

Quality Assurance Processes for Programme Design and Module/Programme Review

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Introduction

It is important to Union Theological College (UTC), and to the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's Council for Training in Ministry, to ensure that all Presbyterian Theological Faculty, Ireland (PTFI) awards are of an appropriate quality, set at the correct level, make use of relevant and up-to-date teaching, learning and assessment methods, and provide learning opportunities which enable students to succeed.

The College ensures that proposals for new and revised programmes are scrutinised closely, new modules are introduced appropriately, and that programmes are reviewed on an annual basis. In addition, it is important that modules are reviewed each time they are taught and that this process is

easily understood by students, faculty, staff and all those who are stakeholders in the oversight, review and delivery of UTC programmes.

In the academic year 2018-2019 UTC adopted a more formal role for each Department in the oversight, review, and delivery of programmes and individual modules. The Faculty acknowledge the need to maintain appropriate threshold academic standards in this process and the review process is designed to ensure best practice.

1. New Programme Design

The College needs to ensure that new programmes are consistent with its mission, strategy, and budget. Furthermore, the College must also ensure that the programmes are academically sound and that adequate resources are in place to deliver an appropriate student learning experience. The Faculty, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, agree whether or not to proceed with the development of any new programme.

There are three significant stages to the process of the approval of any new programmes which the Faculty have agreed to consider developing:

1. Initial approval by the Faculty is based on strategic consideration of whether a proposal would be academically appropriate, in line with the College's mission statement, and financially viable. This is granted after the Faculty have carried out consultation with students, external examiners, employers, the Teaching and Learning Panel, and the Management Committee of the Council for Training in Ministry.¹
2. Interim approval by the PTFI based on the Faculty presenting it with a programme specification and new unit descriptions. External expertise is sought in the preparation of these documents.
3. Full and final approval by the PTFI is based on the Faculty presenting a programme specification and new unit descriptions which have been revised in light of reporting the interim programme to key stakeholders.

Depending on the precise nature of the PTFI award the consultation process may vary slightly.

Stage One – Initial Strategic Approval

In the design of any new programme and in the revision of existing programmes Faculty are committed to taking into consideration matters of externality and employability. For any PTFI programme which will form part of a ministry training pathway the process involves close co-operation between the College and the church constituency which it seeks to serve.

In this consultation process the Faculty, Teaching and Learning Panel, and Management Committee use the following criteria in their decision-making process.

¹ The Teaching and Learning Panel is a panel of the College Management committee which serves as an external reference point and as an advisory body for academic matters. It contains experienced professionals in addition to direct appointees from the College Management Committee.

In order to secure initial approval a proposed new programme must:

- Fit with the College's mission and strategic aims and form a coherent offering with other existing and planned programmes within the College
- Present a business case for financial viability of the programme, taking into consideration market trends, competitor activity, and anticipated student demand
- Designate whether the Faculty or a department will take the lead for the programme development
- Designate a proposed external examiner and other relevant sources of externality
- Have the necessary resources to ensure a high-quality student learning experience.

Stage Two – Interim Approval

This stage begins with the preparation of programme and module documentation. It normally involves consultation with students and draws in external expertise (including but not restricted to proposed external examiner(s) for the new programme). The programme specification with accompanying new module descriptions should be produced using the templates available on the N-Drive. These documents should provide a formal description of the programme and modules which is intended for a general external audience, as well as current and prospective students.

The Faculty will present the final version of the programme specification to the PTFI who may decide whether or not to grant interim approval for the new programme (either with or without conditions).

At this second stage of the process, Faculty, External Experts, and the PTFI should scrutinise the documentation to ensure that:

- Standards are appropriate to the level and category of award
- The programme is academically coherent i.e. the component parts link together to meet the overall aims and objectives of the programme
- How the programme fits with the College's Teaching and Learning Strategy (applicable from 31 August 2019)
- The intended learning outcomes are clearly defined, appropriate, aligned to the correct level descriptors of the FHEQ, and appropriately engaged with any relevant Subject Benchmark Statements
- The College's Assessment Policies and Procedures have been followed e.g. a range and blend of assessments which are aligned to learning outcomes
- There is appropriate alignment to the research interests of the Faculty
- There are appropriate resources to support the programme
- Due consideration has been given to the mode of delivery
- The entrance requirements are appropriate
- The programme meets the expectations of the Council for Training in Ministry, if appropriate other Councils of the Church, and the expectations of other main employers
- The role of ministerial placement or other work-based learning opportunities is, if appropriate, considered

For *online* programmes the process of scrutiny must further ensure that:

- There is appropriate technical and academic support
- Facilities exist for supporting interaction between students (where appropriate)
- Evaluation of systems of communication (including methods of obtaining student feedback) is appropriate
- Mechanisms are in place to ensure assessed work is properly attributable to the appropriate students

Stage Three – Full and Final Academic Approval

Once the PTFI have granted interim approval, the agreed programme specification and module documents should be reported to relevant stakeholders: students; external examiner(s); the Teaching and Learning Panel; the Management Committee; and the Council for Training in Ministry. Feedback should be sought with a view to revising and enhancing these documents.

Once the necessary changes to the programme specification and module documents have been agreed by UTC Faculty, then full and final academic approval should be sought from the PTFI. As part of this submission the PTFI should receive the following:

- Final programme specification
- New module documents
- A written summary of relevant consultation
- A written statement from the external examiner

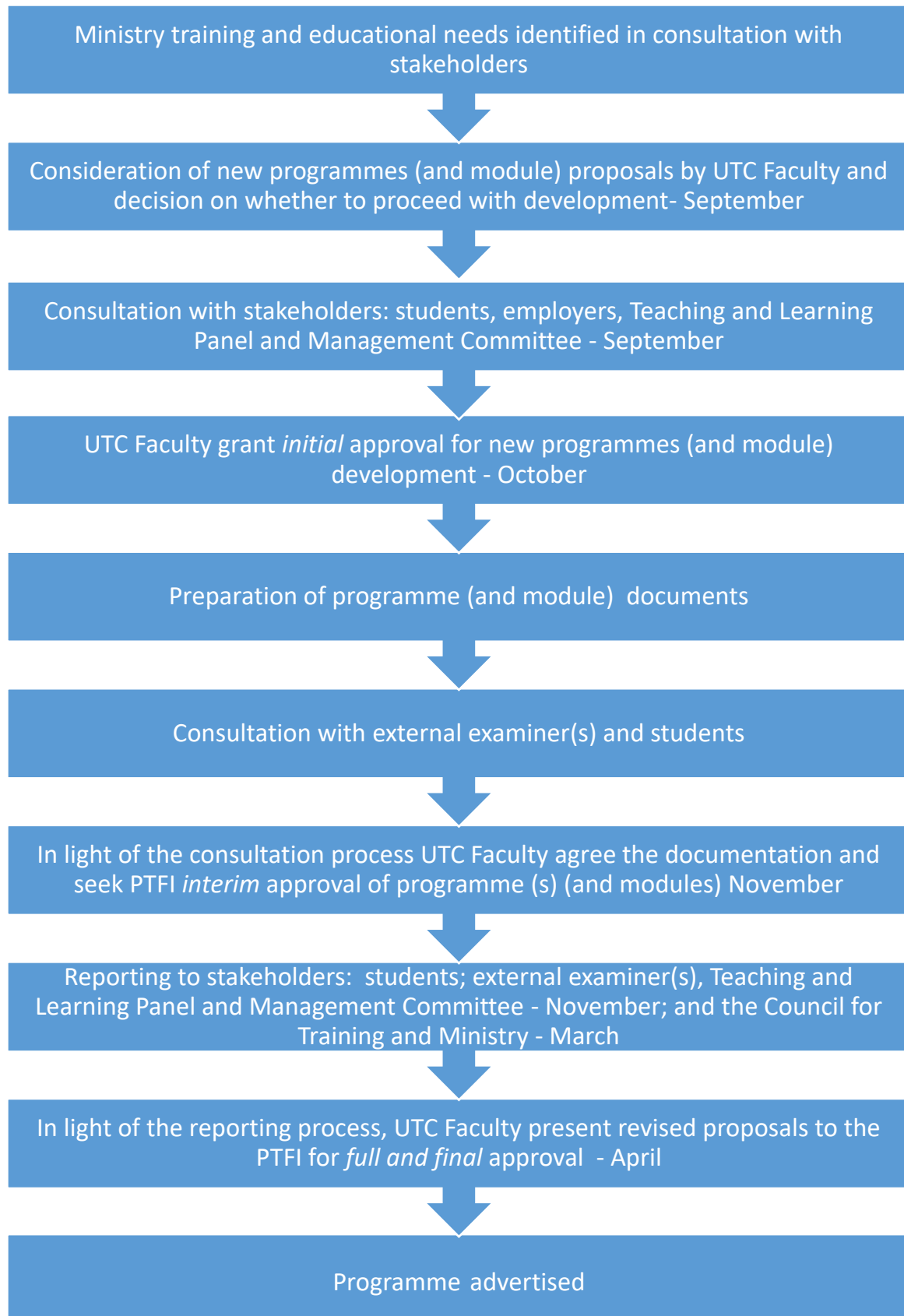
Throughout this third stage of the process the same criteria listed in stage two should be used to assess the proposed programme.

The PTFI may approve the programme either with or without conditions. Once these conditions are met, the final approval of any new programme by the PTFI should be reported to relevant stakeholders. At this point the programme may be advertised.

Once implemented, the programme will be monitored through the processes set out in the Programme Design and Review process.

The Approval Process for UTC Programmes with a PTFI award is summarised in the flowchart below.

Approval Process for UTC Programmes 2019/20



2. Programme Management and Review

1. New Modules

The process of designing and developing new units or modules is part of the overall programme management and should contribute to the enhancement of the programme. Proposals for new UTC modules should be considered by the relevant department and an outline proposal should be brought to the Faculty at an early stage. Faculty should consider any proposals in the light of a number of factors.

Factors that should be considered in the development of a new module are:

- The ministry or training needs identified by the Church
- The skills which the student will acquire or develop
- The academic content and level of the unit/module
- The learning outcomes of the proposed unit/module and how it fits with the overall aims and objective of the programme(s)
- How the module fits with the College's Learning and Teaching Strategy (applicable from 31 August 2019)
- Methods of assessment which are aligned with the College's Assessment Policy
- Appropriate alignment to the research interests of the Faculty
- Appropriate resources to support the module
- Due consideration has been given to the mode of delivery

Once provisionally agreed by the Faculty, a module co-ordinator should be appointed by the appropriate Department for developing the module, completing a new module template (available on the N-Drive).² In order for the PTFI to grant final approval to a new module the following must have taken place:

- Consultation with external examiner and the Teaching and Learning Panel
- If the new module is to be a compulsory element of a PCI ministry training pathway then there should also be consultation with the Council for Training in Ministry
- Faculty approve a new module document

The final approval of any new module by the PTFI should be reported to relevant stakeholders.

2. Changes to Existing Modules

Changes to existing modules may be either major or minor:

- Major changes to modules include allocation of CATS points, status (compulsory or optional), level, contact hours, and assessment profile

² In some previous processes this is referred to as a new unit template.

- Minor changes to modules include module title, semesters, minimum or maximum number of students, staff involved, course content, and teaching methods which do not have an impact on the learning outcomes. These should be reported to the Faculty.

Minor changes to existing modules (either compulsory modules or optional modules) should be reported to the Head of the Department and approved by the Department.

Major changes to existing modules should follow the process laid out above for the final approval of a provisionally agreed new module.

3. Module Withdrawal

The withdrawal of individual modules is part of the process of continual review of the range and viability of modules on offer. Departments may withdraw optional modules but these must be reported to Faculty. Withdrawal of compulsory modules should be approved by Faculty and reported to the Management Committee through the Teaching and Learning Panel. The withdrawal of a module should not adversely affect the learning outcomes of the programme. Faculty should consult with students on the pathways that may be affected by the withdrawal of any module.

4. Module Information

Module co-ordinators are responsible for the module data published in the College Handbook and on the College's website. Each department should ensure that the information on each module is complete, up-to-date and appropriately consistent.

3. Annual Review Process

The annual module and programme review provides:

- an opportunity to take a holistic view of the quality and standards of the provision;
- a structured opportunity to reflect upon and enhance current provision;
- an opportunity for the student voice to help enhance the College's programmes;
- an opportunity to record external and independent confirmation of the quality and standards of the programmes;
- an opportunity for good practice to be identified and shared; and
- evidence of quality assurance processes to help to secure the confidence of external bodies.

The Annual Review Process (ARP) for all UTC programmes and modules involves evidence drawn from the following internal and external sources:

- Assessment data from Exam Board
- Students' evaluations of modules and tutors
- Student surveys
- Reports from representative student bodies

- If appropriate, any reports from placements
- External examiners' report and response
- Teaching and Learning Panel report
- The Quality Action Plan and all relevant internal policy documents
- Relevant outcomes from action points arising out of programme review last academic year

Programme coordinators are responsible for the coordination of the monitoring of their programme(s). The ARP process begins with gathering a range of data and reports on all programmes.

1. **The student voice** – As listed above, student input to the process of review (including from the Teaching and Learning Panel and Student Committees) is especially important: the Quality Code expressly recognises that, for optimal annual review of programmes, there must be 'effective collection, collation and analysis of student perspectives and feedback'.
2. **Programme coordination** – Once such data, reports and other input have been received, and departmental review of all modules carried out and made available to Faculty, via the N: Drive, **programme co-ordinators** – in consultation, as necessary, with colleagues – compile and present to Faculty a draft programme review, using the *programme review template*. In support, a *programme review spreadsheet* details the number of students:
 - active on 1 June (full-time and part-time);
 - who left the programme in the previous 12 months;
 - who graduated in the past 12 months, including the awards and degree classification received.

With each subsequent version of the annual spreadsheet, trends in student retention, completion and performance may emerge and merit comment or action.

3. **Review and response** – In receiving and responding to the programme coordinator's report, and taking account of input from all internal and external stakeholders (such as EEs), **Faculty** assesses whether threshold standards are being achieved in each programme, modify as necessary the draft programme review and finalise it, including its consequent action points.
4. **Reporting out** – Faculty's review, stored on the N: Drive, is reported out to all relevant internal and external stakeholders: the awarding body (PTFI); the Teaching and Learning Panel; the Student Committees; and the programme external examiner.
5. **Oversight** – As the body with ultimate responsibility for academic oversight, PTFI receives, reviews, comments and responds to all programme reviews that it receives, reporting back to Faculty for implementation.
6. **Strategic planning for enhancement** – All reviews by Departments and by Faculty also feed into the Principal's annual report, with strategic planning for enhancement in mind.



4. Periodic Review of Governance and Programmes

It is helpful if, alongside annual monitoring of programmes, there is a periodic review of governance and programmes to ascertain the continuing effectiveness of the programmes offered and the management of those programmes. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, through its Council for Training in Ministry, has initiated a review of theological education on a number of occasions in recent years.

The most recent review of the work of Union Theological College reported to the General Assembly in June 2009, and in the intervening period the recommendations of that review have been implemented. The recommendations included:

- The creation of a new permanent post of Executive Principal;
- A new management structure for Union Theological College;
- A new Faculty departmental structure.

This review enabled a holistic and strategic view to be taken of the work of the College, including comparisons with the work of similar colleges. This report also included a review of course requirements for those training for ordained ministry in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

At its February 2019 meeting, the Curriculum Panel recommended to the Management Committee that a regular three-year review of the work of Union Theological College take place. It is proposed that the next review take place in 2021 and a review methodology is to be drafted and approved.

The 2017 meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland affirmed five priorities for the work of its Councils and in the next period each Council, including the Council for Training in Ministry, will demonstrate how it will reflect these priorities in its work. These priorities relate to leadership, fruitfulness, discipleship, mission and community. This will have implications for the training of people for ministry and for the work of Union Theological College and PTFI.