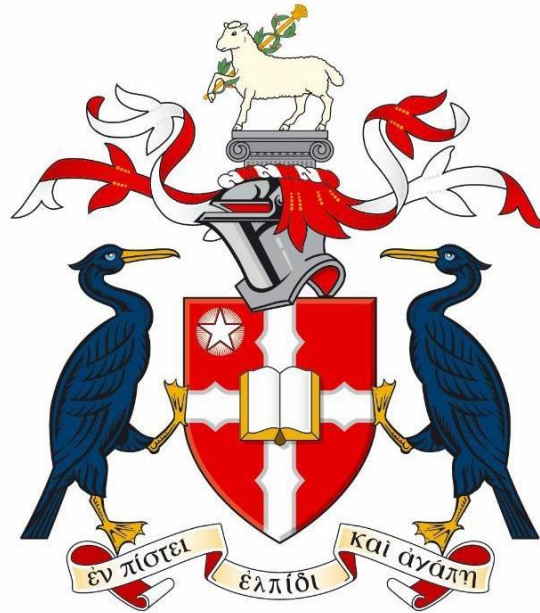# Liverpool Hope University

Academic Quality Handbook 1 (QH1): Principles of Course[1] Design and Approval

March 2024 version

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[1] *Course refers to any provision offered by the University.*

A. Introduction

This handbook forms part of Liverpool Hope University's academic quality framework and is to be seen in that wider context. All the University's quality handbooks and guides are approved by Senate upon recommendation from Academic Committee.

The quality handbooks provide guidance for:
- Staff (in academic Schools and partner organisations) responsible for the development, delivery, and oversight of academic provision.
- Student representatives/students interested in the processes by which courses of study are approved.
- QAA/OFS review teams, professional bodies and other external agencies with an interest in the quality and standards of the University's academic provision.

UK higher education is based on the principle of autonomy. A degree-awarding body such as Liverpool Hope University thus has responsibility for the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities of the courses it offers and also the qualifications and credits it awards. The University must therefore have a robust framework in place to ensure the quality and standards of its academic provision.

This Quality Handbook (QH1) sets out an overview of the University's approach to design and approval of its courses. The University is responsible for the academic standards of courses of study leading to its awards. The **course approval process** is the way in which the University satisfies itself that appropriate academic standards are set and high-quality learning opportunities are in place for students.

Note that in addition to the overarching principles described in this Handbook, the following specific handbooks and guidelines relating to course design, approval and review are available:

- QH2 Approval of new courses of study leading to an award of the University (new courses that consist of **50% or more** of new provision).
- QH3 Approval of new courses of study leading to an award of the University where the new course consists of **more than 50%** existing provision.
- QH4 Review of existing courses.
- QH5 Approval of modifications to existing provision (at full course level or below).
- QH6 Withdrawal or suspension of courses.
  QH7a Professional Learning and Development Handbook - Approval of short courses leading to the award of University credit up to a maximum of 30 credits.
- QH7b Professional Learning and Development Handbook - Approval of non-credit bearing courses.
- QH8 Partnerships Guide (guidance for courses run in partnership with others).
- QH9 International Student Placements, Exchange and Study Abroad procedures.
- QH10 Seeking and Maintaining Professional Accreditations.
- QH11 Accreditation of Prior Learning.

The need for creation of new courses or change to existing courses can be in response to a range of different criteria/circumstances. **The flowchart in Appendix 2 is designed to give support** in identification of the appropriate route to take.

B.   External Reference Points

The University is accountable to the Office for Students (OFS) for the quality and standards of its provision. In addition, the University aligns to the Expectations for Standards and Quality as set out by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

There are a range of external reference points that are crucial in defining and setting the academic standards of the University's provision. These are particularly of importance in decisions relating to course design and approval:

- QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education,
- Framework for HE Qualifications of UK Degree Awarding Bodies,
- Higher Education Credit Framework for England,
- Subject Benchmark Statements.

A number of the University's academic courses are professionally oriented, and consequently the University is also accountable to a range of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). Links to the relevant PSRBs are available through the Liverpool Hope Academic Quality website.

C.   Internal Reference Points

There are also a range of internal reference points that are also crucial in defining and setting the academic standards of the University's provision. These are also of importance in decisions relating to course design and approval:

- The University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, which provides the broad framework for its course of quality enhancement initiatives and is a driver for the provision of high-quality learning experience for Hope students.
- The University Regulations.

D.   Compliance with the UK Quality Code

In the design and operation of the course approval process, the University adopts the broad principles of the Quality Code for Higher Education. Appendix 3 details how course approval processes at Hope address the relevant Core Principles and Practices of the UK Quality Code. In particular, this addresses issues of externality, Independence and Expertise, Student Voice, Evidence, Enhancement and Support of staff. You can find more information in the UK Quality Code for HE Advice and Guidance Course Design and Development.

E. Core stages in the Approval Process

The approval of all courses at Hope involves four core stages. All courses are approved using a process that includes these four stages although the detail of that process at each stage varies, dependent on the nature of the provision and its audience.
- Stage 1: Course Viability;
- Stage 2: Approval to proceed for an initial proposal;
- Stage 3: Course Portfolio;
- Stage 4: Approval to deliver the fully complete course.

STAGE 1: COURSE VIABILITY PROPOSAL (INITIAL PROPOSAL)
The initial proposal for any new course / course reapproval must, in the first instance, be presented to the Course Viability Group (CVG). This group consists of:
- The Director of Student Administration and Enrolment;
- the Head of UK Student Recruitment;
- the Director of Corporate Comms and Marketing and
- the Associate Dean International.

STAGE 2: APPROVAL TO PROCEED
- The University Executive Board (UEB) agrees to development of this course.
- Course Team complete the Course Specification Document via the online approval system;
- Initial approval will be noted at School Academic Committee and Senate via Academic Committee.

STAGE 3: COURSE PORTFOLIO
- Requires construction of a curriculum/syllabus, collation of other relevant material and final completion of a Course Portfolio;
- Should involve relevant stakeholders as appropriate;
- External input is required for most courses.

STAGE 4: APPROVAL TO DELIVER
- Documentation is reviewed and commentary acted upon as necessary.
- Final approval will be noted at Senate via Academic Committee.
- The definitive Document is formed from the Course Specification, Course Portfolio and the Approval documents.

The timescale for the process of approval of individual courses will vary according to the type of provision and is outlined in the relevant document. Generally, completely new UG or PGT provision might be expected to have a 12 to 18-month gestation from initial idea to arrival of students on the course. This will allow for appropriate marketing and inclusion in the relevant prospectus. The University Executive Manager (UEM)) (via the Head of School) is responsible for adhering to these timescales. For more on timescales see the relevant Quality Handbook/Guide.

Stage 1: Course Viability Proposal

Identification of new courses

Potential new courses, both credit bearing and non-credit bearing may be identified through reflective meetings, by individuals (Executive Deans, Heads of School/Department, academic tutors), through cross-school/departmental collaborations, or because of identifiable gaps in the market. **The initial proposal for any new course / course reapproval must in the first instance be presented to the Course Viability Group (CVG).**

If the School Academic Committee (and specifically the HOS) support the proposal, the relevant UEM will work with Course leads complete the CVG *Agreement to Proceed* paperwork (see Appendix 1) and a meeting with the CVG is arranged. The CVG will scrutinise the proposal and make a recommendation to UEB taking into account the following:

- Evidence of Demand;
- Applicant profile;
- Competitor Market;
- Career/further study opportunities;
- and any other areas deemed relevant.

Stage 2: Approval to Proceed

2a) CVG Recommendation

The CVG will advise the UEB Secretary that a course has been considered and the proposal should be included in the agenda for the next UEB meeting. The CVG Chair will include an overview report and recommendations. UEB will discuss whether the proposed provision accords with wider institutional goals and corporate strategy. UEB will also consider the resources and staffing needed to deliver the course. UEB may:

1. approve in principle the proposal - report to Academic Committee and to Senate **or**
2. refer the matter back to the school for further clarification/detail **or**
3. reject the proposal.

2b) Approval in Principle

After appropriate local discussions with relevant HOS the subject team, with the support of the UEM, should complete the Course Specification Document via the online course approval system following the procedure as set out below:

- The Course Specification Document sets out the fundamental properties of the provision and how the provision links to both internal and external reference points.
- This form requires initial marketing information, which will be used to advertise the course whilst the approval process is underway. Subsequent marketing documentation will be required for all courses but may vary dependent on the course and audience.
- Information on the Course Specification Document will also be used to populate SITS to create a course outline ready for further detail as it is agreed, to include a new course in the timetable as early as possible and to make an initial entry for the course

on the Curriculum Overview Record.

When the online course proposal is finalised, the course leader submits the proposal and the UEB Secretary will record the approval to proceed on the online system. This outcome will also be recorded on the formal Curriculum Overview of courses. This will trigger the release of the stage three documentation to the subject team.

It will also trigger the request for the course to be included in the agenda for Academic Committee and then to Senate. Once UEB has noted the approval in principle of UEB the relevant team may move forward with curriculum design and according to the agreed timeline, complete the full definitive document for approval.

The completed Course Specification proposal should be included as an agenda item at the next School Academic Committee.

NOTE that Stage 2 is common to all new provision although the content of the Course Specification Document varies slightly according to the nature of the provision being proposed. The initial selections on the online system will generate the correct version of the document.

Stage 3: Course Portfolio

Every Course, whether credit bearing or otherwise, must go through the process of course design– this process should be completed through the online system. Course design must involve the design of a detailed curriculum and syllabus. In some instances, this will be a very simple process directed by a specific need for Professional Learning and Development (PLD). In other cases, such as the design of new awards of the University, this will be a longer process that requires a full co-design approach, involving external colleagues. The detailed approach for each type of provision is explored in the relevant Quality Handbook/Guide: See Appendix 2 for more information.

In all cases, the curriculum/syllabus must be contained within an appropriately structured Course Portfolio which is built from the relevant Course Specification Document. Other aspects of the Course Portfolio will vary dependent on the types of provision being approved. Construction of the Course Portfolio should be undertaken on the online approval system, which will provide the appropriate fields for entry. Once the online documentation is complete the system will forward it to the relevant HOS for checking prior to moving to the approval stage.

Stage 4: Approval to Deliver - Full Course Approval

Once the curriculum, syllabus and assessments and any other required elements are designed, every course must have approval to be delivered. Approval can happen in a range of ways depending on the nature of the course. For example, a non-credit bearing PLD course may be approved directly by the relevant member of UEB or School Academic Committee, whereas a new award of the University must have scrutiny from external experts followed by approval

of the relevant Executive Dean and the Chairs of the relevant University subcommittees.

Details of approval requirements for each form of provision are in the relevant Quality Handbooks as above. All courses that receive final approval to be delivered <u>must</u> be reported to Senate via Academic Committee.

F. Documentation

At the end of the approval process every course will have a completed Definitive Document that consists of three elements:
- the Course Specification,
- the Course Portfolio, and
- the Course Approval Documentation.

After final approval, a copy of the completed definitive document must be dated and lodged with the Registrar/Student Administration Team. In addition, the UEMs will maintain a record all of all courses in their respective areas. The UEMs will ensure that:

- the Definitive Document is lodged with the Registrar;
- the central Curriculum Overview document is updated;
- the Course is included in Hope portfolio;
- delivery commences.

G. Periodic Review of the Course

Once approved, all courses leading to the award of University credit are subject to the University's standard processes for review and enhancement (see QH4).

Every course offered as part of the University's portfolio is subject to a yearly review under the Annual Review and Enhancement (ARE) process.

Full Course Review is usually conducted once every five years. However, a review may be triggered at any stage where there are concerns voiced by the Faculty Executive Dean, Head of School or Chair of Academic Committee (for instance, in response to ARE issues, School Reviews or from analysis of key subject data sets) or from external examiner comments, for example, in which case, the process may begin at the co-design stage.

H. Modifications to Approved Courses

Should a subject team wish to make modifications to an approved course of study outside of the normal review cycle, this should be undertaken using the University's **Course Modification Processes** (see QH5). This includes offering a course in a different mode to that originally approved (for example, offering a current course as a wholly on-line course) <u>or</u> for (new) delivery in the Network of Hope or other 'at a distance' location.

Appendix 1 - COURSE VIABILITY APPROVAL

Agreement for School/ Department to Proceed with Course Approval/Reapproval			
This form is designed to be used to request initial approval from UEB for the development of a new course to be added to the Hope Portfolio or for a course to undergo five-year reapproval to remain in the Portfolio*.			
Sponsoring School:			
Course name (subject)			
Course type (Choose one)	Single Hons BA, Single Hons BSc, UG Major, PGCert, MA, MSc, Other (please specify).		
New course	Yes/No	**Reapproval**	Yes /No
Proposed start date (for reapproval please show required date).		**Predicted intake** (for reapproval please show intake for last 3 years).	
Evidence of demand for the course. Colleagues proposing the course should meet with the Course Viability Group**. A copy of the report of the meeting should be submitted with this form (see meeting agenda below).			
Date of meeting with Course Viability Group: Academic colleagues in attendance: Brief account of outcome of meeting:			
Course Structure and content.			
Please append a brief overview (300 words max) of the structure and content of the proposed course to this form.			
Does this course require additional staffing over and above that already in the school/dept? Please give details.			
FTE of staff required: Reason for this requirement: How will introduction of this course affect the workload of current staff?			
Does this course require additional resources over and above that already in the school/dept? Please give details.			
Please list each of (including approx. cost where this is available): Physical resources: Electronic resources: Library resources: Licenses: Accreditation fees: Other:			
UEB approval to proceed to approval/reapproval process.	Yes/No		

If UEB approves the initial proposal, much of the information on this form can be directly copied into the course specification.
*** The Course Viability Group consists of the Director of Student Administration and Enrolment, the Head of UK Student Recruitment, the Director of Corporate Comms and Marketing and the Associate Dean International.*

Agenda for meeting with the Course Viability Group

Evidence of potential demand
Why would someone want to study this provision?
Will the title be understood by your audience?
Who has been consulted about the demand internally and externally?
What does your market research say about a demand for the course?
What is the relevance to the Access and Participation Plan?
Are you seeking professional accreditation?

Applicant profile
Who are your target audiences? (UK, international, mature, school leaver etc.)
What experience/qualifications might they have?

Competitor market
What competition is there from other HEIs - regionally and nationally?
What are USPs of this course compared to competitors?
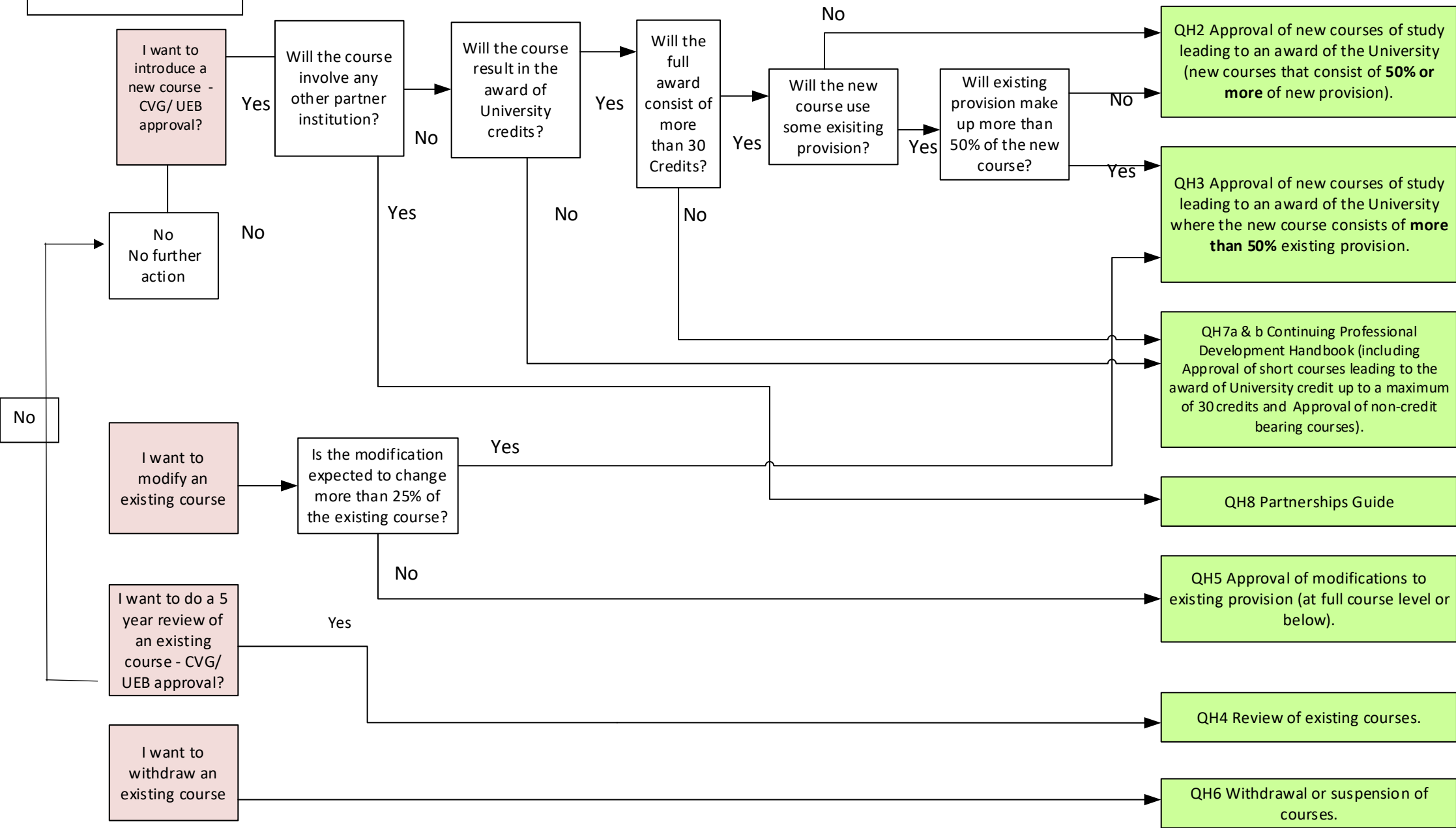
Career/further study opportunities
What are the opportunities for graduates from this course?
What is the strength of the current job market for graduates with this qualification?

Other considerations
Will this course enhance the success of the Access and Participation Plan?
Is the proposed start date realistic in terms of recruitment opportunities?

Appendix 2
Flowchart identifying appropriate Documentation

Handbook to use

I want to introduce a new course - CVG/ UEB approval?

Yes → Will the course involve any other partner institution?

No → No further action

Will the course involve any other partner institution?
- No → Will the course result in the award of University credits?
- Yes → (QH8 Partnerships Guide)

Will the course result in the award of University credits?
- Yes → Will the full award consist of more than 30 Credits?
- No → (QH7a & b Continuing Professional Development Handbook)

Will the full award consist of more than 30 Credits?
- Yes → Will the new course use some exisiting provision?
- No → (QH7a & b Continuing Professional Development Handbook)

Will the new course use some exisiting provision?
- No → QH2 Approval of new courses of study leading to an award of the University (new courses that consist of **50% or more** of new provision).
- Yes → Will existing provision make up more than 50% of the new course?

Will existing provision make up more than 50% of the new course?
- No → QH2 Approval of new courses of study leading to an award of the University (new courses that consist of **50% or more** of new provision).
- Yes → QH3 Approval of new courses of study leading to an award of the University where the new course consists of **more than 50%** existing provision.

QH7a & b Continuing Professional Development Handbook (including Approval of short courses leading to the award of University credit up to a maximum of 30 credits and Approval of non-credit bearing courses).

I want to modify an existing course → Is the modification expected to change more than 25% of the existing course?
- Yes → QH8 Partnerships Guide
- No → QH5 Approval of modifications to existing provision (at full course level or below).

I want to do a 5 year review of an existing course - CVG/ UEB approval?
- Yes → QH4 Review of existing courses.
- No → No further action

I want to withdraw an existing course → QH6 Withdrawal or suspension of courses.

Appendix 3: **Relationship to Relevant Parts of the UK Quality Code**

Scope

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2018) is focused around expectations for both Standards and Quality. These expectations are underpinned by a range of Core and Common expected practices. The following sets out the most relevant parts of this code to the course approval and review process, the guidance for QAA and indicates how Hope ensures that it meets these requirements within these processes.

1. Expectations for standards
The UK Quality Code has the following expectations for standards:
      The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.
      The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.

The following table sets out how Liverpool Hope aims to meet these requirements as expressed in the Core and Common Practices of the code:

(a) Core practices	
What QAA says	What Hope does
The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks.	
In practice, this means that when designing and approving courses, relevant national qualifications frameworks are referred to.	The University recognises the importance of independent external participation in the course design and approval process (i) in order to gain the benefit of appropriate academic/professional expertise in the design of the course, (ii) in the interests of transparency to stakeholders, and (iii) to provide assurance to Academic Committee and Senate on the academic quality of new provision and that the University's approval processes have been conducted in line with sector-wide requirements. The principle of externality is reflected in the requirements for subject teams to engage with a range of relevant external reference points, to carry out engagement and consultation activities during course development and in the activities of approval Panels.
Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.	
In practice, this means that the awarding body or	The University has extensive processes set out in QH5. This describes partnerships with other institutions are set up monitored, with a

organisation ensures that it maintains responsibility for setting and maintaining standards of a course regardless of where it is delivered.	particular emphasis on approval and delivery of courses. This work is overseen by the Academic Committee which then reports to Senate on this matter.

The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.

In practice, this means that feedback from external stakeholders is used to inform course design and development.	The University recognises the importance of independent external participation in the course design and approval process (i) in order to gain the benefit of appropriate academic/professional expertise in the design of the course, (ii) in the interests of transparency to stakeholders, and (iii) to provide assurance to Academic Committee and Senate on the academic quality of new provision and that the University's approval processes have been conducted in line with sector-wide requirements. The principle of externality is reflected in the requirements for subject teams to engage with a range of relevant external reference points, to carry out engagement and consultation activities during course development and also in the activities of approval Panels.

(b) Common practice

The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.

In practice, this means that regular monitoring and evaluation are used to drive improvement and enhancement of course design and development processes.	The course approval process itself is reviewed annually, through the analysis of approval reports and through feedback from co-design members, senior academics and Chairs via post- event reflection activities.

2. Expectations for quality

The UK Quality Code has the following expectation about Quality:

Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.

The following table sets out how Liverpool Hope aims to meet these requirements as expressed in the Core and Common Practices of the code:

(a) Core practices	
The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.	
In practice, this means that course approval processes facilitate the design and development of high-quality, relevant, market-attractive courses which lead to credible and recognised positive outcomes for students.	Independent and expert judgements can be made on the quality and standards of the provision under consideration through the involvement in course design and approval of academic peers and, as appropriate, students, graduates, employers, service users, collaborative partners, etc. Decisions to approve new provision are given in principle by UEB and Chair of Senate at the start of the process, and signed off by the Chair of Academic Committee at the end of the process ensuring a further level of independence from the delivering School: Independent and expert advice is also given by externality at the co-design stage and via external academic review.

The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.	
In practice, this means that course approval processes ensure that there are appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.	The approvals process is led by the Head of School and the relevant UEM. Additional support is also given through the Communities of Practice (for example, Curriculum Design; Assessment) and formal opportunities such as modules run on the PGCert LTHE which are open to all Hope Staff. All staff are expected to attend a range of L & T focused events throughout the year.

The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.	
In practice, this means that course approval processes ensure that there are appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.	The specific evidence required by via the approval process, in order to recommend to Senate that the course be approved, varies according to the nature of the proposal under consideration (a new undergraduate course, for example, compared to a 15-credit short course professional development module), although the core principles are common throughout. The principles which should underpin course design and which will be considered throughout the approval process are clearly stated in this handbook and in the submission document requirements. The quality of information which will be provided for students and other stakeholders following approval is also considered through approval of course specifications, which form part of the documentation considered within the approval process but are also intended for separate publication.

Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.	
In practice, this means that when a course is designed and developed in partnership with an external organisation, the degree-awarding body's course approval processes consider and document responsibilities in relation to delivery, support and monitoring arrangements.	QH8 the Partnerships Guide describes the University's processes for approval and delivery of courses in partnership with other institutions. There is a full set of processes which include approval of the partnership by UEB and Senate, due diligence relating to the partner organization and the signing of a specific document relating to the arrangements for each individual partnership. The experience of students is monitored through the central University procedures in addition to those highlighted in QH8.

(b) Common practices	
The provider reviews its core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.	
In practice, this means that regular monitoring and evaluation are used to drive improvement and enhancement of course design and development processes.	The primary focus of the course approvals process is to assure the University that appropriate academic standards are being set and that mechanisms are in place to ensure appropriate learning opportunities will be provided to students. The process is a forward-looking one in that, through their discussions, the University (via Senate) should be able to form a judgement of confidence in the proposing School's likely future management of the course to ensure the continuing quality and standards of, and to take steps to enhance, the provision for which they are responsible.

The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.	
In practice, this means that students are key stakeholders in course design and development processes	Students are actively involved throughout the design and approval of academic courses. Students are represented at subject meetings and will be party to the initial discussions in relation to new proposals. Students also form part of the initial scrutiny at School Academic Committee and will be present at the co-design stage, where the detail of the curriculum and its delivery is considered and lastly, at Senate, where the final approval is given.