INTRODUCTION

1. The University’s Articles of Government give to the Academic Board responsibility for “...the content of the curriculum...” and for “...academic standards and the validation of courses...”. This section of the Academic Handbook describes how those responsibilities are discharged. The University’s portfolio management arrangements apply to all credit and non-credit credit bearing courses that fall within the responsibility of the Academic Board, including courses which are incorporated within Collaborative provision. They also apply to courses that are subject to the regulations of external validating bodies on whose behalf the Academic Board is authorised to take decisions.

2. Academic Board has delegated to the Student Recruitment and Partnerships Committee (SRPC) and its subcommittee the Academic Portfolio Strategy Committee (APSC) the management and oversight of the academic portfolio and to the Learning, Teaching and Student Achievement Committee (LTSAC) the authority to approve the delivery of new courses.

3. This policy has been mapped against the Quality Assurance Agency’s UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the UK Quality Code) covering course design and development, monitoring and evaluation, external expertise and student engagement and to the Competition and Markets Authority’s (CMA) guidance published in March 2015.

4. The policy also reflects the precepts and guidance on online distance learning in the relevant sections of the UK Quality Code. Online learning is developed to support students who complete the majority of their study without physically attending the University.

5. The University manages its academic portfolio and maintains effective oversight of the courses being approved and delivered through validation, course review, revalidation and course withdrawal processes. The University’s academic portfolio includes all taught awards, including those delivered as part of a higher and degree apprenticeship programme. Such programmes are included under the reference to ‘course’ in this policy.
6. The Academic Framework authorises courses to be assigned to an academic school, the Solent Learning and Teaching Institute, the Research and Innovation Office or a collaborative partner (collectively referred to as ‘school’ in this policy).

7. The University, via the LTSAC, conducts routine audits on academic policies and processes associated with the management of the University’s academic provision. This is to monitor and ensure that academic practice within the University is in line with sector and relevant professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements.

**PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT**

**Principles**

8. The University’s course approval, monitoring and review arrangements represent a key mechanism for achieving the strategic objective of enhancing the student experience of learning, achievement and employability and are specifically intended to ensure that each course:

   i. is fully aligned with the University’s Mission, current Strategic Plan and its key supporting strategies;
   ii. is fully mapped to the UK Quality code for Higher Education and appropriate expectations, core and common practices;
   iii. is designed to take due account of appropriate internal and external reference points and stakeholders input, including apprenticeship standards;
   iv. incorporates the themes and principles in the Academic Framework, including employability and inclusivity;
   v. is coherent, current, adequately documented and appropriate to enable students to achieve the intended learning outcomes;
   vi. has sufficient and appropriate resources available and/or committed to support it; and
   vii. provides a sufficient return on investment for the University.

9. The purpose of course approval is to assess whether a course proposed and subsequently developed leading to an award of the University meets the requirements for that award, as determined by internal and external reference points.

10. The purpose of course monitoring and review is to consider and evaluate the continuing performance, relevance and operational effectiveness of a course in light of developments in research, professional and industry practice and pedagogy, changes in the external environment such as requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRB), and its continued alignment with the University’s strategy and mission.

11. The student academic experience must be central in the considerations of new course proposals and the review of existing courses.

12. The above principles are applicable to apprenticeship programmes to ensure that students are enabled to achieve both the degree award and the apprenticeship award.

**Management of the University’s Portfolio (Stage 1)**

13. A ‘school’ intending to add a course to their portfolio must review and agree an outline business case before presenting their request to APSC for approval to develop the course.
14. An outline business case will be presented to the ‘school’ management team (SMT) using a University template. This will include indicative:
   i. market demand identified from light touch market research;
   ii. resource requirements; and
   iii. award details.

15. In reviewing the business case the SMT must consider how it impacts the ‘school’s’ academic portfolio and whether the course will attract new markets or split existing markets. The potential impact on the University’s academic portfolio must also be taken into consideration.

16. Where the SMT agrees a business case for a new course full Stage 1 documentation should be presented to APSC for approval, using a University template. The documentation should include details of:
   i. the precise nature of the course (i.e. type, title, mode, student numbers);
   ii. the likely market demand;
   iii. external and internal context (i.e. student satisfaction, graduate employment); and
   iv. resource implications, including those identified for apprenticeship programmes through an appropriate mapping to the relevant apprenticeship standard.

17. The proposed course will be added to the University’s portfolio and can be advertised once APSC approval has been received. Details required to advertise the course must have been produced as part of the Stage 1 documentation and provided to Quality Management. APSC will require confirmation from Quality Management that the material information have been provided.

18. For courses to be delivered entirely online the business and pedagogic case for using online distance learning must be clearly articulated and address the higher risks and additional resources associated with delivering a course online. The proposal must also be approved by the Head of Learning Technologies before presented to APSC for University approval.

Course Development and Peer Approval (Stage 2)

19. Deans in collaboration with Quality Management will set up a course development team, with a nominated team leader, to design and develop the course and prepare all the required documentation. The team should consist of:
   i. teaching staff;
   ii. relevant professional services staff;
   iii. the student representative who will be on the Validation Panel; and
   iv. the external representative who will be on the Validation Panel.

20. For the development of apprenticeship programmes which are using existing validated provision with no modification, the development team will consist of the teaching team and relevant professional services staff.

21. The nominated team leader has overall responsibility to ensure that:
   i. the course is informed by relevant internal and external reference points, good practice in curriculum design and delivery, and stakeholder’s input;
ii. the course is mapped to relevant internal and external reference points, such as apprenticeship standards, subject benchmark statements, PSRB requirements.

iii. there is reflection around curriculum design and learning outcomes to ensure full student engagement across the full teaching weeks and the University’s policies on employability and inclusivity;

iv. the development team take into consideration the resources required for the course and confirms a delivery and implementation plan for the course;

v. the materials produced for the Validation Panel contains all the information required to enable the panel to assess the course against the criteria set out in paragraph 33;

vi. updated marketing materials are produced for the effective marketing of the course; and

vii. draft module delivery templates are produced for the first year of operation.

22. Before they can approve the materials to be presented to the Validation Panel the Dean must be satisfied that:

i. the proposed course design meets all internal and external requirements;

ii. the required resources are in place or have been committed;

iii. students have been involved in the design of the course;

iv. the design will enable students to achieve the course learning outcomes; and

v. the course has been fully and appropriately documented.

23. The materials to be produced for approval by the Validation Panel, will include:

i. the course specification;

ii. all module descriptors;

iii. draft course handbook, including information on the arrangements for End Point Assessment (EPA) (where appropriate);

iv. employer facing handbook (where appropriate).

24. The Validation Panel will also be provided with the following documentation to aid their review of the course proposal:

i. a brief overview and introduction to the course (for new course proposals) or a critical reflection of course performance since last (re)validation (for revalidations)

ii. staff CVs; and

iii. a staff development plan (where appropriate for online courses);

Exemptions from the Assessment Regulations, the Academic Framework and other academic policies and regulations

25. Exceptionally, as part of the course development and design process, a perceived requirement for a course to be exempt from parts of the assessment policy, Academic Framework or other academic policies and regulations may emerge. In such circumstances the request for exemption, with supporting evidence, should be submitted by the relevant Dean or Head to the Head of Quality Management, who will consider requests and take action on behalf of the LTSAC. A summary of approved exemptions is presented by Quality Management to the LTSAC annually.

26. Where such an exemption is sought, a course may not be presented to the Validation Panel until the outcome of the exemption request has been resolved.
**Transition arrangements**

27. Where a new or revised provision is replacing an old course, it may be necessary to approve temporary transitional arrangements to protect the interests of existing students and maintaining the robustness and standards of the award.

28. Where, in exceptional circumstances, it is proposed that students are transferred to the new provision, all students affected must be fully informed of the proposed arrangements and agree to the arrangements as part of the development process.

29. The transitional arrangements should be approved as part of the validation process.

**Peer approval**

30. The Validation Panel will be set up by Quality Management. The Panel under delegated authority from LTSAC will review the documentation, question the course development team if necessary and set appropriate conditions and recommendations.

31. The Chair is responsible for overseeing and engaging the Validation Panel in conducting a thorough review of the course materials and of ensuring that the final report is produced in line with University requirements.

32. It is expected the Panel will conduct its business by correspondence/virtually, however it is recognised that there may be instances where a physical meeting is required such as where there is a PSRB requirement or serious concerns are raised by panel members.

**Validation Panel membership**

33. The constituent membership of each panel will be determined by Quality Management in consultation with the Panel Chair, based on an assessment of the perceived level of risk and content of the course. At a minimum each panel will consist of:

   i. A Chair from outside the proposing ‘school’ from the chair’s standing panel;
   ii. One internal panel member from outside the proposing ‘school’ from the staff standing panel;
   iii. One independent external representative from the external standing panel;
   iv. One student representative from the student standing panel and from outside the proposing ‘school’; and
   v. A member of the Solent Learning and Teaching Institute with recent experience of designing, delivering and/or management of online distance learning provision (online courses only)

34. The external and student panel members will also be part of the course development team. Where, for whatever reason, the panel member appointed is unable to complete the validation then suitable replacement members will be appointed.

35. For the approval of apprenticeship programmes which are using existing validated provision with no modifications, the validation panel membership will consist of, at a minimum:

   i. A Chair from outside the proposing ‘school’ from the chair’s standing panel; and
   ii. At least one internal or external panel member from outside the proposing school from the University standing panels.
Panel’s Assessment of the Course (the Validation)

36. The Panel will assess the course design and documentation against the following criteria in order to make a recommendation to the LTSAC:

i. the course documentation is clear and conforms with University guidelines, such that students and teaching staff would know what is expected of them;

ii. the course meets the educational principles set out in the Academic Framework;

iii. the intended learning outcomes relate appropriately to the relevant internal and external reference points, including apprenticeship standards, and the aims of the provision;

iv. the design and organisation of the curriculum are effective in promoting student learning and creating the conditions for the intended learning outcomes to be achieved;

v. there is sufficient evidence that the curriculum and course design have been informed by current thinking within the discipline, by recent developments in learning and teaching, relevant occupational and professional requirements, and by the research, enterprise and advanced professional practice of staff;

vi. the learning and teaching strategy, assessment strategy, variety and balance of assessment, learning and teaching methods employed will effectively enable and support: student learning; the achievement of the intended learning outcomes; and promote inclusive practice;

vii. there is an appropriate balance of academic, practical and personal development elements;

viii. there is a robust logical and intellectual coherence to the course ensuring a high level experience for students, which is clearly related to the course aims and intended learning outcomes;

ix. the increasing demands on the learners as they progress through the levels of the course are clearly and appropriately articulated;

x. the embedding of employability, including real-world learning, within the course is clearly articulated and appropriate, which prepares students adequately for career opportunities in their field, for other forms of graduate-level, managerial and professional employment or for further study; and

xi. the arrangements for the End Point Assessment (EPA) and any other components are clearly articulated and appropriately set in order to meet the relevant apprenticeship standard (for apprenticeship programmes only).

37. For the assessment of apprenticeship programmes which are using existing validated provision with no modifications, the panel will assess that:

i. the existing course fulfils all the requirements of the relevant apprenticeship standard; and

ii. the components of the programme collectively enable the successful completion of the apprenticeship.

38. The Panel may comment on other aspects and any such comments will be considered appropriately by the University.

Validation Panel recommendations

39. The Validation Panel may recommend:

i. approval with no conditions or recommendations;

ii. approval with conditions to be met within a specified time limit and/or with recommendations;

iii. suspension of the process with conditions for recommencement; or
iv. non-approval with feedback.

Conditions and recommendations

40. Where a Panel identifies conditions for the approval of a course they must be met and approved before the course is presented to the LTSAC for University approval (Stage 3). The ‘school’ is responsible for providing sufficient evidence to the Chair of the Panel to satisfy the conditions.

41. The Chair of the Panel will sign off the response to the conditions after reviewing the updated course documentation, or request further evidence/work, on behalf of the Panel. Exceptionally, if the Chair is unavailable then the Head of Quality Management (or nominee) will sign off the response to the conditions in collaboration with the available Panel members.

42. The course team will address any recommendations set as part of the course review process.

Period of approval

43. A course is approved to recruit students for a maximum period of 6 academic years.

44. The approved period begins from the academic year the course can be delivered as approved by the LTSAC. Periods during which the course is suspended for delivery will be included within the approved period.

45. Courses must be revalidated before the end of the approved period in order to continue to recruit.

46. Under exceptional circumstances the approved period for a course can be extended by one academic year. Such circumstances may include where a PSRB review is due in order to minimise duplication of processes; or where a negative outcome from a Revalidation Panel has been received (suspension or non-approval of the revalidation proposal) and the extension will allow the course team to address the feedback from the panel. An extension request should be submitted by the ‘school’ to LTSAC for approval.

University approval (Stage 3)

47. The LTSAC will receive confirmation from the Chair of the Validation Panel or exceptionally the Head of Quality Management (or nominee) that all conditions have been met. If the committee is satisfied with the outcome they will formally approve the course and the proposed start date.

48. Quality Management will receive all course approval reports and will report annually to the LTSAC on themes arising from the reports.

Non-credit bearing (NCB) and Kitemarked provision approval

49. NCB provision must be formally approved by the relevant Dean as part of a documented University process, established by Quality Management, for academic and quality assurance oversight. The ‘school’ will report approvals to APSC.

50. In approving a NCB provision due regard should be paid to ensuring that the provision reflects the University’s mission and strategic aspirations.
MONITORING AND REVIEW OF COURSES

51. All credit and non-credit bearing courses are subject to annual and cyclical review; enabling the University to reflect on the learning opportunities students have experienced, the academic standards achieved and the courses’ continuing currency and relevance.

52. The University’s processes for the monitoring and review of courses include:
   i. **Course review:** The review of each course annually to assess its operational performance and to identify areas for enhancement. The process of course review is detailed in the appropriate section within this policy.
   
   ii. **Module and course modifications:** Enables course teams to continuously enhance their provision based on feedback received from students and external examiners in order to improve the student learning experience and align to changes in the subject area. The policy and process for making module and course modifications is contained in section 2F: Module Approval and Course Modification.

   iii. **Course revalidation:** The periodic re-approval of a course every 6 years to ensure its continuing currency and validity and to update and refresh the course curriculum where required. The process of course revalidation is detailed in the appropriate section within this policy.

   iv. **Suspension and withdrawal:** In order to maintain the currency of the University’s academic portfolio or to align to the University’s strategic goals courses may be required to be withdrawn or suspended. Outcomes of a review or continuous low demand for a course may also lead to its suspension or withdrawal. The policy and process for suspending or withdrawing a course is detailed in the appropriate section within this policy.

Course review

**Purpose**

53. The purpose of course review is to evaluate, in a self-critical and developmental manner, the performance and effectiveness of a course and to determine actions for further enhancement of the provision. Monitoring will be carried out, as a minimum, on an annual basis.

54. Arrangements for the monitoring of collaborative provision will follow these general policy requirements, but the detailed procedures will be agreed as part of the Operational Schedule in the Memorandum of Agreement.

55. All credit and non-credit bearing provision should be included in monitoring arrangements as set out below.

**Objectives**

56. The objectives of course review are to:
   
   i. evaluate the continuing currency and validity of courses in light of developments in research, professional and industry practice and pedagogy, and changes in the external environment such as requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies;
ii. evaluate the continued alignment with the University’s strategic goals;
iii. evaluate whether students are attaining the intended learning outcomes and whether the assessment regime enables this to be appropriately demonstrated;
iv. ensure that recommendations for appropriate actions are followed up to remedy any identified shortcoming; and
v. evaluate the performance of provision against agreed performance indicators and external benchmarks.

**Process**

57. In alignment with annually agreed University priorities and objectives and in consultation with Heads of Subjects (or equivalent), the relevant Dean will confirm the targets for each course in their ‘school’.

58. Targets must be set for each key performance indicators (KPIs), which will include:

   i. Student satisfaction survey outcomes, where available;
   ii. Employability outcomes, where available;
   iii. ‘Good honours’ outcomes, where available; and
   iv. Module performance outcomes;
   v. Progression rates, where appropriate; and
   vi. Any other KPI agreed by LTSAC.

59. The ‘school’ can, at their discretion, include other targets (such as competitive position, application and conversion ratios) to ensure courses are being evaluated against ‘school’ and University priorities.

60. In autumn of each year the course team with student representatives (review team), will review the previous year’s course performance, determining if:

   i. the actions taken to meet the course targets were successful;
   ii. the agreed standards, quality and enhancement actions were effective; and
   iii. whether the curriculum remains fit for purpose.

61. Based on the review and the targets for the forthcoming session the course leader will document the actions proposed to meet the new targets, address any academic standards issues identified and to enhance the student experience.

62. Each team will be provided with the new targets and the following information from the previous year:

   i. Relevant satisfaction survey results, where available;
   ii. Relevant employability survey outcomes results, where available;
   iii. External Examiners reports;
   iv. Student and module outcomes;
   v. PSRB reports where relevant;
   vi. Validation/revalidation reports that contain recommendations to be addressed; and
   vii. other information provided by the ‘school’ for inclusion in the review.

**Outcomes of course review**

63. The SMT, supported by Quality Management, will receive all course review reports, including targets, for review and approval, and will complete the ‘school’ report for noting at the LTSAC. The SMT will monitor the effectiveness of the implementation of the course review plans.
64. Quality Management will present annually to the LTSAC a summary report to assure the University that standards are secure and learning opportunities for students continue to be improved, highlighting emergent themes arising from the scrutiny of the ‘school’ reports.

65. The Course Leader will also present, for information, to their course committees the approved version of the course review report including the action plan.

66. ‘Schools’, in collaboration with Quality Management, will also report on the outcomes of the scrutiny of module awards and standalone modules.

67. The LTSAC will consider the overall outcome of the monitoring process and report to Academic Board on the robustness of the University’s standards and the quality of the student learning experience.

68. The Committee may require further actions arising, either collectively or individually, from the reports presented by the ‘schools’ or the summary report prepared by Quality Management.

69. Where there are concerns over standards, delivery, quality of student experience or the administrative arrangements, the ‘school’ or the LTSAC may refer a course to the appropriate professional services department for additional support and guidance.

Non-credit bearing (NCB) provision monitoring

70. ‘Schools’ in collaboration with Quality Management should review any NCB provision as part of a documented University process established by the Quality Management. Outcomes should be reported as part of the ‘school’s’ course review report to LTSAC.

Course revalidation

71. The purpose of course revalidation is to review a course after a period of time to ensure the continuing currency and validity of a course.

72. All courses leading to a Solent University award are approved for a maximum period of 6 academic years. Courses must be revalidated before the end of that period in order to continue to recruit to that course. The ‘school’ can submit a course for an early revalidation where considered necessary.

73. The SMT, including a member of Quality Management, should discuss and review the business proposal for the revalidation to confirm the option to propose to APSC regarding Stage 1.

74. The business proposal will include the following information:

   i. the scope and extent of the proposed changes to the course;
   ii. additional risk and resources identified due to the changes proposed; and
   iii. actual course data, including student application and enrolment numbers and course review data from the last three years.

75. From the analysis and evaluation of the business proposal for a revalidation the SMT can decide to either:

   i. Propose to APSC that the course is considered low risk and should therefore proceed straight to Stage 2 of the course approval process. The proposal to
APSC will comprise a brief reflection of the course’s performance since the last (re)validation; or

ii. Require the course team to complete full Stage 1 documentation, as detailed in the course approval Stage 1 section of this policy, for presentation to APSC as the course has changed substantially or is considered high risk.

76. For courses recommended to proceed directly to Stage 2, APSC may at their discretion request full Stage 1 documentation to be provided to the Committee before the course can proceed to Stage 2.

77. After a revalidation proposal has been approved by APSC the revalidation will follow the same processes as a new course approval from Stage 2 as detailed in the course approval section above.

78. Where the SMT, APSC or a Validation Panel do not approve the revalidation of a course then the ‘school’ must follow the University’s suspension and withdrawal processes detailed within this policy; or request the extension of the approved period in order to address the concerns raised.

Suspension and withdrawal

79. The purpose of the University’s course withdrawal policy and practices are designed to protect the interests of those students enrolled on or accepted for admission to the course concerned.

Suspension of course delivery

80. As a result of low demand, short-term operational issues, adverse course review or other significant issues the relevant Dean or the Head of Quality Management may request permission from the Chair of APSC to suspend delivery of a course.

81. The suspension will be reported to the next meeting of APSC.

82. Any students who have been offered a place must be informed and, where possible, offered a suitable alternative course. Where a suitable alternative does not exist or the student declines the alternative offer, the student should be refunded any deposits. Reference should be made to the published CMA guidelines regarding contractual obligations with students when considering changing confirmed offers made to students.

83. Courses which have failed to recruit students must be officially suspended for that academic year.

84. Courses can only be suspended for a maximum of two consecutive years after which time they will be withdrawn.

85. The ‘school’ in collaboration with Quality Management and Admissions will make arrangements to notify and protect the interests of existing students.

Withdrawal of a course

86. When a ‘school’ believes a course has come to the end of its life or if a course is not revalidated, it should be formally closed, and recruitment stopped. The proposal to withdraw the course should be presented to APSC for approval. The ‘school’ in collaboration with Quality Management and Admissions should make arrangements to notify and protect the interests of existing students and students accepted onto the
course. APSC will report course closures to the Student Recruitment and Partnership Committee (SRPC)

87. It is the University’s normal practice to ‘run-out’ a withdrawn course to protect the interests of existing students and the reputation of the University. Any changes required to ensure a smooth closure must be approved using the module approval and course modification process.

88. Where a course is withdrawn and replaced by a similar course, students may be offered the opportunity to transfer to the new course either through recognition of prior learning (RPL) arrangements or through transition arrangements approved through the validation process.

89. Exceptionally, it may be necessary to close a course before all students have completed their studies. In such cases the University will take all reasonable steps to keep students informed and to protect the interests of the students. Reference should be made to the published CMA guidelines regarding contractual obligations with students where this becomes necessary.