Introduction

The proposed Approvals Process is designed to apply only to programmes/courses which are being adapted in line with the University's Responsive Blended Learning approach for academic year 2020/21 and to other programme/course changes being introduced temporarily in response to COVID-19 for academic year 2020/21.

In addition, the process applies to programmes and courses being withdrawn from 2020/21 due to the portfolio modernisation activity.

Any course or programme modifications which related to the above should be progressed through the University’s standard approvals processes, as should all new programmes.

A generic process for approving Responsive Blended Learning changes is outlined below. There are six exceptions to this generic process:

- a change to the semester in which a course is being offered;
- withdrawal of a course;
- introduction of a replacement course;
- amalgamation of course;
- a change to the start/re-start date of a programme due to COVID-19;
- withdrawal of a programme or a course as a consequence of the portfolio modernisation activity.

These modifications must go through the University’s standard approvals processes so that the changes can be recorded in PAMS and Banner for timetabling and student enrolment purposes. These modifications will be fast-tracked, i.e. changes will be reviewed promptly by the Clerk to USC and those proposals which normally require approval by the University Studies Committee will be considered by the Chairs of UCQS and USC and approved by Chairs’ action. The process and dates for fast-track approval are provided in the COVID-19: Guide to Programme and Course Structure Changes.

At its meeting on 21 April 2020, the University Executive approved that the session dates, including start dates, for Academic Year 2020/21 should remain as published and that adaptations to address the impact of COVID-19 should be made programme/course delivery to enable the session to proceed according to these timescales. The Director of the Learning and Teaching Academy has set out a vision and framework for Responsive Blended Learning, which sets out the University’s approach to learning, teaching and assessment for 2020/21. Both the session dates and the Responsive Blended Learning approach were endorsed and supported by: the Senate at its meeting on 23 April 2020; the Learning and Teaching COVID-19 Contingency Group on 27 April 2020; the University Executive on 5 May 2020; the University Committee for Learning and Teaching on 6 May 2020.

As part of the suite of procedural arrangements which need to be put in place or modified to support the delivery of the Responsive Blended Learning (RBL) framework, this paper sets out the institutional process for approving RBL and other COVID-19 programme and course modifications, which is likewise responsive to the current situation.

Approaches to Approvals: Changing in UK HEI Practices

The UK HE sector as a whole is currently planning for significant modifications to learning, teaching and assessment for Academic Year 2020/21 in anticipation of the continuation of the current situation in some form: social distancing; restrictions on movement and travel; ill-health. The general trend is for blended learning approaches, which will allow online to be combined with face-to-face sessions as and when restrictions are removed. In addition, as social distancing measures remain in place, HEIs are looking at campus reconfiguration in a number of areas, including teaching room capacities.

The sector has recognised that the required changes to learning, teaching and assessment require rapid response in a short period of time and that traditional full programme/course approval processes would be "overly...

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bureaucratic” at a time when academic staff are experiencing significant pressures in repurposing courses and programmes. HEIs are, therefore, putting in place streamlined approval processes which provide institutional oversight and accountability.

Generic Approvals Process for Responsive Blended Learning

In view of the above, it is proposed that a temporary Responsive Blended Learning Approvals process is introduced to expedite approval of the institution-wide programme/course changes required to deliver learning, teaching and assessment through the Responsive Blended Learning (RBL) framework.

The following approach is proposed for AY 2020/21 in relation to RBL changes to learning, teaching and assessment:

1. After the Responsive Blended Learning Framework (RBL) position paper has been considered by UCLT on 6 May 2020, an adapted version, which focuses on the institutional baseline requirements for all courses to be delivered through the RBL approach (via the VLE), should be submitted to the Chair of the University Committee for Quality and Standards and the Chair of the University Studies Committee to take collective Chair’s action in approving the changes for all programmes/courses. In this way, as there is a common RBL baseline for all courses, there would be no need for Schools to produce the standard programme/course modification submissions. Notification of the approval of both Chairs and the adapted RBL paper would be circulated to UCQS and USC for information.

2. By end of July, each School should provide a short narrative (1 page max) of its School-specific approaches to RBL, ie in addition to the institution-wide course baseline requirements, and including any accreditation-specific requirements (the QAA and KHDA must be notified of all such modifications). Such summaries would be submitted to the Chair of the University Committee for Quality and Standards and the Chair of Chair of the University Studies Committee to take collective Chair’s action in approving each School’s approach. Notification of the approval of both Chairs and the collated School summaries would be circulated to UCQS and USC for information and also to Academic Quality. School summaries will be appended to the SFC Quality Report. A proforma for School summaries has been provided as Appendix 2 in the COVID-19: Guide to Programme and Course Structure Changes.

3. Both the institutional RBL position paper and the School summaries will be submitted to the external member of the UCQS (no external has as yet been recruited to the USC) for endorsement, and thereby provide external verification (for QAA purposes) of the University’s approach.

As noted in the introductory section, there are six key exceptions to the generic process for approving Responsive Blended Learning changes (as outlined in bullets 1-3 above). These are critical changes which must be processed expeditiously for AY 2020/21, but require to go through PAMS and so cannot be routed through the generic RBL approval procedure.

Five categories of change are related to temporary course/programme structural modifications undertaken in responses to COVID-19 for AY 2020/21; the sixth category relates to programme/course withdrawals emerging from the portfolio modernisation process. See diagram on the last page for a summary.

The six categories of change which are excluded from the RBL approval process are:

- a change to the semester in which a course is being offered;
- withdrawal of a course;
- introduction of a replacement course;
- amalgamation of courses;
- a change to the start/re-start date of a programme due to COVID-19;
- withdrawal of a programme or a course as a consequence of the portfolio modernisation activity.

These modifications must go through the University’s standard approvals processes so that the changes can be recorded in PAMS and Banner for student enrolment purposes. These modifications, which must be undertaken on PAMS by 27 June 2020, will be fast-tracked, ie changes will be reviewed promptly by the Clerk to USC and those proposals which normally require approval by the University Studies Committee (in this case, programme withdrawals and change of start date) will be considered by the Chairs of UCQS and USC and approved by Chairs’ action. Further details on this process and associated timescales are provided in the COVID-19: Guide to Programme and Course Structure Changes.

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Any other types of programme/course modifications, which are not related to mitigating the impact of COVID-19 or are not withdrawals due to the portfolio review (eg introducing a new programme or new mode of study), will need to be managed through the usual approval process and will go forward for consideration at a scheduled meeting of the USC or, if required, at an additional meeting of USC or by correspondence. Additional meetings of USC or consideration by correspondence might be required in the case of new/modified programmes being offered from 2021/22 as a result of the portfolio modernisation activity.

The above processes are summarised in a diagram on the next page. Please refer to the COVID-19: Guide to Programme and Course Structure Changes for details on how to make changes to programmes and courses.
COVID-19 Approvals Process: 2020/21 Programme and Course Modifications

2020/21 Course delivery/assessment changes due to Responsive Blended Learning

- ONE PAGE NARRATIVE
  Summarise School-specific RBL approaches and accreditation requirements

- School to send summary to K.Wallace, Clerk to USC, by 31 July 2020

- School (+ University) summaries approved by Chairs of USC + UCQS

- School (+ University) summaries sent to USC, UCQS and AQ for information

- School (+ University) summaries sent to UCQS external for endorsement

- School notified of any comments

- Summaries appended to SFC Quality Report

Other COVID-19 Changes to Courses + Programme Structures for 2020/21

- change of semester for courses
- withdrawal of a course
- introduction of replacement course
- amalgamation of courses
- a change to the start/re-start date of a programme

- School to make changes on PAMS/Banner and consult with other Schools by 27 June 2020

- Changes reviewed K.Wallace, Clerk to USC

- Change to programme start dates fast-tracked and approved by Chairs of USC + UCQS (all other changes approved by Schools)

- Schools notified of approval or requests for re-submission

- Changes made live on Banner

Programme/Course Withdrawal from 2020/21 due to Portfolio Review

- Permanent programme or course withdrawals from 2020/21 due to portfolio review

- School to make changes on PAMS/Banner and consult with other Schools by 27 June 2020

- Changes reviewed K.Wallace, Clerk to USC

- Programme withdrawals fast-tracked and approved by Chairs of USC + UCQS (course withdrawals approved by Schools)

- Schools notified of approval or requests for re-submission

- Changes made live on Banner

All other changes to programmes and courses

- New programmes new modes of study, programmes with January start date as permanent change, and all other changes

- School to make modifications on PAMS/Banner as per standard approvals process and by specified deadlines

- Changes reviewed by K.Wallace, Clerk to USC

- Programme proposals to be considered by USC at a scheduled meeting or additional meeting/by correspondence

- Schools notified of approval or requests for re-submission

- Changes made live on Banner

Full details are provided in Summary of 2020/21 Approvals Process and Guide to Making Course Changes 2020/21