



ACADEMIC QUALITY POLICY & PRACTICE

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Section 7: Programme Review

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7. PROGRAMME REVIEW

7.1 Introduction

The University is committed to the ongoing enhancement of its programmes, taking account of developments in the disciplines, pedagogic practice and being responsive to feedback and monitoring.

The process for approval of new programmes is detailed in [New Programme Approval](#) (Section 5).

7.2 Periodic Review

GCU complies with the [SFC Guidance to colleges and universities on quality AY 2022-23 and AY 2023-24 \(refreshed August 2023\)](#) which states that 'All aspects of provision are expected to be reviewed systematically and rigorously on a cycle of not more than six years to demonstrate that institutions meet the expectations set out in the [QAA Quality Code for Higher Education](#), and the standards set out in the European Standards and Guidelines (part 1)'.

Schools are responsible for the ongoing monitoring, review and enhancement of the programmes within their portfolio as part of the Annual Monitoring process. Further scrutiny and refresh of programmes takes place at least once every 5 years to ensure that programmes remain viable, continue to fit with the School/University mission and strategy and continue to deliver a high quality student experience. Programme Review will normally take place as part of the Enhancement-Led Internal Subject Review (ELISR).

To ensure the University complies with and adheres to consumer law ([CRA/CMA](#)) any programme and/or module amendments must be conducted in a timely manner, with due consideration given to the impact on current and potential students. [The Programme Specification Proforma](#) (PSP) published on the website must be the most up-to-date version. The content of the programme, the modules offered and the approach to learning and teaching must be as stated in the PSP. Altering a programme without taking cognisance of the University Quality Enhancement and Assurance processes and updating the PSP could potentially result in the Programme being in breach of University policy and the University not meeting its obligations under consumer law.

7.3 Approaches to Programme Review

Normally, Programme Review (and Approval) will be subsumed within Enhancement Led Internal Subject Review (ELISR) following which programmes will be placed in indefinite approval subject to periodic monitoring over a five year cycle. Exceptionally, a programme may require to be reviewed or modified out with the ELISR process and/or within the five year cycle.

In all circumstances the University aims to take a proportionate approach to Programme Review and modification dependent upon the nature and extent of any proposed change. Advice should be sought from the School's Quality Assurance and Enhancement contact to confirm approaches.

It is the responsibility of the Head of Department to ensure that the appropriate approach for the review of programmes in their Department has been formally agreed with the Department of Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

The key factor in determining the approach to be adopted is the potential degree of impact on the students' learning experience. Consideration needs to be given to the implications of the proposed change on the structure and balance of the programme, its educational aims, learning outcomes and content, and/or the wider practical implications for the student learning experience.

Each approach within the review process will be designed to ensure all programmes have adequate scrutiny and opportunity to demonstrate enhanced provision.

All decisions of Programme Review Panels concerning programme review are reported to the Learning Enhancement Sub-Committee (LESC) of the Education Committee (EC) on behalf of Senate.

7.4 Timelines for Programme Review

Timelines for the completion of the review process will be confirmed in consultation with the Department of Quality Enhancement and Assurance with all activity normally completed by the end of Trimester A. This deadline has been agreed primarily to ensure that timely and clear information can be made available to students and applicants, to inform their academic choices and to help Departments, both academic and professional, plan work accordingly.

Where units or programmes being reviewed are delivered outside the standard trimester pattern e.g. Trimester B starts, advice on timescales for proposed updates should be sought from the School's Quality Assurance and Enhancement contact. The key consideration will be the completion of the review and approval process (including consultation) sufficiently far in advance of the start date to communicate with applicants/current students in good time about approved updates.

7.5 Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies

Where possible, Programme Review will be undertaken in partnership with professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). If a PSRB visit takes place independently, responsibility for supporting the event lies with Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

In cases where separate accreditation visits are required, the process will be supported by Quality Assurance and Enhancement who will also ensure that the PSRB report for these separate visits will be submitted to the Learning Enhancement Sub-Committee (LESC) for consideration.

Quality Assurance and Enhancement can also provide administrative support to Departments with an accreditation process.

Quality Assurance and Enhancement actively engage with academic Departments/units, to maintain an institutional register of accreditation activity.

7.6 Consultation

The University has a legal responsibility to provide clear and accurate information to students and applicants about their programme of study. “Material information” about a programme is that information which enables prospective and current students to make informed choices. An offer of a place and its acceptance – which establishes a contractual relationship between the University and the applicant – is based on “material information”. It is therefore necessary to take account of whether any proposed unit or programme updates would affect material information provided about the programme(s).

“Material information” includes information about, inter alia, the programme title; core units of the programme; the range of optional units offered; overall methods of assessment (such as the overall balance of examinations, coursework and practicals); the location of teaching; the balance of contact time and independent study; the length of the course; professional accreditation; and the final award.

If proposed updates to units and programmes would affect “material information”, it will normally be necessary to seek, and take into consideration, the views of affected students on the programme(s). In the case of major updates, normally the consent of affected students will be required to implement the change. It is therefore advisable to introduce major updates to the programme for future cohorts only.

Where the proposed change would not affect current students (for example, in the case of most updates to one-year taught postgraduate programmes or the first year of undergraduate programmes), it is good practice to consult current students as part of the review process.

Applicants and students must be informed of updates to “material information” at the earliest opportunity. Major updates to undergraduate programmes will normally be approved by the start of the UCAS application cycle. This is in order to avoid informing applicants of substantial updates to programmes at the time of making an offer, or after an offer has been made. Major updates to postgraduate programmes will normally be approved and communicated no later than six weeks prior to the commencement of the programme.

7.7 Programme Suspension, Withdrawal or Extension of Period of Approval

7.7.1 Process for Programme Suspension

Programmes currently within their period of approval may be subject to temporary suspension as part of annual planning process and/or in the case of low student recruitment. Suspension permits the School to consider factors impacting on the student experience on the programme and/or underlying causes of low recruitment and the action it wishes to take to address these. In such circumstances the [Guidance for Programme Suspension](#) should be followed.

The suspension process should be completed as early as possible and, in any event, no later than each December for undergraduate programmes commencing the following September and not less than 6 weeks before the start date for postgraduate programmes.

In some instances the evaluation of the programme may lead to the conclusion that it is no longer 'fit for purpose' and should be withdrawn from the University's portfolio. The process detailed in the following paragraph should then be followed. If the School wishes to develop a new offering in the discipline area the programme should be formally withdrawn and the standard [Programme Approval process](#) should then be followed.

7.7.2 Process for Programme Withdrawal

A School may, at any time (out with the review cycle), propose that an approved programme of study be withdrawn. Consultation regarding programme closure should be initiated with all key stakeholders at the earliest point.

The recommendation to close a programme may emanate from the Programme Board and/or the Senior Management Group. After consultation with stakeholders and due consideration by the programme board, a report will be submitted to School Board for consideration and approval of the proposal before onward submission to Education Committee.

The report should include full minutes (as described below) of the rationale for the decision. Where the proposal emanates from the Senior Management Group, such minutes shall include:

- Senior Management Group minute with rationale for the decision to withdraw the programme.
- Programme Board minute which will record programme board discussion in support or not in support of the decision to withdraw the programme as proposed by the Senior Management Group. The minutes should contain the following]:
 - Support for the proposal together with associated rationale
 - Outright rejection of the proposal
 - Rejection of the proposal with associated rationale
 - Evidence that any Schools, other than the host School, which contribute to or are served by modules on the programme have been consulted at an early stage and that any comments have been fed into the consultation process.
- A School Board minute containing evidence of communication with Programme Board and the rationale for the withdrawal of a programme.
- A description of how provision for continuing students will be managed
- Confirmation that the change has been communicated to students 'at the earliest opportunity' and how students will be supported to complete any outstanding modules and their programme of study. Students must be re-assured that any decision to withdraw the programme will not impact on their studies.

Where the proposal emanates from the Programme Board such minutes shall include:

- Programme Board minute which will

- record the programme board's **decision to seek approval to withdraw a programme**
- outline the rationale for the proposed withdrawal of the programme
- provide evidence that any Schools, other than the host School, which are either served by contribute to modules on the programme have been consulted at an early stage and comments fed into programme board consideration of the proposal.
- Senior Management Group minute evidencing consideration of the proposal to withdraw the programme.
- A School Board minute containing evidence of communication with Programme Board and the rationale for the withdrawal of a programme.
- A description of how provision for continuing students will be managed
- Confirmation that the change has been communicated to students at the earliest opportunity' and how students will be supported to complete any outstanding modules and their programme of study. Students must be re-assured that any decision to withdraw the programme will not impact on their studies.

7.7.3 Communicating Programme Withdrawal

Once the decision has been made by Education Committee regarding the proposal to withdraw a programme, the School will be responsible for alerting Admissions and Enquiry Services and Communications and Digital Engagement so that a statement can be added to the University website to reflect that the programme is under review and may be withdrawn. Clear contact details for enquiries will be included in the statement together with an offer of an alternative programme of study, if applicable.

Where either Education Committee or School Board minutes contain decisions and/or recommendations relating to the withdrawal of a programme this will be explicitly highlighted to Senate in the agenda. Following Senate Admissions and Enquiry Services will amend the website and prospectus and communicate with applicants.

The host School will ensure all relevant documentation pertaining to or referencing the programme being withdrawn is amended.

7.7.4 Extension to Period of Approval (Deferment of Review)

As indicated above, Schools must scrutinise their programmes at least once every **five** years and the mechanism for this is the [programme review process](#). The Department of Quality Assurance and Enhancement hold the University timetable for this process and will liaise with the relevant School staff at the beginning of each academic year to schedule events.

In certain circumstances, a School may seek an extension to the period of approval and thus defer the scheduled review of a programme. While not an exhaustive list, such circumstances may be as a result of: the bedding-in of strategic restructuring and changes in the School/subject area having an impact on the programme to be reviewed; portfolio review activity; the impact and timing of changes external to the University from professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies, for example,

cognisance and integration of new standards and the preference for this to be simultaneously considered within the review process; or other external and/or internal policy changes.

Proposed extensions to the period of approval of a programme must be approved by the Learning Enhancement Subcommittee and should include:

- a Programme Board minute containing the rationale for the change together with any relevant supporting information
- a School Board minute approving the decision of the Programme Board.

The extension will normally be granted for one academic session only.