BOURNEMOUTH UNIVERSITY

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*This document is part of the Academic Regulations, Policies and Procedures which govern the University's academic provision. Each document has a unique document number to indicate which section of the series it belongs to.*

# 4A – Programme Approval, Review and Closure: Policy

## 1. SCOPE AND PURPOSE

1.1 This policy and procedure is for Bournemouth University (BU) and partner staff involved in the programme evaluation process.

1.2 This policy and procedure outlines the principles and arrangements BU applies to programme approval, review and closure and outlines the process, timescales, key stages, responsibilities and documentation requirements.

1.3 You should read this policy and procedure in conjunction with the documents listed in Section 3 below. The relevant BU's Management of Published Course Information: Policy and Procedures (part of BU's suite of corporate policies) where this sets out the relevant procedure for managing the information after a decision has been taken within this procedure.

1.4 In order to align with consumer law requirements, new programmes will be promoted from the point at which conditional approval is granted by the external panel. Programmes will be opened for applications once external panel approval is granted (conditions of approval having been met). Programmes in development or under review will be flagged as such on Course Search until any conditions from the review have been met and formal notification sent.

## 2. KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

2.1 **Senate:** to approve new policies or amendments to existing policies relating to programme approval, review or closure and to approve new awards.

2.2 **Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC):** oversee the Programme Approval, evaluation and Closure on behalf of Senate.

2.3 **Strategic Portfolio Approval Group** (SPG) is responsible for oversight of Portfolio Development. With initial strategic oversight for approving all new programme proposals, strategic changes to existing programme, new Partners, and decisions to suspend and close courses. In line with BU3025 strategy and through development and maintenance of BU Portfolio Development Plan(s).

2.4 **Faculties/Partners:** to agree with SPG and Academic Quality the annual schedule of review activity in line with the delivery planning process and following BU's agreed review policy and procedures, and to lead on the initial planning and Faculty approval of new and revised taught awards and Professional Doctorates. Faculties are responsible for leading the programme reviews for partners programmes and liaising with the partner on the process and deadlines.

2.5 **Doctoral College:** to lead on the initial planning and Faculty approval of any new and reviewed Standard Research Degree awards and PhDs by publication in consultation with Faculties via the Research Degree Committee (RDC) and Academic Quality, and to provide guidance on the development of all research degree programmes.

2.6 **BU and Partner staff and BU appointed external panel members:** to carry out their designated roles in accordance with BU's requirements.

### 3. ACCESSING OTHER RELEVANT BU DOCUMENTS

3.1 All documents can be accessed here

Key documents with direct relevance to this one are:

- *2B - Programme Structure and Curriculum Design Characteristics Policy*
- *3R – Programme Update Communications: Procedure*
- *BU Management of Published Course Information: Policy and Procedures*

3.2 Other documents with direct relevance to this are:

- *2A - Awards of Bournemouth University: Policy*
- *3P - Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and UK Credit Transfer: Policy and Procedure*
- *4B - Programme and Unit Modifications: Policy and Procedure*
- *4C - Panel Members for Programme Approval, Review and Closure: Procedure*
- *4D - Continuing Professional Development (CPD): Policy and Procedure*
- *4F - Internal Progression: Procedure*
- *4J - Guidelines for Online Learning and/or Blended Learning programmes with extensive online learning*
- *4K - Placements: Policy and Procedure*
- *5A - Welcome Guide and Programme/Level Handbooks: Procedure*
- *7A - Partnership Models and Definitions: Policy*
- *8A - Code of Practice for Research Degrees*

## Policy

### 4. PRINCIPLES OF EVALUATION EVENTS

4.1 BU uses the term 'evaluation' to refer to the formal approval process which all academic programmes are subject to prior to delivery and at periodic stages in the lifecycle of a programme. All academic programmes leading to an award of the University must undergo formal procedures that include approval, annual monitoring and periodic review. Programmes may also be subject to modification following processes set out in *4B - Programme and Unit Modifications: Policy and Procedure.*

4.2 Final programme approval lies with Senate, however the responsibility for the approval process is delegated to Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC), who via Academic Quality, establishes a panel, drawing on independent members of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG), as well as independent external academic and professional peers drawn from outside BU on the basis of their experience and expertise, and students. Peer evaluation of the academic and professional dimensions of the proposals takes place through formal discussions with the development team and the panel will recommend the standard periodic review period or if necessary, a shorter period of approval. Academic Quality will report all new programme approvals, reviews and closures to Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC) when completed.

4.3 All BU award-bearing programmes will be formally approved and then reviewed, to ensure the curriculum remains up to date and delivers a high-quality academic experience. A formal review event may normally take place at intervals of six years (or three years in the first instance for programmes at new Partners). However, modifications may be appropriate to support timely updates, to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant, in line with 4B, Programme and Unit Modifications Policy. For Standard Research Degrees and PhDs by Publication, *8A - Code of Practice for Research Degrees* is updated annually with a wider periodic review of the research degree provision normally carried out on a 6-year cycle. Professional Doctorates are reviewed periodically in line with the timescales and processes set out for taught postgraduate programmes. Programmes that lead to the award of a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) must be reviewed within the timescale required by the PSRB. Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC) may initiate a review at its discretion (these are referred to as Focused Enhancement Reviews). A Faculty or Partner may also request an early review as part of the process of planned programme changes.

4.4 Specific processes are set out in this policy and procedure relating to the closure of programmes. The primary aim of the closure process is to assure the maintenance of academic standards and

the quality of the student experience for the remaining students during the period for winding down teaching for the programme. The review for closure will focus on quality of delivery, students' access to resources, and the capability of the staff team allocated to the programme in its final years of operation and ongoing processes to assure the academic standards of the award. The review for closure also provides an opportunity to review and learn from the experience of delivering the programme either at BU or at a Partner

4.5 If the programme is subject to PSRB approval/accreditation, it is essential that the PSRB's requirements are met. The Faculty must check with the PSRB what requirements apply. Academic Quality will ensure that, if necessary, the process to be followed is adapted to ensure that these requirements are met. Additional steps may be required at Faculty level to meet PSRB requirements, and the Faculty must ensure that these are met.

4.6 A key principle of this policy is to normally make changes only if the overall effect of the changes is either neutral or advantageous to potential applicants, offer holders or students. Ensuring that changes are fair and made fairly is therefore an important objective of this policy.

## 5. CONSUMER LAW REQUIREMENTS FOR INFORMATION PROVIDED TO STUDENTS, APPLICANTS AND POTENTIAL APPLICANTS

5.1 Faculties and Marketing & Communications should follow the procedures set out in 3R – Programme Update Communications: Procedure and BU's Management of Published Course Information: Policy and Procedures to ensure the University is compliant with the information requirements that apply under consumer law to students, those who have accepted offers to study at BU, applicants and potential applicants.

5.2 Programme reviews are normally regarded as having consumer protection implications and can affect BU's legal obligations in relation to students and applicants. Where a review results in a proposal to make material changes to a unit or programme as defined in 4B – Programme and Unit Modifications: Policy), the relevant provisions in 4B must be applied with regard to carrying out student consultation, taking account of consultation feedback before approving changes, notifying changes to affected students and offer-holders and seeking and recording consent to changes where required before implementing them.

5.3 If the changes affect information already made available to potential or current applicants who have not yet accepted an offer from the University, the University will be required to communicate changes made to the programme to those individuals as soon as the review is complete. The relevant procedures in the Management of Published Course Information: Policy and Procedures must be followed.

5.4 At enrolment students agree to the current version of the programme and will be provided with access to the programme handbook that is based on the course information published at the time of enrolment.

5.5 Further advice can be sought from Marketing & Communications or Legal Services.

## 6. PROGRAMME APPROVAL, PERIODIC REVIEW AND CLOSURE

6.1 The stages for the processes are detailed in appendix 1.

6.2 The Faculty Executive is responsible for ensuring that all programmes put forward for approval or review are supported and can be resourced by the Faculty. This will include consideration of the resources required to support the programme as well.

6.3 The Faculty Executive is also responsible for considering the framework for delivery of a programme put forward for approval or review in relation to the overall BU proposition and strategic aims and applying any relevant BU guidance on the BU proposition when deciding whether a proposal is supported by the Faculty.

6.4 The Strategic Portfolio Group will determine what information is required from the Faculty in order for the Strategic Portfolio Group to make an appropriate judgement on the viability of the proposal

and whether it is consistent with the BU proposition and strategic aims.

6.5 The types of programme activity which will be considered by the Strategic Portfolio Group during the annual delivery planning process are listed below.

- **New** programme award titles/new subject areas (including those at Partners)
- **Strategic modifications** to programmes such as changes to titles or new modes of delivery i.e. accelerated degrees
- **Reviews** of existing programmes (including those at Partners)
- **Suspensions and closure** of existing programmes (including those at Partners)
- **Deferral requests** for periodic reviews (including those at Partners)

6.6 All decisions to cease recruitment, either as a suspension or closure to a programme, will be considered by the Strategic Portfolio Group. For all instances of closure, BU needs to be assured that appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that academic quality and standards are managed and maintained for the duration of the programme until there are no remaining students enrolled. Closure often takes place as part of a wider periodic review of a group of programmes, particularly if the closing programme is being replaced by a new programme of the same level and/or in a similar subject area. Such strategic portfolio changes would be considered and approved by Strategic Portfolio Group. Strategic Portfolio Group may also decide that a programme will close in the future but continue to recruit further cohorts who will complete their studies before closure.

## General

### 7. REFERENCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

7.1 Office for Students Regulatory Framework

7.2 *The UK Quality Code for Higher Education (QAA, 2024)*.

7.3 *Equality Act 2010: Technical Guidance Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)* (Further and Higher Education section).

### 7.4 Reporting to the Office for Students (OfS)

7.4.1 While a key objective of this policy is to ensure that any programme changes, including closures, comply with consumer protection law, it is possible that certain closures or other changes might trigger a reporting requirement to the OfS. All staff involved in implementing this policy should have regard to BU's Reportable Events Procedures.

7.5 This policy has been reviewed according to the University's Equality Analysis Procedure in July 2025.

### 8. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Programme Approval and Periodic Review Process and Stages