

## **GUIDANCE NOTES FOR FACULTY ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE (FADC) REPRESENTATIVES ON PARM PANELS**

These guidance notes are aimed primarily at colleagues from faculties who may have had little experience of PARM processes at MMU.

### **1. ROLE**

You have been nominated by your Faculty, to sit on a University Programme Approval, Review or Modification (PARM) Panel as a FADC representative.

The purpose of the Panel is to:

- (a) consider a submission by a programme team who wish to do one, or a combination of the following:
  - (i) introduce a completely new programme
  - (ii) undertake a review of an existing programme
  - (iii) make significant changes to an existing programme

and

- (b) make a recommendation to the University on whether the programme/changes should be approved so that students may be recruited.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

The University's processes for ensuring the quality and standards of all its taught provision is guided by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Academic Framework and Code of practice.

The QAA, was established in 1997 by the Government, to check how universities maintain their own academic standards and quality. They review and report on how they meet their responsibilities, identify good practice and make recommendation for improvement. It publishes guidelines to help institutions develop effective systems to ensure students have the best learning experience.

### **3. PARM**

All taught provision within the University is subjected to processes to ensure that the experience the students receive whilst undertaking their course of study is of a high standard, that the proposed learning outcomes of the programme are achievable and relevant, and that the content of the programme is current and relevant in light of developing knowledge in the discipline. At MMU this process is referred to as Programme, Approval, Review and Modification (PARM).

**Programme Approval** – relates to completely new proposals which are considered by a University PARM Panel.

**Programme Review** – a University PARM Panel considers the student experience, reviews the content of existing programmes and approves any changes proposed. The normal review cycle for MMU programmes is 6 years (unless there is a specific reason for a shorter period eg professional body requirement).

**Modification** – the University has two types of modifications (Minor and Major Modifications). As their names imply, each deals with proposals requesting different levels of change. Major Modifications deal with significant changes to the programme and may require a University PARM Panel meeting.

#### **4. THE PROGRAMME APPROVAL, REVIEW AND MODIFICATION PROCESS**

This is a two staged process:

##### **Stage 1 – Strategic Approval**

A Programme Team must submit the business case and proposal outline to:

- (i) its home Faculty and, once approved at faculty level to
- (ii) the University Planning & Management Information Department for approval.

As part of this process the Faculty and the University will be seeking to ensure that the proposal:

- is appropriate and in line with the University's strategic direction,
- can be adequately resourced,
- does not overlap with provision elsewhere within the University, and
- will be financially viable.

If the proposal satisfies these requirements, the Deputy Vice Chancellor will give "Strategic Approval". In giving strategic approval, the DVC is giving the "green light" for the programme team to develop their proposals for submission to a PARM panel. In giving his approval, the DVC might lay down certain conditions which must be considered by the PARM panel when it meets to consider the full proposal. Strategic Approval alone does not entitle a programme team to recruit students and run the new or modified programme.

##### **Stage 2 – Academic Scrutiny**

Once the programme team has received strategic approval, a PARM Panel may be convened to look at documentation, meet students (if the proposal directly affects existing students), talk to the programme team and to make a recommendation to the University. This is the part of the process which involves the FADC representative.

#### **5. THE PARM PANEL**

The Panel comprises a range of internal staff and external experts and must:

- be able to make impartial judgments on the comparability of a programme, in terms of standard and content, with similar programmes offered elsewhere in higher education in the UK, and be able to consider the programme in a national perspective;
- address the requirement in QAA's Code of practice for independence and externality;

- include members familiar with current developments in the field of study;
- include at least one member, where appropriate, with relevant experience of industry, commerce, public service or the professions;
- include members with an understanding of current practice and developments in teaching, learning and assessment in higher education;
- be aware of the University's requirements for the award(s) relevant to the proposal(s) under consideration (or the requirements of any other relevant awarding body);
- be aware of the additional requirements involved in the approval of programmes involving collaborative provision as set out in the Institutional Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision;
- be aware of the requirements of any professional, statutory or statutory bodies associated with the programme and the requirements of the University as set out in the Institutional Code of Practice for Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (see relevant Section of the Handbook)

[http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/docs/psrb\\_icp.pdf](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/casqe/regulations/docs/psrb_icp.pdf)

### Panel Membership

The composition of a Panel will include, *as a minimum*, the following:

- A Senior University Representative (Chair)
- External Assessors (*at least 2 for approval; at least 1 for review and modifications*)
- Faculty Academic Development Committee Representative
- Faculty/Campus Quality Administrator

Additional representatives might be requested to attend depending on the nature and complexity of the proposal and might include:

- Head of Faculty/Campus SAS
- Centre for Academic Standards & Quality Enhancement representative
- Collaborative Partnership Office representative
- Academic Board Research and Enterprise Committee's Research Degrees Sub-committee Representative from another Faculty (for research proposals)

- i a **Senior University representative, who shall chair the Event.**  
The University Representative is a member of staff from another Faculty. They are not expected to possess relevant subject expertise.  
The University Representative should be able to participate in the process impartially and effectively, bringing detachment and objectivity to his/her task of leading the event.
- ii **Independent external assessors** are people of high academic/professional standing in a relevant subject area. The nature and number of external assessors depends on the size, the type of event and the nature of the programme.

- iii **A Faculty Academic Development Committee representative.**  
This member of academic staff will come from the same Faculty but not from the same department or division as the proposal/programme under scrutiny. The role of the FADC representative is to have an objective view of the proposal, bringing to bear their experience of scrutinising programme documentation, identifying issues using their own awareness of learning and teaching strategies in use across the Faculty. They should be cognisant of policies, issues and concerns at Faculty level whilst being objective at subject level.
- iv **The Faculty/Campus Quality Administrator.** This is the person who organises the PARM event, co-ordinates the distribution of documentation and who acts a Panel Secretary to the event.
- v **The Head of Faculty/Campus SAS** or nominee who acts as the representative of the Director of Faculty/Campus Student and Academic Services. This person is a senior member of the administrative team who is concerned with looking at the administrative and support arrangements for the proposal.
- vi **A Representative from the Centre for Academic Standards & Quality Enhancement (CASQE)** who normally only attends when the proposal concerns complex regulatory issues, significant collaborative arrangements or PSRB accreditation. The Centre is responsible has responsibility for ensuring that Faculties comply with the University's quality procedures
- vii **a member of the Academic Board Research and Enterprise Committee's Research Degrees Sub-committee** from another faculty

## 5. THE ROLE OF THE FADC REPRESENTATIVE

The FADC representative is a member of academic staff from the same Faculty but not from the same department or division as the proposal/programme under scrutiny.

The role of the FADC representative is to have an objective view of the proposal, bringing to bear their own experience of scrutinising programme documentation, identifying issues using their awareness of learning and teaching strategies in use across the Faculty. You should, therefore, be cognisant of policies, issues and concerns within the Faculty. You are not expected to have any in-depth knowledge of the subject under scrutiny.

Questions which you might address include, but are not limited to:

- are the learning outcomes, assessment criteria etc current and consistent/comparable with those of other programmes in the faculty/university?
- does the programme “hang together” as a coherent learning experience for students?
- are student support arrangements appropriate?
- will any placement activity conform to University requirements and will it equip students to find employment in their chosen profession/field (*where relevant*)?

There will be at least one External Assessors included on the Panel who will be looking at the “subject” coherence, relevance, appropriateness etc.

**For Programme Review and Modifications** the relevant subject External Examiners will already have looked at the proposed changes to the curriculum content itself and a brief report on their comments and recommendations should be available with the documentation for scrutiny.

When looking at the documentation submitted to the Panel it should be noted that:

- **For approvals and reviews** – the Panel is looking at the whole of the programme(s)/network under consideration and it is within its remit to comment on any part of that documentation.
- **For Major Modifications** – the Panel will be asked to focus only on the part of the programme that is being modified or added. Programme Teams are asked to make quite clear, in their submission, which parts of the documentation are up for consideration by the Panel. For example, the proposal might be a request to introduce a new named award route into an existing network. The new route might comprise 4 units which are already approved as part of the network (or another programme) and 4 completely new units. The remit of the Panel in such a case would be:
  - to consider and approve the new award title
  - to consider and approve the 4 new units
  - to consider whether the 4 existing units are appropriate for use within the new award (*ie it is not for the Panel to take a view on whether those units are appropriate per se but whether they were appropriate for the new award*)

Any units and regulations which are not included in the proposed new route should not be part of the Panel's discussions unless they clearly have implications for that route.

## **6. WHAT WILL HAPPEN PRIOR TO THE PANEL EVENT?**

Once you have been nominated as the FADC representative, you will be contacted by the Faculty/Campus Quality Administrator (F/CQA) for the Faculty that is organising the event.

The F/CQA should provide you with details of the date and venue of the event and they should also ask you if you have any particular requirements which need addressing (eg wheelchair access, hearing loops, dietary requirements etc).

For "home" programmes and proposals the PARM event is normally held on MMU premises. If you have to travel to another MMU site, you may claim travel expenses in the normal way. However, if collaborative partnership proposals are under consideration it may be that the event will be held at the premises of the collaborative partner. If these are reasonably local it is usually simpler for you to make your own travel arrangements and recoup expenses via the standard claim form available from the F/CQA. However, if the Panel is travelling a significant distance or abroad, it is common for the F/CQA to make travel arrangements for the whole Panel. If you need to recoup any costs relating to travel, please keep your receipts which will need to be submitted together with an expenses form.

Nearer the time you should be sent a pack of information and the documents for the event. Whilst these may vary slightly depending on the nature of the event, as standard you should receive:

## **General Information**

- Confirmation of the day, time, venue
- Details of any hotel accommodation
- Directions to the venue
- A list of the Panel membership
- An agenda and programme for the day

## **Proposal Documentation**

### For Programme Approvals:

- A copy of the Strategic Approval Form (approved by the Deputy Vice Chancellor)
- A Programme Specification
- Unit specifications
- Plus any specific documentation requested by the University or professional or regulatory body

### For Reviews and Modifications:

- A Programme Specification
- Unit specifications
- A Course Development Plan (including the Strategic Approval Form approved by the Deputy Vice Chancellor)
- Plus any specific documentation requested by the University or professional or regulatory body

## **6. WHAT WILL HAPPEN ON THE DAY?**

It is always useful to arrive a few minutes early at the event as this will afford you the opportunity to meet and talk informally to other members of the panel.

MMU has a standard agenda for PARM events but this can be amended depending on the nature of the event. Typically, however, there will be the following meetings:

### **Initial Private Panel Meeting**

The Chair will welcome all panel members and effect introductions around the table, briefly explain the different roles of all participants and outline the purpose of the event, the agenda for the day and any special/unusual arrangements (eg moving to a different building for lunch or a tour of facilities etc).

It is common practice for the programme team to have an “observer” at the private panel meetings. However, it is up to the Chair to decide if this is appropriate. The purpose of having an “observer” is to ensure transparency in proceedings, to provide the Panel with the opportunity to clear up simple procedural matters/questions and to allow the programme team to know in advance of their own meeting what the major subjects for discussion are likely to be.

The main purpose of this meeting is to construct a list of subjects/issues that panel members would like to ask students (where relevant) and the programme team. The Chair will ask each member of the panel for specific items they wish to raise, and place these under the following broad headings:

- Programme Aims and Outcomes
- Programme content
- Learning, Teaching and Assessment
- Student Admission, Retention, Progression and Success
- Learning Resources
- Quality and Standards
- Ethical Issues

The above headings are the themes used when writing the report of the event.

Once all members have had the chance to offer areas for discussion, the Chair will briefly summarise these and will normally ask the person who has raised the item to lead on discussions (although all other panel members are encouraged to join in with any supplementary questions).

### **Meeting with Students:**

It is not always a requirement of a PARM event to have a meeting with students. Where there is (definitely required for review events and sometimes required for modifications depending on their nature), this is usually scheduled at the beginning of the event so that any issues raised by the students can be discussed with the programme team. No members of the programme team are included in this session.

The Chair will introduce the Panel to the students and ask the students to introduce themselves with their first names and their current stage of study. The Chair should also assure the students that they may speak frankly and in confidence about the programme as no issues will be attributed to individual students.

The purpose of this meeting to find out what the students really think about their experience on the programme – its content, relevance to their future employment, the level of support for students in academic and pastoral terms, facilities eg library and computing resources etc.

### **Brief Private Panel Meeting to discuss student meeting**

The student meeting is a vital (and often the most interesting) element of any review or modification event. The points raised by students are extremely important but must be put into context and weighed against the range of other evidence (eg from documentation and from the programme team meeting). The students may well not be representative of their cohorts but that should not discount their contribution.

This short meeting provides the opportunity for the Panel to review and amend (where appropriate) the agenda prepared for the meeting with the programme team in light of comments made by students.

### **Meeting with Programme Team**

After introductions, the Chair will start to work his/her way through the agreed agenda in a logical manner and will ask pre-determined members to lead on specific questions. The role of the Chair is to keep proceedings on track. Discussions under one heading will often ebb and flow onto subjects listed under other headings. If it looks like a succinct discussion of the new area will complete scrutiny of that area, the Chair will often let the discussion continue but should flag that the Panel is straying (particularly helpful to the

F/QA who has to decide under which heading of the report the item will finally reside). If the discussion strays completely, the Chair will draw the discussion to a close and return to the agenda.

When all issues raised earlier have been addressed, the Chair will check if the panel members have any issues which they still need to raise, or if there are any issues which remain unresolved and need further discussion. They will also ask the programme team if they have anything to add that has not been covered by the questions.

### **Private Panel Meeting - to make decision**

The programme team will withdraw at this point. The Observer may or may not stay in the meeting at the discretion of the Chair.

### **Outcome of Event**

The purpose of this meeting is to decide whether, in the opinion of the Panel, the proposals under consideration are satisfactory, and to formulate a recommendation to the University about the outcome of the event. If the Panel is minded to recommend approval of the proposals, the Chair will ask whether this is to be subject to any conditions or recommendations.

Conditions and recommendations are described as:

**Conditions** must be fulfilled and approved by the Chair **BEFORE** the new/modified programme can enrol students. Examples of common types of conditions include:

- Updating and amendment of definitive document
- Completion and signature of formal agreements for collaborative arrangements (*this absolutely **must be signed off before enrolment can take place**. The timescale for completion of such conditions must, therefore, be reasonable*).

Conditions should be “do-able” in the proposed timescale (see below).

**Recommendations** must be considered by the programme team (normally as part of their annual monitoring of the programme). They do not **have** to be acted upon if the programme team decide, after consideration they are not appropriate. However, at the next review, the Panel will be looking to see whether the recommendations have been addressed.

**Recommendations to the Faculty/University** – the Panel may, occasionally, wish to raise issues/make recommendations which are more appropriate for consideration at Faculty or University level. These will be submitted either to the FADC or Academic Standards Sub-committee of the Academic Development Committee as appropriate. It is important that any such issue is **not** included as a condition that the programme team will be unable to fulfil as this will delay the completion of the approval process.

### **Compliance with Conditions**

The Panel must set a date by which any conditions must be met, keeping in mind that these must be completed and signed off by the Chair **BEFORE** the programme can enrol students. This is particularly important in the case of collaborative agreements as there are legal arrangements to be completed. It is recommended that the time limit for the response should be no longer than **four** weeks. Where, for example, negotiations relating

a collaborative arrangement are still to be completed this may receive a separate, extended time limit, but the ruling on no enrolment unless all conditions are met must still apply.

In the case of a panel considering several or very significant conditions, the Panel must decide whether it should recommend a limited period of approval (eg 2 or 3 years rather than the standard 6 years) or non-approval.

If “non-approval” of the proposal is being considered, the Panel must think through, carefully, the consequences of such a decision on existing students. Where non-approval is agreed, the programme team must be provided with a way forward to redeem the situation while ensuring the quality of experience for existing students. In the case of periodic reviews this might include, for example, suspending any new intakes for the coming year or extending approval of the existing programme for a further year to enable a new submission the following year.

It is quite normal for the Programme Team's written response to conditions to be considered and, where appropriate, signed off by the Chair. However, depending on the nature of the condition(s) it might be more appropriate for other members of the Panel to be involved in this process. It should be agreed at the meeting who will be responsible for this process.

#### Good Practice

The Chair will also ask Panel members to commend any good practice which they have noted as part of their scrutiny of the documentation and during their meetings with students and staff. The University is particularly interested in good practice which can be transferable across the institution.

#### Confirmation of Next Review

The Panel will also be asked to confirm the date of the next periodic review of the programme:

- **Approval or Review events:** this is normally 6 years hence unless the Panel has particular reasons for suggesting a shorter period.
- **Modification Event:** the next review will be as scheduled at the time of the last approval/review event. It is not normal practice for the panel to recommend that, following a modification event, the review of the programme is put back.

#### Final Session to Feedback recommendation to the Programme Team

Representatives of the programme team will return to hear the final recommendation of the Panel. The Chair will inform them of:

- the recommendation of the Panel to the University
- any conditions
- any recommendations
- the date for compliance with conditions
- the date of next review
- any good practice commended by the panel.

## 7. **AFTER THE EVENT**

### The PARM Report

The F/CQA will send out the conditions and recommendations to the programme team asap (within a few days).

A draft report, written by the F/CQA and approved by the Panel Chair, will be sent to all those people who attended the event (panel and programme team) with an invitation to confirm accuracy and suggest any amendments to correct inaccuracies. It is usual for a response date to be included and, if no responses have been received by the due date, the F/CQA will confirm the report. Suggested changes have to be approved by the Panel Chair before they can be included in the report. A copy of the confirmed report will then be sent to you. PARM reports follow a standard template provided by the University.

### Questionnaire

You will also be asked to complete a short questionnaire on your experience of the PARM event. This is often sent out with the draft report. The University is keen to improve its processes wherever possible and welcomes your comments. Please return your completed questionnaire to the F/CQA.

### Response to Conditions of Approval

If you have been asked to look at the response to any conditions these will be sent to you as soon as possible and it would be most appreciated if you could let the F/CQA your comments as soon as you can.

If you have any further queries or questions concerning the PARM process and your role, your first point of contact should be the F/CQA responsible for the event.

Centre for Academic Standards & Quality Enhancement  
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### **Useful MMU websites:**

*Centre for Academic Standards & Quality Enhancement home page:*

<http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/asu.php>

*The Academic Regulations and Procedures Handbook (scroll down to sections on Programme Approval, Review and Modification)*

[http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/quality\\_assurance.php](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/quality_assurance.php)

*Academic Policies, Regulations and Codes of Practice*

[http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/academic\\_policy.php](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/academic_policy.php)

*Assessment Regulations for Taught Undergraduate, Postgraduate and Research Programmes of Study:*

[http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/grad\\_regulations.php](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/grad_regulations.php)

[http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/asu/Regulations\\_for\\_UG\\_or\\_PG\\_Programmes/Research\\_Regs\\_Sept\\_2009\\_final\\_version.pdf](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/asu/Regulations_for_UG_or_PG_Programmes/Research_Regs_Sept_2009_final_version.pdf)

*PARM webpage:*

<http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/parm.php>

*Practical Guidance webpage*

[http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/practical\\_guidance.php](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/academic/practical_guidance.php)

### **External websites:**

*Quality Assurance Agency website:*

<http://qaa.ac.uk/>

*Higher Education Academy*

<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/>