



Procedure for Validation of a Programme Leading to New Major Award

Document Area	Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement
Document Function/ Owner	Vice President for Academic Affairs & Registrar
Author	Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team
Required Approval	Academic Programmes Committee of Academic Council (ACAPC)

Issued Document Location

Internal Staff Portal / Hub	YES (default repository)
Internal Student Portal / Hub	No
ATU Website	No
Issue Date	03/07/2023 Effective date 01/09/2023

Table of Contents

1. Purpose	4
2. Scope	4
3. Reference Documents	4
4. Procedure	4
4.1 Stage 1 Initial Planning and Scoping	5
4.2 Stage 2 Faculty Endorsement	5
4.2.1 Submission of New Programme Proposal Form	5
4.2.2 Faculty Executive Review	5
4.2.3 Approval to proceed to Outline Permission Stage	6
4.3 Stage 3 Outline Permission	6
4.3.1 Outline Permission Request	6
4.3.2 UPT APPC Review	6
4.3.3 Communication of Decision	7
4.4 Stage 4 Detailed Development	7
4.4.1 Co-ordination of Programme Development	7
4.4.2 Planning for validation	7
4.4.3 Developing the Programme Specification	7
4.4.4 Completion of Programme Specification	8
4.5 Stage 5 Validation	8
4.5.1 Internal Validation	8
4.5.2 Internal Validation Report	8
4.5.3 External Validation	9
4.5.4 External Validation Report	10
4.6 Stage 6 Approval	11
5. Associated Documents Generated by this Procedure	11
5.1 Forms and Templates	11
6. Measurement of Effectiveness of this procedure	12
7. Revision History	12
Appendix 1 Outline of the Procedure for the Validation of a Major Award	13
Appendix 2 Submitting documentation to the Quality Office	14

Appendix 3 Outline of Programme Specification.....15

1. Purpose

This procedure supports *AQAE003 Developing and Validating New Taught Programmes Policy*, which articulates the principles and standards underpinning the University's approach to developing and validating new programmes. The policy outlines the main stages in the process for developing and validating new programmes and this procedure gives the detailed steps to validate a programme which leads to new major award, in adherence with that policy.

2. Scope

This procedure applies to staff involved in developing and validating new major awards for taught programmes leading to awards at Level 6 to Level 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). This procedure can also be extended to proposed embedded programmes which lead to minor awards. Separate validation processes are not required where a major award and linked embedded awards are proposed concurrently.

The *Procedure for Proposing a New Award Title* and/or the *Procedure for Proposing a New Award Standard* must be implemented where a new award title and/or award standard is proposed for the new programme. This should be completed in advance or in parallel with this procedure.

3. Reference Documents

AQAE003 Developing and Validating New Taught Programmes Policy

4. Procedure

The process for validating a new programme leading to major award has 6 stages:

Stage 1	Initial Planning and Scoping
Stage 2	Faculty Endorsement
Stage 3	Outline Permission
Stage 4	Detailed Development
Stage 5	Validation
Stage 6	Approval

The steps required of each stage are detailed below and Appendix 1 provides a schematic overview.

New programme and module documentation is managed through the Academic Module Manager (AMM) application. Users are assigned roles for the use of AMM during the development of programmes by the lead proposer.

The submission of documentation to the Quality Office is also required at various stages in the procedure. Details on how to submit documentation to the Quality Office is contained in Appendix 2.

4.1 Stage 1 Initial Planning and Scoping

4.1.1 Research and Development

The Programme Development Team (PDT) conducts its research and development for a new programme in accordance with the *AQAE003 Developing and Validating New Taught Programmes Policy* and the *AQAE004 Programme Design Policy*. The PDT should use the *New Programme Proposal Form, Programme Specification (Major Award) template* and the *Module Template* to guide the research and development of the programme proposal.

4.1.2 Completion of New Programme Proposal Form

The lead proposer of the PDT will co-ordinate the completion of the *New Programme Proposal Form*. This should be completed via AMM (preferable) or on the template provided where AMM is not yet available.

4.2 Stage 2 Faculty Endorsement

4.2.1 Submission of New Programme Proposal Form

Once satisfied that the proposal is sufficiently developed, the lead proposer of the PDT will submit the completed *New Programme Proposal Form* electronically to the Faculty Executive for their review.

4.2.2 Faculty Executive Review

The Faculty Executive will meet to consider the proposal outlined in the *New Programme Proposal Form*. In their deliberations the Faculty Executive must consider the following:

- Rationale for the development of the programme
- Demand for the programme
- Strategic fit with faculty and university plans
- Alignment with existing courses in the faculty and the extent of cross-university collaboration
- Resources implications
- Potential for economies of scale with exiting modules/programmes
- Appropriateness of the award title and award standard
- A draft outline Programme Schedule

The Faculty Executive then decides to

- i. Endorse the proposal.
- ii. Prescribe conditions to the proposal (this will require a resubmission).
- iii. Reject the proposal, outlining the reasons.

The decision must be communicated via email to the PDT.

4.2.3 Approval to proceed to Outline Permission Stage

When a programme proposal is endorsed by the Faculty Executive it is approved to proceed to the Outline Permission stage of the process.

4.3 Stage 3 Outline Permission

4.3.1 Outline Permission Request

The *New Programme Proposal Form* must be submitted to the Quality Office. Submissions to the Quality Office should be in accordance with directions in Appendix 2.

The VP for Academic Affairs & Registrar brings the proposal to the University Planning Team's Academic Programme Provision Committee (UPT APPC) for consideration.

4.3.2 UPT APPC Review

In its deliberations the UPT APPC must consider the

- rationale for the programme
- alignment with Faculty and University Plans
- potential demand
- financial viability and sustainability

The UPT APPC may liaise with the PDT through the lead proposer before coming to a decision.

The UPT APPC decides to

- i. Grant permission to proceed to detailed development (conditions for commencement outlined).
- ii. Request additional information or work on the proposal and agree to consider a resubmission.
- iii. Reject the proposal, stating its reasons.

If permission to proceed is granted the UPT APPC may outline conditions that must be satisfied following successful validation but before commencement of the programme.

If additional information or work on a proposal is requested, this must be addressed by the PDT. A response and updated proposal must then be submitted to the UPT APPC.

If the proposal is rejected, the reasons for same should be deliberated on by the Faculty Executive and PDT and used to inform future programme development.

4.3.3 Communication of Decision

The Quality Office communicates the decision of the UPT APPC to the lead proposer of the PDT.

The VP for Academic Affairs & Registrar presents a list of all new programme proposals approved to proceed to detailed development by the UPT APPC to the next meetings of the UPT and Academic Council.

4.4 Stage 4 Detailed Development

4.4.1 Co-ordination of Programme Development

The lead proposer agrees responsibilities and deadlines for the development of the *Programme Specification* with the PDT.

4.4.2 Planning for validation

The lead proposer will meet with the nominee of the VP for Academic Affairs & Registrar who sits on the Faculty Academic Planning Committee (FAPC) to review and agree the proposed timeline for validation and the proposed commencement of the programme.

The lead proposer then requests that the FAPC form a dedicated programme review sub-committee (internal review panel). The Chair of the FAPC will appoint the internal review panel.

The recommended membership of the internal review panel is:

- Head of School/Faculty not involved in the programme or their nominee (Chair),
- Nominee of the VP for Academic Affairs & Registrar (mandatory),
- Member of the of Academic Council Academic Programmes Committee (ACAPC) (mandatory), and
- Two members who may be academic staff or Heads of Department, none of whom are involved in the programme. The Chair may, where necessary, nominate other staff members (not FAPC members) not involved in the programme who have discipline specific or other relevant knowledge.

The Chair will also appoint a Recording Secretary.

In constituting the panel, gender balance should be sought.

4.4.3 Developing the Programme Specification

The Programme Specification is developed in AMM using the *Programme Specification (Major Award) template* (outline available in Appendix 3).

The lead proposer may assign permission to members of the PDT to draft modules and populate other sections of the document in AMM. This should be completed by a deadline agreed by the PDT, allowing time for review and amendment to the draft before submission for internal validation.

4.4.4 Completion of Programme Specification

Once the PDT have agreed to the draft *Programme Specification*, the lead proposer must submit the completed *Programme Specification* to the Chair of the internal panel for internal validation.

4.5 Stage 5 Validation

4.5.1 Internal Validation

The Chair (or their nominee) circulates the *Programme Specification* to the internal panel who must conduct an initial review of the programme. The validation criteria outlined in the *AQAE003 Developing and Validating a New Taught Programme Policy* must be used to conduct the review.

The mechanism for internal validation will be via an internal validation panel meeting where the PDT meet with the internal panel to review the programme in accordance with the format for the external validation panel meeting (outlined in section 4.5.3).

On conclusion of the internal validation process the internal panel must decide

- to approve the programme to proceed to External Validation,
- Not to approve the programme to proceed to External Validation, subject to minor changes, or
- not to approve the programme to proceed to External Validation and recommend resubmission of the programme, outlining the major changes required.

The Chair oversees that any minor changes are addressed by the PDT by reviewing the response of the team documented in the *Internal Validation Report* and the updated *Programme Specification*.

If major changes and a resubmission of the *Programme Specification* are required, the revised documentation must be resubmitted for internal validation.

4.5.2 Internal Validation Report

Internal validation must be formally concluded by the Chair of the internal panel by submission of the *Internal Validation Report Form* and updated *Programme Specification* to the Quality Office. The report may be made available to the External Validation Panel.

4.5.3 External Validation

Convening an External Validation Panel

The Quality Office, on behalf of VP for Academic Affairs & Registrar must convene the External Validation Panel (external to ATU) for the external validation of the programme.

The recommended composition of the External Validation Panel is:

- a person with current or former experience as a Registrar or senior academic manager from an Irish Higher Education Institution (HEI), who will act as Chair,
- two academics with expertise in the discipline(s) from another HEI,
- a person with expertise in the discipline(s) who may be from a profession, industry, or the community, and
- a student representative registered on an award at, or higher than the NFQ level of the programme and from outside the proposing Faculty, who is selected by the Quality Office from the *Register of Students Eligible to participate in Programme Validations*.

Additional panellists (maximum 2) may be invited by VP for Academic Affairs & Registrar to participate in the panel, particularly where multi-disciplinary expertise is required.

The nominee of the VP for Academic Affairs & Registrar will act as Academic Secretary to the panel. Their role is to advise on queries related to quality assurance and enhancement policy and procedure.

The VP for Academic Affairs & Registrar will also nominate a Recording Secretary to the panel.

The PDT will submit a list of up to five suitable persons with discipline expertise who may be selected as panellists. The *Validation Panel Nomination Form* should be submitted to the Quality Office with the particulars of any nominees a minimum of four weeks in advance of the scheduled panel meeting.

The following criteria will apply:

- Nominees may be academics from another HEI or those from a profession, industry, or the community with expertise in the discipline(s).
- Nominees must not have been involved in the development of the programme and any potential conflict of interest should be indicated.
- For awards at Level 9 on the NFQ, a panellist from outside the Republic of Ireland is required recommended.

In constituting the panel, gender balance should be sought.

Meeting of the External Validation Panel

The mechanism for the programme validation is via a meeting of the External Validation Panel and the PDT, organised by the Quality Office. The meeting may be in-person and/or online.

The Quality Office must circulate the *Programme Specification* to the External Validation Panel at least three weeks in advance of the scheduled panel meeting.

A quorum of 4 persons (including the Chair) is required for the meeting to proceed.

The panel meeting will take the following format:

- The Chair will hold a preliminary meeting of panel members to identify the key observations in relation to the programme. The Chair will also outline their plan for coordinating the meeting with the PDT.
- The Head of College (or their nominee) and members of the Faculty Executive involved in the programme will meet with the panel to introduce the programme proposal and brief them on the alignment of the programme with ATU strategy.
- The panel will then meet with the PDT to evaluate the programme against the validation criteria provided in the *AQAE003 Developing and Validating New Programmes Policy*.
- Following the meeting the panel will hold their own deliberations and prepare an oral report on their decision. The panel must decide whether the programme should be:
 - i. validated (without changes)
 - ii. validated, subject to condition(s) and/or recommendation(s)
 - iii. rejected, stating the reasons.
- The panel present a brief overview of their findings and decision to the PDT and members of the Faculty Executive.

4.5.4 External Validation Report

Following the meeting the Academic Secretary and Recording Secretary, compile the *External Validation report (Major Award)* using the template provided. This must be reviewed and agreed by the Chair and then circulated to the panel. Following this the report is sent to the Quality Office, who forwards it to the lead proposer.

If the programme has been validated without changes, Stage 5 Validation is concluded (proceed to Stage 6).

If the programme is validated subject to conditions and/or recommendations, they must be reviewed and addressed by the PDT.

The PDT compiles a revised *Programme Specification* and completes a detailed response to the report (included on *External Validation Report (Major Award)* template.

The response must detail specifically how the conditions have been addressed and where applicable, how the recommendations will or have been addressed. This is submitted to the Quality Office, who may review and liaise with the PDT for further clarification.

The Quality Office must

- verify compliance with the conditions, and
- consider the response to any recommendations and the rationale for not addressing recommendations, where relevant.

Once the conditions have been verified, the Quality Office will notify the lead proposer and VP for Academic Affairs & Registrar.

4.6 Stage 6 Approval

The VP for Academic Affairs & Registrar presents the *External Validation report (Major Award)* to Academic Council for approval.

The Academic Council must formally acknowledge that the conditions of validation are met and approve the programme.

The programme is now validated, and the Quality Office will:

- change the status of the programme to approved in AMM,
- add the programme to the student record management system,
- add the programme to the *Register of University Programmes*, and
- include the programme in the next update of the *Irish Register of Qualifications (IRQ)*.

5. Associated Documents Generated by this Procedure

5.1 Forms and Templates

- AQAE003_001 New Programme Proposal Form
- AQAE003_002 Module Template
- AQAE003_003 Programme Specification (Major Award) template
- AQAE003_004 New Programme (Major Award) Internal Validation Report template
- AQAE003_005 New Programme (Major Award) External Validation Report template
- AQAE003_006 Validation Panel Nomination Form

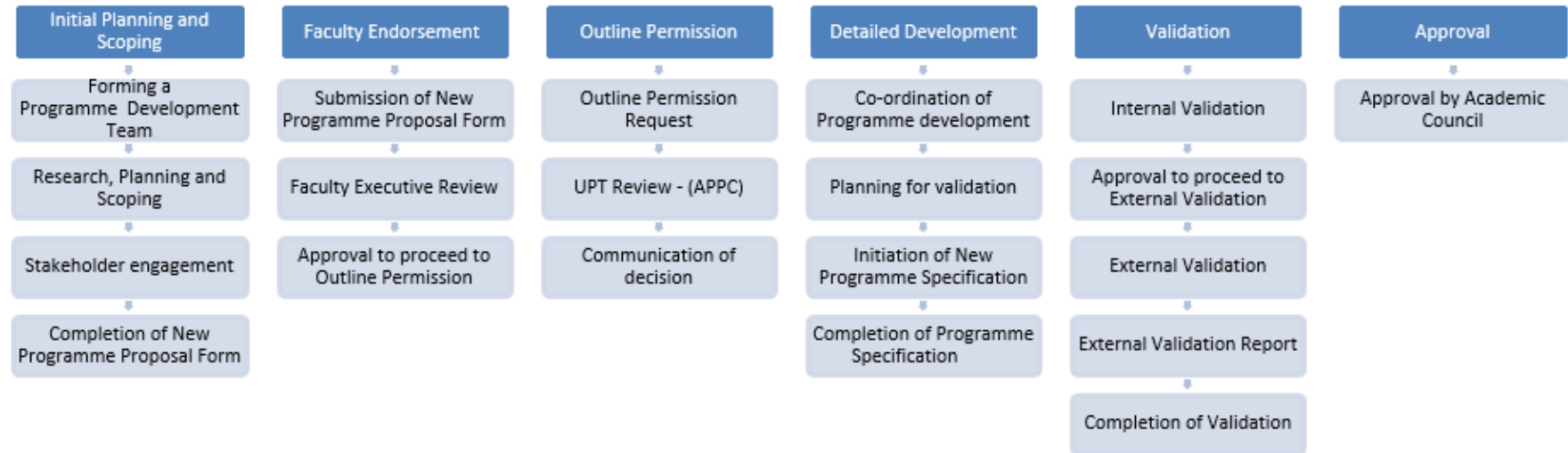
6. Measurement of Effectiveness of this procedure

Not Applicable.

7. Revision History

Revision No	Description of Change	Approval Date
000	New Procedure	20/06/2023

Appendix 1 Outline of the Procedure for the Validation of a Major Award



Appendix 2 Submitting documentation to the Quality Office

The Quality Office operates a SharePoint site for the submission of all documentation related to programme validation.

Once a programme is endorsed by the Faculty Executive, the completed New Programme Proposal Form must be uploaded to the Developing and Validation of New Programmes area of the Office of the Registrar/Quality Office SharePoint site using the relevant online form.

Following approval of the New Programme Proposal all subsequent documentation including the Programme Specification and any subsequent revisions, Appendices to the Programme Specification, and Panel Nomination Form should be uploaded in the same manner.

The Quality Office will file documentation appropriately and documentation relating to the validation process will be visible by all.

Appendix 3 Outline of Programme Specification

1. Programme Details
2. Introduction
 - 2.1. Programme Aim
3. Overview of University
 - 3.1. Context and History
 - 3.2. Vision, Mission and Values
 - 3.3. Profile of the University
4. Introduction to School and Department
 - 4.1. Overview and Profile
 - 4.2. Programmes Currently Offered
5. Rationale for Programme
 - 5.1. Justification for the Programme
 - 5.2 Strategic Relevance of the Programme
 - 5.3. Market Research and Consultation
 - 5.4. Similar Programmes
6. Demand for this Programme
 - 6.1. Profile of Learners and Anticipated Demand
 - 6.2. Projected Student Numbers
 - 6.3. Employment Potential for Graduates
7. Programme Design and Management
 - 7.1. Structure of Programme
 - 7.2. Work Placement
 - 7.3. Professional Body Recognition
 - 7.4. Programme Delivery
 - 7.5. Programme Management

8. Resources Available for Programme Delivery

8.1. Staffing

8.2. Library

8.3. Academic Support

8.4. Information Technology

8.5. Laboratories and Equipment

8.6. Student Support

8.7. Staff Support

8.8. Additional Resources Required for Programme Delivery

9. Access, Transfer and Progression

9.1. Entry Requirements and Access Routes

9.2. Transfer Routes

9.3. Progression Pathways

10. Teaching, Learning and Assessment

10.1. Teaching & Learning Strategy

10.2. Assessment Strategy

11. Programme Learning Outcomes

12. Schedules

12.1. Approved Programme Schedule

12.2. Programme Delivery Schedule

12.3. Programme Assessment Matrix

13. Module Descriptors

14. Appendices