

# Section 5



Nottingham Trent  
University

## **Quality Handbook**

**Part C: Assuring and enhancing quality**

### **Section 5: Course Design and Approval Requirements**

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## 1. NTU's course design and approval principles and requirements

- 1.1 All University taught courses are subject to academic consideration and approval through the University's course design and approval process.
- 1.2 The process has two routes depending on the nature of the provision and the scale of the change required.
- 1.3 The process is underpinned by the following principles:
  - a. Collaboration between colleagues,
  - b. Externality, and,
  - c. Due consideration of the student journey.

### Further information

- Details of the University course design requirements can be found in [Quality Handbook Section 12](#).

## 2. NTU's course design and approval process

**There are two routes to approval, through Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC) via the Academic Course Approval Sub-Committee, and through School Academic Standards and Quality Committees (SASQCs).**

- 2.1 A new course, or high impact change(s) to an existing course is approved through ASQC via the Academic Course Approval Sub-Committee. All other changes (medium, low and very low impact) to an existing course are considered and approved by SASQCs.

### ASQC Approval

- Any new course, or high impact change(s) to an existing course.

### SASQC Approval

- SASQCs actively monitor all changes to courses and modules, regardless of the extent of the change or the route of approval. Through this oversight, SASQCs exercise responsibility for monitoring the accumulation of course and module changes over time
- SASQCs report to School Executive Team (SET) who maintain strategic overview of curriculum development and overall shape of the taught course portfolio.
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- 2.2 [Quality Handbook Supplement \(QHS\) 5A](#): Requirements for approving changes to courses defines the four impact levels and the types of change which fall into each, including examples. It specifies the approval route for each level of impact, the associated requirements for internal consultation and external input and the documentary requirements.
- 2.3 The design of new courses and modules, and proposed revisions to existing courses and modules, is undertaken in CourseLoop, the University's curriculum management system. Academic consideration and approval is undertaken through, evidenced in and communicated to key stakeholders from CourseLoop.

## Further information

- If the course is non-award bearing or leads solely to Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) recognition, please refer to Quality Handbook Supplement 5I: Requirements for the approval and quality management of different categories of course and [Quality Handbook Supplement 5J: Guidance on assessment regulations when there are PSRB constraints](#).
- If the course includes an NTIC/KICL progression route, please refer to [Quality Handbook Supplement PS5: Requirements for initiation and cessation of progression arrangements between Nottingham Trent International College \(NTIC\) and NTU](#).
- If the change is for collaborative provision, please also refer to [Quality Handbook Section 10: Working with Others](#).

## 3. ASQC Course Design and Approval

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- 3.1 There are three requirements for course approval for new courses and, courses with high impact changes. These are:
- d. School Executive Team (SET) approves the course proposal for new courses or high impact changes to existing courses. This will generate an Approval to Proceed (ATP). For courses delivered at Mansfield, the Mansfield Portfolio and Operational Oversight Board has the authority to make final decisions on ATP.
  - a. SET approves the course business viability through the Business Case.
  - b. The ASQC Academic Course Approval Sub-Committee approve the course as being academically sound and viable.
- 3.2 The course design and approval process consists of seven stages. As of 2025/26 all seven stages must occur 2 years ahead of the planned launch, or re-launch, of the course. Implementation detail including post-stage actions, stakeholders involved and timeframes can be found in [QH Supplement 5B](#).

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Stage	Purpose	Responsibility
Stage 1: Commencement of Business Evaluation	Ensures that new courses and proposed high impact changes to courses align with the University's strategic goals, are appropriate to market, and will not contravene consumer rights legislation.	School Executive Team (SET) approve the proposal with Approval to Proceed. In the majority of cases, exceptions to the new lead times following approval must be submitted at this stage.
Stage 2: Planning for course design and approval	Introduces CADQ to proposal and kick starts the design stages. CADQ and School agree a timeline for course approval.	CADQ manages the process, School co-leads the discussion.
Stage 3: Designing the course ( <i>and continuation of business evaluation process</i> )	<p>The design of all new courses and high impact changes is undertaken through a collaborative process supported by appropriate internal and external expertise to ensure that the courses provide a high-quality academic experience (OfS B1).</p> <p>Please note that it is not recommended that 'suites' of courses are designed at the same time unless there is strong academic benefit of doing so.</p> <p>Preliminary Registry checks occur alongside course design.</p> <p><i>In parallel, School Executive Team approves the Outline Summary to facilitate the business case process.</i></p>	<p>School manages the process alongside CADQ. Advice and guidance is provided by CADQ and other professional services as identified during Stages 1 and 2. CADQ provides <a href="#">staff development opportunities</a> on course design.</p> <p>Exceptions to the new lead times following approval should be submitted at this stage.</p>
Stage 4: External input	<p>Consultation about the course proposal which seeks views from a minimum of external colleagues and students to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students are involved in the process of course design (OfS B2),</li> <li>- it aligns with sector standards (OfS B5), and,</li> <li>- there is credibility of the awards (OfS B4).</li> </ul> <p>The course is refined in light of this consultation. CADQ can provide and pay for one trained student experience stakeholder to take part in stakeholder consultations.</p>	<p>Schools have two options through which key stakeholders can be consulted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CADQ-organised stakeholder consultation</li> <li>- School-led consultation activities</li> </ul>

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<p>Stage 5: Review of course design</p>	<p>SET reviews and approves the business case to confirm that the course can be financially and operationally viable.</p> <p>The course design is reviewed by CADQ in CourseLoop to ensure it meets NTU requirements for course design.</p> <p>Viability checks are coordinated by CADQ to ascertain the business and operational viability of the course (please note that these will only begin later in 2024).</p> <p>The course design is checked by School leadership, to ensure it meets NTU and School priorities, and to ascertain the business, financial and operational viability of the course.</p>	<p>SET</p> <p>CADQ manages the process and liaises with the School. Schools ensure appropriate information is provided in CourseLoop</p> <p>CADQ</p> <p>School Leadership</p>
<p>Stage 6: Final check of course information and completion of report by CADQ</p>	<p>Final information in CourseLoop is checked by CADQ ensuring that course approval requirements are met.</p> <p>Approval report is completed for submission to the ASQC Academic Course Approval Sub-Committee.</p>	<p>CADQ manages the process.</p>
<p>Stage 7: Course Approval</p>	<p>Academic approval of new courses or high impact changes to existing courses is granted by the ASQC Academic Course Approval Sub-Committee. Approval is granted for a period of 5 academic years. The sub-committee provides University oversight of portfolio and course development and provides assurance that courses have been designed to provide a high quality student experience.</p>	<p>Schools, CADQ and ASQC.</p>

3.3 Integral to these stages is the **Business Evaluation** process. This is completed through the curriculum management system, CourseLoop, and consists of three stages:

- a. An Approval to Proceed (AtP) which begins the process;
- b. An Outline Summary to be completed after the Planning Meeting before the detailed course design commences;
- c. The Business Case which must be completed before the School Leadership Check takes place.

3.4 Schools take the lead in designing the course, utilising the CADQ resources and staff development sessions related to course design. The course team have the option of running School-led consultation activities or opting for a CADQ set-up Stakeholder Consultation.

3.5 Either way, the purpose of the Stakeholder Consultation is to:

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- a. Establish a shared understanding of the aims of the course;
- b. Consider the course coherence which should provide a high-quality student experience enabling students to develop skills and knowledge in a systematic way, scaffolding their learning to achieve independence and preparation for success after graduation. This may be demonstrated through a course diagram;
- c. Confirm that the course is at the appropriate standard for the level of the award(s) involved and takes account of subject and qualification benchmark statements;
- d. Confirm that the curriculum is current and valid in the light of developing knowledge in the subject;
- e. Confirm that the course prepares students for the world of work, as reflected in the Strategic Plan;
- f. Identify any further refinements or adjustments before the course proceeds to approval.

## Further information

- Please see [QH Supplement 5D](#) for more information on running a Stakeholder Consultation.

- 3.6 **Viability checks** are undertaken and recorded in CourseLoop. They determine the financial viability of the course and the requirements for course build, timetabling and Student Route and Student Loan Company funding eligibility. They also consider whether the final course proposal continues to align with the approved Business Case. Where the design has strayed from the Business Case there may be a requirement to revisit the Business Case, or re-work the design of the course.
- 3.7 In the case of Apprenticeships, the Apprenticeship team will undertake a compliance check.
- 3.8 Upon completion of course information in CourseLoop, the designated CADQ Senior Quality and Standards Advisor (SQSA) will review the course design to ascertain that it meets NTU expectations and requirements.
- 3.9 Deputy Deans (or their equivalent) will decide whether the proposal meets the expectations and requirements of the School during the **School Leadership Check**, including its alignment to NTU priorities and the requirement for proposed resource.

## Further information

- Please see [QH Supplement 5C](#) for guidance on the School Leadership check.

- 3.10 When the Deputy Dean is satisfied that that the course design has been completed, this will be confirmed in CourseLoop. The CADQ SQSA will subsequently check the course information on CourseLoop and will prepare a summary report with recommendations to the ASQC Academic Course Approval Sub-Committee.

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## Collaborative Courses

- 3.11 Please note, all collaborative courses will be approved through the Academic Partnerships Sub-Committee. This includes Validation Service courses. The committee will be considering the course only. The sub-group will not approve articulation agreements which will continue to be approved through SASQC.
- 3.12 The partner and/or the collaborative arrangements will be approved through a separate process outlined in [Quality Handbook Section 10B](#). Criteria will include responsibilities for delivery, staffing, adequate resource and agreed levels of support. This approval will take place prior to course approval.

## 4. ASQC Academic Course Approval Sub-Committee

**ASQC, through the Sub-Committee, retains University oversight of course design and approval and will receive reports detailing approval outcomes.**

- 4.1 The CADQ SQSA summary report and recommendation to the ASQC Academic Course Approval Sub-Committee will identify:
- Whether relevant course design requirements have been met;
  - The student experience has been adequately considered and articulated in the course learning and teaching strategy and the assessment strategy;
  - All course and module information has been completed;
  - Consultation has taken place with external colleagues and students;
  - Consultation has taken place with internal University colleagues;
  - Where there are implications for other courses or NTIC/KICL, this has been considered and discussed with those parties;
  - The outcomes of checks on the viability of the course.
- 4.2 The two possible outcomes of the Sub-Committee are:
- Approve with implementation dates;
  - Not approve (with reasons given for this decision).
- 4.3 Notification of the approval will be sent to key stakeholders including the Deputy Dean; the Course Leader; Academic Registry and Finance.
- 4.4 Students can only be enrolled onto the course after these confirmations have taken place.

### Further information

- The terms of reference of the ASQC Academic Course Approval Sub-Committee is set out in [Quality Handbook Section 1: Academic Quality Governance](#).

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## 5. SASQC Course Design and Approval

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- 5.1 If the course change is determined to be very low, low or medium impact then changes will be considered and approved at School level through SASQCs.
- 5.2 All information on the role and responsibilities of SASQCs can be found in [Section 1 of the Quality Handbook](#).
- 5.3 The deadline for SASQC changes to be approved for implementation the following academic year will depend on whether the change affects the 'material information' of the module or course. The deadline for changes which affect material information will be the last working day of December, and the deadline for all other very low, low or medium impact changes will be the last working day of February.
- 5.4 Information on the deadlines to **course operational changes** from September 2026 can be found in Supplement 5K.

## 6. Timelines (including new 2-year lead time)

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- 6.1 For all courses being considered by the Academic Course Approval Sub-Committee, plus course title changes and start date additions, there is a minimum lead time of 2-years from approval to the start or re-start of a course. This allows for appropriate marketing and recruitment of the new or revised course and mitigates challenges related to course set up, estate allocation and other resources.

### Further information

- Please see Supplement 5K for more information on Course Approval Timelines for 2026/27 – 2029/30 entry.
  - Research degrees (excluding MRes), closed collaborative provision, category 4 and 5 short courses, skills bootcamps, CPD and microcredentials are out of scope of this 2- year lead time.
  - If there is a Nottingham Trent International College (NTIC)/Kaplan International College London (KICL) progression route in place for the course, the School Executive Team must consult with the International Development Office (IDO) before any decisions are made.
- 6.2 Schools must ensure that there is sufficient time allocated for the completion and approval of the Approval to Proceed, Outline Summary and the Business Case to ensure this is completed prior to ASQC Academic Course Approval Sub-Committee consideration.

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- 6.3 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 or KICL progression routes). This may affect the determination about when the change should be implemented from.
- 6.4 Schools must determine the appropriate timeline for approval by the ASQC Academic Course Approval Sub-Committee to meet its agreed portfolio development and marketing plans.
- 6.5 Schools should allocate a minimum of five working days (equivalent) for the design of a course, or a major re-design of a current course. Additional time may be needed for more complex courses.

### Exceptions: criteria and process

- 6.6 There may be circumstances where exceptions to these deadlines are necessary. These will be rare.
- 6.7 Exceptions will be requested via the Course Start Date Exceptions form by the Executive Dean or Deputy Dean at the 'Approval to Proceed' stage of business evaluation. The School will be asked to provide evidence that they have investigated and can mitigate the impact of the late approval. Exception requests will be processed for approval by the University Executive Team (UET).
- 6.8 Grounds for exception will fall into one of five criteria:
  - a. An immediate change required by a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB);
  - b. An immediate change required by an employer or partner institution;
  - c. An urgent response to institutional priorities or strategic initiatives.
  - d. Publication of an updated apprenticeship standard which requires change in the next application cycle
  - e. A response to immediate local competitor threat.
- 6.9 Following submission of the Course Start Date Exceptions form, the request will be received by UET and discussed within 2 weeks.
- 6.10 The course will only be added to the agenda of a Course Approval Sub-Committee meeting once minutes of the UET meeting, with confirmation of course exception, have been received and evidence of UET approval uploaded to the Proposal on CourseLoop.

## 7. University oversight

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**ASQC is 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.**

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- 7.1 ASQC receives a termly report, prepared by CADQ, which summarises all high impact changes to courses and all new course approvals.
- 7.2 ASQC ratifies the academic approval decisions from the ASQC Academic Course Approval Sub-Committee.
- 7.3 ASQC 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.
- 7.4 CADQ will periodically review the course design and approval process to ensure that it remains efficient, fit-for-purpose and rigorous.

## 8. Teach-out

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

- 8.1 When a course ceases to recruit students following a School's course discontinuation process, a SASQC must ensure that adequate standards are maintained for any remaining students or those such students are enabled to transfer to a suitable alternative course elsewhere.

### Further information

- A full description of the teach-out process is contained in [QH Supplement 5G](#).

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<b>Policy owner</b>
CADQ

<b>Change history</b>			
<i>Version:</i>	<i>Approval date:</i>	<i>Implementation date:</i>	<i>Nature of significant revisions:</i>
Oct 2021	21.10.21	21.10.21	Full re-write to accommodate the change in process for design and approval of courses.
Sept 2022	22.09.22	01.10.22	Further refinements to the Design Sprint process in line with recommendations agreed at ASQC May 2022. Approved by ASQC Chairs Action 07.07.22 Updates to reflect transition of the business evaluation process to CourseLoop during 2022/23
Nov 2023	02.11.23	23.11.23	Full re-write.
Sept 2024	19.09.24	01.10.24	None
Sept 2025	25.09.25	01.10.25	Addition of information related to the new course design and approval lead times and deadlines. Role of SASQCs in the context of approval and oversight of taught course portfolio added. Standard updates largely related to the use of CourseLoop for capturing course changes in Schools. Inclusion of Mansfield Portfolio and Operational Oversight Board.