Programme Development and Validation Procedure

September 2026

Version 1.0

setu.ie

Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta an Oirdheiscirt

South East Technological University

Document Details

Document Title:	**Programme Development and Validation Procedure**
Version:	1.0
Approved By:	Academic Council
Date Approved:	15th September, 2026
Effective Date:	15th September, 2026
Review Date:	Three years from approval
Procedure Owner:	Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning

Consultation Details	
Name:	Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee (November 2025)/ Academic Council (December 2025 and January 2026)/ Executive Management Team (April 2026)/ Staff representative bodies (April to June 2026).
Date:	November and December 2025/ January 2026/ April to June 2026
Details of Consultation:	The procedure was reviewed by the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee, Academic Council, the Executive Management Team and staff representative bodies.

Revision History		
Previous Version No.	Summary of Amendments	Version No.
N/A	First draft	0.1
0.1	Amendments made following feedback from members of the Office	0.2

	of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning.	
0.2	Amendments made following feedback from Academic Council.	0.3
0.3	Amendments made following feedback from a staff representative body.	0.4
0.4	Final approval by Academic Council	1.0

Publication Details	
Where	**Date**
Drive/Public/HR/Policies	
All Staff Email	

Feedback or issues arising on implementation of this procedure should be communicated to the procedure author.	
Procedure Author:	Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning

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Introduction

1. This document sets out the necessary procedures for programme development and validation in SETU and should be read in conjunction with the Programme Development and Validation Policy.

2. SETU operates a range of processes to validate University programmes (including their curricula) and subsequent modifications and changes to such programmes. A primary objective of all of these processes is to produce a current, definitive Final Programme Document that is of an appropriate standard to underpin the academic quality of the programme and that is appropriate for the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) level of the Programme. This Document should communicate necessary information to all of the relevant stakeholders including students, staff, prospective students and their advisors, Academic Council, the University, and regulatory agencies.

3. The Final Programme Document and its constituent Approved Programme Schedule — held by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning — is part of the legal foundation and record of all of SETU's programmes under the University's delegated authority to make awards. It establishes a set of obligations towards students as well as towards funding and regulatory agencies. As the record of the programme on which a student is registered, it also contributes to the establishment of relevant student and staff rights and responsibilities.

4. The decision as to how a programme (or part of a programme e.g. module(s), non-major awards) will be validated in terms of process rests with the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning who will conduct an initial evaluation based on relevant information. Faculties must engage with the Office in advance of the submission of any proposals to seek guidance on this, to ensure that an efficient process can be undertaken.

5. The process to be used will depend on such factors as *inter alia* the nature of the programme and consequent award(s), the complexity of the programme, and the constituent elements of the programme. The options here will range up to a full validation process (including a panel review and site visit), and the decision on the process being used will be confirmed by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning as part of relevant communications.

6. Under the full validation process, new programmes are validated through a two-stage Programme Resourcing (PR) and Programme Validation (PV) process. The Programme Resourcing stage considers the strategic and business case for the proposed programme. The Programme Validation stage considers the academic merit and suitability of the proposed programme. While the Programme Resourcing stage is an internal process, conducted and managed by the Faculty who are developing the new programme, the Programme Validation stage involves input from an expert panel with external representation. The Programme Validation stage is managed by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning.

7. Collaborative Programmes, Transnational Programmes and Joint Awards are validated through the same processes, but with further requirements as outlined in the Programme Development and Validation Policy.

8. Changes to existing programmes can be validated through either a Programme Modification or a Minor Change process. Where the changes proposed are of sufficient scale and depth to effectively constitute a new programme, then the New Programme Validation processes may be required.

New Programme Validation

9. New programme validation is typically a two-stage process, which may be tailored by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning as appropriate depending on the programme:

    i. Stage 1: Programme Resourcing/PR Stage – the PR stage centres on the strategic fit of the programme, and the development of a revenue and resource plan.

    ii. Stage 2: Programme Validation/PV Stage - the Programme Validation stage centres on a formal consideration of the academic standard of the programme proposal by an expert panel which ordinarily includes external members. The Final Programme Document is the product of a successful application.

10. New programmes are typically developed through a Programme Development Team established by the Head of Department with a designated Programme Development Team Leader. The Programme

Development Team will consist of relevant members of academic staff who will work in close consultation with the relevant Head of Department.

11. As part of the preparation for validation, the relevant Faculty should engage with the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs to ensure that appropriate processes are being followed, for any desired support and guidance in preparing the submission, and for ensuring the proposal complies with the regulatory framework of the University.

12. The Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs must complete a Structure and Compliance Review of any new programme using relevant documentation provided by the Programme Development Team and will confirm the extent to which the University regulations are being applied. This will facilitate the commencement of the validation process by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning and must be completed (in conjunction with the Faculty) prior to the formal submission of the validation documentation. This will also form part of appropriate feedback on the submission to the Programme Development Team for their consideration.

13. The Programme Development Team will be supported in their development of the Programme Proposal by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning (in the form of an agreed representative of the Office). It is important to emphasise that the Office representative's role here is one of support and advice around the development, structure and compliance of the programme. This will include guidance on learning outcomes, the structure of documents, and structural and compliance aspects of the proposed programme, on which sign-off will be provided by the representative. The responsibility for developing the proposal and all associated documents etc. rests with the Programme Development Team. Programme Development Teams are expected to work closely with the Office's representative.

14. Programme Development Teams should engage with relevant internal and external stakeholders as appropriate in developing their proposal. These stakeholders would depend on the nature of the proposed programme, but could include *inter alia* other SETU staff and functions, employers, businesses, regional and national bodies and representatives, Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), SETU graduates, and current/potential students.

15. In producing the proposal, at all stages of the process, the Programme Development Team should be cognisant of the SETU Programme Development Charter, which should inform the proposed programme as appropriate[1]. Furthermore, the Programme Development Team should consider any relevant University, national and international requirements and best practices in their programme design.

Stage 1: Programme Resourcing Stage

16. Under this stage, the primary purpose of the Programme Resourcing Proposal is for the Programme Development Team to make a compelling case for the programme in terms of rationale, demand, expected revenue, resources required and other relevant considerations in the form of a Strategic and Financial Resource Review.

17. Evaluations are made based upon the information, documentation and data submitted as part of the proposal. The outcomes of these evaluations should be communicated to the Programme Development Team by the Head of Department.

18. Faculty[2] (through the Faculty Management Team) must ensure that a Strategic and Financial Review of any new programme is carried out. The review is undertaken by the Faculty in consultation with the Finance function in SETU, who will support and advise the Faculty on relevant matters pertaining to forecasted revenue, costs and resources associated with the proposed programme based on information provided by the Faculty. This review needs to consider *inter alia* the rationale for the proposed programme, it's strategic alignment with and contribution to both the University and the Faculty, the expected demand for and revenue expected to arise from the proposed programme, and the resources that will be needed to deliver the programme. Where this review is approved by Faculty (through the Faculty Management Team), it is sent to the Executive Management Team for noting.

[1] The application of the Programme Development Charter may vary depending on the nature of the programme and this should be considered by Programme Development Teams. For example, because of their size, programmes that are not major awards may not be able to address all aspects of the Charter and this should be recognised in the following of this procedure for such programmes.

[2] Where a new programme is being developed across more than one Faculty, a joint Strategic and Financial Review must be undertaken, which will require the agreement and approval of all Faculty Management Teams involved in the proposed development.

19. The Executive Management Team may comment on the outcome of the review and Faculty should consider these comments in its decision making and final approval. It is ordinarily expected that, at a minimum, new programmes will demonstrate in the Strategic and Financial Review that they have the capacity to breakeven (in terms of revenue and costs) within an acceptable period. Where this is not the case, the Faculty should satisfy themselves that there are other compelling and justifiable reasons to approve the proposed programme (e.g. strategically or regionally important; demonstrable long term growth potential etc.), which the Executive Management Team may wish to comment on.

Stage 2: Programme Validation Stage

20. At the Programme Validation stage, the Faculty's Programme Validation Proposal document (as developed by the Programme Development Team) is considered by a Programme Validation Panel including external experts.

21. The Programme Validation Panel are asked to recommend to Academic Council whether or not Council should approve the proposed programme and consequent award(s). The primary focus of the Programme Validation Proposal stage will be on the overall quality of the programme and the standards to be attained.

22. The Programme Validation Panel may examine any aspect of the proposal including those areas already approved as part of Stage 1 above and may address these in their report as they see fit. However, the Programme Validation Panel is asked to give particular and detailed consideration to the academic standards and merit of the proposal.

23. The Programme Validation Proposal document should be based on the approved Programme Validation Proposal template for the current academic year, and must be submitted to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning. The Office representative who has been supporting the Programme Development Team will review the proposal for clarity, completeness, consistency, structure and compliance and may provide feedback to the Programme Development Team as appropriate. The representative will issue a statement of compliance and structure pertaining to the proposal in advance of the proposal being sent to the Programme Validation Review Panel.

The Programme Validation Review Panel and Panel Review Event[3]

24. The Programme Validation Review Panel will be determined and formed by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning and may include an independent, external chairperson, a nominee of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning (as secretary), and an appropriate independent and external membership with relevant expertise. In determining panel members, the University will endeavour to achieve an appropriate gender balance, and include international panel members, where possible.

25. SETU will not appoint panel members where there is any possible conflict of interest material to the approval decision being undertaken. This will also be checked with the relevant Head of Department in advance of any appointment being made. All panel members are asked to declare any potential conflicts of interest and the primary duty to declare any issues in this regard rests with the invitee. Where a potential conflict is not declared and is subsequently highlighted, the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee will review the nature of the potential conflict and advise Academic Council on what action, if any, is required to ensure the independence of the review panel. The University Conflict of Interest Committee may be consulted where necessary.

26. Panel members should treat all material that they receive related to the programme being validated as confidential and will be required to sign confidentiality and data protection statements to this effect. The discussions at any Panel meetings are strictly confidential.

27. The Chairperson and members of the Programme Validation Panel are supplied with a copy of this procedure and the associated Programme Development and Validation Policy (along with any other relevant documentation) and the Programme Validation Proposal document (including relevant appendices) by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning. The Head of Department, Head of Faculty and the Programme Development Team Leader are notified by

[3] The constitution of the panel and the steps here may be varied depending on the nature of the programme being validated and any other relevant circumstances as appropriate. This will be determined by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning.

the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning as to the composition of the Programme Validation Panel.

28. The arrangements for the Programme Validation Panel Review Event are made by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning, in consultation with the Faculty. This will typically involve a site visit and/or meetings with relevant stakeholders (depending on the circumstances), as deemed appropriate or necessary by the Panel.

29. The Programme Validation Panel Chairperson and Secretary are responsible for clarifying the aims of the validation event to the members of the Panel and on the context within which they will operate. The Programme Validation Panel Chairperson ensures that the review is conducted in a constructive and helpful manner and that an objective outcome is achieved.

30. The principal function of the Programme Validation Panel is to evaluate the proposed programme (as well as any associated embedded awards), which will direct how they will undertake their work.

31. At the end of the process, the Chairperson of the Panel will normally make an oral presentation of the Panel's findings and conclusions to the Programme Development Team. This presentation will be indicative of the contents of the written report and will typically include a recommendation for approval or rejection of the proposed programme, and may outline special conditions for approval or suggestions for modifying the programme.

32. A written report of the findings of the Programme Validation Panel will be prepared by the Panel Secretary in consultation with the Panel.

33. The written report will include general findings along with issues that the Panel has identified with the proposal that need to be complied with or addressed before the programme should be validated. The Panel should categorise any issues identified into conditions and recommendations. "Conditions" are matters that require immediate attention and should be fully complied with in drafting the Final Programme Document. "Recommendations" may be more developmental or formative in nature but, nonetheless, the Faculty and the Programme Development Team are required to address them fully in the Faculty Response.

34. When endorsed by the Panel and signed by the Panel Chairperson the report will be presented to the Programme Development Team through the relevant Faculty (and will be sent to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning representative who is supporting the Programme Development Team for information).

35. Following consultation by the Programme Development Team with the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning representative, a Faculty Response (if required) is prepared. The Faculty, with the approval of the Head of Department and Head of Faculty, submits the agreed Faculty Response and the Final Programme Document to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning.

Validation of New Programmes by Academic Council

36. The Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning submits confirmation of the Programme Resourcing approval, the Programme Validation Panel Report, the Faculty Response and the Final Programme Document to the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee ('the Committee'). The Committee is asked to examine and consider the documentation and (if appropriate) to make a recommendation to Academic Council that:
    i. Academic Council procedures and processes have been properly carried out;
    ii. The Faculty Response and the Final Programme Document have adequately addressed the conditions and recommendations of the Programme Validation Panel;
    iii. The provisions of the Faculty Response and the Final Programme Document are in compliance with SETU regulations and policies (subject to any documented derogations recommended by the Committee to Academic Council), and national policy.
    iv. The programme as presented should be approved and validated by Academic Council.

37. The Committee's recommendation is included in its report to Academic Council.

38. All new programmes at SETU are validated by Academic Council. Academic Council considers the Committee's recommendation and decides whether or not to validate the programme.

39. In the event of approval by Academic Council, the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning informs the Faculty and the Programme Development Team of this (including any conditions of approval) and arranges, through the appropriate channels, for the newly approved programme to be listed among the approved programmes validated by SETU.

40. The University publishes the Programme Validation Panel Report on the SETU website to provide public confidence in the validation of its programmes.

Validation of Programmes Composed Entirely of Existing Modules

41. In some cases, programme proposals may be made that draw exclusively from SETU's existing module catalogue. Such programmes are required to advance through both Programme Resourcing and Programme Validation stages.

42. However, it is understood that the documents in both cases may be considerably shorter and that the respective processes will not ordinarily comment on the make-up of existing approved modules.

Minor, Special Purpose and Supplemental Awards[4]

43. Special purpose and supplemental programmes are required to advance through both Programme Resourcing and Programme Validation stages but a minor award, as it is a subset of an existing award[5], may proceed directly to the Programme Validation stage.

44. Given their nature, it is acknowledged that some elements of the Programme Validation process may not be fully relevant for minor, special purpose or supplemental awards and thus may be varied as appropriate (for example, having a desk review by a smaller panel instead of requiring a site visit). Guidance on this may be sought from the Office of the Vice

[4] Explanations of these award types can be found at: https://www.qqi.ie/what-we-do/qqi-awards/qqi-awards-standards/types-of-qqi-awards.
[5] Details of the existing award must be specified in the documentation submitted.

President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning, who will determine the process to be followed as befitting the nature of the award.

Validation of Individual Modules

45. An academic Department may from time-to-time require individual stand-alone modules to be validated.

46. Any new module(s) proposed will be sent by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning to an external assessor for review.

47. The assessor and a representative of the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning will review the module(s) as a desk exercise and will specify any conditions and/or recommendations, which will be forwarded to the relevant Faculty as an assessment report.

48. A Faculty response (if required), together with a definitive module descriptor(s) and the assessment report is forwarded to the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee for consideration by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning. The Committee will consider in the first instance if any conditions (which must be complied with), recommendations or comments (which must be addressed) specified by the assessment report have been fully taken into account as appropriate in the revised documentation.

49. The Committee's recommendation is included in its report to Academic Council, for validation by Council. Academic Council considers the Committee's recommendation and decides whether or not to validate.

Alterations to an Existing Approved SETU Programme

General Principles

50. Programme Boards will, from time to time, decide to update or rewrite programmes (or elements of programmes, such as specific modules). Reasons for doing so may include *inter alia* keeping the content up to date, improving or amending aspects of delivery or assessment, evaluation of

the programme, updating for revised PSRB and other requirements where necessary, or modifying elements of the programme to allow for delivery at different locations or through different modes of delivery.

51. Programme Boards should ensure that mechanisms exist to keep students informed of such proposed changes where appropriate, and may need to consider consulting with affected students on the changes in advance. Any changes should be communicated to the relevant students, including where these may have particular implications for them (e.g., repeat students).

52. Programme Boards must clearly specify on any proposed changes the requested effective date of the change. If approved, this date must be appropriately communicated to ensure that any necessary changes are reflected by the University accordingly, including system changes.

53. Depending on the type and degree of change being proposed, Programme Boards may need to use either the **Programme Modification** or the **Minor Change** processes.

54. A Programme Modification is a programme change that is not considered to be a minor change (as set out in section 55 below).

55. A Minor Change is a change that does not impact programme learning outcomes or the meeting of programme academic standards, and which is limited both in frequency and volume.

56. Changes proposed through either of these processes will require Academic Council approval before they are implemented. Programme Boards must be mindful of this, and relevant timelines, when specifying the effective date of any proposed changes.

57. In the first instance, the Programme Board will agree a proposal to change its programme and will document the proposed changes and the evidence for them, including when the change is to be effective[6] and the implementation of the change (as well as any transitional elements required). It is at this point that the decision is made to pursue either the Programme Modification or the Minor Change process and Programme

[6] The effective date is also the date from which any related administration processes must be in place and operating. Consequently, clear communication on this date and any implications of changes to relevant University functions is essential.

Boards are encouraged to consult with the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning on this where they require any guidance. The relevant template is then completed by the Programme Board.

58. If the proposal is expected to have resource implications for the Faculty, the Faculty Management Team must review the proposal and approve any resource implications before proceeding. This may require consultation with the SETU Finance function depending on the circumstances, which will be determined by the Faculty Management Team.

59. If the proposal is expected to have implications for other programmes or Faculties (for example, because of common modules), the proposed change must be discussed and agreed with the affected Programme Board(s)/Faculty(s) before submission. A proposal for the relevant change(s) to any other affected programme(s) must be submitted at the same time.

Significant Modifications to an Existing Approved SETU Programme (Programme Modification Process)

60. Based on the proposal submitted, the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs will determine the appropriate process and route to follow. This will depend on the nature of the modifications sought. Options available include *inter alia:*
    - a panel review (based on sections 24 to 35 above[7]);
    - a desk review of the proposal by relevant internal and/or external experts (with composition determined by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning as appropriate), and;
    - a desk review conducted by a member of the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning[8].

61. When the review has been completed, a definitive Final Programme Document (with a Faculty response if necessary) and a written review report is forwarded to the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and

[7] The constitution of the panel and the steps set out in these sections may be varied depending on the nature of the proposed modifications, with the approval of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning.
[8] Desk reviews may apply relevant steps set out in sections 24 to 35 above as appropriate to the review being conducted.

Learning Committee for consideration and approval. The Committee will consider in the first instance whether any matters raised in the review (including *inter alia* any conditions or recommendations) have been fully taken into account in the revised documentation and appropriately addressed.

62. The Committee's recommendation is included in its report to Academic Council for Council validation. Academic Council considers the Committee's recommendation and decides whether or not to validate the programme modification.

63. Changes to programme schedules must be processed at the very latest in the academic year *preceding* the academic year in which the changes will take effect (effective date of change) and must be appropriately communicated to relevant stakeholders.

64. All modules submitted in the course of an application to change an approved programme must demonstrate full compliance with SETU's regulations/policies (subject to any documented derogations specified in the proposal, recommended by the Committee and ultimately approved by Academic Council).

Minor Changes to an Existing Programme Schedule (Minor Change Process)

65. In specified instances set out in this procedures document below, changes of a minor nature to an approved programme may be considered by Faculties (through an appropriately constituted and approved sub-committee) and recommended to the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee for noting in their report to Academic Council.

66. Typically, a minor change should only be made with an effective date in the following semester (or later). Any variation from this should only be permitted in exceptional circumstances and with good reason, having considered any implications of the change for relevant stakeholders and how it will be communicated.

67. Examples of changes that may be permitted as minor changes include adjustment or minor re-phrasing of the indicative content, minor amendments to module assessment, module sequencing or operational changes. Module sequencing includes an application where a once-off

swop of modules between semesters in the same academic year is requested.

68. Where changes affect fundamental characteristics of the programme (such as the title, the programme learning outcomes, the aims and objectives or the level and/or require multiple changes to the programme documentation), such changes would not be considered 'minor' in nature.

69. Minor changes, by their nature, should be limited both in frequency and volume. Definitive limits are not being set for this. However, where modules or programmes are seeking very frequent changes or changes that, cumulatively over a period of time, amount to significant change, Academic Council (and appropriate sub-committees or the Committee making recommendations on minor change proposals) reserve the right to request that the Programme Modification process is used instead. Consequently, the frequency and volume of minor changes by modules and programmes must be monitored by sub-committees and the Committee who make recommendations on minor change proposals and should be reported on to Academic Council where necessary.

70. Programme Boards are encouraged to consult with the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning where they are unsure as to whether the Minor Change Process is appropriate.

71. In order for minor changes to be considered at Faculty level, a Faculty must establish a Faculty Programmes sub-committee ('the sub-committee') with the approval of the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee. This approval will only be granted where the Faculty can demonstrate that they have the capacity and the expertise to operate such a sub-committee and complete any necessary administrative processes, and where they commit to reporting to the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee on the sub-committee's recommendations, activities and operation.

72. A sub-committee's approval can be withdrawn at any stage by the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee where they deem this to be necessary, including (but not limited to) where a sub-committee seeks to exceed the agreed scope of its authority.

73. Each Faculty Programmes sub-committee should develop a schedule of meetings to consider minor change proposals from Programme Boards

and should provide a report to the relevant Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee meeting on any proposals considered, along with their recommendations.

74. The Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee should only consider recommendations from Faculty Programmes sub-committees at one of its meetings in each semester[9]. The dates of these meetings will be advised to the Faculty Programmes sub-committees at the start of each academic year, and these meetings will typically take place in November and either in March or April.

75. Any recommendations that will necessitate a change to a programme (or part(s) of a programme) will be noted by the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee in its report to Academic Council as recommended for Council approval.

76. Appropriate communications should also be sent by the Faculty Programmes sub-committee to Programme Boards who have made minor change proposals, outlining the recommendation of the sub-committee and/or where further information is required including information to make a recommendation. Details of minor changes approved by Academic Council should be sent to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning by the relevant Faculty Programmes sub-committee in a format specified by the Office and to relevant Programme Boards and Faculties. This is to ensure that changes can be appropriately processed in advance of implementation including *inter alia* changes to module descriptors and approved programme schedules.

77. After each semester (and more often if required), each sub-committee should provide a report to the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee of its activities and operation. Based on this report and any further information that is relevant, the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee will decide whether to renew the Faculties approval or not.

78. If a Faculty does not have approval to establish and operate a Faculty Programmes sub-committee, all minor changes for the Faculty will need to be sent to the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning

[9] In exceptional circumstances, with the agreement of the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee, the Committee may consider minor change proposals at other times.

Committee for consideration[10] (via the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, Teaching and Learning), who will make a recommendation to Academic Council. The Committee will also monitor the volume and frequency of changes it is asked to consider as noted above.

[10] Consistent with section 74 above, the Taught Studies Programmes, Teaching and Learning Committee should only consider minor change proposals at the relevant meetings scheduled for such purposes, which will typically take place in November and in either March or April, except for in exceptional circumstances with the agreement of the Committee.