FAQs

Programme Approval

Q: There is a revised set of procedures in place for programme and module approval, how do they differ from the system we have been used to until now?

A: In a number of ways. There is an increased emphasis on developing a sound business case at the outset, one that is informed by appropriate market research, for consideration by the Business Case Committee. To compensate, however, there are fewer stages of approval to negotiate subsequently and a greater emphasis on input from the Faculty with regard to development of the curriculum and the completion of specifications. School and Faculty representatives will form Programme Development Teams and attend each stage of the procedure in order to bring specific projects to completion. Full details can be found in Annex C: Programme Approval and Withdrawal of the University’s Code of Practice for Quality Assurance for Taught Programmes https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/documents/quality-assurance/codes/taught/pdf/AnnexC.pdf

Q: Will the new procedure apply to all new programmes of study?

A: Only to taught programmes of study (UG & PGT) developed by Kent’s Schools, either unilaterally or in collaboration with other Schools or partner providers. New programme of study leading to research degree awards will remain subject to the present procedures for approval as set out in Annex B: Programme Approval and Withdrawal of the University’s Code of Practice for Quality Assurance for Research Programmes. https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/documents/quality-assurance/codes/taught/pdf/AnnexB.pdf

There is a real sense that the new procedures for approving taught programme, with its greater emphasis on business case development and intensive curriculum development by a School / Faculty programme team, will be inappropriate for a new research programme. Of course, should there be a perceived benefit to a specific proposal opting into the more intensive procedure, such as for a new taught doctorate, that could be accommodated.

Also, new programmes submitted directly by partner providers, such as the Validated Institutions or the Partner Colleges, will not be subject to the revised process but will be covered by the relevant procedures set out in Annexes L and O of the Code of Practice respectively.
Q: What will be the involvement of EG in the new process?
A: Any new proposal or area of development that requires the provision of significant new resource (e.g. a new post or posts, significant capital expenditure, significant expansion of space, but not, for example, a small increase in library budget) must first be considered and greenlit by EG before it proceeds to the Business Case Committee. Where no such new resource is required, the proposal will be considered first by the BCC.

Q: How will market research fit within the revised process?
A: Market research will be at the centre and EMS have been closely consulted throughout the project. The intention is that early engagement between EMS and Schools will facilitate marketing new programmes. All Schools intending to put forward a business case for a new taught programme of study should contact the FSO when it seems this will be a likely possibility. This is so that workload can be planned.

Q: Will there be a concentrated amount of work for agencies supporting the process at business case stage?
A: Schools will be encouraged to inform supporting departments as early as possible to help them plan workloads and FSO will be gatekeepers to the process, supporting other departments by implementing specific deadlines for each new programme and in addition the window for this stage has been made as wide as possible.

Q: Will there be any knock-on effects to the academic calendar?
A: No, there will be a fixed cycle for this specific process but no impact on anything else such as term dates. Please note that in a separate development, there will be discussion in Senate and its Boards during 2017/18 of changing the structure of the academic year. We will discuss what any proposed changes will mean for the programme and module approval process.

Q: What does the new cycle for the approval of programmes look like?
A: It looks like this:

(a) Planning and Development
   - Any time of year: Planning of new provision;
   - May-February: Development of business cases;
   - January-February and early September: Meetings of the Business Case Committee (BCC).

(b) Curriculum Development, Approval and Marketing
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UG
- **February-July**: Curriculum development and approval stages;
- **March-April**: update on progress at planning round;
- **Sept/Oct**: end of process and marketing begins for entry. Note – approx. 18 months is needed prior to September entry.

PG
- **February-April**: Curriculum development and approval stages;
- **March-April**: update on progress at planning round;
- **April**: end of process and marketing begins for September +1 year entry.

Q: How can Schools be responsive to student feedback and external examiner recommendations?

A: We would like to retain the facility for someone at Faculty level to allow revisions to take place in July (before the summer vacation period). However, we are somewhat constrained in this respect because of Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) requirements, which have changed recently. There will be a separate taskforce to look at the implications of CMA requirements during 2017/18.

Q: How will work in Schools and relevant committees’ link? How will duplication of effort be avoided?

A: The key players in Schools and Faculties (Directors of Education & Graduate Studies / Associate Deans) will retain their engagement with the process. They will remain the obvious route for coordinating approval activities with local committees. Also, there is a module available to be added to KentVision that will help links between Schools and other units working on approval and tackle the problem of duplication. However, this won’t be ready for this year.

Q: Will there be the option to have electronic updates on the programme/modules process?

A: This is slightly outside the scope of the project. However, because FSO will have more comprehensive engagement with the entire approval process this will facilitate far better communication for everyone. We hope in future to buy a software module for KentVision to facilitate all programme and module development from first idea to marketing.

Q: Under the former system there was a sense that the approval process was fragmented into discrete stages (School / Faculty / University), with staff working in isolation on their part of the process with no real-time insight into developments at any of the other stages. Will we see this end?

A: The revised procedure will allow for explicit engagement between the School and Faculty in developing the curriculum and recommending it for approval to PASC. This will take place in the new School / Faculty Programme Development Team, which will feature a Programme Lead nominated by the School (the SPL). The SPLs will also be invited to attend the meeting of PASC at which their programmes will be considered. Also, as the FSO have now be actively participating at every stage of the process will ensure there is a clear workflow.

Q: Will there be further consultation with Schools about the annual timetable for programme and module approval?
A: We have carried out a range of research and consultation to inform the current proposals and we will review in partnership with Schools how the new cycle of approval works for them in May 2018, following discussions throughout 2017/18.

Q: Will there be changes to programme and module specifications?

A: No changes will be made as a result of PMAS changes. However, some minor changes have been incorporated in to the programme specification templates (UG & PGT) in order to foreground the University’s increased emphasis on developing and incorporating inclusive practices in learning and teaching. After this year, we may have to make small changes to the specifications to reflect ongoing work by KentVision on the 'academic model': that is, the structures that help to support and create a programme (e.g. start date, exit route, stage structuring.)

Q: Why will it now take so long for a new programme to go from initial idea to admittance of students?

A: For UG we are constrained by requirements by UCAS and key periods when prospective students are looking at their options and making their applications. The lead-in time can take as much as two years. We hope that as the new procedures for programme and module approval evolve and bed down, our internal processes should take a shorter time than has previously been the case. PGT is different as it the process normally completes in a shorter timeframe anyway.

Q: There are times when the University needs to be responsive to the rapidly changing marketplace with its new programme development, can the new system handle that?

A: There is an out-of-cycle “fast-track” option for these cases. This involves getting together a business case and then going through a more time-compressed curriculum development and approvals process. Please note this will be used only in exceptional circumstances and that successful applications are likely to be those that can make the case for acting quickly in order to capitalise on specific opportunities arising in the HE sector and/or market.

Q: Any other key changes arising from the new system that we should be aware of?

A: The approval of new programmes has been largely taken out of the existing School and Faculty Committee structures, with the School and Faculty Development Teams making recommendations directly to PASC. This has a knock-on effect for modules coming forward as part of new programme developments, as the approval will take place on the authority of the Associate Dean assigned to the specific Programme Development Team. New modules coming forward outside of a new programme development will be approved under the arrangements in place prior to the advent of the new methodology. See Annex B: Approval and Withdrawal of Modules. https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/codes/index.html

Q: The foregoing refers exclusively to the development of new programmes, how will amended programmes of study be treated?

A: Substantially amended programmes of study will proceed through a similar structure, albeit less intensively. Should the Associate Dean be satisfied with the outline of the proposed development s/he will greenlight its development and convene a virtual Programme Development Team to consider the full submission via PMAS. The PDT will be empowered to approve modules and makes recommendations on the programme to PASC. See section 6 of Annex C: Programme Approval and Withdrawal of the University’s Code of Practice for Quality Assurance for Taught Programmes. https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/codes/index.html
Curriculum design

Q: What will be the process for decreasing the number of programmes?
A: There will be an extended planning period of at least three years, with changes coming online in 2021 at the earliest. There will be no changes for current students and the shift may require some dual running. But before this can happen we must decide whether this is something we would indeed like to pursue. Discussions around how we structure our entire education offer will be held in 2017/18 involving stakeholders from across the University.

Q: What consideration will be given to timetabling?
A: Changes to timetabling are outside of the scope of this project.

Q: How do we name the new programmes under the streamlined portfolio vision to ensure market appeal?
A: This will be done closely with EMS and schools and will be given detailed consideration.

Q: At PGT level there is additional complexity in programmes, will this be given additional attention?
A: Changes will be carefully considered and informed using market advice and regularly reviewed.

Q: Is there evidence that students are keen on pathways or that it makes life easier for students?
A: From previous experience within schools there has been a clear strengthening of cohort identity where the programme offer has been simplified or programmes are few, for example, as in the Schools of Psychology and Architecture.

Q: What’s the optimum programme number?
A: Many of our competitors have fewer than 200, UG and PGT combined. Kent has around 750.