

Nottingham Trent University

Quality Handbook

**Part C: Assuring and
enhancing quality**

**Section 5: Course design
and approval**

Section 5

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1. Categories of course approval

All University taught courses and Professional Doctorates are subject to academic consideration and approval through the University's course design and approval process.

Requirements

- 1.1 A new course, or high impact change(s) to an existing course, is designed, developed and approved through the University's Design Sprint process.
- 1.2 Very low impact changes to a course are part of routine and regular updating to ensure that currency is maintained.
- 1.3 Very low, low and medium impact change(s) to an existing course are considered and approved by a School Academic Standards and Quality Committee (SASQC) or by the University Research Degrees Committee (URDC) in the case of Professional Doctorate courses.
- 1.4 SASQCs have responsibility for maintaining a record of all changes to modules and courses, regardless of the extent of the change, and reporting to School Executive Team (SET) who maintain strategic overview of curriculum development and overall shape of teaching portfolio.
- 1.5 SASQCs also have responsibility for monitoring the accumulation of smaller changes to a course. See QHS 5B for examples of how combinations of changes may trigger different approval mechanisms.

Explanatory notes

- Definitions of the impact level including examples of types of change and the documentary requirements can be found in Quality Handbook Supplement (QHS) 5A.
- If the course is non-award bearing or leads to Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) recognition, please refer to QHS 5J.
- If the course includes an NTIC progression route, please refer to QHS PS5.
- Over time, the same course may implement several packages of changes that individually fall firmly into the low impact or medium impact categories, but which cumulatively may constitute a significant change to course philosophy and delivery. Whilst it is anticipated that course teams will themselves declare that a

'tipping point' has been reached, it is the responsibility of the SASQC to ensure that the appropriate approval process is undertaken.

2. Business Evaluation

Business evaluation ensures that new courses and proposed changes to courses will align with the University's strategic goals, will be appropriate to market, are financially and operationally viable and will not contravene consumer rights legislation.

Requirements

- 2.1 All proposals for new courses and changes to existing courses are assessed for their market, financial or consumer rights impact under the appropriate Business Evaluation process within the home School.

Explanatory note

- Details of the Business Evaluation processes for standard University and collaborative provision can be found on the Centre for Academic Development and Quality (CADQ) webpages.
- For changes to courses, a Course Change Form must be completed first. This is used to determine whether Business Evaluation is needed.
- The process of Business Evaluation is currently under review and for 2022/23 will be built into the Design Sprint process supported by the new Central Course Portfolio Database.

3. Timescales

All new courses or changes to existing courses must be planned in sufficient time and in line with School and University strategies.

Requirements

- 3.1 It is the School's responsibility to ensure an appropriate timeline for changes to courses that are subject only to SASQC scrutiny and approval (see QHS 5A).
- 3.2 Strategic Planning and Change, Schools and CADQ all play a part in making the decision about when and whether the University will support a new development.
- 3.3 It is particularly important to consider the impact of the change on any 'material information' that has already been provided to current students or to students who have accepted an offer (including from NTIC progression routes). This may affect the decision about when the change should be implemented (see explanatory note below).

Explanatory notes

- School Executive Team approval (via the Course Change Form) is required where a proposed change is considered to impact on any material information already provided to students or prospective students.
- 'Material information' refers to the following aspects: entry requirements, core and optional modules, information about how the course will be delivered (e.g., contact hours, work placements, expected workloads, levels of staff), methods of assessment, details of the award on successful completion, location of study and placements (where known), length of course, who regulates and accredits, and any surprising or important terms, including those that may prevent a student completing. Advice about the impact of the change on material information should be sought from Legal Services and / or the Marketing Team.
- Scheduling of Design Sprints is carried out by CADQ.

4. The course design process

The design of all new courses and changes to courses that are high in impact is achieved through a collaborative and supportive design process. The course team works with appropriate internal and external expertise in a set of facilitator-led workshops to ensure that the course aligns with the requirements summarised in 4.1 below.

Requirements

- 4.1 The Design Sprint process is normally scheduled over eight weeks. This comprises an introductory workshop, a preliminary meeting, a set of getting-ready activities, two design days and some work between and after the design days to ensure the course aligns with the University's expectations.
- 4.2 The core design team is constituted as follows:
 - a. Sprint facilitator (usually a senior member of the School)
 - b. Senior Quality Officer
 - c. Educational Developer
 - d. Core module leads (maximum eight) with expertise in key areas of course design (to include, at least: Learning and Teaching, Assessment, Employability)
 - e. A student (or alumnus) from a cognate discipline
 - f. An academic colleague from another School (SL or PL with expertise in learning and teaching)
 - g. School Employability Manager
- 4.3 Additional attendees are invited for specific parts of the process, depending on the particular requirements of the course. These are agreed at the preliminary meeting and may include:
 - a. FlexNTU learning designer
 - b. Quality management team experts
 - c. Apprenticeship team member
 - d. Employer(s)
 - e. Additional student(s) or alumnus
 - f. Representative from PSRB(s)
- 4.4 On the second design sprint day, a set of stakeholders are invited to discuss the proposed course. These stakeholders include:
 - a. Employer(s)
 - b. Student(s)
 - c. Academic colleague from another institution, preferably with expertise in teaching and learning.
 - d. Representative from PSRB(s)
 - e. Representatives from Professional Services (as required)
 - f. A senior member of the School (for example, Deputy Dean, School Quality Manager) and Head of Department

- 4.5 Decisions about the course, and its modules are recorded in the Central Course Portfolio Database as the Design Sprint proceeds. At the end of the process, the Senior Quality Officer confirms that the course meets the University requirements.
- 4.6 A viability check takes place between the two design days. This ensures that what is being proposed continues to align with the original approved business case. Where the design has strayed from this business case, the Senior Quality Officer will consult with the Head of Academic Quality. This may result in the requirement to revisit the business case, or re-work the course design.

Explanatory notes

- The Central Course Portfolio Database is in its final stages of development in 2021/22. Where a design sprint takes place prior to the database being in full use, an interim database will be used to record decisions and agreed course details.
- Guidance on the details of the Design Sprint process can be found in QHS 5B.

5. Externality

Independence and objectivity are essential to provide confidence that the standards and quality of the University's courses are appropriate. External input contributes to the decision-making about new courses and changes to courses which are considered low and medium impact.

Requirements

- 5.1 External input into the design of a new course, or changes to a currently approved course is achieved through the engagement with either the external examiner or an external member of the Design team.
- 5.2 A course team might also consult and take feedback from a wider range of external and internal stakeholders and make use of external reference points to inform the course design.

6. Approval

The decision to approve a course is informed by full consideration of academic standards and of the appropriateness of the learning opportunities which will

be offered to students. Approval also serves to confirm that the course aligns to current University priorities.

Requirements

- 6.1 A SASQC or the Design Sprint team, as appropriate, will exercise a professional academic judgement, at a threshold level, to assure itself of the following:
- the course is consistent with the University's priorities and Strategic Plan and those of the relevant School;
 - the course is at the appropriate standard for the level of the award(s) involved and takes account of subject and qualification benchmark statements;
 - the curriculum is current and valid in the light of developing knowledge in the subject;
 - the course prepares students for the world of work, as reflected in the Strategic Plan;
 - the course has been thoroughly thought out and adequately specified;
 - the course team has a shared understanding of the aims of the course;
 - the resources (including staff resources) available to support the course are (or will be) satisfactory. The appropriate Business Evaluation process will agree the physical and financial resources to support the new course or changes to the existing course and due consideration of this sign off will be taken during design sprint process.
- 6.2 QHS 5A sets out the specific actions required for consultation and notification when approval takes place at SASQC.
- 6.3 Where the course, or changes to the course, has been agreed at a Design Sprint, the CADQ Quality Officer will confirm that the entries in the Course Portfolio Database accurately reflect the decisions made. A short report will accompany such confirmation. Notification of the approval will be sent to key stakeholders via the Course Portfolio Database.

Explanatory notes

- The Central Course Portfolio Database is in its final stages of development in 2021/22. Where a design sprint takes place prior to the database being in full use, an interim database will be used to record decisions and agreed course details.
- The CADQ Quality Officer will ensure all stakeholders are appropriately notified. At a minimum these include: the Head of School Operations; the School Administrative Manager;

Marketing; Admissions; Academic Registry; the Course Leader and to the named contact for collaborative courses.

- 6.4 Students can only be enrolled onto the course after these confirmations have taken place.

7. Course information

Information about the course and its modules will be held on the Central Course Portfolio Database, which will be gradually populated during 2021/22. Whilst this transition takes place, a range of documentation will be required to record aspects of the course design, and to provide information for SASQC where they are responsible for approving a course change.

- 7.1 QHS 5A sets out the documentary requirements for other course changes for which SASQC has responsibility for approval.
- 7.2 QHS 5B provides detailed guidance about the information that must be recorded for new courses and high impact changes to courses that have been designed through the Design Sprint Process.

Explanatory notes

- For changes to collaborative provision, please also refer to Quality Handbook Section 10.

8. University oversight

ASQC and URDC are responsible for oversight of the decisions about the design of new courses and changes to current courses. ASQC also oversees the efficacy of the University's processes for course design and approval.

Requirements

- 8.1 ASQC receives a termly report, prepared by CADQ, which summarises all medium and high impact changes to courses and all new course approvals. URDC receives the equivalent for Professional Doctorate approvals.
- 8.2 ASQC or the University Research Committee (URC) may withdraw academic approval from a course at any time if it has evidence that the course is no longer meeting the minimum acceptable standards for that award.

- 8.3 CADQ will periodically review the course design and approval process to ensure that it remains efficient, fit-for-purpose and rigorous.

9. Teach-out

The learning experience of students on courses in teach-out will be maintained.

Requirements

- 9.1 When a course ceases to recruit students, a SASQC or URDC has to ensure that adequate standards are maintained for any remaining students or those such students are enabled to transfer to a suitable alternative course elsewhere. Teach-out arrangements are reported to CADQ; where CADQ considers that the arrangements do not meet University expectations, it may refer the matter to the Pro Vice-Chancellor – Education for resolution.

Explanatory note

- A full description of the teach-out process is contained in QHS 5G.

Section 5

Policy owner
CADQ

Change history			
<i>Version:</i>	<i>Approval date:</i>	<i>Implementation date:</i>	<i>Nature of significant revisions:</i>
Sept 2016	30.09.16	01.10.16	New 'routes' for approval of different kinds of changes Additional requirements in order to meet CMA guidance Reference to new documentary requirements for new courses and course changes
Dec 2016	15.11.16	15.11.16	Inclusion of Success for All Educational Developer in membership of DAGs and as part of course development for undergraduate courses
Sept 2017	12.09.17	01.10.17	Extended requirement for Course Operational Document to making changes to existing courses and made explicit the requirement to include curriculum mapping, assessment schedules and assessment and feedback plans as part of documentary requirements.
Sept 2018	12.09.18	01.10.18	Inclusion of requirements for NTIC progression routes Removal of requirement for a Curriculum Refresh course road-map as part of documentation requirements Explanatory note added regarding requirement for UET agreement of proposed changes for approvals scheduled after 15 January 2019 (UG) and mid-July 2019 (PGT)
Sept 2019	11.09.19	01.10.19	Updated explanatory note regarding approval of late course changes and consequent impact on material information Removed reference to Success for All Educational Developer in membership of DAGs and as part of course development for undergraduate courses
Nov 2020	2.12.20	9.12.20	Removal of thematic changes route for approval Introduction of impact level approach to determining academic approval required Introduction of sprint development approach to academic approval
Oct 2021	21.10.21	21.10.21	Full re-write to accommodate the change in process for design and approval of courses.

Equality Analysis		
<i>Version:</i>	<i>EA date:</i>	<i>Completed by:</i>
Oct 2015	08.12.13	CADQ