

University of Suffolk

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR EXTERNAL ACADEMIC PANEL MEMBERS INVOLVED IN COURSE VALIDATION OR RE-APPROVAL

These guidance notes are intended to provide information for external academic representatives who are interested in getting involved in course approval and re-approval panels at the University of Suffolk.

There are two forms of course approval at the University: 'validation' for proposed new courses and 're-approval' for existing courses. Courses are normally reviewed and re-approved at least once every five years.

The (re)approval processes are used to ensure that:

- ✓ courses provide students with a high quality learning experience, comparable to similar courses at other universities
- ✓ there is a sound rationale for offering the course, for example in terms of student and employer demand
- ✓ the course is designed and delivered in a way that supports equality and diversity
- ✓ the course is described to students and other stakeholders in a clear, accurate and complete manner (for example via course handbooks)
- ✓ there are sufficient resources (including staff) to effectively deliver the course
- ✓ the course complies with the University's academic regulations
- ✓ the course meets national expectations, including those set by the Quality Assurance Agency and any professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.

What are the criteria for appointment of external panel members?

External academic panel members should be able to demonstrate:

- ✓ appropriate competence and experience and continuing active involvement in the relevant subject discipline(s)
- ✓ relevant academic and/or professional qualifications, normally to at least the level of the qualification being presented for (re)approval, and/or extensive practitioner experience where appropriate
- ✓ knowledge and understanding of relevant external reference points for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance and enhancement of quality
- ✓ competence and recent experience relating to the design and delivery of programmes of study within the relevant subject discipline(s) to at least the level of the qualification being presented for (re)approval
- ✓ for provision at partner institutions, preferably familiarity with delivery of higher education within the relevant sector and/or location (e.g. FE, overseas).

The appointment as an external panel member of anyone in the following categories or circumstances is not permissible:

- anyone who has been involved in the design and development of the course or is intended to be involved in subsequent course delivery
- a member of the governing body of the University of Suffolk or its partner institutions
- a current employee of the University of Suffolk or its partner institutions
- a current or former external examiner appointed to a course at the University of Suffolk or its partner institutions, unless a period of five years has elapsed since the appointment ended
- anyone with a close professional, contractual or personal relationship with a member of the team involved in designing and delivering the proposed new course
- anyone significantly involved in recent or current substantive collaborative activities (including research) with a member of staff involved in the design or delivery of the proposed new course
- former staff or students of the University of Suffolk or its partner institutions, unless a period of five years has elapsed since their employment ended or they completed their studies
- anyone associated with the sponsorship of future students on the course or in a position to significantly influence the employment of such students.

What happens at a course (re)approval event?

In the months leading up to the course validation or re-approval event, the course team will undertake preparatory work and will prepare documentation that describes their proposed new or existing course. This documentation will include information on the content of the course, how it is delivered and assessed, and what resources are required to run the course (including staff resources). In addition, for re-approval events the course team will produce a self-evaluation document that reflects on how well the course has operated over the last few years and how they see the course developing in the future.

A panel is formed by the University of Suffolk to consider the course under review. There are typically around 7-8 members of the panel, including academic staff, administrative staff, students and external academic and employer representatives. There is also a panel secretary, who will be happy to answer any queries you have either leading up to the event or on the day.

Two or three weeks before the event, panel members are sent a pack which contains details on arrangements for the event and the course documentation (usually in hard copy with supporting information available electronically). This gives panel members a chance to find out more about the course before the event and to identify any things that they would like to discuss on the day.

The panel meets at the University or, for partner institutions, at the relevant partner institution. The event typically starts at around 9:30am and finishes by 3.30pm, with lunch provided. During the event, the panel gets a chance to view facilities, meet with students and discuss the course with the course team. At the end of the event, the panel reaches a decision about whether the course should be approved or re-approved. The panel also has the opportunity to commend positive aspects of the course and/or identify areas where there is room for improvement. These conclusions are recorded in a written report which is produced by the secretary and sent to the panel to check.

The course team is expected to revise the course in light of any conditions or recommendations set by the panel, and their response is subject to the approval of the panel chair (who may consult with other panel members where necessary).

What is my role on the panel?

As a member of the panel, you will be expected to critically examine the course documentation before the event and identify any things that you would like to discuss on the day.

During the event, there will be an initial private meeting of the panel where you can discuss your views on the course and collectively agree a series of questions to ask the course team and students later in the day.

The panel will be expected to undertake constructive discussions with the course team and with students in order to make a collective judgement on the quality and academic standard of the course, and its value and relevance in terms of professional and/or employer needs.

Your role is that of a 'critical friend', who is there to discuss the proposal in detail and offer helpful suggestions to the course team, as well as pointing out potential pitfalls and problems arising from your scrutiny of the documentation. As an external panel member, please do feel free to challenge assumptions held by the course team and/or the University and offer a fresh perspective.

A checklist setting out potential areas to focus on is available on the course approval, modification and review pages on the University website, and will be sent to you with the (re)approval documentation.

What about practical arrangements?

As an external academic panel member, you will be paid a standard fee of £200 plus any reasonable expenses incurred in carrying out your duties.

Travel expenses will be reimbursed at either second-class rail fare or, if a car is used, at 45p per mile (the maximum mileage claim permitted is for 500 miles; longer journeys should be undertaken by train). Where necessary, overnight accommodation will be booked and paid for by the University and the cost of an evening meal will be reimbursed (maximum claim £15).

Your completed fee claim form and travel and related expenses claim form should be submitted to the University's Validation and Exams team at the following address:

Validation and Exams team
University of Suffolk
Waterfront Building
Neptune Quay
Ipswich
Suffolk IP4 1QJ

Email: validation@uos.ac.uk

Expenses claim forms must be fully completed and all receipts provided, otherwise payment cannot be guaranteed.

Where can I go to for further advice?

If you would like further information or advice on taking part in a course validation or re-approval event, please get in touch with the Assistant Quality Manager, Simon Bransden (email s.bransden@uos.ac.uk).