

Protocols for dealing with under-prepared or weak validation submissions

Very occasionally the outcome of a validation event is to refer the proposal back to the faculty for further work. Whilst there must be a provision for this outcome at a validation event, it should be an exceptional course of action. The university expects that faculty Heads of Quality and PVC/Deans shall only sign off suitably prepared proposals. Nevertheless, occasionally under-prepared or weak proposals are presented, and these protocols have been developed to provide guidance to validation panel chairs, faculty Heads of Quality and programme proposers.

Protocols for situations where significant issues are identified prior to the validation event

Identify that the proposal is not yet ready

Any significant shortfalls in the proposal should be identified upon receipt of the documentation by

- Validation panel chair, or
- Servicing officer, or
- Department of Academic Quality validation panel representative

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 internal or external requirements/protocols, such as the university procedures for validation and the relevant sections of the QAA Quality Code.
- Presentation of information which is significantly unclear or contradictory
- The academic challenge of the programme is not set at the correct level and is defined without engagement with national reference points

Record reasons and alert relevant parties with a recommendation for action

The Head of Academic Quality should be immediately advised of the reasons why the proposal is not yet ready with a recommendation of what action should be taken.

Where a proposal is not yet ready, if time allows the recommended action would normally be to make arrangements for supplementary information to be circulated to the validation panel. All supplementary papers must be received by panel members at least 5 working days prior to the validation event.

If there is no time for a late circulation of papers it should be recommended that the event be postponed and a new date set.

Decide the appropriate course of action

A decision is then made whether to postpone the event or make a late circulation of supplementary papers. The PVC/Dean should be formally alerted by the Head of Academic Quality, stating the reasons, with a copy of the email to the Panel Chair, faculty Head of Quality and the programme leader/proposer.

The decision on the appropriate course of action should be arrived at swiftly and by consensus through discussion between the Chair, faculty Head of Quality and PVC/Dean, mediated by the Head of Academic Quality. The Pro Vice-Chancellor Teaching and Learning will arbitrate where the decision is contentious.

Review of processes

To learn lessons from the situation all parties should reflect on what might be done differently to avoid similar cases in the future. More formally, it is within the remit of the Academic Quality Committee to monitor trends and make recommendation to changes in practice.

Protocols for situations where significant issues are identified during the validation event and the panel is unable to proceed

Very exceptionally cases arise where it is evident to the panel that the validation should be terminated before the panel draws together conditions and recommendations. This is distinct from cases where the outcome is that the proposal is referred back with an invitation to resubmit.

The validation panel chair should seek agreement of the panel not to proceed with the validation***The panel should record its reasons for not proceeding with the event***

This will be an issue which is so fundamentally wrong that the panel is not confident that quality and standards of the award can be assured, for example

- Fundamental mismatch between programme outcomes and module outcomes
- No confidence that resources are in place to support the proposal including a lack of critical mass of staff to support the proposed programme
- Serious concerns about the strategic commitment to the proposal from the faculty or a partner institution

The panel chair should alert a senior staff member

The PVC/Dean, Head of School or Department or College Principal must be advised of the situation. The chair should explain that issues have arisen which are of such a magnitude they are unlikely to be addressed through attaching conditions to the validation.

Identify a follow-up plan

Feedback should be given to the programme team on the reason for terminating the validation. If the occasion allows, it may be helpful to share with the programme team what actions for improvement are required. Alternatively, agreement may be reached to hold a second stage meeting at a later date to discuss an improvement plan. To help the team prepare for a fresh validation event the report of the validation event will specify an action plan, instead of conditions and recommendations.