Guidance document for staff on new programme development and validation

setu.ie

Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta an Oirdheiscirt
South East Technological University

Frequently Asked Questions on New Programme Development and Validation

What documents should I consider when developing a new programme?

This guidance document is relevant, as well as the Programme Development and Validation Policy and the Programme Development and Validation Procedure.

Who is this document relevant to?

This document is intended as a guide for staff regarding the SETU approach to new programme development and validation (to include major and non-major awards and individual modules).

What is addressed in this document?

Guidance is initially provided for when a Programme Development Team is developing a new programme, before information about the key stages in the validation and approval process (Programme Resourcing, Programme Validation and Programme Approval) is outlined. Information on other programme validations is also provided, as well as a flowchart of the overall process and the outline headings for a programme validation proposal which should be utilised.

Is there support available when developing a new programme?

Yes, there are supports available and these are indicated in the guidance document. A key support throughout the process is the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning.

Who can I contact if I have any questions on this document or on programme development and validation generally?

Please contact Dr Paul O'Leary who is the Head of Quality Promotion and Academic Policy Development in the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning.

Guidance document for staff on new programme development and validation

Note – A summary flowchart of the programme development and validation process is set out in Appendix 1 of this document.

Introduction and context

SETU has developed a policy and procedure to guide the development, validation and approval of new programmes in the University. The ultimate approver of programmes is Academic Council, but there are also various bodies, groups and roles involved in the overall process, including staff who develop and support new programmes and bring these through the relevant stages. It is acknowledged that this can be a complex task, particularly where a staff member has not been involved in programme development activities before, and that support is necessary. Part of this support (along with relevant training, guidance and advice) is the current document.

This document is intended as a guide for staff regarding the SETU approach to new programme development and validation (to include major[1] and non-major awards and individual modules). It should be read in conjunction with the Programme Development and Validation Policy ('the policy') and the Programme Development and Validation Procedure ('the procedure') documents which contain essential information on this topic and what is required. In this context, the guidance document is a necessarily abbreviated version of certain points for staff involved with programme development and validation and should not be relied upon exclusively for the development and validation of programmes.

Further information, guidance and support regarding the processes in this document and in the policy and the procedure can be obtained from Dr Paul O'Leary (Head of Quality Promotion and Academic Policy Development, Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning (OVPAA)).

Guidance when developing a new programme

Prior to commencing formal development, it is advisable that any staff member who is planning to develop a new programme engages early with the OVPAA for guidance and support on what will be required and to discuss the overall process including this document. Important information is also set out in the procedure and this should be consulted as part of any discussions with the OVPAA, as this may give rise to some initial questions for the OVPAA.

This engagement is vital as it allows the OVPAA to identify at an early stage what process or processes may be relevant and to advise on the steps and documentation needed, allowing for a more efficient process. The decision on the process to be used rests with the OVPAA based on the information provided, which will inform the necessary review arrangements

[1] Embedded awards are also included.

and expected timelines. The OVPAA, as part of this and necessary ongoing engagements over the process, will seek to provide advice and guidance on these matters and queries that may arise and seeks to be a source of help and support.

A Programme Development Team ('the team') is typically formed by the Head of the Department where the programme will be situated, with a Programme Development Team Leader appointed. The constitution of the team will depend on the nature of the programme, but will usually be members of academic staff (though can involve other members also where this will be of value to its development e.g., external members, students, recent graduates etc.; that will be a decision for the team). If a programme is cross -disciplinary or cross-Faculty, this should be appropriately reflected in the composition of the team. The Programme Development Team is primarily responsible for the development of new programmes and for the production of relevant documentation, but achieves this through working with others as indicated throughout this guidance document. In this sense, programme development should be viewed as a collaborative and collegiate process, working towards the development and validation of high-quality University programmes.

It is important that the team is aware of and consults relevant University documentation early in the development process, in addition to the aforementioned policy and procedure. This is to ensure that what is being produced by the team is aligned and consistent with regulations, policies, and other relevant documents. Some further SETU documents that may be relevant include (but are not limited to):

- Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes (and the Supporting Documents referenced within the Regulations)
- Connecting for Impact (Strategic Plan 2023-2028)
- Programme Development Charter
- Statement of SETU Graduate Attributes
- Student Charter
- Student Academic Integrity Policy
- Quality Framework
- Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Feedback Strategy

Additional to University documentation, the team should ensure that it consults other guidance, documents and sources that are relevant to the development and delivery of high-quality programmes. There is no exhaustive list of what might be considered here, and this can vary by discipline area. Examples might include (but not be limited to) appropriate guidance on Universal Design for Learning, and publications by QQI and the HEA.

In developing a new programme, the team should ensure that it engages with other stakeholders as relevant. This should help the team in its work to produce a well-informed, complete, and robust proposal and should allow the team to identify information and documentation that it may need. The range of stakeholders will vary depending on the

nature of the programme. Potential external stakeholders could include (but are not limited to):

- Employers and businesses (regional/national/international)
- Regional, national and international bodies and groups
- Research institutes, centres and groups
- Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)
- Graduates of SETU programmes
- Colleagues from other higher education institutions, where appropriate
- Potential students of the proposed programme, including SETU students from qualifying programmes that could be envisaged as sources of potential students

Consultation with internal stakeholders is also highly beneficial and should be provided for where relevant, recognising the collaborative nature of programme development. A key stakeholder here can be existing students of SETU programmes, particularly where the proposed programme could be a variation on (e.g., a specialism or sub-specialism) or an extension of an existing programme e.g., a Level 9 programme that could have as prospective applicants those who are existing Level 8 students. Other internal stakeholders may be relevant SETU areas or functions, which would again depend on the nature of the programme and its prospective development and direction. In this regard, potential SETU stakeholders could include (but are not limited to):

- Faculty of Education & Lifelong Learning
- Other Faculties
- SETU Global
- Library
- Office of Research, Innovation & Impact
- Graduate Studies Office
- SETU Research Institutes, Centres and Groups
- Centre for Academic Practice
- GenAI Steering Committee
- Sustainable Development Office
- Equality Diversity and Inclusion Office
- Student Support Services

The decision on what consultations take place, the structure, the purpose and extent of these, and what is done as a consequence will rest principally with the Programme Development Team and Faculty. It is advisable that Programme Development Teams, based on the nature of the programme, identify which stakeholders are expected to have particular relevance for the programme and in what ways e.g., curriculum matters, staff or student supports, provision of frameworks/training, input to development, general or specific advice etc. In addition, it is important that the team identifies that these engagements took place, the nature of the engagement, what was learned from them, and what actions were taken

as a consequence. This is an area that a validation panel may wish to explore and may seek evidence of. It should be noted as well that, as a Statement of Employability is required in a programme validation submission, it may be beneficial to have prepared (or at least drafted) this as part of the consultations.

Outside of any stakeholder consultation, it is advisable that the team proactively engages with the OVPAA, as set out in the procedure and in this guidance document. This is important to ensure that any steps needed are being undertaken, to help identify and resolve any structural issues, to manage compliance with University requirements, and to reduce the likelihood of delays later in the process. As part of their work, the OVPAA will complete and sign off on a Structure and Compliance Review prior to progression to the validation stage, providing appropriate feedback to the Programme Development Team following this review. This is an important activity to help with ensuring that the programme and documentation are complete, clear and understandable, are appropriately structured and produced, and are aligned with University regulations and policies. The OVPAA will advise on the requirements here and will support teams in this work. It should be noted that, where a programme is not compliant with the regulations in some respect, the Programme Development Team will need to seek a derogation from Academic Council to permit this. Any such request will need to be clearly made in the documentation that is submitted for the Structure and Compliance Review and Programme Validation Stages and is subject to Academic Council approval.

Programme Resourcing Stage

The Programme Resourcing Stage precedes the Programme Validation Stage, and is managed at Faculty level. A Strategic and Financial Review must be completed for this purpose, the structure and format of which should be determined by the Faculty in conjunction with the University Strategy Office and Finance Office.

The key requirement of the team here is to produce a Strategic and Financial Review and to present this for evaluation by the Faculty Management Team (on behalf of the Faculty), which addresses both the strategic rationale for and financial implications of the proposed programme. Support from the Finance Office should be sought by the Programme Development Team in completing the financial portion of the review, in terms of developing demand and revenue forecasts, establishing the resources needed and costing these etc. In addition, support from the Strategy Office should be sought in completing the strategic portion of the review, in terms of developing the strategic rationale for the programme, alignment with University strategy etc. Support from other University offices may also be sought by the Programme Development Team at this stage, depending on the nature of the programme and its circumstances, and this will be determined by the team and the Faculty.

Where more than one Faculty is involved in the development of a programme, a joint review is needed and must be approved by both Faculties. Where a Faculty/Faculties approve(s) a review, it is sent to the University's Executive Management Team (EMT) for noting who may

comment on the outcome. Such comments should be considered by the Faculty(s) in advance of their final approval.

In order to proceed through the Programme Resourcing Stage, teams should have developed a rigorous and complete review. The work required here needs to be determined by the team and the Faculty, but would likely include:

- internal and external consultation with stakeholders (as previously noted, and to inform other work here, including market research, and relevant estimates and forecasts);
- consideration of the strategic alignment and contribution of the programme to SETU and the Faculty;
- appropriate and robust market research;
- a realistic appraisal of resources available and required, forecasted market demand, and the capacity of the proposed programme to be academically and financially sustainable for SETU.

Teams should be aware that a programme that has good academic merits may not be viable (or not viable now) to develop or run, and so should approach this stage pragmatically and realistically in the best interests of the University. From a University perspective, it is vital that Faculties manage this stage in a thorough and evidenced way. EMT oversight here is a necessary step to assure this and to maintain consistency across SETU.

Programme Validation Stage

The operation of the Programme Validation Stage will depend on the nature of the programme itself. This will be determined by the OVPAA and communicated accordingly, reinforcing the importance of early and ongoing engagement with the OVPAA. Documentation will need to be produced by the Programme Development Team and this will be reviewed by the OVPAA in advance of further validation activities commencing. Outline headings for this document(s) are set out in Appendix 2, which can be added to by the team and varied by the OVPAA as necessary. This should be part of the documentation that is submitted by the Programme Development Team for validation. Advice can be sought from the OVPAA here.

For many new programmes, a Programme Validation Panel will be needed and the requirements around this are set out in detail in the procedure. This will typically involve a site visit and/or will typically involve a meeting(s) with the team to discuss the proposal (depending on the circumstances). The Programme Validation Panel will communicate their findings to the team in writing and this will be responded to by the team, along with any changes to the programme documentation, before further submission to the OVPAA.

To support an effective validation process, documentation submitted to a Panel must be complete, accurate, internally consistent, and professionally presented. In this context, some examples of areas that Programme Development Teams should consider include (but are not limited to):

- ensuring that all documents are fully proof-read;
- ensuring that the presentation of documents is of a high standard;
- ensuring that weblinks in documents are correct;
- ensuring that statements made are substantiated where appropriate and that the information provided throughout the documents is accurate and consistent;
- ensuring that learning outcomes are appropriate;
- ensuring that documents are provided in accordance with any timelines specified by the OVPAA;
- ensuring that where derogations from Academic Council are being sought, this is clearly stated.

The OVPAA will support and engage with Programme Development Teams on documentation by providing advice and relevant feedback pre-submission on intended documents, and will also address any queries that teams may have in this regard. Faculties should also seek to support their teams and develop their own structures and arrangements for this e.g., facilitating engagements between team members and staff who have previously been involved in validation processes. The overall goal with documentation is to ensure that the best possible document(s) is presented to the Panel in an efficient and timely manner. This should help to facilitate a successful Panel event being conducted as scheduled to meet the Faculty's own intended timelines with regard to new programmes being made available.

Validation Panels can ask questions and seek information on any documentation provided (and, indeed, on documentation – internal or external - not provided or addressed where the Panel believes that it should have been e.g., specific policies, standards, consultations etc.). Thus, teams should be well prepared and briefed in advance, and Faculties should support this through advance meetings and discussions in tandem with OVPAA advice where sought. From experience, some types of areas that Validation Panels might focus in on could include the level and type of assessment, learning outcomes, appropriateness of the curriculum, and teaching and learning on the programme.

Programme Approval Stage

The approval of programmes, post the satisfactory completion of the resourcing and validation stages, involves the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee and – finally – Academic Council. This is set out in the procedure document. It is essential that teams engage with the OVPAA on bringing the necessary documentation to the relevant bodies and through the necessary channels. University bodies meet in accordance with set schedules and have specific deadlines for submission of documentation for consideration. Teams and Faculties should be cognisant of this in the context of their own needs and expectations and should seek early clarity on these from the OVPAA.

It is important to note that a programme is not approved as an SETU programme until approval has been granted by Academic Council and cannot be presented as such until the Faculty and team have been advised of this formally. This should be factored into timelines

around (for example) promotions/marketing, communications with prospective students or organisations, and delivery/resourcing arrangements by teams and Faculties.

Other Programme Validations Including Individual Modules

The procedure document recognises that not all programmes are the same and this is factored in through the determination of processes to be followed being made by the OVPAA based on engagements with teams/Faculties, as previously noted. Consequently, programmes:

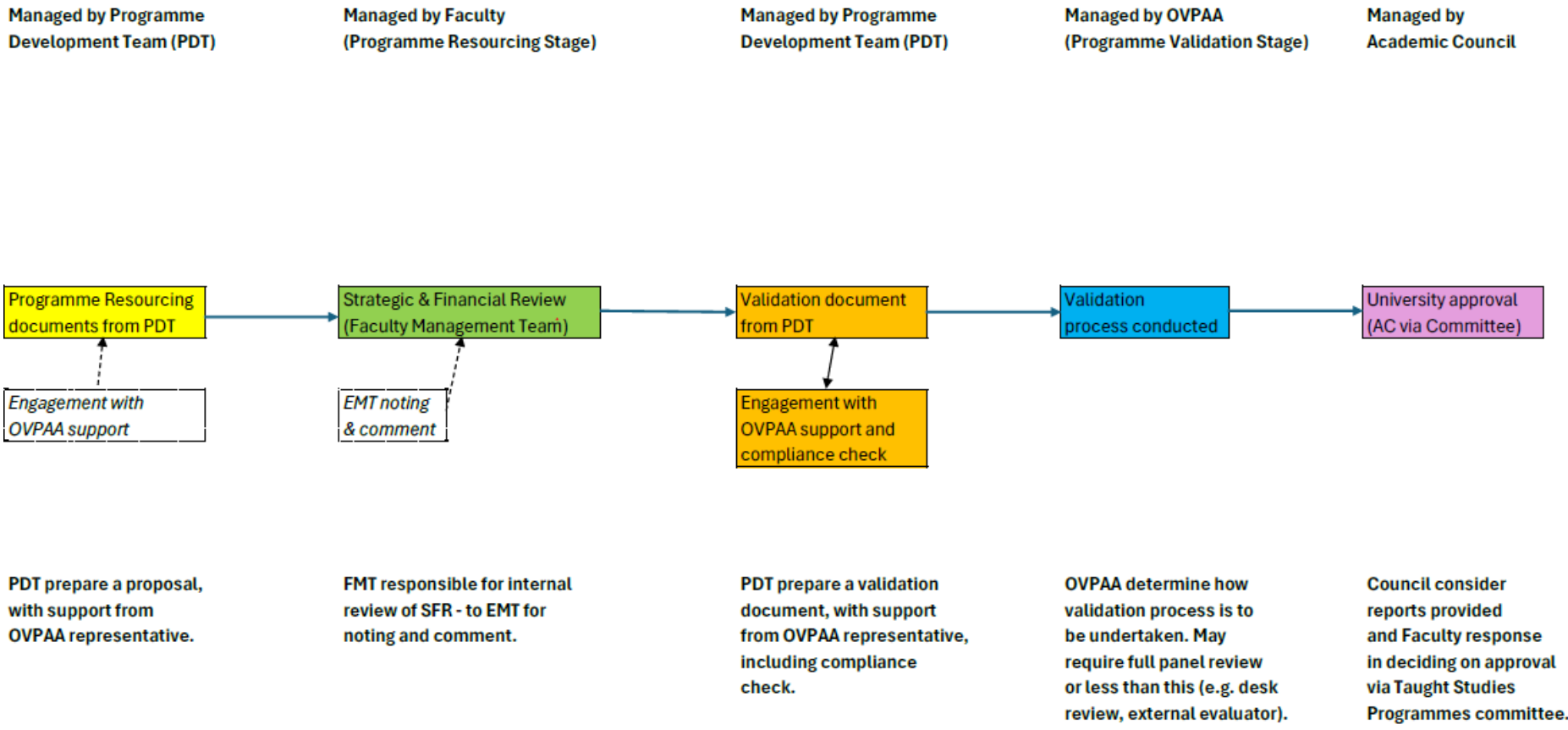
- may not have to undertake all stages (minor awards);
- may require more limited documentation (using existing modules only to form a new programme);
- may not require a site visit and have a smaller panel (special purpose/supplemental awards);
- or may require a desk review as opposed to a panel review (validation of modules only).

Guidance as to what needs to be done will be provided, on a case-by-case basis, to teams by the OVPAA at the outset of the programme development journey as previously noted. This will provide important clarity here as early as possible[2], but the principles and advice contained in this document should remain relevant whatever the process being followed. Naturally, should plans change as programmes are developing, guidance provided by the OVPAA may evolve or adjust which reiterates the importance of maintaining ongoing engagement with the OVPAA throughout the processes and stages.

[2] This can include, but not be limited to, adaptations to Appendix 2 depending on the nature of the proposed programme. Any such adaptations will be determined and advised by the OVPAA.

Appendix 1 - Summary flow chart of the programme development and validation process

Programme Development and Validation Process - Outline Model



Appendix 2 - Programme Validation Proposal: Outline Headings[3]

***Please note**: Where embedded awards are part of this proposal, relevant information for these awards must also be specified which will – at a minimum – be for each embedded award:*

Proposed Programme Title; Proposed Programme Schedule; Programme Rationale; Programme Description; Programme Aims/Objectives; Programme Learning Outcomes (with mapping as set out); Programme Entry Requirements; Transfer Pathways; Employability (including a Statement of Employability).

Section 1 – Basic Information

Proposed Programme Title

Award Type

NFQ Level of Award

Department

Faculty

Faculty Contacts for Validation Process

Section 2 - Proposed Programme Schedule

Standard SETU template completed

Section 3 – Proposed Programme Information

Narrative section, completed by Programme Development Team in sufficient detail to allow for an appropriate review, which should typically address (and which can be added to as appropriate):

- Programme Rationale
- Programme Description
- Programme Development and Stakeholder Engagement
- Programme Aims/Objectives
- Programme Learning Outcomes:
    - Mapped to SETU Award Standards
    - Mapped from Module Learning Outcomes
    - Mapped to Professional Accreditation Criteria (where relevant)

[3] These can be added to by the team and varied by the OVPAA as necessary.

- Programme Approaches to Teaching and Learning, including Feedback to Students
- Programme Assessment Strategy
- How the Programme Supports Graduates in Developing the SETU Graduate Attributes
- Programme Entry Requirements
- Transfer Pathways
- Graduate Opportunities
    - Progression
    - Employability (including a Statement of Employability)
- How the Programme Development Charter Has Guided Development of the Programme and Is Appropriately Reflected in the Programme
- Special Regulations Sought (if any)
- Programme Commentary on Resources
- External Accreditation Requirements (if any)
- Appendices
    - Module Descriptors (standard SETU template)
    - Programme Team Membership and Qualifications