Annex L: Quality Assurance Procedures for Courses of Study at Validated Institutions and Partner Colleges

APPENDIX A: Guidance on Procedures for Division Panels Convened to Consider New and Substantially Revised Validated Institution Courses of Study (Taught Courses)

1. Definition of Validated Provision

Validated provision denotes courses of study devised and delivered by a partner institution/organisation to its own students and which lead to University awards. Partners offering such provision are commonly referred to as ‘Validated Institutions’.

2. Proposals for New or Substantially Revised Validated Courses of Study

2.1 Where an approved partner institution (i.e. one that has satisfied the requirements of Annex O) has received outline approval from the Business Case Committee to proceed with a specific new course of study, the course proposal (i.e. the course and module specifications) is considered in the first instance by the appropriate Academic Liaison Officer (ALO). Where, following consideration of the course and module specifications the ALO is satisfied that it is appropriate to do so, QACO will submit the paperwork to the Divisional Director of Education/Graduate Studies and UG/PG Student Experience (DDESE/DDGSSE) for approval. The DDESE/DDGSSE will have the discretion to determine whether they are able to approve the course on behalf of the Divisional Committee or whether a Panel is necessary. Where the proposed course is with an existing Validated Institution and within a subject area which the Validated Institution already validates with that partner, a Panel will normally not be necessary. Where the proposed course is with a new Validated Institution or within a new subject area with an existing Validated Institution or utilises new specialist resources/facilities a Panel will usually be necessary. Should it be deemed that a Panel is necessary, a Panel will be established to visit the Validated Institution and meet with staff in order to consider the course proposal in detail.

2.1.1 In cases where a Validated Institution submits a substantially revised version of an existing course of study, the course proposal is considered in the first instance by the ALO. Where, following consideration of the course and module specifications the ALO is satisfied that it is appropriate to do so, QACO will submit the paperwork to the DDESE/DDGSSE for approval. The DDESE/DDGSSE will have the discretion to determine whether they are able to approve the course on behalf of the Divisional Committee or whether

1 Substantial revisions may include but are not limited to changes to curriculum, course learning outcomes and credit values of existing modules. Further guidance on major and minor changes to courses can be found at: https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/documents/quality-assurance/guidance/pdf/approvalrisktable.pdf
a Panel is necessary. Where the proposed course is with an existing Validated Institution and within a subject area which the Validated Institution already validates with that partner, a Panel will not normally be necessary. Where the proposed course is with a new Validated Institution or within a new subject area with an existing Validated Institution or utilises new specialist resources/facilities a Panel will usually be necessary. Should it be deemed that a Panel is necessary, a Panel will be established to visit the Validated Institution and meet with staff in order to consider the course proposal in detail.

2.1.2 The documentation required to be provided to such panels by the partner institution is set out at section 5 below.

2.2 Such Panels will normally include at least two members from the University, one of whom shall be appointed as Chair, and at least one member external to the University. The Panel is responsible for making a detailed assessment of the design, level, coherence and currency of the curriculum under review and of the capacity of the Validated Institution to assure the standards of the provision under review and to provide learning opportunities sufficient for students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Based on its assessment, the Panel is empowered to make one of a number of recommendations to CASC on the Division’s behalf:

i) that the proposal be given permission to proceed for consideration by the Course Approval Sub-Committee of the University (CASC), along with the panel’s report of the approval event;

ii) that the proposal be given permission to proceed for consideration by CASC subject to the prior satisfaction of specified conditions along with the panel’s report of the approval event. These conditions might include revisions to the proposal or provision of additional resources. The submission to CASC should include a statement from the Validated Institution as to the steps it has taken to meet the panel’s conditions;

iii) that the proposal be resubmitted in a revised form for further consideration by the panel;

iv) that the proposal is rejected.

At the end of the approval event the Chair will inform the partner of the recommendation that it proposes to make to CASC on the Division’s behalf.

3. Appointment of the Panel

3.1 The appointment of members of panels will be approved by the relevant Director of Division.

Each panel will comprise:

a) at least two members of the Division, one of whom should be normally be the relevant Divisional Director of Education and UG Student Experience/Director of Graduate Studies and PG Student Experience or alternatively a member of the relevant Divisional Committee (i.e. Education and Student Experience Committee or Graduate Studies and Student
Experience Committee, as appropriate to the level of the proposal) who will act as Chair and a representative from a subject area cognate to that of the proposed course.

b) at least one member who is external to the University and of sufficient status and academic expertise to command authority in the educational provision under consideration. External Examiners currently employed by the University may not be appointed as external members of the panel;

c) a secretary (nominated by the Quality Assurance and Compliance Office) who will be an administrator with a working knowledge of the expectations of the University’s Code of Practice (normally a QACO Administrator);

3.2 Members a) to b) above are all full voting panel members. Divisions should ensure that between the panel members, there is appropriate training and/or expertise to judge the quality and standards of the proposed partner to deliver and assess the course. The Division may appoint additional members where it feels this to be appropriate. Examples of those with appropriate training and expertise would include a Divisional Director of Education and Student Experience/Graduate Studies and Student Experience. All panel members must be sufficiently independent from the educational provision under review to be able to provide an impartial view on it. The Secretary will attend in an advisory capacity to the panel and will lend expertise on matters of procedure, regulation and quality assurance.

Note: Where a conjoint Approval Panel is formed the Division retains responsibility for appointing the members a) to b). The Validated Institution may provide the secretary and some additional panel members (see 3.3 below for detail on the requirements of a conjoint panel).

3.3 Where a new course of study or a substantially revised existing course proposed by a prospective Validated Institution is subject to approval by a third party, the Division may consider establishing a conjoint panel with the third party organisation provided that the following conditions are met:

i) that the Division will normally be represented on the approval panel by at least two of its members, one of whom should normally be the relevant Divisional Director of Education and Student Experience/Graduate Studies and Student Experience or alternatively be a member of the relevant Divisional Committee (i.e. Education and Student Experience Committee/Graduate Studies and Student Experience Committee, as appropriate to the level of the proposal) and a representative from a subject area cognate to that of the proposed course;

ii) that chairmanship of the panel resides with the University;

iii) that, such as it considers appropriate, the University retains the right to appoint external subject area experts to the panel;

iv) that the agenda and areas covered by the approval event are considered sufficient by the Division to allow for full consideration of the proposal as per the requirements of this Annex and the University’s Code of Practice;
v) that the written report of any such event is subject to the approval of the Chair of the panel (normally the member of the relevant Divisional Committee);

vi) that, following consideration by the Division, the proposal and the report of the conjoint validation event are subject to consideration by CASC before final approval is given by the University, as per the requirements of this Annex and the University’s policies and procedures for the approval of collaborative partnerships.

4. Detailed Terms of Reference of a Division Panel

The terms of reference of a Division Panel are:

a) to evaluate whether the proposed course is set at the required academic level, and where appropriate, consistent with the relevant subject benchmarks;

b) to ensure that the admission criteria meet the requirements of the University;

c) to identify whether the course specification(s) can be delivered, learning outcomes achieved and quality and standards maintained;

d) to ascertain whether the assessment strategy allows learning outcomes to be appropriately tested;

e) to evaluate whether teaching staff at the proposed partner are adequately skilled and receive sufficient training and development to support the delivery of the course;

f) to investigate whether the proposed partner is appropriately resourced to undertake its responsibilities as set out in the Code of Practice for the Quality Assurance or Taught Courses of Study and the Credit Framework;

g) to approve any new or substantially amended modules associated with the proposal;

h) to report its findings on a – g above to the partner institution and to CASC.

i) to make recommendations to CASC on the proposal, specifying any conditions required for the proposal to proceed.

5. Documentation Required for the Panel

At least three weeks prior to the panel event, the Head of the Validated Institution or their nominee should send copies of the following documentation (sufficient for all members of the panel, including the Secretary) to the designated member of the Quality Assurance and Compliance Office, who will circulate the materials to the panel.

- The proposed programme for the visit (see guidance in section 8 below).
- Rationale for the proposal
- Course specification
- Module specifications
6. **Areas of Panel Focus**

The Division panel will fulfil its terms of reference as stated in section 4 by exploring the following five key areas:

**Section A: Course Design and Curriculum Content**

In exploring the design of the course and the curriculum content the panel will consider:

- whether the course is current and valid in the light of (i) developing knowledge in the discipline and developments in teaching, learning and research, and (ii) changes in student demand, employer expectations and employment opportunities (as appropriate);
- the appropriateness of the award title and relevance of the course to the title;
- the proposed level and credits specified for the course and whether or not they are consistent with the University of Kent’s Credit Framework and the national FHEQ;
- the content of the course specification and the module specifications and whether or not the learning outcomes of the modules fulfil the course level aims and learning outcomes;
- whether the aims and learning outcomes meet relevant subject benchmark statements and professional body and industry requirements.

**Section B: Admissions Criteria**

The panel will seek evidence that the collaborative partner’s admission criteria are consistent with the University’s minimum entry requirements. The panel will explore:

- whether the entry requirements are clear, appropriate and fair;
• whether RPL\(^2\) arrangements are made clear;
• whether there is an appropriate induction programme in place;
• mechanisms employed for addressing widening participation;
• the expected intake number for the first cohort and subsequent years.

**Section C: Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy**

In exploring the learning, teaching and assessment strategy the panel will consider:

• the appropriateness of the learning and teaching methods employed in relation to course aims and the curriculum content;
• whether students are encouraged to develop as independent learners;
• whether the assessment methods enable the course aims and learning outcomes to be effectively tested;
• the appropriateness of the assessment methods employed;
• whether assessment load is appropriate for the course level and credit volume;
• whether the criteria for assessment is readily available to students and examiners, including re-examination assessment
• whether the criteria enable examiners to distinguish between different classifications of attainment;
• whether the weighting and timing of assessment clear to students;

**Section D: Student Support and Resources**

The Panel will explore the student learning environments and resources which the proposed partner provides, including:

• The appropriateness of the student support available that is appropriate to the student profile and course(s) of study;
• The system of academic support and advice the partner operates which should be in consistent with Annex G of the Code of Practice for Taught Courses;
• Whether or not the proposed partner has adequate resources to students with disabilities and special learning needs;
• The information for students which is made available to students to assist them complete the course;
• The suitability of the staff responsible for student support and guidance;
• Whether or not there is appropriate technical and administrative support available if required;
• Whether there is adequate specialist accommodation and equipment available;

\(^2\) Recognition of Prior Learning
• Whether the proposed partner makes available course materials, appropriate books/journals, IT support and other specialist equipment which students require to complete the course.
• how the proposed partner will communicate University’s appeals and complaints procedures to its students;

Section E: Maintenance and Enhancement of Quality and Standards:
The Panel will explore and assess the capacity of the proposed partner to ensure the maintenance and enhancement of quality and standards of the course, considering such matters as whether or not the partner institution has methods of receiving and responding to student feedback which are consistent with Annex M of the Code of Practice;
• how feedback from staff, students, external examiners and PSRBs is used to enhance the course and the student experience;
• the availability of staff induction, staff development and peer observation;
• to investigate whether the partner has adequate experience and resources to properly undertake its responsibilities as set out in the Code of Practice for Taught Courses;
• whether or not the partner has adequate support and review methods for students on placements or studying through distance learning.

7. Panel Preliminary Assessment: Consultation and Actions
7.1 Members of the panel will consider the documentation (which normally will be sent to them at least three weeks prior to the review visit).
7.2 Each panel member should provide the Chair of the panel with some brief feedback on the documentation including a list of key points they believe need to be focused on during the review visit, two weeks prior to the Division panel meeting.
7.3 The Chair of the panel will use any feedback from the panel members when planning the panel’s approach to the visit. The Chair of Panel may identify further documentation that the panel wishes the partner organisation to provide prior or during the Division panel.
7.4 The Chair may also, following its advance discussion, propose changes to the course for the series of meeting. In particular, members of the panel may feel that some meetings might be shortened or cancelled in view of the documentary evidence that it has received. Members of the panel may also, if it considers it to be necessary, ask for further meetings to be scheduled.
7.5 The Secretary of the Review Panel should communicate any action points arising from the advance consultation to the partner organisation at least one week prior to the panel event.
8. Programme for Panel Event

8.1 The Division panel will normally convene over one day, although, the length of the visit may be determined by the size and complexity of the proposed partner and course(s). The programme for the visit will be proposed by the Chair of the Panel in consultation with the Validated Institution (or their nominee). Unless a variation to the standard programme has been negotiated and agreed between the Chair of the Panel and the Validated Institution, the panel event schedule should incorporate the following sections:

- Welcome by the Head of the Validated Institution
- Private meeting of Panel
- Tour of the facilities (where applicable)
- Meetings with the Management Team
- Meeting with the Teaching Team
- Meeting with current students (where available)
- Private meeting of Panel
- Feedback to staff at the Validated Institution.

8.2 The programme must be finalised one week prior to the Validation Panel taking place and confirmed to all parties by the Secretary.

9. Panel Outcomes

9.1 Following consideration of the documentation and the information yielded by meetings with staff and students, the Division panel is empowered to make one of a number of recommendations to CASC on the Division’s behalf:

i) that the proposal be given permission to proceed for consideration by the Course Approval Sub-Committee of the University (CASC), along with the panel’s report of the approval event;

ii) that the proposal be given permission to proceed for consideration by CASC subject to the prior satisfaction of specified conditions along with the panel’s report of the approval event. These conditions might include revisions to the proposal or provision of additional resources. The submission to CASC should include a statement from the partner institution as to the steps it has taken to meet the Division panel’s conditions;

iii) that the proposal be resubmitted in a revised form for further consideration by the Division panel;

iv) that the proposal be rejected.

9.2 At the end of the approval event the Chair will inform the partner of the recommendations that it proposes to make to PASC:

Note: Conditions set by the Division panel are mandatory requirements which must be addressed satisfactorily before the proposal may be permitted to proceed for consideration by CASC.
The Panel may also make advisory recommendations to the Validated Institution for its consideration.

10. **Action to be taken following the Divisional Panel**

10.1 The Secretary will be required to write a draft report from the Panel event not more than **two weeks** after it taking place.

10.2 The Secretary should send a copy of the report to the Chair of the Panel for approval. Once the Chair has approved the report, it will be sent to the Head of the Validated Institution, who will submit a follow-up report to the Chair of panel, commenting on the implementation and progress of actions taken to satisfy any conditions set to allow for the approval of the proposal. The Chair of the Panel will review this follow-up report, where appropriate approving that the Validated Institution has met the conditions and recommendations set by the Panel before the proposal is submitted to CASC.

10.3 When it is satisfied that it is appropriate to do so, the Chair of the Divisional panel should recommend the course proposal, the panel event report and any follow-up report submitted by the Validated Institution, be forwarded to the Course Approval Sub-Committee, together with the recommendation on the approval of the proposal.

10.4 CASC may recommend approval\(^3\) or approval subject to the satisfaction of identified conditions, on behalf of the Education and Student Experience Board/Graduate and Researcher College Board or refer any suggested amendments back to the responsible Division panel. CASC may recommend approval\(^3\) or approval subject to the satisfaction of identified conditions, on behalf of the Education and Student Experience Board or refer any suggested amendments back to the responsible Division panel.

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\(^3\) Note that CASC will request confirmation that a Memorandum of Agreement has been signed between Kent and the partner institution or is in the negotiation stage prior to approval.