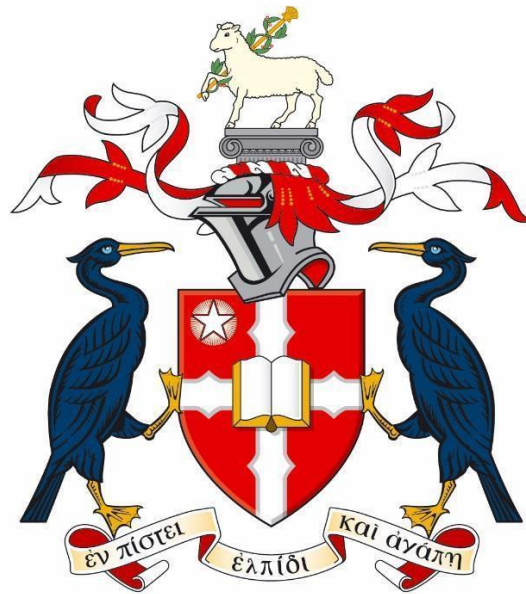


# Liverpool Hope University



## **Academic Quality Handbook 5 (QH5):** Approval of Modification to Existing Provision

July 2021 version

## 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 Schools/Departments, 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 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 (QH5) sets out an overview of the University's approach to approval of modifications to existing provision (at full course level or below). It should be read within the context of the overarching document QH1.**

The following handbooks are also of relevance:

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.

QH6 Withdrawal or suspension of courses.

The need to make changes to existing courses can be in response to a range of different criteria/circumstances. **The flowchart in Appendix 1 is designed to give support** in identification of the appropriate route to take.

## B. The Need for Modifications

Before initiating a course change, the subject team should carefully consider the nature and extent of any proposed modifications, given the time and deliberation which takes place in the initial course approval process.

It is accepted that there may, on occasion, be a need to modify approved provision and update the corresponding version of the approved documentation.

The reasons for a requirement for modification might include:

- developments within a subject area,
- innovations within teaching and learning,
- enhancement actions following student feedback / annual review (ARE)
- to reflect the University's strategic positioning within the sector.

**In most cases, it is expected that proposed changes will have arisen during the Annual Review & Enhancement process.**

Note: this guidance outlines the process to be followed when making modifications to approved provision. It is NOT intended to address those reasonable adjustments which may be required by an individual student because of, for example, a known disability or extenuating circumstances. The Student Development and Wellbeing Team can provide advice to academic teams about accommodations for individual students and these should be reflected within individual student Learning Support Plans, where appropriate.

It is essential that the University has robust systems in place to manage modifications, proportionate to the risks involved in making such changes. These processes for modifications apply to all credit bearing provision of the University. Modifications may range from the trivial to the major and so the processes for approving these changes are therefore dependent on the scope and scale of those changes. Key points on this change spectrum include:

- The need to seek external comment.
- The need to invite student comments.
- The need to notify central systems (UNISTATS, SITS, Results), prospective and continuing students and other interested parties, in line with the Competition and Marketing Agency (CMA) regulations.

The diagram in Appendix 1 provides guidance as to the appropriate process for modification dependent on its extent.

**Before deciding to make any change, subject teams must consult Appendix 1 to determine what process should be used.**

## C. Principles Governing the Approval of Modifications

### 1. External consultation

Where there are proposed *major* changes to the conceptual or structural foundations of approved courses, external expert opinion should always be sought.

It should be noted that some modifications could impact on any accreditation that applies to that course or to its component parts. In these circumstances, staff wishing to make modifications should first check with the specific accreditation criteria of the Professional Body. In addition, staff should refer to Quality Handbook 10 (QH10): Seeking and Maintaining Professional Accreditation.

### 2. Timing

Modifications should not be applied retrospectively or proposed in the same year as Course Approval takes place. Major modifications should normally be triggered by the ARE process, and therefore should not normally be considered during the first year of a course's operation.

All modifications should be approved in advance of the start of the next academic session. In exceptional circumstances, in-year modifications can be considered. The timeline for proposing and approving major modifications should ensure that current students enrolled on an approved course are not normally affected by major modifications to provision. However, it is recognised that, occasionally, major modifications may be required that could affect students currently enrolled on a course.

All proposed modifications should be submitted for review/approval in a timely manner to facilitate production of course handbooks, UNISTATS updates and timetabling.

### 3. Student Considerations

Students should be actively engaged in the modification process, particularly where the modification is classed as major. Further guidance on consultation is provided later in this document. Care should be taken to consider the impact of such modifications on all groups of students to ensure that any modification does not disadvantage specific students / groups of students.

### 4. Curriculum Changes

Curriculum content will have been defined via the co-design process and, other than the acceptable changes as defined below, **the fundamental subject content cannot be modified except via a co-design process.**

### 5. Cumulative effects of change

**Prime consideration should be given to prevention of curriculum drift.** Note that any proposal to modify approved provision must be considered in the light of all modifications made to that provision since the provision was (re)validated. Where EITHER the proposed modification/s alone OR the proposed modification/s in combination with all other previous modifications constitute a major modification as outlined above then this triggers the process for approval of new courses.

## D. Minor Modifications

### 1. Definition of Minor Modifications

<b>Key Features</b>	No impact on the course of study. Student representation not required. External comment not required.
<b>Examples</b>	Updating reading lists; staff changes; minor changes in School/Departmental operating processes, room changes, changes to visit locations (which in themselves do not change the Learning Outcomes and which have no additional cost implications), changes to academic responsibilities, periodic changes of External Examiners.
<b>Process Changes</b>	Requires no formal notification but should be noted in the minutes of School /Departmental Academic Committee meetings as appropriate. Makes no changes to UNISTATS, SITS input or results.
<b>Method of Change</b>	Amendments via School/Departmental Academic Committee.
<b>Notes</b>	Ensure that all changes are consistent throughout, for example, on the web site, subject leaflets, handbooks, Moodle etc.

## E. Major Modifications

### 1. Definition of Major Modifications

<b>Key Features</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May result in up to 25% change to the course as originally approved by Senate.</li> <li>• Requires Student representation.</li> <li>• Requires External Comment.</li> <li>• Likely to make changes to UNISTATS, SITS input and/or results.</li> <li>• Will need to be fully communicated to prospective students (and those on course if affected) prior to delivery.</li> <li>• Acceptable changes to curriculum under a major modification: inclusion of new material that accounts for no more than the equivalent of 30 credits of a Major (or Masters) course (over the 180-credit course) or 60 credits of a Single Honours course (over the 360-credit course).</li> </ul>
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion of new material that accounts for no more than the equivalent of 30 credits of a Major (or Masters) course (over the 180-credit course) or 60 credits of a Single Honours course (over the 360-credit course).</li> <li>• A change in the title of an approved course, where the <b>only</b> change is to the wording of the title.</li> <li>• Changes to Learning Outcomes.</li> <li>• Changes to place of delivery.</li> <li>• Changes to the assessment patterns or weightings.</li> <li>• Changes to examinations (format and type).</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in trips and visits (which themselves constitute part or all of a Learning Outcome).</li> <li>• Changes in delivery or contact time.</li> <li>• Changes to timetabling blocks.</li> <li>• addition or withdrawal of a work placement or access to specific facilities or equipment.</li> <li>• The introduction or withdrawal of specific options or topics.</li> <li>• Changes to prerequisites or corequisites.</li> <li>• An extension of existing provision to include new collaborative partnerships.</li> </ul>
<b>Unacceptable Changes to curriculum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removal of pre-approved key concepts, historical persons or events, or pre-defined skills (such as pre-approved statistical or research methodologies, practical or performance skills). If such changes are required, the processes described in <i>QH3 Approval of courses including more than 50% existing provision</i> should be followed.</li> </ul>

## 2. Process for Major Modifications

<b>Method of Change</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Proposal discussed by Subject Team (Subject Leaders responsibility).</li> <li>II. Subject Leader seeks External comment on the proposed changes.</li> <li>III. Student comment invited.</li> <li>IV. Proposal formally adopted (and minuted) at School/Departmental Academic Committee.</li> <li>V. Major Modification Form completed and signed off by the HOS/D.</li> <li>VI. Major Modification Form discussed (and minuted) at School/Departmental Academic Committee: Student comment invited. Formal comment added to the Major Modification Form. All changes are defined on this form.</li> <li>VII. The HOS/D approves the changes.</li> <li>VIII. The relevant UEM informs all those who are affected by the changes including for example, Academic Committee via minutes and appended Major Modification Form, prospective and continuing students as appropriate, SITS, UNISTATS, Recruitment/Admissions, Data Group and other relevant persons.</li> <li>IX. UEM maintains the Change Register for each course.</li> </ol>
<b>Notes</b>	By this process, the HOS/D may approve changes of up to 25% per course of study (Major, Single or Level of study) in any Review Period (five years) without triggering a full re-approval.

## 3. Major Modifications which trigger full reapproval

If the modifications, in their totality, constitute a 'significant change' to an 'approved award or major/course', then a comprehensive process of scrutiny is required and the amended provision is subject to the usual academic approval process as outlined in Quality Handbook QH3. In seeking opinion on the proposed modification, the current course specification must be made available to contextualise any proposed modification.

#### **4. Consultation with students affected by Major Modifications**

In line with the University's principles relating to modifications, it is expected that major modifications will be introduced in advance of students commencing the course or level of Study as appropriate. However, in exceptional circumstances major modifications may be required that affect students currently studying. In such instances, it is essential that the modification itself, and the reasons for such, are discussed with current students in advance of approval being given and that specific concerns are considered and addressed as appropriate within the approval process.

It is also required, in line with wider sector requirements for student engagement ([QAA, 2018](#)) that should major modifications be proposed which impact on the future experiences of enrolled students (for example, major modification/s to Level I provision which will impact on the current Level C students' subsequent experience and expectations) then again consultation and engagement must occur, with key concerns considered and addressed within the approval process.

It is for the HOS/D to determine the specific process by which students are consulted, since the scope, scale and focus of the modification will vary in each case. However, as a minimum it is expected that the Course Representatives will be actively involved via the relevant Staff Student Liaison Committees and where whole cohorts are affected, mechanisms should be established to ensure effective engagement and consultation with all students. The advice of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Life and Learning) should also be sought in those cases where major modifications are being proposed which will impact on the experience of current students.

In all our communications with prospective and current students we must act fairly. We must be:

- Timely
- Accurate
- Honest
- Consistent.

Information on any modifications to approved provision should be made available to students via the Course Representative, Staff Student Liaison Committee and formally communicated to students by the School/Department once approved.

## **F. Audit and Monitoring**

It is the responsibility of the Head of School/Department to ensure that, in advance of any approval being granted, all modifications submitted for approval have been subject to due process. As part of the Annual Review process (ARE), Schools/Departments are required to provide an overview of all modifications. To facilitate this, a Record of Change should be kept at School/Departmental level to enable review and monitoring both in year and across years. This is important so that oversight is maintained and 'incremental drift' of approved provision prevented.

AREs should include a comment on modifications within a year and the HOS/D is required to confirm that all modifications have been managed in accordance with the processes for major modifications.

Academic Committee will commission an audit of a random sample of modifications during the year to ensure effective operation of the process.

## **G. Additional Information for Staff**

**FOR ALL MAJOR MODIFICATIONS** strict version control of the core course documentation must be adhered to following approval of modifications.

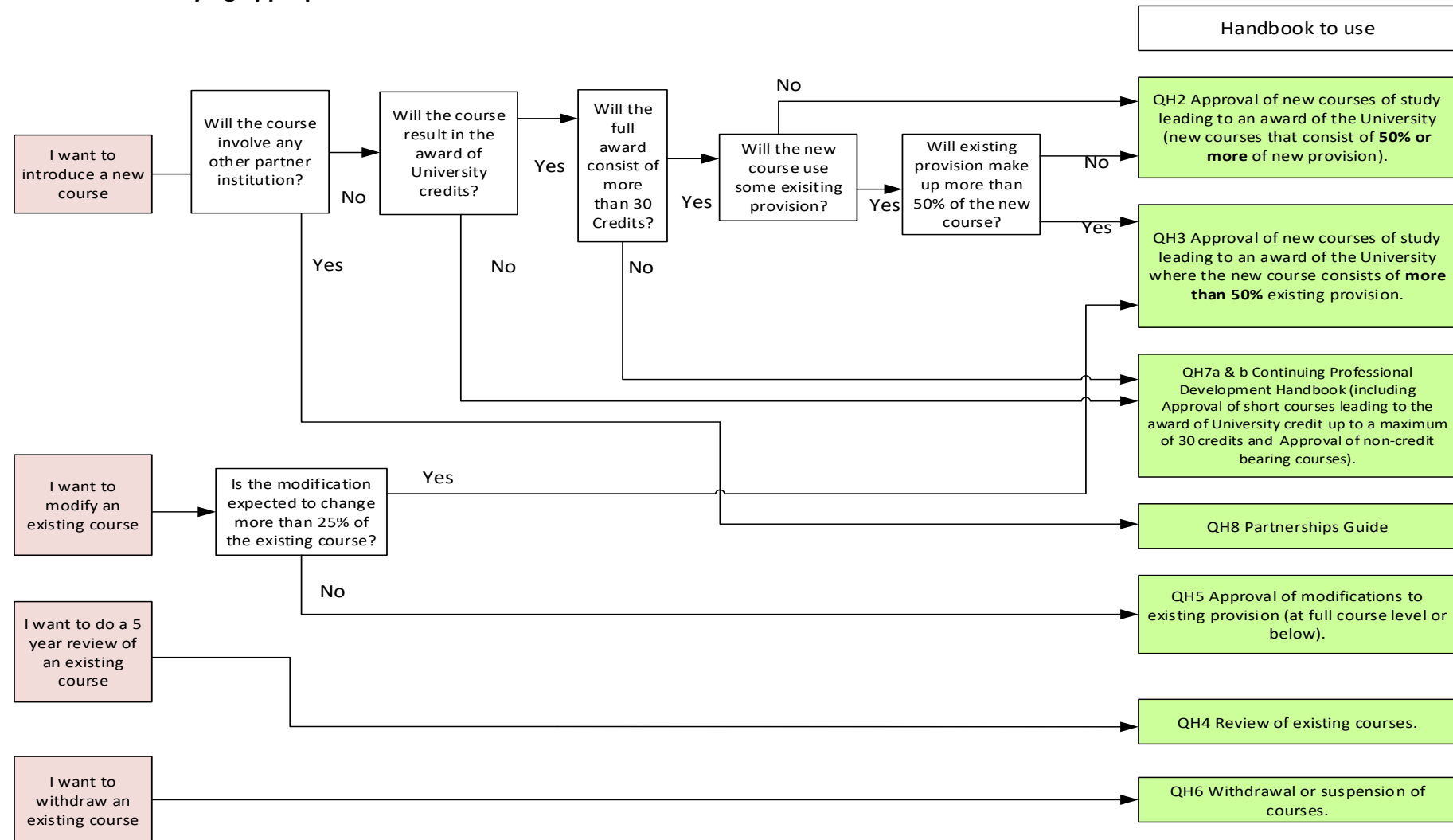
Once any major modification has been approved by School/Departmental Academic Committee, then a copy of the Major Modification Form must be forwarded by the UEM, to the relevant officers in:

- Student Administration who will be responsible for ensuring that the modification is reflected within the relevant student administration systems/information.
- Recruitment and Admissions who will be responsible for ensuring that the modification is appropriately communicated to prospective students including but not limited to subject information leaflets, subject webpages, and prospectus.
- Head of Subject who must inform current students who may be affected by the changes, via email, moodle, or tutorial.



## Appendix One

### Flowchart identifying appropriate Documentation



## Appendix 2: Relationship to Relevant Parts of the UK Quality Code

### Scope

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2018) is focused on 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:

<b>(a) Core practices</b>	
What QAA says	What Hope does
<b>The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualification's frameworks.</b>	
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.
<b>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.</b>	
In practice, this means that the	The University has extensive processes set out in QH5. This describes partnerships with other institutions are set up monitored, with a

awarding body or 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.
<b>The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.</b>	
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>(b) Common practice</b>	
<b>The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.</b>	
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:

<b>(a) Core practices</b>	
<b>The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.</b>	
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 the Rectorate 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/Department: Independent and expert advice is also given by externality at the co-design stage and via external academic review.
<b>The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.</b>	
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/Department 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.
<b>The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.</b>	
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.

<b>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.</b>	
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 University Executive Committee 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>(b) Common practices</b>	
<b>The provider reviews its core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.</b>	
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/Department'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.
<b>The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.</b>	
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/Departmental 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.