Course (programme) validation: Guidance for student panel members

On behalf of the Department of Academic Quality (DAQ) and De Montfort Students’ Union (DSU) we would like to thank you for agreeing to sit as a student panel member at a new course validation event. This important role provides an opportunity for you to gain an insight into a course other than your own; it also helps to make sure that students are at the heart of decisions and that the student experience continues to be enhanced.

What is Validation?

Each new course has to go through a demanding validation process before students can be recruited to it. Validation is used to ensure that a new course is appropriate academically, that the academic standards and quality are suitable and that students will have the best possible opportunity to learn. Validation is a rigorous developmental process, culminating in a validation event where a panel scrutinises the proposal put forward.

Aims and Purpose of Validation:

Validation is the method by which new courses are introduced into the university’s offer to students. It is an opportunity for new courses to be scrutinised before their introduction, both to assure their standards and to enhance the quality of the proposal. As part of the validation process the course teams and validation panels will consider:

- The rationale for introducing the new course
- How the new course fits with other courses on offer and with the overall faculty strategy
- The awards offered and the curriculum – its design, content, delivery and assessment
- The appropriateness of the standards set for the level of the award
- The appropriateness of the intended learning outcomes and how well those intentions are being met
- The suitability of human, physical and other learning resources to support the new course
- The student experience offered by the new course, including opportunities for employment and further study for its graduates
- The way in which the course facilitates the widest possible access to ensure that all students can maximise their potential.

Revalidation

Normally once a new course is validated it does not have to be revalidated at a later date. The quality and standards of a course are checked annually via staff, student and external examiner evaluations, and every few years via the periodic review process. Sometimes, however, an existing course is required to go through a revalidation event. This is usually because the course is undergoing significant change and revalidation provides a suitable opportunity to thoroughly review the reason for the changes and the potential impact on the course. Some courses require regular revalidation to meet the needs of external bodies called Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs); courses governed by PSRBs are those which normally lead to direct qualification for a profession such as Nursing, Midwifery, Pharmacy etc.
The validation process

The validation process varies depending on two key issues, as follows:

**Risk assessment of the new course proposal**: DMU operates a risk-based approach to validation and the documentation required and the scope and length of the event itself will depend on how ‘high risk’ the course proposal is. For example the introduction of a joint honours course where a single honours course in the same subject already exists would be seen as low risk, as an experienced course team is in place along with the resources to deliver the subject. A proposal which involved the introduction of a subject which has never been offered at DMU before would be seen as high risk, as there is no proven track record of delivery of the subject, and potentially no existing learning resources to support it.

**Timescales for development and delivery of the new course**: Often new course development takes place over many months, or even years. However, sometimes new courses are needed very quickly, within a matter of a few weeks, as a response to external requirements. While the validation process may be the same, the timescales to receive and comment on the validation documents may be shorter than usual.

**Documentation**

In advance of the validation event the course team will be asked to provide the following information.

- **Basic course information** – the award, modes of delivery and modules which make up the course. This will also include the rationale for introduction of the new course, projected student numbers and opportunities for employment/further study for its graduates
- **Information about resources** – physical spaces to be used; the staff (academic and professional services) who will teach and support the course; learning resources such as Library resources
- **Confirmation/evidence that the course fits with national subject benchmarks and level descriptors** – this is to ensure that the content of the course is appropriate to the subject area and that the course is set at the correct level of challenge
- **Course/student handbook** – a draft of the handbook which will be provided to the students on arrival. As a student representative you will be asked to comment specifically on the quality and content of this handbook
- **Course and module templates** – documents explaining the content, delivery and assessment of the course and its modules. The documentation is also expected to include more detailed information on assessment, including an indicative student assessment timetable to show how assessment tasks are spread through the academic year
- **Evidence of external consultation and input into the new course**
- **Information about how technology will be used to enhance students’ learning experiences**
- **Information about how the course promotes and supports equality and diversity within the student body.**

The documentation is circulated to the panel approximately 3 weeks prior to the validation event. Panel members are asked to review the documentation and, bearing in mind the aims and purpose of validation, feed back their comments to the servicing officer, identifying points on which they would like additional clarification and areas that they would wish to pursue further with the course team during the event.
Minor issues may be resolved by the provision of additional documentation or a brief explanation. Otherwise panel members’ comments are collated into an agenda of topics for discussion on the day of the validation event. The event provides the opportunity for the panel to discuss specific points with the course team and other representatives from the faculty.

The Panel

The evidence given in the documentation is considered by a panel made up of independent external and internal representatives.

The panel constitution will normally be:

- **Chair** – a senior academic (Head of School, Head of Department etc.) from a faculty other than that in which the new course proposal sits
- **External peers** – there will usually be at least one external panel member, normally from a senior academic post, although externals may also be drawn from industry or professional bodies as appropriate
- **Member of a different faculty** – who does not have a close relationship with the subject area of the new course
- **DSU elected student representative** not associated with the subject area of the new course
- **Library and Learning Services representative** – to ensure appropriateness of learning resources to support the new course
- **Department of Academic Quality representative** – to ensure that the new course meets national quality and standards benchmarks, and to advise on the validation process
- **Servicing officer** – a member of the faculty proposing the new course, who will write a report reflecting the outcomes of the validation event.

The validation event

The day begins with introductions and a private meeting of the panel members to agree priorities for discussion. There may also be an initial presentation by the course team to provide an overview of the new course proposal.

Throughout the day the panel meets with senior staff and the course team. If the event is to revalidate an existing course, the views of students on the course will be sought. The panel may also be given a tour of resources. The event will conclude with feedback from the panel on whether the course may successfully be validated, and what else, if anything, the course team needs to do to improve the course or address issues prior to students arriving. The panel may set the following:

- **Conditions** – action points to address issues of a serious nature, which must be resolved prior to the start of the new course
- **Required technical corrections** – action points to address minor issues, such as typographical errors in the student handbook, which must be resolved prior to the start of the new course
- **Recommendations** – points for the course team to think about in terms of the future development and improvement of the course
- **Observations** – any other points which the panel wishes to convey to the course team, including commendations and recognition of good practice.

Following the review a report will be drafted for the approval of the chair and the panel before circulation to the course/faculty team and to the others within the university.
Below are two examples of validation event agendas. The length of the validation will depend on how ‘high risk’ the new course proposal is deemed.

**Example 1**

10:00 – 10:15  Arrival and introductions/refreshments  
10:15 – 10:30  Presentation from the programme leader to the panel  
10:30 – 11:00  Private meeting of the panel  
11:00 – 12:15  Discussion between the panel and the course team  
12:15 – 13:00  Lunch and private meeting of the panel  
13:00 – 13:15  Feedback to the course team on validation outcomes

**Example 2**

09:30 – 09:45  Arrival and introductions/refreshments  
09:45 – 10:00  Presentation from the programme leader to the panel  
10:00 – 10:30  Private meeting of the panel  
10:30 – 11:00  Discussion between the panel and the Faculty Executive  
11:00 – 11:30  Private meeting of the panel/break  
11:30 – 13:00  Discussion between the panel and the course team  
13:00 – 14:00  Lunch and private meeting of the panel  
14:00 – 14:15  Feedback to the course team on validation outcomes

**Role and responsibilities of student panel members:**

As a student panel member you are a full member of the panel. You will be expected to fully participate, actively contributing to the discussions and the decision making process. Your views will be equal to those of any other panel member. You will be expected to:

1. Read the documentation in advance of the validation event.
   The documentation in total may, at first glance, appear overwhelming; do not be put off by this. The main focus for you as a student is the validation document outlining the new course and its rationale, and the student/course handbook. Seek guidance from the servicing officer if you have any concerns about the documentation or your role in the event; feel free to ask as many questions as you need, we want to ensure that you feel supported in this important role. You may also seek guidance from the Department of Academic Quality – contact details on page 5.

2. Identify with the servicing officer (by email) any issues you would like to explore during the event. Highlight points of good practice and areas on which you would like further clarification. These will form the feedback you submit to the servicing officer.
   Do not worry that you are not an expert in the subject matter or in educational quality standards; those are the areas of expertise for which the other members of the panel have been appointed. You are on the panel to offer the student viewpoint; the other panel members will be happy to help if you have questions about some of the other issues. Whilst your own experiences are of value, it is more important to consider the general student experience that the new course is likely to offer. It is important that any issues you raise are based on the evidence received and not on your own experience as a student at DMU.
You will be asked to consider if, in your view:

- the course described would appeal to students
- 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
- the levels of support provided would meet student needs and expectations
- the information provided to students about the course, specifically the student/course handbook, is appropriate and accessible.

3. Attend the validation event.

4. Ensure that you get opportunity to review the final report and approve or suggest amendments as necessary within the specified timescales.

**Timescales**

Once you have been confirmed as a panel member you will receive the documentation, normally 3 weeks before the event. This will give you plenty of time to read through and ask for any clarification you need.

You will:

- receive the documentation, along with a comments form.
- be given a deadline by which any initial comments on the documentation should be submitted to the Servicing Officer
- receive a summary of the outcomes within one week of the review event
- receive a Chair approved draft of the final report within two weeks of the review event, with the expectation that you will confirm approval or return comments within two weeks.

For further information, clarification or queries please don’t hesitate to contact either the servicing officer for the validation event, or Sally Lloyd, Senior Officer, Taught Programmes, Department of Academic Quality on (0116) 257 7303 or via email at slloyd@dmu.ac.uk

**Benefits**

Sitting on the validation panel will count towards your student representative accreditation and be included on your Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR). You will gain experience of being an integral part of the validation process, ensuring that students’ views are accounted for in the process of introducing new courses to the university.