seek to ensure that different points of view are given a fair hearing whilst, at the same time, ensuring that the schedule is adhered to and that discussions are brought to a close within the time allotted. Towards the end of the event, the Validation Panel will hold a private meeting to consider its conclusions, which the Chair will then present, orally, to the full forum. The secretary will record the outcomes, which will then be approved by the chair and sent to the course development team in a formal letter.

#### **Internal Academic Panel Members**

The internal academic panel members pay particular attention to the appropriateness and contemporaneity of the proposed curriculum and the resources available to support it. They will also have familiarity with BIMM Institutes' frameworks for quality assurance and academic standards/and the enhancement of learning and teaching and be able to comment on these issues and the quality of learning opportunities provided by the proposed course.

#### **The External Subject Specialist**

The external member of the Validation Panel is an expert from the field in which the course is based. The external assessor has a particular responsibility for ensuring that the quality and standards of the course are comparable with those offered throughout UK and Irish Higher Education, and for this reason they are normally drawn from another Higher Education Institution.

**Student Representative (if available – some events may run outside term-time)**

A student rep from our existing pool will be a member of the panel with a particular focus on student support and the quality of learning opportunities provided by the proposed course.

**Outcomes at Stage Three**

Approval Panels will relay their findings to the course development team at the end of the meeting and confirm that the course is approved to go to stage four (with Conditions - which must be addressed, and Recommendations: which, the BIMM Institute course team must consider and formally respond to).

The secretary of the panel will write formally to the course team once the Chair of the Approval Panel has approved the findings. The course team will then be asked to respond formally to the Approval Panel's findings (to an agreed deadline) before the course is formally approved to progress to stage four with the stage three approval letter being signed off by the chair of the approval panel on behalf of LTEC. LTEC will receive the stage three approval letter sent to the course development team confirming that the conditions and recommendations have been met, alongside a detailed report from the approval panel secretary approved by the approval panel Chair. ADQA will file this correspondence alongside the report and a finalized set of course and module specifications and year one handbooks: forming the definitive record of the approved course against which later modifications will be made.

**Minor & Significant Changes to Courses and Modules Once Approved/Validated**

Minor modifications to modules and courses can be dealt with through drafting a short document detailing the changes to the module or course (including a statement on the academic rationale for the change) and including the relevant documentation marked up with the proposed changes using the 'track changes' function in Microsoft Word. After changes have been formulated they are passed on for approval (see appendices 1-3).

New courses (and any significant changes to existing provision) must be presented for consideration and approval by LTEC (using LTEC templates), and then the relevant senior academic committee at the awarding institution. If changes are very substantial the awarding institution may insist on revalidation of the course.

The criteria for judging whether a change to a course or module is significant is simple: any change that effects the aims, learning outcomes and/or makes major changes (such as the assessment mode/type, weighting or timing) to the assessment of those outcomes is significant. Changes to content and delivery of teaching and learning (including clarifying assessment briefs, updating resource and reading lists, staffing lists etc.) are generally not considered as significant. However, it is important that changes to assessment briefs are reflected across all colleges to ensure parity of student experience. If in doubt, please consult the ADQA team for advice.

Please note that this process can take longer than you might expect- changes proposed at the beginning of an academic year may not be approved until the summer term and changes to published regulations, policies and assessment dates are not generally allowed in year (they need to be approved for the next academic year so as not to disadvantage current students or applicants).

**New Course Approval Process**

Our awarding partners have strict rules on the timelines for new course development, therefore any proposal needs to be made at least six months in advance of the final external validation event. The

ADQA team hold records of all validation and revalidation schedules and can advise on appropriate timelines for new course development in order to avoid scheduling clashes.

Please also bear in mind that the outline proposal sets in stone the key attributes of a new course or module including course and module names, fees, admission tariffs and financial costings. Any changes (however minor to the specification) may require a re-submission of the specification to the awarding institution, which is likely to delay the process significantly.

### **Stage One Course Proposal Document (Internal & external phases – new courses only)**

For the Stage One Course Proposal Document please use the pro-forma available via ADQA. The outline includes the following key sections (as awarding institution requirements do have some small differences it is important that the form is completed in full and this will be edited before submission):

- Title and award of course
- BIMM Institutes that will offer the course
- Proposed start date
- Name of Course Leader(s)
- Proposed entry requirements
- Academic rationale for proposed course
- Relationship with BIMM Institute Learning and Teaching Strategy
- Market demand for the course
- Proposed structure of course (by term including module types, credit weighting and whether modules are new or existing)
- Resources required to deliver course in first three years
- Projected student numbers for the first three years
- Signatories and comments from ADQA

Date for submission for awarding body approval: this will depend on the awarding institution – please contact the ADQA team for confirmation of possible dates.

### **Stage Three: Internal Approval (see approval template)**

For the internal approval event two documents are required: the approved and signed Stage One Course Approval Document as detailed above (with confirmation of approval from the awarding institution) and a course validation document (pro-forma(s) available from ADQA) including the following key sections:

#### **1. Background Information & Course Development**

- Background to the proposal: the rationale and reasons for introducing the course, the relationship to the institution's plans, how it differs from and complements existing or related courses.
- A statement of the target market, details of market research and consultation with employers, prospective students and relevant professional bodies: all of which contribute to ascertain demand for the course and competition by other providers.
- Target and minimum and maximum student numbers for recruitment in each year and pathway for the period of proposed validation.
- If the proposed course is replacing an existing course, include details of consultations with students over the change.
- Details of course management arrangements.

- BIMM Institute colleges where the course is to be delivered.

## **2. Curriculum**

- An explanation of the curriculum framework where this leads to a number of exit point and awards.
- A discussion of the curriculum content, its coherence, breadth, depth and progression. The relationship between the compulsory and optional elements and the balance of teaching, learning and assessment needs.

## **3. Course Specification**

- The awards and FHEQ level.
- The aims and learning outcomes of the course(s), stating how the outcomes meet the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications descriptors for the relevant awards.
- Core structure diagram, showing the order of modules, when they will be taken and a rationale for the order.
- Core and optional units and the credit volume and level of each component.
- A 'curriculum map' showing the outcomes of modules and assessment against the intended learning outcomes of the course as a whole.
- An explanation as to how the course design and development has taken account of any relevant subject benchmark statements. It is suggested that core benchmark statements are listed together with reflective statements on how the course or its outcomes are aligned to these.
- Details of all the elements assessed, the assessment mode and timing including resit modes
- Minimum and maximum periods within which a student must complete the course and associated assessment, including re-sits.
- Any provision for deferment.
- Relationship or articulation of the course with existing internal or external courses
- Details of any bridging units or special induction arrangements.
- Arrangements for practical experience and work placements.

Note: course specifications are the minimum level of information that prospective and registered students should have in relation to a course and therefore must be approved for publication to students.

## **4. Teaching & Learning Strategies**

- Details of strategies for delivering the course, achieving the intended outcomes and facilitating or supporting the students' learning and progression.
- Details of any placements, trips or visits, including specific aims and learning outcomes, criteria and approval processes for suitable placements, responsibility for finding and arranging placement, and supervision arrangements.
- Arrangements for preparing and supervising students undertaking dissertations or projects.
- Responsibilities of students.

## **5. Assessment**

- Details of the assessment strategy, including how the methods will assess the outcomes of

- the course and the philosophy guiding the selection of methods.
- Assessment criteria and their relationship to learning outcomes
- The pass mark for all units.
- Progression requirements for students to proceed to subsequent stages of the course.
- Assessment weightings for the overall scheme and within specific units.
- Deadlines for submission of work.
- Specification of which elements must be passed to obtain the award and specification of any elements, which cannot be the subject of compensation or condonement.
- Any course specific criteria for the award.
- Use of unweighted formative and diagnostic assessment.
- Mechanisms for provision of feedback to students on assessed work including format, standards and timescale.

## **6. *Module Specifications (see template)***

Module Specifications are technical documents that record the key attributes of a module that are formally approved within this approval process and once approved the specification acts as a definitive record of the module against which any (future) major modifications are made. Any change to the information in a Module Specification is considered to be major.

Each Module Specification should contain details of:

- Proposed title and code
- Academic year of introduction
- Name of Module Leader
- Credits
- FHEQ/QCF level
- Description of module
- Course(s) that will use the module
- Learning outcomes
- Assessment (including mode, subcomponents, learning outcomes assessed, duration/length, week of submission, submission point and weighting)
- Teaching and learning methods and contact hours
- Module specific resources required List of core texts and recommended reading (appended)

## **7. *Admissions***

- Entry requirements including admissions criteria for the course, taking account of the abilities, aptitudes, skills, qualifications and experiences which would indicate potential to succeed on the course and how these might be demonstrated.
- Any requirements of statutory or regulatory bodies, such as medical or criminal record checks.
- Admission by AP(E)L.
- Course fees.

## **8. *Staffing***

- A discussion of the human resources required to deliver the course.
- List of the proposed staff who will manage or teach on the course, including details of vacant posts. The list should note the proposed responsibilities for each staff member (for example: course leader) and whether full or part time, permanent or sessional staff. Where staff have commitments to other courses, these should be specified and quantified.
- Curriculum vitae for each of the teaching staff.

- Projected staff development needs.

### **9. *Learning & Other Resources***

A discussion of the resource requirements for the course, including:

- Details of library resources necessary to support the course.
- Details of relevant multimedia, information technology and computing resources necessary for the course.
- Teaching accommodation.
- Workshop, laboratory or studio space and any other specialist teaching resources or accommodation available to support the course.
- Equipment needs.

The discussion should indicate whether existing resources are expected to be adequate or whether new resources will be required to run the course and how these are to be secured.

## Appendix 1: University of Sussex Validated Course & Module Modifications Procedure

### Context

At BIMM Institute Higher Education (HE) courses we run are validated by one of our university partners. This procedure is designed for validated provision.

Validated provision is contracted with our university partners and as part of this contract we submit our course proposals to a formal validation or approval process with the relevant university. Courses are then periodically reviewed and re-approved on a cycle of anywhere between 2 and 6 years. This means that any significant changes to validated provision must be approved by the validating university (to ensure we do not breach our contractual agreement) as well as having been consulted on and approved at BIMM Institute to ensure academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are maintained for our students.

### Types of modification

There are two modification types covered by this process as follows:

1. **Minor Modifications:** Revising Schemes of Work (providing this does not remove content as specified in the information provided to applicants); updating reading lists, resource and staffing information.
2. **Major Modifications:** changes to module title; changes to module/course learning outcomes; changes to module assessment briefs and weightings; changes to module assessment strategy; change of course title and/or exit awards; changes in professional accreditation; changes to course learning outcomes; significant changes to the overall approach to teaching, learning and assessment strategy across the course; changes to mode of delivery; changes to curriculum structure; changes to the criteria for admission; extending the use of an existing module to another course as a core module; approval of new modules for inclusion in an existing course; deletion of a module from a course; variation from the relevant BIMM Institute and/or University regulations.

College course teams should be mindful of the cumulative effect of a significant number of individual changes to a course and must ensure that all changes are approved through the appropriate process, and clearly communicated to students, staff and other relevant stakeholders in a timely manner. Revalidation or re-approval of an existing course outside of the standard cycle should be initiated where substantial curriculum change is required covering several major modifications at once. This may occur, for example, in the case of changing professional or industry requirements, or where the addition of a significant number of core modules results in a change to the course learning outcomes. The BIMM ADQA team can advise teams on whether changes proposed may trigger re-approval/re-validation.

### Process

It is important that staff and students are consulted regarding all modifications. Therefore, for all three modification types, changes should be brought to the relevant Board of Studies (BoS) for consultation before seeking approval internally or externally. The only exceptions to this rule are changes that are made solely based on BIMM Institute staff academic judgement, these are: staffing information, reading lists, and ensuring content currency.

The approval process is outlined in the table below.\*

**Outline of the modifications approval process:**

Process	Minor Change	Major Change	Revalidation
<i>Consultation</i>	External examiner; Course Team; Students (via BoS); ADQA	External examiner; Students (BoS); Other relevant stakeholders (Industry Advisory Panel or IAP); Course Team; ADQA	See BIMM Institute policy on approval: <a href="http://www.bimm.co.uk/academic-quality/">http://www.bimm.co.uk/academic-quality/</a>  See also relevant university policies
<i>Documentation Required</i>	Revised course documentation	Revised course documentation plus documents required by university partners	
<i>Approval by</i>	Changes to assessment briefs must be approved by Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee (LTEC)  All other changes must be approved by the BoS in affected colleges, changes made outside the term time committee cycle must be approved by the BoS chairs.	LTEC and then final approval from relevant university committee	
<i>Reported to</i>	LTEC and relevant university committee	Academic Board and relevant university committee	

To make deadlines for the appropriate university partner committee, changes may be approved by Chair's Action on behalf of LTEC and/or Academic Board.

\*Please note that course teams need to consult with ADQA on the timing of proposals for modification as there are strict rules set by our university partners on when modifications can be proposed and considered.

## Appendix 2: Policy for Exemptions to University of Sussex-Validated Delivery

### Context

It is understood that under certain, rare, circumstances local factors may impact one BIMM Institute college that results in a necessary deviation from the validated delivery. This document outlines the conditions under which an exemption may be applied for and the process for doing so.

### Policy

#### 1. Exemptions covered by the policy

Under this policy, a college can only seek an exemption from the validated delivery of a module, strictly limited to:

- The weeks in which the module runs
- The week(s) in which assessments run

Only the weeks in which a module runs, or assessment is delivered can be moved; colleges may not increase or decrease the number of delivery/assessment weeks.

#### 2. Conditions for receiving an exemption

Exemptions will only be granted if all of the following can be demonstrated by the college:

- a) That delivering the module as validated is affected by some local factor that applies to the college in question;
- b) That failing to change the delivery would result in a negative student experience or a drop academic standards;
- c) That changing the delivery does not result in a negative student experience or a drop in academic standards;
- d) That no reasonable alternatives exist to changing the delivery.

#### 3. When exemptions will not be granted

Exemptions will not be granted under the following circumstances:

##### **a) Student benefit not linked to local factors**

If the sole rationale behind a requested exemption is based on pedagogic arguments involving general course structure, or any other such argument which is generic and not linked to a specific locale, these will be denied. If there is a clear benefit to student learning which is affected by changing the course this advantage should be experienced by all students. The change should be made to the course as whole and apply to all colleges through the standard major/minor modifications process.

##### **b) Changing the delivery would result in a substantial negative experience for students.**

If changing the delivery of the module from the validated provision would create substantially negative student experience the request for an exemption is likely to be denied. When considering any such request the potential detriment to the students will be weighed against the obstacles that the college is facing. As such, exemptions which would result in a negative student experience which are solely based on resourcing issues are likely to be denied on the basis that colleges should be committed to protecting the student experience and should be reasonably expected to provide all necessary resources.

### Process

Colleges must complete the pro-forma available from ADQA and send it to the chair of LTEC by 1st February. If the college has outlined a claim that clearly addresses the conditions in section 2 of the

policy, the request will be put to the Term 2 meeting of Learning Teaching & Enhancement Committee (LTEC) for consideration.

LTEC shall consider the request and make a judgement as to whether the request meets the conditions in section 2 of the policy. The following outcomes are possible:

1. Approval of the requested exemption to go to Curriculum Development & Approval Sub-Committee (CDASC) (with or without conditions).
2. Where one part of the application is felt to be lacking, LTEC may withhold judgement and request a resubmission with conditions. This will be considered on Chair's Action before any possible submission to CDASC.
3. Where the requested change is perceived to be to wholly beneficial to students, LTEC may request that the change is applied to all colleges through the minor/major modifications process.
4. Denial of the request.

## Appendix 3: Technological University Dublin Validated Course & Module Modifications Procedure

### Context

At BIMM Institute the majority of Higher Education (HE) courses we run are validated by one of our university partners, with the exception of a small amount of franchised provision. This procedure is designed for validated provision and staff should refer to the relevant awarding universities own procedures for policy and process in regard to franchised awards.

Validated provision is contracted with our university partners and, as part of this contract, we submit our course proposals to a formal validation or approval process with the relevant university. TUD validated courses are periodically reviewed and re-approved on a 5-year cycle. This means that any significant changes to validated provision must be approved by TUD (to ensure we do not breach our contractual agreement), as well as having been consulted on and approved at BIMM Institute to ensure academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are maintained for our students.

### Types of modification

There are three modification types covered by this process as follows:

1. **Annual Updating:** revising curriculum content to ensure currency; updating reading lists, course-notes, staffing information and assessment overview and content, etc.; other changes having no impact on module learning outcomes or assessment specification.
2. **Module Modifications:** changes to Module title (requires new Module code): Module aims and learning outcomes; Module assessment structure and weighting; Module ECTS credits.
3. **Programme Modifications** changes to pre- or co-requisite modules; extending the use of an existing module to another existing course; approval of new modules for inclusion in or removal of existing modules from an existing course; change of course title or exit award/s available; course learning outcomes; changes to teaching, learning and assessment across the course; curriculum structure; criteria for admission; variation from the relevant BIMM and/or university regulations.

College course teams should be mindful of the cumulative effect of a significant number of individual changes to a course and must ensure that all changes are approved through the appropriate process, and clearly communicated to students, staff and other relevant stakeholders in a timely manner. Revalidation or re-approval of an existing course outside of the standard cycle should be initiated where substantial curriculum change is required covering several major modifications at once. This may occur, for example, in the case of changing professional or industry requirements, or where the addition of a significant number of core modules results in a change to the course learning outcomes.

The BIMM Academic Development and Quality Assurance (ADQA) team can advise on whether proposed changes may trigger re-approval/re-validation.

### Process

It is important that staff and students are consulted regarding all modifications. Therefore, for all three modification types, changes should be brought to the relevant Board of Studies (BoS) for consultation before seeking approval internally and/or externally.

The approval process is outlined in the table below\*

**Outline of the modifications approval process:**

<b>Process</b>	<b>Annual Updating</b>	<b>Module Change</b>	<b>Program Change</b>	<b>Revalidation</b>
<i>Consultation</i>	Staff and students	External Examiner; Course Team; Students (via Programme Committee); ADQA	External Examiner; Students (via Programme Committee); Other relevant stakeholders (e.g. Industry Advisory Panel); Course Team; ADQA	See BIMM Institute policy on approval: <a href="http://www.bimm.co.uk/academic-quality/">http://www.bimm.co.uk/academic-quality/</a>  See also relevant university policies
<i>Documentation Required</i>	Revised module guide marked up in track changes	Revised course documentation plus documents required by university partner (M2 doc)	Revised course documentation plus documents required by university partner (M1&M2 docs)	
<i>Approval by</i>	Programme Committee	LTEC and then final approval from relevant university committee	LTEC; External Examiner; Final approval from relevant university committee	
<i>Reported to</i>	Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee (LTEC)	Academic Board, Academic Quality Assurance Committee (AQAC)	Academic Board: Relevant university committee	

To make deadlines for the appropriate university partner committee, changes may be approved by Chair's Action on behalf of LTEC and/or Academic Board.

\*Please note that course teams need to consult with ADQA on the timing of proposals for modification as there are strict rules set by our university partners on when modifications can be proposed and considered.