**Note of guidance for external reviewers**

Dear External reviewer,

Firstly, thank you for agreeing to act as an external reviewer for the University as part of its process for approving new courses or major changes to existing courses. A robust approval process for new courses or major changes to courses is a central part of the University’s mechanisms for ensuring that its students and the wider public can have confidence in the academic standards of its awards and the quality of the learning opportunities we provide.

This letter outlines the new course and major change approval process, how your review fits into that process, and how your comments will be considered.

**Aim of the course approvals process (major changes and new course proposals)**

The process aims to ensure that the following have been considered:

* the academic case for expansion or change in the subject and category concerned including fit with the department/faculty, division and university strategy and priorities;
* the potential of the course to attract high quality students in sufficient numbers to ensure the viability of the programme;
* the availability of supervisors and appropriate departmental and central facilities and support (IT, library and subject specific resources);
* the ability of the faculty/department to provide appropriate organisational support;
* the capacity of the collegiate University to meet the students’ wider support needs;
* the financial implications for the department or faculty and the wider university community;
* the level of risk involved in each new course or major change proposal, including the means proposed for its delivery, and the required level of resource necessary to ensure that the required outcomes of the new or changed course can be achieved;
* the views of students;
* the views of an external subject specialist and, where relevant, an industry professional; and
* the views of other departments which might be involved in or affected by the introduction of the course or changes to the course.

And that the proposed course is, or continues to be:

* academically sound, with clear aims and learning outcomes and a teaching and assessment methodology which supports those aims.
* aligned with:
* the [*University awards framework*](https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/university-awards-framework) (and consequently the qualification and level descriptors set out in the UK Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ));
* the relevant subject benchmark statement; and
* any specific requirements set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies;
* designed inclusively to take into account the needs of a diverse student body.

**Structure of the process**

Proposals originate and are developed within a department or faculty. Formal scrutiny is then undertaken through the appropriate bodies of the division[[1]](#footnote-1). Once a proposal has received initial academic scrutiny by the division it is sent out for external review.

The reason we involve an external reviewer is that they provide a subject specialist perspective outside of the department or faculty putting forward the proposal. They can comment on matters of quality and standards that are specific to that discipline area and make comparisons against national standards and similar courses elsewhere.

The comments from the external reviewer are considered by the division as part of its decision whether or not to recommend the course for approval to the University through its Education Committee.

**Completing your report**

You should receive the:

* full course proposal
* a series of questions which it would be useful for you to address in your review.

However, if you have any comments which fall outside these questions please feel free to include them.

**External review questions (new course proposals)**

Please comment on the potential of the course to attract high quality students in sufficient numbers to ensure the viability of the course.

Please comment on the aims and intended learning outcomes of the proposed course in respect of:

* subject content;
* subject specific skills; and
* general, transferrable skills.

Please comment as to whether the aims and intended learning outcomes of the programme meet the subject benchmark statements, the relevant level descriptor of the Framework of Higher Education Qualifications[[2]](#footnote-2) and standards set by professional bodies (where relevant).

Please comment on the suitability of the proposed methods of teaching and assessment including the suitability of the type and spread of assessment, in relation to the intended aims and learning outcomes of the course, and, to the best of your knowledge, in comparison with similar courses elsewhere.

Please comment as to whether the design of the syllabus will enable the aims and intended learning outcomes to be met in respect of:

* subject content
* subject specific skills
* general, transferable skills
* progression of skills and knowledge through the course.

If not, please indicate ways in which this might be addressed.

Do you consider that the course takes appropriate account of recent developments in the subject? If not, please indicate ways in which this might be addressed.

Do you consider that the course is appropriate to prepare graduates for employment in the relevant sectors (for industrial, scientific and professional courses)? If not, please indicate ways in which this might be addressed.

Do you have any other comments on any aspect of the documentation?

**External review questions (major changes to courses proposals)**

Please comment on the impact of the changes to the course on its ability to attract high quality students in sufficient numbers to ensure the viability of the course.

Please comment on whether the aims and intended learning outcomes are still valid or have been appropriately amended in light of the changes to the course, particularly in respect of:

* subject content;
* subject specific skills; and
* general, transferrable skills.

Please comment as to whether the (revised) aims and intended learning outcomes of the course continue to meet the subject benchmark statements, the relevant level descriptor of the Framework of Higher Education Qualifications[[3]](#footnote-3) and standards set by professional bodies (where relevant).

Please comment on the suitability of the proposed changes to methods of teaching and/or assessment including the suitability of the type and spread of assessment, in relation to the (revised) aims and learning outcomes of the course, and, to the best of your knowledge, in comparison with similar courses elsewhere.

Please comment as to whether changes to the design of the syllabus will enable the aims and intended learning outcomes to continue to be met in respect of:

* subject content
* subject specific skills
* general, transferable skills
* progression of skills and knowledge through the course.

If not, please indicate ways in which this might be addressed.

Do you consider that the changes to the course take appropriate account of recent developments in the subject? If not, please indicate ways in which this might be addressed.

Do you consider that the course continues to prepare graduates for employment in the relevant sectors (for industrial, scientific and professional courses) as a result of the changes? If not, please indicate ways in which this might be addressed.

Do you have any other comments on any aspect of the documentation?

1. The University is structured into departments and faculties which are entities at the same level, these are grouped together in four divisions (and the Department for Continuing Education). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/qualifications-frameworks> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/qualifications-frameworks> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)