Purpose of the Programme Validation Process

All new taught programmes must be validated, using the validation process set out by the University. This is a key mechanism by which the University establishes academic standards, ensuring that:

• the academic rationale for new programmes is fully exposed and understood

• the requirements for students to achieve the intended learning outcomes are clear

• resources can be provided to deliver the programme to standards acceptable to the University

In addition to this, the validation process aims to ascertain that proposed programmes are in line with the University of Malta’s overall vision and strategy and are responsive to market demands, and that the quality of our programmes is comparable to that of our European and international partners. The procedure for the approval and validation of new programmes is designed to be rigorous and effective, whilst also encouraging appropriate innovation.

Roles of the Bodies Involved in the Programme Validation Process

The bodies involved in the programme validation process are as follows:

Programme Originators: develop an idea for a new programme with the backing of the respective Department within a Faculty, Institute, Centre or School (F/I/C/S)

Department: responsible for considering approval of Stage 1 and Stage 2 proposals and making recommendations to the Programme Validation Committee (PVC) through the Board of the F/I/C/S

Board of Faculty, Institute, Centre or School (F/I/C/S): responsible for considering Stage 1 and Stage 2 proposals and making timely recommendations to Senate through the PVC

Academic Programmes Quality and Resources Unit (APQRU): responsible for providing administrative support to academic staff in the planning stages of new courses to ensure that programmes of study offered by the University are in line with regulations, bye-laws and University policies, whilst also considering their viability in relation to available resources and market demands

Programme Validation Committee (PVC): responsible for recommending decisions for Senate approval after analysing the documentation submitted at both stages of approval
Distance & E-Learning Validation Committee (DEC): assists the PVC with the validation of distance learning programmes and study-units through a sub-committee of PVC and DEC

External Reviewer: responsible for providing expert independent feedback on various aspects of the proposed programme.

Senate: responsible for approving academic programmes offered by the University

Council: responsible for approving additional funding for implementing programmes of study (if required)

Overview of the Process

There are two main stages in academic programme planning. Stage 1 concentrates on the practicality and feasibility of the idea generated within the overall vision and strategy of the University. Stage 2 focuses on the design and detailing of the academic programme given that the original idea has been approved in principle by Senate (and Council if applicable). Programme originators are encouraged to start developing the proposal at a sufficiently early stage and to adhere to the deadlines established by the PVC to ensure that the validation process (both internal and external) is completed in time to allow for the proper marketing of the programme.

Stage 1 Approval

Step 1: Programme Originators/Departmental Boards submit to AQPRU the Stage 1 Proposal Form, which is intended to provide preliminary details of the proposed programme. The Stage 1 Proposal Form must be submitted through the Board of the F/I/C/S not less than 12 months prior to the intended commencement of the proposed programme. Stage 1 Proposals which are not recommended by the Board should be submitted to the PVC accompanied by an explanation why the proposal does not have the support of the Board. If the programme being proposed includes elements of distance learning (online or blended), the proposers are required to submit with the Stage 1 Proposal Form, a duly completed Distance Learning Programme Checklist (detailed as Appendix D to the Distance & E-Learning Policy)

Step 2: APQRU refers the Stage 1 Proposal Form to the PVC for preliminary approval, if in line with requirements; or to the programme originators for amendment as necessary

Step 3: PVC refers to Senate for “In-principle” approval or returns the proposal to the originators. Recommendations of the PVC are expected to be discussed at Senate only if there is advice against the recommendation

Step 4: If additional funds are required to run the proposed programme of study, programme development can continue subject to Council approval for additional funding
**Step 5:** If “In-principle” approval is given by Senate, and no significant additional funds are required, Senate advises APQRU to inform programme originators to move on to the Stage 2 Approval phase

**Stage 2 Approval**

**Step 6:** APQRU liaises with programme originators and Officers in charge for submission of the Stage 2 documentation at least 7 clear months from the proposed date of commencement of the programme (by the end of February for courses commencing in October, by the end of June for courses commencing in February)

**Step 7:** Stage 2 Proposal Form together with detailed study-unit approval forms for all new study-units listed in the programme are submitted to the Board of F/I/C/S for approval. Study-units which involve blended or online learning must be accompanied by the relevant checklists, (duly completed), as detailed in Appendices C and D to the Distance & E-Learning Policy

**Step 8:** Stage 2 Proposal Form together with the documentation referred to in Step 7 are subsequently forwarded to APQRU

**Step 9:** If all documentation is submitted in line with requirements, APQRU forwards the Stage 2 documentation to the PVC for consideration. For programmes which include elements of blended or online learning, the checklists are forwarded to the PVC/DEC sub-committee for evaluation of the blended/online methodologies, prior to the submission of the programme documentation to the PVC for consideration

**Step 10:** PVC refers the programme documentation to an independent external reviewer (when applicable) for evaluation

**Step 11:** Subject to receipt of a positive recommendation from the external reviewer (when applicable), PVC submits its recommendation to Senate for confirmation of final approval
Programme Development Checklist

In programme planning and design explicit consideration should be given to the following issues:

- The proposed programme title. Does the title appropriately reflect the aims and scope of the programme? Is it self-explanatory and attractive to students, and is it distinguishable from other programme titles?

- What is the rationale for the proposed programme? There should be a valid justification for introducing the programme. Is the new programme being developed in response to the changing needs of the Maltese economy or society? Does this new programme contribute to the research domain of the University? It is also important to explain how the programme objectives will be aligned with the vision of the Department, Faculty and the University. Programme originators should consider whether similar
programmes exist at the University and in what ways the proposed programme differs from these. It is also important to explain the need for an additional programme and to describe any unique, distinctive and innovative features.

- Is there a target group of students for the proposed course? Is the proposed programme designed to meet a specific student clientele e.g. managers with a certain number of years of experience? Will any preparation and/or pre-qualifications be necessary for the student to join the programme? These considerations are important because they will influence the nature and level of the award, the content of the curriculum, the learning outcomes, and the assessment strategy.

- It is important to establish the structure, objectives, and intended learning outcomes of the proposed programme. In order for the proposed programme to achieve its aims, it must demonstrate a clear strategy which links the curriculum to the intended learning outcomes, enabling students to achieve these outcomes. Programme initiators should also determine how these learning outcomes will be assessed.

- Is the proposed programme in line with the University regulations? It is important to check at each stage of programme development that the proposals being made conform to the regulations of the University, applicable to all undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The regulations are the framework for course design, providing important guidance on such issues as levels of study-units, credit allocation, minimum credit requirements for different awards, etc. Delays in validation can be avoided by ensuring that such factors are considered and the programme is properly aligned with the general regulations.

- Review all the study-units which will contribute to the proposed programme. Are there any existing study-units which can be utilised in the programme? Will new study-units need to be developed? It is essential to make necessary arrangements to ensure the agreement and commitment of other Departments regarding any study-units which are to be included in the proposed course.

- Is the programme responsive to market demand? Will the programme meet the requirements of professional and statutory bodies and employers? If in the affirmative, explain how this will be achieved. If this is not the case, what differences exist between the outcomes of the programme and the needs of the industry? Why is supply not matching demand? What are the career prospects for graduates? Evidence of consultation with relevant stakeholders should be provided (e.g. minutes of meetings) as such evidence will promote confidence in the utility and standards of the programme.

- Is the proposed programme supported by adequate resources? Can physical resources, space, and equipment be made available in the timescale proposed? What additional resources will need to be provided in order to meet the requirements of the proposed programme? Is the Department proposing the new programme assured of the commitment and availability of staff that have sufficient expertise to deliver the programme?
Is the proposed programme financially viable? The programme initiator should take into account all resources required to implement the programme of study, as well as the expected number of students to be admitted in considering the financial viability of the programme.

**Major Amendments to Programmes of Study**

If an existing programme of study is amended in a major way it should be submitted to the same process of validation as for new programmes.

A major amendment to a programme of study is one which involves:

- Any significant change to the name/title of the programme
- Changes in a number of compulsory study-units which affect 20% or more of the programme content, as last approved by Senate (since a change in a number of compulsory study-units signifies a major change in the programme's aims and objectives)
- Any changes to the structure of the programme including any changes in the pre- and co-requisites, or in the balance between compulsory and elective study-units, if this change affects 20% or more of the programme content, as last approved by Senate
- Any significant changes in the learning outcomes of the programme
- Changes to bye-laws - including the addition of interim awards
- Changes to the mode of delivery
- Changes to the method of assessment of 20% of the study-units listed in the programme

Click [here](#) to refer to the presentation "Guidelines for the Writing of Effective Learning Outcomes", for more information on writing and developing learning outcomes.