Guide to programme approval/ validations
2017-18
**Message from the President of the Students' Union**

Introducing students onto our approval and validations panels is a huge step forward for Royal Holloway that makes us stand out amongst other institutions as innovative and inclusive, taking on board student feedback as readily as that from academics.

Seeing as students are paying to study with us and are the people taking our courses, it makes complete sense to include them in the development of new courses and programmes, so it goes without saying that this is also a project close to my heart.

Having spent the last year as Students’ Union President (Education and Campaigns), I have been privileged enough to witness first-hand the incredible dedication and passion that Royal Holloway students display when working as Course Representatives, on Faculty Boards or in our Academic Societies.

This year at our Laurels Awards Ceremony, we acknowledged many of these outstanding students, providing us with further confirmation that we have a fantastic pool from which to recruit student curriculum consultants.

I know that our students, working alongside myself, our brand new Vice President Education Clement Jones and members of College staff will thoroughly enjoy this experience, gaining an enormous range of transferable skills, an insight into course management and be able to diversify and modernise many of our courses with their input.

As I pass the Education Officer baton over to Clement, I am confident that this project will thrive as a perfect example of the collaborative partnership between RHSU and Royal Holloway.

**Natasha Barrett**

President, Royal Holloway Students’ Union

**Message from the Head of the Academic Quality and Policy Office and the Head of Educational Development**

Royal Holloway University of London thrives on the skills, expertise, and enthusiasms of its students, its staff, and the wider community. To further develop this vibrant culture, the ‘Curriculum Consultants’ project is enhancing our academic curricula by benefitting from our students’ invaluable insights and contributions at all stages of their design. By ensuring that the aims, content, teaching, and assessment of our courses are the products of close collaboration between students, staff, and external experts, we will ensure that the aspirations and values of all are the foundations of our excellent education.

**Marina Beck, Head of the Academic Quality and Policy Office, and Mark Crompton, Head of Educational Development**
1. OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMME APPROVAL AT THE COLLEGE

All programmes of study offered by the College have to undergo an approval process prior to being offered to prospective students. The College has well-established validation processes, which are designed to ensure that programmes at the outset meet the required standards and provide students with a high quality of learning opportunities. In the same vein when amendments are made to current programmes as part of a programme refresh (revalidation) these are scrutinised to ensure that they enhance the quality of learning, while maintaining the appropriate standards in terms of required learning outcomes at course unit and programme level.

Proposals for new and revalidated programmes of study are considered by the College’s Academic Planning Committee who make a decision about whether the (re)validation can proceed. This decision considers the likely potential for recruitment of students, admissions requirements, target student numbers for the first five years of operation, resources required and timetabling requirements. The academic approval of such programmes then rests with a validation panel, chaired by the relevant Faculty Associate Dean (Education) with two internal panel members from the Faculty in which the new/ revalidated programme will be delivered and one external discipline specialist. From 2017-18 validation panels will also include at least one student representative to provide a vital student-perspective. The validation panel makes recommendations to the relevant Faculty Board that the programme be (re-)validated based on its deliberations. The panel may set conditions which have to be met before the programme is approved to be delivered to students and/or may propose recommendations for consideration by the programme team as they deliver the programme. These may or may not result in future amendments to the programme or to some aspect of the provision.¹

2. EXTERNAL BENCHMARKS

2.1 UK Quality Code

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) who wish to offer programmes of study need to ensure that these meet the expectations set out in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). This code provides all higher education providers with ‘a shared starting point for setting, describing and assuring the academic standards of their higher education awards and programmes and the quality of the learning opportunities they provide.’

The Code consists of the following three sections:

- **Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards** - sets out expectations which HEIs are required to meet to ensure that academic standards for programmes of study are set and maintained.²

- **Part B: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality** - sets out expectations that HEIs are required to meet to ensure: that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and

¹ For more details: [https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/quad/services/academicqualityassurance/programmevalidation-newprogrammesandmajorrevalidations.aspx](https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/quad/services/academicqualityassurance/programmevalidation-newprogrammesandmajorrevalidations.aspx)

learning resources are provided for students; that the learning opportunities provided are monitored; and that the HEI considers how to improve them through regular review and feedback, which includes student views and the views of external advisors.

- **Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision** – set out the expectation that HEIs make available information about their provision that is valid, reliable, useful and accessible to students as well as the public more generally.

### 2.2 Competition and Markets Authority

In March 2015 the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) published consumer law advice for HEIs to help them understand their responsibilities under consumer protection law with particular reference to the information provided to undergraduate students about programmes of study and associated costs.³ In response to this the College has developed ‘CMA documents’ which are provided to applicants at the point the College makes them an offer of a place and include the required information about the programme structure as well as information on tuition fees and other extra costs which the student may have to incur. These CMA documents form part of the paperwork considered as part of the (re-) validation of a programme.

### 2.3 HEFCE guidance on published information for prospective undergraduate students

Earlier this year the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) issued guidance on the quality of published information for, in particular, prospective undergraduate students to guide them in choosing the HEI and particular programme of study.⁴ The guide covers information on programmes of study as well as accommodation costs and financial support and complements the advice published by the CMA and the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (see above). The guidance is not, however, intended to cover all of the information that HEIs must legally provide such as details about complaints procedures. Although the focus of the HEFCE document is on prospective undergraduate students, their guidance should apply equally to information that the College provides for postgraduate taught and taught doctoral students.

### 2.4 Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies

A number of current programmes at the College have been accredited by external Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). This means that the programmes not only meet the requirements set by the QAA but also meet additional external requirements which may qualify graduates to work in certain professions, e.g. programmes in Psychology have accreditation from the Health Care and Professions Council and the British Psychological Society. PSRBs will normally only accredit new programmes once they have run for one or two years. However, it is important when

---


⁴ [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/Guide,to,providing,info,to,students/Guide_to_providing_info_to_students.pdf](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/Guide,to,providing,info,to,students/Guide_to_providing_info_to_students.pdf)
validating a programme for which accreditation will be sought, to ensure that any PSRB requirements are met from the outset.

3. STRUCTURE OF PROGRAMMES

3.1 Structure of undergraduate programmes

Undergraduate Bachelor’s programmes entail a minimum of three years of full-time study and require students to register for a total of 360 credits. Students take 120 credits per year. Individual course units will normally be worth 15 (1/2 unit) or 30 (full unit) credits. If programmes are offered part-time students would be expected to take 60 credits per year. Most programmes will have a number of mandatory courses which students must take as well as optional courses which afford students the opportunity to pursue particular areas of interest within their chosen subject of study. These may also include courses in other departments across the College and even, where possible, courses at some other colleges of the University of London. Some programmes include mandatory course units that are ‘non-condonable’: these are course units which students must both take and pass in order to progress to the next stage of study and/or to obtain a particular degree title. For example, if a student is studying a degree in French they must pass the first year French language course in order to progress to the second year, and in the final year must pass the French language course to be awarded a BA French. Similarly students taking a specialist pathway may have to pass a certain number of courses in that specialism, e.g. for the award of a BSc Management with marketing a student must have passed a certain number of courses in marketing. There may exceptionally be occasions where an undergraduate programme shorter than two years in validated, e.g. the LLB (Senior Status) which is only two years and gives students advanced standing to complete the degree in two years.

Some undergraduate programmes are longer than three years as they may involve students taking a year out to work in business/industry or to study abroad. Such programmes normally have a 13th unit attached to them as students are given credit for the extra year, e.g. through completion of a report, or in recognition of courses taken while studying abroad. This extra unit forms part of the final year degree average.

Programmes that involve a modern foreign language as a major or half component involve a period of residence abroad. Students can study or work while abroad and as above receive credit for this. They also complete an oral examination on return and receive credit for that. The extra two 30 credit units form part of the second year degree average.

Finally the College offers a number of 4 year integrated Masters programmes - essentially a Bachelor’s programme plus a year at Master’s level – an additional 120 credits. Some of these programmes include the option of a year in industry/business with an extra 30 credits which counts towards the third year of the programme. Such programmes may also include a year out to work in business/industry, which makes the programme 5 years.
With all the degrees above it is assumed that as students move through the years from first year (Level 4) to final year (Level 6 in the case of Honours degrees or level 7 in the case of integrated Masters), the knowledge and understanding they gain increases in depth, breadth and complexity, as do the skills. (see also below).

### 3.2 Structure of postgraduate taught programmes

Postgraduate taught programmes are offered over one calendar year of study (September to September, 52 weeks of full-time study). Part time students normally complete their studies over two years but College regulations permit up to five years to complete such programmes on a part-time basis.

Postgraduate taught programmes consist of 180 credits (1,800 notional learning hours) at Level 7. Course units at postgraduate taught level have credit values in multiples of 10, so can vary from 10 credits to up to 30 credits. 120 credits are devoted to taught courses while 60 credits are assigned to the dissertation/project in line with national guidance in this regard. If a student fails the dissertation, they can be awarded a Postgraduate Diploma if they have passed all taught courses (120 credits). Students normally complete taught courses during the autumn and spring terms and then work over the summer term and summer vacation period on their dissertation, which is submitted in early September.

### 3.3 Structure of taught doctoral programmes

The College currently offers two taught doctoral programmes in Egham. One of these includes taught course units which need to be passed before the student is permitted to start work on the thesis element of the programme. Having passed taught courses to the value of 120 credits the student can choose to take an exit award of a Postgraduate Diploma, and with the addition of a project worth 60 credits could exit with a Master’s award.

### 3.4 Course units

#### 3.4.1 Credit value and notional learning hours (NLHs)

As mentioned above all programmes of study consist of course units which have an associated credit value. What this means is that students who have successfully met the learning outcomes of the course based on their assessed work are deemed to have passed the course, and are awarded credit towards their degree (see 3.2.2 below).

The credits associated with a course reflect the number of notional learning hours a course has: 1 credit is equal to 10 notional learning hours. Notional learning hours reflect a combination of hours a student is expected to be present in scheduled teaching sessions (e.g. in lectures, seminars), and also the hours that they are expected to spend studying independently. So, a 15 credit course unit has 150 notional learning hours associated with it. A student would therefore be expected to devote a minimum of 150 hours on that course during the academic year.

#### 3.4.2 Course units

As alluded to above course units are designed to be offered at a particular level:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>First Year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4.3 Learning outcomes
Every course unit, and indeed each programme as a whole, needs to have learning outcomes. These should define what a learner will have acquired (knowledge and understanding) or what they will be able to do (skills) on completion of the course unit or programme as a whole. The learning outcomes should be achievable, measurable and assessable.

Examples of good learning outcomes

**Latin**
Demonstrate a knowledge of basic Latin grammar and syntax

**Computer Science**
Calculate the complexity of basic algorithms

**Management**
Demonstrate independence and originality in developing problem-solving skills and applying them

**English**
Produce clear, accurate, artistically coherent and technically sophisticated written work, which articulates a combination of research and creative ideas

4 VALIDATION PROCESS

4.1 Formal event
You are probably wondering why we have a formal approval/validation process. As mentioned above the College, as a UK HEI, has to meet the expectations of the QAA UK Quality Code, in particular Expectation A3.1 and B1:

A3.1
“Degree awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are asset at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks.”

B1.
“Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.”

4.2 Panel composition and roles
The validation panel is normally chaired by a Faculty Associate Dean (Education) but may also be chaired by a Faculty Dean. The panel includes two members of the Faculty in which the programme will be delivered. Feedback for the event is provided in writing by an advisor, who is external to the College and has the necessary discipline specific expertise to comment on the content, teaching, learning and assessment being proposed. From 2017-18 the College will have a student representative as a full member of the panel.

The roles of various members of the panel are set out in a separate document. The role of the student representative is to provide:

- a student perspective on the programme to be delivered and the academic and pastoral support to be provided based on reading of the programme documentation;
- input from a student perspective on issues raised during the validation meeting;
- input on the quality of the programme information to be provided to applicants and students.

### 4.3 Programme documentation

In order for validation panel members to assure themselves that the programme under consideration for approval has been designed in such a way that it from the outset meets the required standards and provides students with a high quality of learning opportunities the following information is provided:

- The programme specification: a high level document which sets out the overall aims and learning outcomes of the programme in terms of knowledge/understanding and the skills (subject-specific, general and transferable) to be gained, an overview of the teaching and assessment approaches, and high level details of the programme structure
- A Course unit specification for all mandatory course units and all, or a selection, of course unit specifications for optional or elective course units
- A Student handbook, based on the College’s handbook template, which the panel would expect to include the marking criteria to be used for assessing different types of work (e.g. presentations, essays)
- A dissertation handbook (optional)
- Where the programme includes a year in business, a handbook which sets out expectations of the student and the department in overseeing the placement
- Where the programme includes a period of residence abroad, a handbook.
- For programmes on offer in the Science Faculty it may be appropriate for the validation panel to also have sight of handbooks relating to field work or laboratory work as appropriate.
- If the intention is to seek accreditation for the programme in the future, the requirements of the relevant PSRB.

The panel will also be given links to the Quality Code and subject benchmarks or award characteristics which are relevant to the programme.\(^5\)
4.4 Decisions of the panel
4.4.1 Standards of award

The validation panel has to assure itself that the programme under consideration meets the standards as set out in Part A of the Quality Code. For example, if the programme is undergraduate does it meet the standards set out for an honours award in terms of the knowledge and understanding to be gained and the skills to be developed (See Appendix A – put in details from QA Quality Code)?

There are also so-called subject benchmark statements, primarily for undergraduate awards, which set out the knowledge and understanding and skills that graduates should have developed for the award of a degree in a particular subject, as well as learning, teaching and assessment methods that are appropriate for the subject. For example, a graduate of a creative writing degree may be expected to have acquired knowledge of ‘the range of relevant contemporary writing, together with a comprehensive grasp of literary history; this includes awareness of major writers and critical approaches’, they should be able to ‘communicate orally and through the written word concrete ideas’ and abstract concepts’, and be able to ‘present information to a professional standard, appropriate to context’. The programme should have built into it opportunities for ongoing assessment, which involves tutor and peer assessment as well as self-critique.6

Additionally, if the proposed programme is to be accredited by a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body in future, there may be additional requirements that have to be met in terms of both expected knowledge/understanding and skill set.

4.4.2 Quality of Academic provision

Part B of the UK Quality Code outlines expectations that HEIs should meet in a number of different areas ranging from the admission of students at the start of their studies to student engagement and teaching and learning. Each chapter also provides HEIs with indicators of good practice, that is, activities that would evidence that the provision is meeting the required expectation.

The duty of the panel is to assess whether students admitted to the programme of study are supported academically and pastorally during their studies to achieve the best possible degree outcomes and the skills required to maximise their chances of employment.

4.4.3 Quality of published information

Part C of the UK Quality Code outlines expectations in terms of the information that HEIs provide current and prospective students about their programmes of study as well as related information about support services provided, ranging from accommodation and finance through to study skills and academic support. As indicated above there are now complementary requirements as made clear in the guidance provided by both CMA and HEFCE.

It is the responsibility of the panel to ensure that the information provided to students in the programme documentation is valid, reliable, useful and accessible for students in line with the expectation of Part C of the UK Quality Code, the recent guidance provided by HEFCE and the CMA. While the legal requirements as set out by the CMA are not directly relevant to the validation of the programme, one of the documents that will form part of the pack of validation materials that you will be provided with includes the so-called CMA template for the new programme(s). This follows the

standard, currently approved College template and represents the information which will be provided to students when they are offered a place at the College. Supplementary to the point made above the panel will need to ensure that the CMA template provides an accurate representation of the required information to be provided to applicants.
4.5 Validation outcomes and process
The validation panel makes one of the following decisions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision of panel</th>
<th>Follow on activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approved with no conditions (possibly with recommendations)</td>
<td>The Panel signs off the validation. Faculty Board approves the recommendation of the validation panel for the programme to be delivered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approved with conditions (possibly with recommendations)</td>
<td>The programme team is given one month in which to address the conditions set. Assuming the Chair of the panel is satisfied that these have been met the validation is signed off. Faculty Board approves the recommendation of the validation panel for the programme to be delivered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not approved</td>
<td>The Panel will give the programme team guidance on what amendments need to be made for the programme to be re-considered for validation. Normally a second validation event will need to be held.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A

General characteristics of a Bachelor’s degree with Honours from the UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards

- Holders of a bachelor's degree with honours will have developed an understanding of a complex body of knowledge, some of it at the current boundaries of an academic discipline. Through this, the holder will have developed analytical techniques and problem-solving skills that can be applied in many types of employment. The holder of such a qualification will be able to evaluate evidence, arguments and assumptions, to reach sound judgements and to communicate them effectively.

- Holders of a bachelor's degree with honours should have the qualities needed for employment in situations requiring the exercise of personal responsibility, and decision-making in complex and unpredictable circumstances.

- Bachelor's degrees with honours form the largest group of higher education qualifications. Typically, learning outcomes for these programmes would be expected to be achieved on the basis of study equivalent to three or four full-time academic years and lead to qualifications with titles such as Bachelor of Arts, BA (Hons) or Bachelor of Science, BSc (Hons). In addition to bachelor's degrees at this level are short courses and professional 'conversion' courses, based largely on undergraduate material, and taken usually by those who are already graduates in another discipline, leading to, for example, graduate certificates or graduate diplomas.

- Much of the study undertaken for master's degrees is at, or informed by, the forefront of an academic or professional discipline. Successful students show originality in the application of knowledge, and they understand how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research. They are able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, and they show originality in tackling and solving problems. They have the qualities needed for employment in circumstances requiring sound judgement, personal responsibility and initiative in complex and unpredictable professional environments.

General characteristics of a Master’s degree from the UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards

- Master's degrees are awarded after completion of taught courses, programmes of research or a mixture of both. Longer, research-based programmes may lead to the degree of MPhil. The learning outcomes of most master's degree courses are achieved on the basis of study equivalent to at least one full-time calendar year and are taken by graduates with a bachelor's degree with honours (or equivalent achievement).

- Master's degrees are often distinguished from other qualifications at this framework level (for example, advanced short courses, which often form parts of continuing professional development programmes and lead to postgraduate certificates and/or postgraduate diplomas) by an increased intensity, complexity and density of study. Master's degrees, in comparison to

---

postgraduate certificates and postgraduate diplomas, typically include planned intellectual progression that often includes a synoptic/research or scholarly activity.

- Some master's degrees, for example, in science, engineering and mathematics, comprise an integrated programme of study spanning several levels. Such programmes typically involve study equivalent to at least four full-time academic years in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and five in Scotland. Of this, study equivalent to at least one full-time academic year is at level 7 of the FHEQ/SCQF level 11 on the FQHEIS and the final outcomes of the qualifications themselves meet the expectations of the descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 7/level 11 in full. Study at bachelor's level is integrated with study at master's level and the programmes are designed to meet the qualification descriptors in full at level 6 of the FHEQ/SCQF level 10 on the FQHEIS as well as those at level 7 of the FHEQ/level 11 of the FQHEIS. Such qualifications are often termed 'integrated master's' as an acknowledgement of the prior period of study at lower levels (which typically meets the expectations of the descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 6/level 10).

General characteristics of a doctoral degree from the UK Quality Code for Higher Education: Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards

Doctoral degrees are awarded for the creation and interpretation, construction and/or exposition of knowledge which extends the forefront of a discipline, usually through original research.

- Holders of doctoral degrees are able to conceptualise, design and implement projects for the generation of significant new knowledge and/or understanding. Holders of doctoral degrees have the qualities needed for employment that require both the ability to make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields and an innovative approach to tackling and solving problems.
- Doctoral programmes that may have a substantial taught element in addition to the research component (for example, professional doctorates), lead usually to awards which include the name of the discipline in their title (for example, EdD for Doctor of Education or DClinPsy for Doctor of Clinical Psychology). Professional doctorates aim to develop an individual's professional practice and to support them in producing a contribution to (professional) knowledge.
- The titles PhD and DPhil are commonly used for doctoral degrees awarded on the basis of original research.
- Achievement of outcomes consistent with the qualification descriptor for the doctoral degree normally requires study equivalent to three full-time calendar years.
- Higher doctorates may be awarded in recognition of a substantial body of original research undertaken over the course of many years. Typically a portfolio of work that has been previously published in a peer-refereed context is submitted for assessment. Most degree awarding bodies restrict candidacy to graduates or their own academic staff of several years' standing.

---

### Celebrating Diversity in the Curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the curriculum content cover a diverse range of viewpoints?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are any viewpoints lacking?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the curriculum content designed to appeal to students from a wide range of backgrounds, e.g. from different cultural and national groups, those speaking different languages, etc. and also all student identities e.g. BME students or LGBT+ students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could any students feel excluded?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the teaching methods (lectures, seminars, fieldwork, practical, on-line etc.) designed to accommodate students from a wide range of backgrounds and with varying needs?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is this also true for the assessment types (exams, coursework, essays, quizzes, reports, presentations, performances, etc.)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there any over-emphasis on one, or a few, approaches?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the assessment tasks designed to effectively evaluate the appropriate skills as detailed in the learning outcomes for a course unit?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the diverse assessment tasks give all students a fair opportunity to evidence their learning?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a fair assessment load: enough to provide opportunities to evidence learning, but not over-burdening?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the assessment timings managed to prevent unnecessary clashes?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development in the Curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do the activities develop students’ skills for diverse choices in future employment? Do they provide experiences of workplaces and/or workplace skills and practices?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are professional skills integrated across the curriculum to ensure access for all students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do students obtain guidance and feedback on their professional skills development?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the development of professional skills assessed?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>