

## **A guide to Validation for Panel Members**

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**This guide is intended to provide support to members of  
validation panels at De Montfort University**

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## Introduction

This guide is intended to support validation panel members through the validation process. For further information about programme approval and validation, please refer to the Department of Academic Quality (DAQ) Guide to Validation, available on the DAQ web pages.

## The purpose of validation

Validation is the process through which the university establishes that a new programme is academically viable, that academic standards have been appropriately defined and that it will offer students the best opportunity to learn. It is about assuring quality but must also be about promoting best practice and adding value by enhancing the quality of the proposal.

The De Montfort University (DMU) approach to validation is one of rigour and proportionality with flexible arrangements for programme approval, allowing us to be responsive to external demands and take account of the different levels of risk involved. This involves an event during which a panel of academic peers and representatives from key professional services departments scrutinise the new proposal. However, the approval process also places great emphasis on the programme development stage, and the preparation and consideration of draft documentation at faculty level is considered key to facilitating an effective validation event. Arrangements for the event itself and the level of scrutiny involved will depend on the type and level of risk a proposal poses.

During the validation process consideration is given to the following themes:

- The **rationale** for the new programme
- The programme **curriculum**, its design, content, delivery and assessment
- The appropriateness of the **standards** set for the level of the award
- The suitability of human, physical and other learning **resources** to support the programme
- The **student experience** offered by the new programme including opportunities for employment and further study for its graduates
- The way in which the programme facilitates the **widest possible access** to ensure that all students can maximise their potential

For some programmes, the purpose of the validation may also be to obtain recognition by an associated Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB). The university remains solely responsible for all academic awards offered in its name and the validation of these programmes. PSRBs may accredit programmes of the University which can convey licence to practice for graduates (e.g. pre-registration Nursing), exemption from some professional examinations (e.g. Accountancy, Law) or membership of professional organisations (e.g. the Institution of Engineering and Technology). In some circumstances PSRBs may simply 'kite mark' a programme as meeting their specifications but conferring nothing more. Different professional bodies have different approaches to how they accredit. Usually this activity takes place separate from university programme validation, but may occur conjointly, particularly where licence to practice is conveyed. Where this is the case it is helpful for the faculty Associate Professor Quality/Head of Quality to provide the validation panel with a short briefing sheet outlining the PSRB's requirements for validation and role in the event.

## Different types of validation activity

There are two types of validation:

**Devolved:** the programme is to be delivered by DMU staff, on campus and/or in a community, corporate or clinical setting, or via distance learning.

**Non-devolved:** Activities which involve partner institutions delivering or supporting an element of, or an entire, DMU programme. All validations for programmes delivered overseas are treated as non-devolved.

Normally programmes which are successfully validated do not need to be revalidated at fixed periods. However, some programmes which also require professional accreditation will require revalidation on a regular basis and all programmes delivered by partner institutions will be considered for re-approval at the point of collaborative review; see the DAQ Guide to Managing Collaborative Provision, available on the DAQ web pages. Where a validated programme is modified it may require revalidation depending on the nature and extent of the changes. Guidance on this is provided in the Guide to Curriculum Modification, available on the DAQ web pages.

## Section 1: The validation panel

### Validation panel terms of reference

The validation panel will:

- Receive proposals for the validation of new programmes or the revalidation of existing programmes
- Ensure the effective scrutiny of proposals by a process which facilitates peer review and using methods deemed appropriate to the validation status and subject matter of the programmes concerned
- Assess the programme to ensure that it meets/satisfies quality criteria and threshold academic standards appropriate to the type and level of award
- Report to the Faculty Academic Committee/the Associate Professors Advisory Group (APAG) on the outcome of the programme validation/revalidation exercise and make recommendations as appropriate.

### Roles and responsibilities of panel members

By accepting membership of a validation panel, members are expected to allocate reading time as early as possible following receipt of the documentation and to raise points for clarification and discussion in advance. In the spirit of openness and transparency, the likely topics for discussion should be shared with the programme leader in advance of the validation event where these have been signalled by the panel. As a rough guide, panel members should be asked to submit their initial observations on the documentation to the validation servicing officer within a week of receipt. There will follow a dialogue between the panel and the programme team, with a view to clarifying as many issues as possible in advance of the validation. This process should ensure that the focus of the validation is on the 'big' issues.

Depending on the validation type a combination of all or some of the following members will form a panel:

#### Validation panel chair

Your main role is to ensure that a fair judgement about the proposed programme can be made by the end of the validation event and that issues are explored and debated in a way that adds value to the quality of the proposal. Your key responsibilities are as follows.

#### Before the event:

- Read through validation documentation as soon as it is available – if there are problems or points that need clarifying beforehand, it is essential to clear these up with the faculty Associate Professor Quality/Head of Quality and programme team, via the servicing officer, as soon as possible and at least one week before the validation. This is particularly important where there are technical and procedural issues which ought to be clarified prior to the validation event.
- Review preliminary comments from panel members before the validation

#### During the event:

- Open discussion by establishing the purpose of the event and setting a constructive tone at the outset to promote a good dialogue with the programme team
- Be transparent by making sure all the issues are on the table – share any concerns with the programme team
- Manage the debate by agreeing who will lead questioning and balance the time available to the topics in proportion with importance – this is done during the first private panel meeting
- Discourage aggressive questioning styles that put the team on the defensive, but be prepared to press if questions are side-stepped

- Encourage everyone to participate but don't let individual members dominate – you may need to cut short contributions that are unproductive or repeating earlier business
- Have regard to the core guidelines against which new proposals are validated and ensure that, either through the documentation presented or meeting with the team, these are satisfied \*
- Guide the panel through the validation options available if there is a shortfall in meeting the core criteria, which range from not validating to combinations of validating with conditions, with required actions, with recommendations for improvement and making observations and commendations\*
- Highlight resource deficiencies where these present a serious threat to students having a reasonable chance of achieving programme outcomes. A condition should be set which requires the deficiency to be addressed to the satisfaction of the panel. Chairs should refrain from directing PVC/Deans in how to solve their resource problems. It is useful, however, in the spirit of sharing the expertise of the panel, to give feedback where, in the panel's judgement, enhancements in approaches to delivery could be considered
- Close the event by giving provisional feedback on the outcomes and ensuring dates and follow-up actions are specified, including who is responsible for ensuring conditions have been met

\*DAQ representative on the panel to offer support/guidance as necessary

#### **After the event:**

- Approve a draft of the conditions, required actions and recommendations for circulation by the servicing officer to the team
- Approve the full report (drafted by the servicing officer) for circulation to the panel
- Confirm in writing to the faculty Associate Professor Quality/Head of Quality and programme leader designate when all the conditions are satisfied (cc. to Faculty Collaborative Coordinator for collaborative programmes). Note: it is the responsibility of the validation servicing officer to co-ordinate submission of the evidence to the chair and other panel members where appropriate

A new programme proposal should be referred back for further consideration and development if the panel does not have confidence because:

- Resource deficiencies are such that students will not have a reasonable chance of achieving programme outcomes, and there is no strategic commitment to address the shortfall
- The academic challenge of the programme is not set at the correct level and is defined without engagement with national reference points.

**If the panel is not confident that deficiencies can, or will, be remedied through setting validation conditions the outcome must be not to validate.**

#### **External panel member**

Your main role is to give an independent and objective view of the quality of the proposal and to draw on your wider experience of provision elsewhere which can counter any inward-looking tendencies. If you are a representative of professional practice or industry we want you to contribute your knowledge of the features of HE programmes that lead to a valuable professional, creative or vocational preparation.

The roles and responsibilities for the external panel member will involve the following:

- Take an independent view and be open and transparent regarding judgements in quality or standards, highlighting issues to be addressed
- Recognise and commend good practice
- Comment on the proposal from an objective viewpoint
- Challenge assumptions held by the programme team – or the University – and offer a critical but constructive perspective.

- Provide guidance on the curriculum and other subject-related issues in relation to the wider higher education sector;
- Offer independent and objectivity to the decisions taken and provide a basis for comparability of academic standards across the higher education sector;
- Offer judgements on the setting and maintaining of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities in the context of sector-recognised standards, the FHEQ, subject benchmarks and other associated elements of the UK Quality Code;
- Advise, where appropriate, on whether proper consideration has been given to the requirements and regulations of professional and statutory bodies;
- Comment on the ability of the programme to provide a relevant and effective experience in the context of preparation for vocational or professional practice;
- Make recommendations to the Panel on syllabi, learning and teaching strategy, learning outcomes and assessment in the context of relevance to current professional and employment practices, developments in academic research in the wider higher education sector;
- Contribute to the decision on the approval of the proposed partner and/ or programme and the setting of conditions;
- Comment on the response to those conditions as appropriate.

The level of input required of you will depend on the validation type. For instance, delivery validations will already have been validated internally and the focus of scrutiny will therefore be more concerned the calibre of the teaching team and appropriateness of resources to support delivery. Where validation takes place alongside partner approval external subject advisers/panel members should, ideally, have experience of collaborative activities in their own institution. The servicing officer will advise accordingly.

### **Academic representative from outside the faculty**

Your main role is to give an independent and objective view of the quality of the proposal and to draw on your experience of provision within your own faculty and across the university as a whole.

### **Student representative**

Your main role is to comment on whether the proposal is likely to appeal to students, and on issues relating to student accessibility and support, for example:

- Whether you feel the methods of learning and assessment described would be accessible to part time as well as full time students, to students with disabilities, and to those of differing ability, culture and gender
- Whether the levels of support provided would meet student needs and expectations

You will also be asked to comment on the information provided to students about the new programme, specifically whether the faculty/programme handbook information (on a VLE site) is appropriate and accessible.

Further guidance on the role of the student representative is provided by the De Montfort Students' Union (DSU) as part of the school and course representatives training.

### **Library and Learning Services representative**

Your main role is to consider the resources statement presented, and to view the library facilities in the case of collaborative validations, in terms of level, quality and access, specifically:

- The allocation and appropriateness of learning resources
- The currency and availability of stock identified in the reading lists
- Provision of skills training and information support for students.

### **Department of Academic Quality (DAQ) representative**

The DAQ representative's role is to ensure that the validation event takes place according to the validation framework and that the proposal sits appropriately to national and university requirements, e.g. the Office

for Students' sector-recognised standards in England, the FHEQ, the HE Credit Framework, undergraduate and postgraduate regulations etc. The DAQ representative will advise the panel on validation protocols and outcomes.

### Servicing officer

Your main role is to prepare the validation report and act as the key point of liaison between the panel and the programme team. You are responsible for co-ordinating the domestic arrangements for the validation, working closely with the faculty Head of Quality/Associate Professor Quality, programme leader and, where appropriate, the validation panel chair. In particular, you are responsible for:

- Setting up meeting invites / booking the venue, refreshments, transport and/or accommodation for panel members
- Ensuring the documentation is collated and subsequently circulated to the panel
- Acting as the key point of contact between the panel and the programme team, in respect of collating and sharing the panel's initial observations and circulation of the programme team's responses to these in advance of the validation
- At the validation, keeping minutes on all discussions, including a list of issues that are likely to be identified as conditions, required actions or recommendations
- Draft the summary of outcomes and circulate an agreed version to the programme team
- Draft the full validation report and circulate an agreed version to the programme team and panel
- Liaise between the panel and programme team, as the programme team endeavour to respond to any conditions, required actions and/or recommendations
- Maintain a full e-record of the validation documentation and audit trail (with hard copies as appropriate). Educational Partnerships will maintain records for non-devolved validations.

Full information about the role of validation servicing officer can be found in the DAQ Guide to Validation for Servicing Officers, available on the DAQ web pages.



## Section 2: Submission and circulation of documentation

### The validation documents

As a minimum the validation panel must receive:

- Validation documentation as outlined in the DAQ Guide to Validation
- Validation event programme (including details of those attending)
- List of panel members and roles
- DAQ Guide to Validation for Panel Members

In addition the external panel member should be provided with directions to the university (if appropriate) and an expenses claim form.

### Before the event

To do their job effectively, panel members need time to read the documentation thoroughly and to seek clarification in advance on points identified. The servicing officer will circulate the documentation to the panel members three weeks prior to the validation event. The servicing officer will ask for initial written feedback, requesting that the panel members raise any queries for clarification and highlight any areas they wish to particularly explore during the validation event.

The validation servicing officer, in conjunction with the faculty Associate Professor Quality/Head of Quality, will summarise these comments, circulate them to the panel members and to the programme team. If time allows, the programme team may respond to straightforward queries prior to the validation event, leaving more time to explore substantive issues on the day.

Should any significant shortfalls be identified upon receipt of the documentation, it is the responsibility of the validation panel chair or DAQ representative to draw these to the attention of the faculty Associate Professor Quality/Head of Quality and programme leader. A significant shortfall will normally fall within one or more of the following categories:

Deficiencies in information which will leave the validation panel unable to draw a reliable conclusion

- Non-compliance with expected requirements/protocols, such as procedures set out in DAQ guidance or non-adherence with relevant sections of the QAA Quality code
- Presentation of information which is significantly unclear or contradictory

## Section 3: The Validation Event

Consideration of the proposal will be undertaken through the analysis and discussion of the submission document produced by the programme team.

During the validation process consideration is given to six main themes:

- The **rationale** for the new programme
- The programme **curriculum**, its design, content, delivery and assessment
- The appropriateness of the **standards** set for the level of the award
- The suitability of human, physical and other learning **resources** to support the programme
- The **student experience** offered by the new programme including opportunities for employment and further study for its graduates
- The way in which the programme facilitates the **widest possible access** to ensure that all students can maximise their potential

The considerations below detail the issues on which the panel will focus, in order to assess the proposal and the resource base and learning environment in place for the delivery of the proposed provision.

### How judgements are made

1. Are the characteristics of the programme clearly defined?
2. Is the proposal in line with the faculty's learning and teaching strategy?
3. Will the programme provide a good learning experience for the likely student intake?
4. Will the curriculum prepare students for the opportunities potentially available on completion of a programme?
5. Is the programme designed to ensure that the overall experience of a student has logic and an intellectual integrity that are related to clearly defined purposes?
6. Is the intellectual challenge and value of the programme defined at the correct level, and with reference to the Office for Students' sector-recognised standards?
7. Has the programme team taken account, as appropriate, of external reference points, including any relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statement(s), Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), the Higher Education Credit Framework for England and the requirements of Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies and employers?
8. Does the curriculum impose an increasing level of demand on the learner during the course of the programme?
9. Is the programme balanced, for example in relation to academic and practical elements, personal development and academic outcomes, breadth and depth in the curriculum?
10. Does the award title reflect the intended learning outcomes of the programme?
11. Is it clear how the intended learning outcomes of the programme will be promoted, demonstrated and assessed?
12. What has the team done to design and implement e-learning into the programme?
13. Are the identified resources necessary to support the programme and are they in place or committed?
14. Is the programme designed so that students are treated equally, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or religion?
15. Do programme learning outcomes feature employability and career management skills development?
16. Do placement learning outcomes contribute to the overall coherence and integrity of the programmes, where applicable?
17. Does the programme reference how spelling, punctuation and grammar will be appropriately assessed and make clear how students' technical proficiency in written English will be assessed?

## Additional considerations for different types of provision

The table below indicates the particular focus of scrutiny appropriate to different types of proposal. This should be read as a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, the core range of topics to be explored during the validation process.

Type of provision	Focus of scrutiny
Distance learning and Enhanced learning through technology (ELT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to open learning centres</li> <li>• Provision of learning support including study skills</li> <li>• Arrangements for tutorial support</li> <li>• Assessment methods and procedures</li> <li>• Arrangements for the submission of assignments</li> <li>• Monitoring and feedback on academic progress</li> <li>• Opportunities for peer group interaction</li> <li>• Procedures for ensuring the students needs and capabilities are appropriate for entry to the programme</li> <li>• Information to students about the programme and clear communication of expectations</li> <li>• Use of technology and study material is appropriate to the subject and enables students to meet the programme outcomes</li> <li>• Provision for updating material</li> <li>• Programme material is designed and structured to support individual study</li> </ul>
Work-based learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roles and responsibilities of all parties including provision of a learner agreement</li> <li>• Provision of training for work-based mentors and assessors, as appropriate</li> <li>• Staff profiles and staff development</li> <li>• Learning resources</li> <li>• Personal tutorial support</li> <li>• Learning support facilities for students</li> <li>• Curriculum design and delivery to ensure the work-based learning includes knowledge and understanding to attract the award of credit</li> <li>• Learning, teaching and assessment strategies</li> <li>• Quality assurance and enhancement procedures</li> <li>• Market research and characteristics of the student intake</li> </ul>
Foundation Degree	<p><b>Employer involvement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the design and regular review of programmes</li> <li>• To achieve recognition from employer and professional bodies</li> <li>• With both local organisations and national sectoral bodies, to establish demand for Foundation Degree programmes</li> </ul> <p><b>The development of skills and knowledge</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical and work specific skills, relevant to the sector</li> <li>• Underpinned by rigorous and broad-based academic learning</li> <li>• Key skills in communication, team working, problem solving, application of number, use of information technology and improving own learning and performance</li> <li>• Generic skills, for instance, reasoning and work process management</li> <li>• Should be recorded by a transcript, validated by the awarding HEI and underpinned by a personal development plan</li> </ul>

**Application of skills in the workplace**

- Students must demonstrate (as appropriate) their skills in work relevant to the area of study
- Work experience should be sufficient to develop an understanding of the world of work and be validated, assessed and recorded
- The awarding HEIs should award credits, with exemptions for students with relevant work experience

**Credit accumulation and transfer**

- Foundation Degrees will attract a minimum of 240 credits – see approved university framework
- Appropriate prior and work-based learning through the award of credits

**Progression - within work and/or to an honours degree**

- There must be guaranteed articulation arrangements with at least one honours degree programme
- Programmes must clearly state subsequent arrangements for progression to honours degrees and to professional qualifications or higher-level NVQs
- For those students wishing to progress to the honours degree, the time taken should not normally exceed 1.3 years for a full-time equivalent (FTE) student

**HND/C provision**

- Consideration should be given to the opportunities available to top up to an honours degree
- Normally at DMU HND/C programmes are written by the university rather than using off the shelf Pearson/EdExcel units. It is a requirement that where the university develops its own Higher National award which is closely related in title and/or content to an existing BTEC Higher National award, a mapping exercise is undertaken at the point of validation. For further information please contact Sally Lloyd or Louise Newell in DAQ, or visit the Pearson website and search for the relevant guidance, entitled Licenced HEIs Guide to Mapping Core Content

For further information on Foundation Degrees please see the QAA's Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark, available via the QAA website. A similar document is available for taught postgraduate provision, the QAA's Master's Degree Characteristics Statement.

**Outcome of the validation**

At the end of the validation, the panel must decide whether it wishes to approve the proposal. The panel's recommendation will fall into one of the following categories:

- **Indefinite approval**, without or without conditions and/or required technical corrections, and/or recommendations
- **Approval for a fixed period**, with or without conditions and/or required technical corrections, and/or recommendations
- **Not approved** – an invitation given to resubmit
- **Not approved** – recommendation that the proposal be withdrawn.

Indefinite approval, which is the standard length of approval, is granted subject to the normal processes of ongoing review and university protocols for the approval of modifications to programmes.

Normally programmes which are successfully validated do not require revalidation at fixed periods. However, some programmes which also require professional accreditation and all programmes delivered by partner institutions will require revalidation on a regular basis. Where a validated programme is modified it may require revalidation depending on the nature and extent of the changes. Guidance on this is provided in the Guide to Curriculum Modification. For non-devolved validations, programmes are validated indefinitely, subject to successful review at the next collaborative review of the partner and programmes.

### Conditions

These serious issues must be addressed to the satisfaction of the panel, normally **before** delivery of the programme can commence or, in the case of a revalidation, to allow the programme to continue in operation after a specified date. When setting conditions, the panel must specify clearly what is to be done, by whom and by when, and what the arrangements will be for ensuring that the given conditions have been satisfied. In certain instances, it may be appropriate to set deadlines for some conditions that fall after the planned start of delivery. An example of this would be for the programme team to submit the learning materials for year two of a distance learning programme in the latter stages of the first year of delivery.

### Required actions

Items that are not serious enough to inhibit the commencement of the programme, but that do need to be addressed at a later date. One example of this would be the need for particular facilities to be built in order for Level 5 students to commence their studies. The programme could be validated, however, a required action following the validation would be for evidence/proof of the facilities' completion to be provided in order for Level 5 students to commence their studies on the course.

### Recommendations

These should be addressed by the programme team and the programme management board(s) as part of subsequent review and development activities. The programme team is required to submit a formal response to the recommendations to the panel as a follow-up to the validation.

In addition to citing conditions and recommendations of approval, the panel may also wish to identify **key observations** arising from the validation process, to include exemplary features and examples of good practice.

Issues not discussed during the day will not be included as conditions unless the panel discusses them with the programme team before the report is approved and circulated.

At the final feedback session, the chair should feed this all back to the programme team.

## Section 4: After the Event

### Preparation of report and validation follow-up

The outcome of the validation will be fully documented in a report, written by the validation servicing officer, which should be finalised and circulated within **five weeks** of the validation event. Panel members will be invited to provide comments on a draft before a final version is agreed. The report, once finalised, will be circulated to key university committees and individuals.

### Responding to conditions and required actions

The programme leader is responsible for co-ordinating the follow-up activity. This will include the provision of evidence to the panel that changes have been made and action taken in response to the conditions and required actions set, as well as the preparation of a formal response to any recommendations. The documentation produced must be sent to the validation servicing officer for onward transmission to the panel. Where they have received responses, panel members must confirm to the validation servicing officer that they are satisfied with the action taken in response to the conditions, required actions and recommendations set.

## Section 5: Further information

### Useful publications

Publications which may prove useful include:

#### Internal documents

Document	Available from
A Guide to Validation	Department of Academic Quality web pages
A Guide for Validation Servicing Officers	Department of Academic Quality web pages
Guidance on Programme (Student) Handbook information	Department of Academic Quality web pages
Protocol for Dealing with Weak Validation Submissions	Department of Academic Quality web pages
Handbook and Regulations for Undergraduate Awards	Department of Academic Quality web pages
Taught Postgraduate Programmes University Regulations	Department of Academic Quality web pages
General Regulations and Procedures Affecting Students	Academic Support Office, Student and Academic Services web pages

#### External publications

Office for Students' Sector-recognised standards	Office for Students' website: <a href="https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/standards">Sector-recognised standards (officeforstudents.org.uk)</a>
The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)	Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) website
Higher Education Credit Framework for England	Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) website
QAA Foundation Degree qualification benchmark	Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) website
QAA Master's Degree characteristics statement	Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) website
QAA Quality Code Chapter 3: Setting and maintaining academic standards (2013)	Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) website
QAA Quality Code Chapter B1: Programme design, development and approval (2013)	Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) website
QAA Quality Code Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning (2013)	Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) website
QAA Quality Code Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others (2014)	Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) website
Licenced HEIs Guide to Mapping Core Content (for DMU-devised Higher National provision)	Pearson website