

Keele’s Framework for Quality Monitoring, Enhancement and Approval of Academic Provision

Introduction

This paper presents an overview of planned revisions to the key processes at Keele that assure the quality of our educational provision. This includes processes for approval of the quality of new programmes and processes that ensure our existing provision remains in good standing. The processes are aligned to the Office for Students’ conditions of registration ([B conditions](#)) and established frames of reference set out by the [Quality Assurance Agency](#) including the most recent [Quality Code](#) (June 2024) and are informed by QAA’s recent [report and resources](#) (September 2024) on approaches to monitoring, review and evaluation in the sector.

Our approach draws on good practice across the sector and builds on work undertaken over the past two years which has focused on establishing a risk-based, priority-driven approach to quality assurance and enhancement. In line with the sector direction of travel, a key principle underpinning our processes is that they are proportionate to the provision under consideration and are applied flexibly with due regard for risk, enabling us to make necessary changes in an efficient and agile manner and reducing the administrative burden.

The paper outlines i) the approach we take to quality monitoring and enhancement (section 1) and ii) to the approval of new provision and reapproval and modification of existing provision (section 2). Following approval, this document will be used to develop and/or update detailed guidance and supporting documentation for all included processes.

Section 1 Quality Monitoring and Enhancement

1.1 Levels of Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Quality assurance and enhancement occurs at various levels, and through various mechanisms, from the most local unit of delivery, through to oversight at university-level. The higher the risk associated with an activity (e.g. creating a new programme), the higher the level of monitoring and approval is required. The management of education quality and provision is delegated from the Senate to University Education Committee.

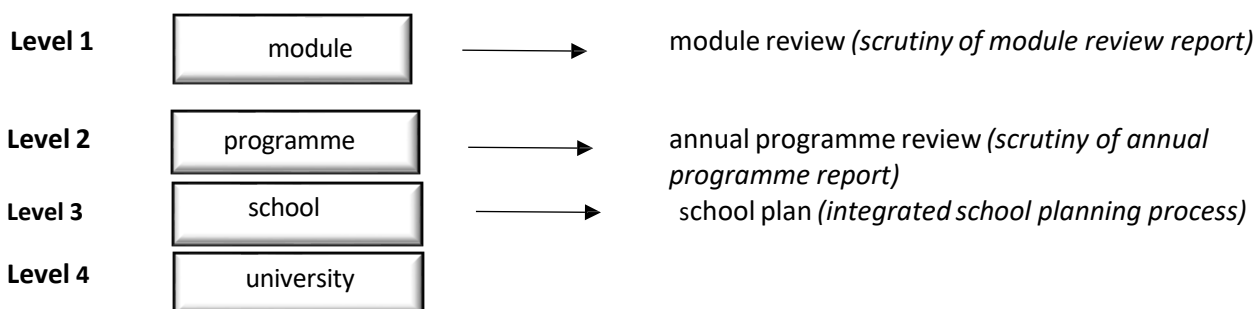


Fig 1: Levels of Quality Assurance & Enhancement Review

1.2 Module level

The principle underpinning our planned approach to module review is one of continuous monitoring. To date, approaches to module review have differed across the university. Going forward, these will be formalised into a consistent **annual module review (AMR)** process, which will require formal review of all modules to take place at least annually through a process of reflection after delivery. The outcome of module review will be the identification of areas for improvement and of good practice which are formally documented and feed into the annual programme review process.

School Education Committees (SECs) will be responsible for ensuring that key actions and observations arising from AMRs are reported by programme directors at school level. Common themes (such as training needs, areas for development and good practice) will be reported to Faculty Education Committees and/or Faculty Executive Groups through the school Directors of Education.

In carrying out AMR, module leads will consider student module feedback and metrics on student engagement and performance to reflect on the delivery and outcomes of the module. The implementation of Explorance Blue has led to a standard platform and question set for student module feedback, and through this relevant role holders (as stipulated in the [Student Module Feedback Procedure](#)) now have improved access to module feedback data for use in module review.

In terms of future developments required to implement this approach, from 2025-26 a standard form (to be approved by Education Committee) will be used for module review. As we are not yet able to draw student performance data directly into the module review form, support will be required from Corporate Information Services (CIS), QA and possibly IDS, to pre-populate the forms with required information. Once achieved, this will increase both the efficiency and effectiveness of this process.

1.3 Programme level

The **annual programme review (APR)** process is an established part of Keele's quality assurance and enhancement processes. Programme-level review builds on the monitoring of module (or unit of delivery) performance through module review. The annual programme review report addresses the performance of the provision in relation to key quality measures aligned to external regulatory requirements, principally those set out by the Office for Students (OfS), which focus on continuation (retention, advancement and withdrawal), completion, progression (graduate outcomes) and student satisfaction. This enables identification of key areas of risk against external benchmarks and internal targets aligned to those benchmarks. Additionally, the APR reflects on student feedback and external examiners' comments and highlights areas for enhancement and existing good practice and innovation for wider dissemination.

Currently, the APR process can take place at a cluster level, where programmes of cognate nature undergo review together. Given the timing of delivery and the availability of datasets, we run the APR process for undergraduate and postgraduate provision separately, annually from July (undergraduate) and November (postgraduate taught). We plan to retain the APR approach, but with improved scrutiny of the clusters to ensure the rationale for these is clear and that the quality of review is not diluted by a cluster approach. It is especially important that provision which varies by mode or type (for example apprenticeship or on-line delivery) is reported separately.

Datasets to inform APR are currently provided by CIS in the form of static summary reports which identify flags in data through a traffic light approach. There is significant work required to improve the quality and scope of data available to support annual programme review. Currently the internal performance data is often at school, rather than programme, level which limits usefulness for individual programme teams. A further weakness is the inability to explore intersectional factors such as student outcomes by certain characteristics. Clarity is sought from CIS on timescales to enable us to interrogate key performance issues in a more dynamic way. Given the timing of reporting during the academic year, it is not possible to compare with external benchmark data, however there may be opportunities to draw in benchmark data from previous years as context.

The APR data sets currently include the following:

- Numbers and characteristics of the student body
- Student retention (UG), advancement to the next year of study and withdrawal
- Outcomes and awards (awards and classifications)
- Progression to employment (graduate outcomes) and Longitudinal Educational Outcomes
- Links to module results
- Student satisfaction. For PGT, where available PTES results are provided.

In relation to UG student satisfaction, in 2024-25 a separate process for responding to NSS performance was used, overseen by University Executive Committee and embedded in school planning processes. This has enabled specific focus to be given to this priority KPI. Going forward, it is proposed that student experience data from NSS should be included in all APRs as it is a key indicator of health. This does not preclude enhanced monitoring at institutional level as appropriate.

It is also proposed that the APR scrutiny considers the date of the latest approval, re-approval (including through accelerated redesign) and/or PSRB accreditation visit. This will enable a judgment to be made on the recency of latest review and potential risk of currency.

There is an existing template for the APR report which we are keen to improve from the perspective of data. As with annual module review, we are not yet able to automatically pre-populate the reports with student performance data, which does mean that programme teams find it difficult to extrapolate from school level data flags and respond appropriately in their reports. This often leads to the requirement for re-submission of the report following review. Pre-populating the report with data at the appropriate level or enabling access to a single dashboard with data at the right level of granularity would enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the process more broadly. Support will be required from CIS, QA and possibly IDS to enable the provision of improved programme-level data for the 2025-26 APR process.

The APR report also requires commentary drawing on qualitative information (for example from student and external examiner feedback), good practice and actions/recommendations arising from recent PSRB and accreditation events.

Reflection on the quality indicators by the programme team is summarised in an action plan, and the whole report and plan is approved by the Head of School following receipt at the School Education Committee. This process is overseen by the Faculty Education Committee/Executive Group. Scrutiny of the APRs is undertaken by a subgroup of the Education Data Sub Committee (itself a subcommittee of Education Committee), with representation of all three Faculty Deans of Education.

Scrutiny considers the extent to which actions in the plan are sufficient to address performance issues flagged in the data set. The scrutiny of APRs acts as a triage, at which point various outcomes are possible, namely that the programme:

- i. is confirmed in good standing on the basis of the performance and actions planned;
- ii. is required to amend or add actions or commentary in its plan and to resubmit the APR;

- iii. is required to address areas for improvement, for example through actions such as a workshop with KIITE, guidance on retention interventions, or major modifications to the programme;
- iv. is recommended for larger scale redesign on the basis of quality risk. This will lead to reapproval of the provision to address areas for development.

The outcome of APR scrutiny is communicated to schools via the Faculty Deans of Education. For programmes in categories i and ii, responsibility for ensuring any required actions are completed lies with the School Executive or Education Committees, and progress is overseen by Faculty Education Committees. For programmes in categories iii and iv, the Faculty Dean of Education will liaise with relevant parties to ensure next steps take place. To balance efficiency and effectiveness, there will be a structured approach taken to identify and prioritise the areas where review or redesign may be necessary and to agree a timeline that considers the severity of the risk(s) alongside institutional capacity and resourcing. The list of proposed redesign and reapproval activity will be held by QA and priorities agreed with University Executive Committee.

One of the risk factors to be considered is recency of quality approval. Provision may not be flagged for specific quality concerns through the annual programme review process and may also be recruiting well. However, it is still necessary for the institution to check and confirm the on-going currency of its provision and alignment with internal as well as external frames of reference. A normal expectation is that all provision will have been through a process of redesign and reapproval **within a five-year period**. QA will hold the calendar of review and provision which has not undertaken redesign within a five-year period will be identified as described above.

For programmes that are subject to cyclical PSRB reviews, where possible, efforts will be made to align Keele's redesign and reapproval processes with PSRB review dates to remove duplication of activity. Where possible a cluster approach will be undertaken to identifying programmes for reapproval. Where programmes have been through a quality approval process, the clock will reset on the 5-year timescale. The process for reapproval aligns closely to that of approval and is outlined in section 2 below.

1.4 Integrated school planning

The APR process, as outlined above, is aligned to the [UUK framework for Programme review](#) in giving assurances about the health of the provision except in relation to financial viability (factors such as student demand (intake); programme resources and staffing; income versus costs). These issues are overseen at a strategic level through the integrated school planning process (see levels 3 and 4 in Figure 1).

The integrated school planning process considers the performance of the programmes within schools, along with a review of the performance indicators aggregated at school level. The planning meetings enable strategic institutional oversight of developments in the University's taught portfolio. The process considers the current and planned portfolio and potential developments over a 3-year timescale, achievement of school KPIs and alignment with education and research goals. Themes related to education quality and enhancement include:

- Portfolio scope and performance
- Identification of opportunities to improve the market strength of the subject area, new courses, progression routes and new market opportunities
- Identification of programmes which may be withdrawn or require review (cross- referencing outcomes from annual programme and focussed review and plans for revalidation)

- School performance on metrics associated with student outcomes and experience and financial contribution
- Staffing and changes which may impact upon delivery or new developments or opportunities.

The process, which is overseen by the Integrated Planning Group, is informed by, and managed alongside academic quality processes. The integrated planning process may result in programmes requiring redesign and reapproval. In this case (as in category iv above), to balance efficiency and effectiveness, there will be a structured approach taken to identify the areas that require review or redesign and to agree a timeline that considers the severity of the risk(s) alongside institutional capacity and resourcing.

Section 2 Programme Approval and Modification

Our planned approach to approval and modification builds on the revisions we have made to our quality processes in recent years and also lessons learned through the accelerated redesign process. As with our approach to quality monitoring and enhancement, it aims to balance effective scrutiny with efficiency of approach.

2.1 Programme Quality Approval & Reapproval (encompassing what was formally termed validation and revalidation)

To ensure the quality and consistency of its provision in line with external requirements (e.g. OfS B conditions, PSRBs, and other bodies) and internal frames of reference, all programmes need to go through a quality approval process before they commence delivery. Permission for a new programme to proceed to development is provided by University Executive Committee (or FSPDG for programmes identified as part of the Financial Sustainability Plan) following scrutiny of a business case(s).

We define 'new' provision as:

- A new programme; or
- A programme which involves significant repositioning or amalgamation of existing programmes (such as the move to integrated single honours from two existing combined honours components) and an amount of new content.

Once a programme is permitted to proceed, the process of design and development will be undertaken, as outlined below (see Annex for the Curriculum Design Process approved by Education Committee in May 2024):

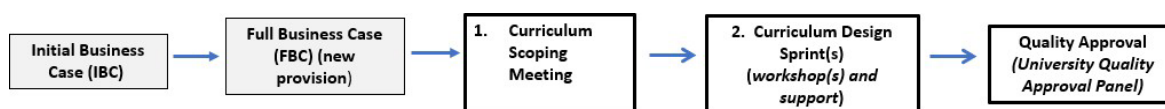


Fig 2: Process for Programme Approval

All new provision and programmes requiring reapproval will be considered at a University Quality Approval Panel. In order to maximise efficiency University Quality Approval Panels may take place in person or online and consider clusters of cognate programmes.

Each Panel will be made up of the following:

- Chair - not from the Faculty proposing the programme
- External reviewer (according to [guidance on externality](#))
- Two Academic members (not from the School proposing the programme)

- One Student Representative - usually a sabbatical officer from the KeeleSU or the KPA
- Support for the panel and regulatory/QA advice is provided by the Validation and Review Manager (QA)

While this will be the standard size of a University Quality Approval Panel, the Dean of Education from the Faculty in which the programme resides may recommend a variation to the membership, for example, to add stakeholder representation, including external industry or school/college expertise and to strengthen the student voice. The latter will be most relevant in the case of new provision in an existing academic field. Details of how the approval process is conducted is provided in separate guidance.

The reapproval process for existing provision follows the same process as that for approval, with the same requirement for scoping and (as appropriate) redesign. Reapproval will be evidence based, including the same core data as required for approval and additional data as specified in the Appendix.

2.2 Programme Modification

Changes to programmes that can be considered through Programme Modification are divided into those which require consideration only within the relevant School ('Minor modifications') and those which require consideration at the Faculty level ('Major modifications') owing to their significance. Any changes to a programme that will require changes to university-level regulations will require discussion by Education Committee prior to being put forward for approval.

Minor modifications will be those made within the terms allowed by the [Student Agreement](#). Major modifications typically constitute a variation from the Student Agreement. In cases where there are major modifications that will impact either existing students or applicants, applicants will be notified of the change and current students will be consulted before implementation.

2.2.1 School-level consideration will be given to approve the following as **minor modifications**:

- Revision of existing modules (e.g. module title or content) which does not involve alteration to the programme learning outcomes;
- Changing modules from mandatory to optional or vice versa, or changing mandatory modules which does not involve alteration to the programme learning outcomes;
- Minor changes to programmes as a whole which do not alter programme learning outcomes or the balance of assessment at the programme level.
- Textual changes to programme overview and aims.

2.2.2 Faculty-level consideration will be given to the following as **major modifications**:

- A change to an existing programme involving significant change to the programme specification including one or more of the following:
 - A substantial change to the programme which alters the character, content, aims or learning outcomes of the programme
 - A change in credit structure (e.g. from 15 credits to 30 credits) in line with the Keele Learning Principles
 - A substantial change to the assessment of the programme (nature and balance of assessment types over the programme as a whole)
 - The introduction or withdrawal of a placement element, international or placement year.

- A change to programme regulations, award or progression requirements.
- Overall changes to the programme which affect 25% or more of the programme.

Prior to Faculty consideration of the changes, the programme team are required to have engaged with relevant teams across the university that will be required to support delivery of the modified programme (i.e. Global Opportunities, Placements) to ensure that there is capacity to deliver the programme in its revised form.

Guidance will be provided by QA on what constitutes significant change. Prior to receipt by Faculty Education Committee, papers are submitted to the QA team and advice is given regarding the appropriate route for approval.

In the case of major modifications, where there are significant changes to credit structure or assessment, it may be necessary for the programme team to undertake a design sprint to ensure the appropriate balance and coherence across the programme. Advice will be given by QA on the process to best support the level of change anticipated.

Currently, new modules developed for existing programmes are approved by Faculty Education Committees. Embedding these new modules within programmes is considered a major modification (if the module is compulsory) or a minor modification (if the module is optional). Given the institution- wide effort and focus on reducing optionality and the volume of low recruiting modules, it is suggested that oversight of module size/viability is ensured through an annual report discussed as part of the annual school planning process. UEC is asked for its view on this.

2.3 Process leading to Approval and Reapproval

As outlined above, there are a number of different potential routes to approval or reapproval (see Figure 3):

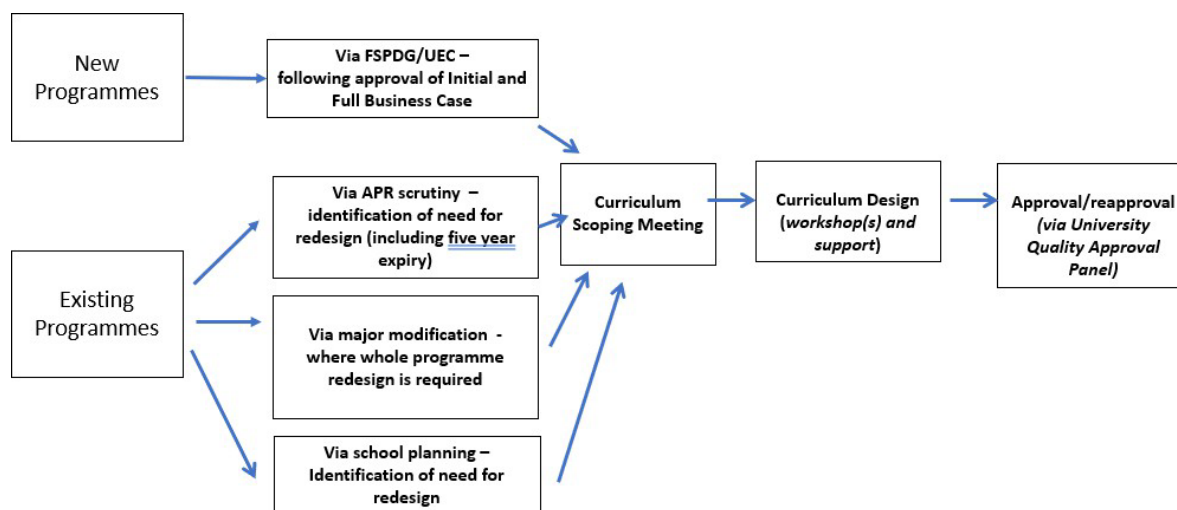


Figure 3. Approval and reapproval processes requiring curriculum redesign

Robust curriculum design or redesign is a required component of the approval of new or substantially changed programmes and those which may have been proposed as major modification. The process of

design or redesign begins with a data-led curriculum scoping meeting at which priorities are set. Redesign of existing provision will draw on additional data including student evaluation and external examiners feedback. A summary of roles, requirements for leading, attending and providing data, and outputs from the design process is appended, and the full paper defining the process as approved at Education Committee (May 2024) is provided in Annex.).

Given the capacity of the supporting this process (QA, KIITE, panel members, and so on) it is important that the volume of activity is carefully managed. As appropriate, a decision may be made to conduct panels virtually.

The Quality Assurance Team will develop and maintain a schedule of all quality approval and reapproval activity, with dates, namely:

- New programmes which have been permitted to proceed to design and approval and the required launch date
- Programmes progressing through Major modifications that are subsequently identified as requiring full review and reapproval
- Programmes identified through the APR process as requiring full review and reapproval including those which have not been reviewed within the preceding 5 years (noting that it is anticipated that this may take some time to resolve given the legacy of pauses to IQA processes during COVID-19).
- Programmes identified through the Integrated Planning Process as requiring full review and reapproval.

In cases where it is determined that the annual list of programme review and approvals exceeds the capacity of QA (and/or other teams) to deliver in-year, this list will be collectively considered by FSPDG, the PVC Education & the Academic Registrar to consider resourcing challenges and if required, identify priorities for review and approval in-year.

Longer term, a curriculum management solution will simplify the need for manual list maintenance and reduce the potential for human error.

Appendix: Roles, requirements and outputs of curriculum scoping (updated from June 2024 paper in Annex)

Curriculum Design	Stakeholders	Data Requirements & Responsibilities	Outputs & Responsibilities
Curriculum Scoping Meeting – New Programmes	Dean of Education/Academic Enhancement (Chair)* KIITE Curriculum Designer School-based Partnerships & Placements Manager (PPMs) Dean of Education (for the relevant Faculty) Head of School Programme Director Director of Education Other members of the programme team, as appropriate QA support	HESA Market insight data (GSRA) Competitor analysis (GSRA) Labour Market Insight data (PPM/Careers) List of indicative self-reflective discussion questions (Chair)	List of actions for programme team to address relating to curriculum design – Chair Action tracker set up by VCO Clarification of further curriculum design support requirements – Chair in discussion with KIITE curriculum designer
Curriculum Scoping Meeting – Existing Programmes	Dean of Education/Academic Enhancement* (Chair) KIITE Curriculum Designer School-based Partnerships & Placements Manager (PPMs) Dean of Education (for the relevant Faculty)	Latest education data set and APR report (QA) Latest NSS data & updated action plan (QA) Student survey (administered by QA) HESA Market insight data (GSRA) Competitor analysis (GSRA)	List of actions for programme team to address relating to curriculum design – Chair Action tracker set up by QA Clarification of further curriculum design support requirements – Chair in discussion with KIITE curriculum designer
	Head of School Programme Director Director of Education Other members of the programme team, as appropriate QA support	Labour Market Insight data (PPM/Careers) Student numbers on existing modules (VCO) List of indicative self-reflective discussion questions (Chair)	