Introduction

A temporary, expedited process was introduced last year for approving changes to courses or programmes related to Responsive Blended Learning and for approving changes being introduced temporarily due to the impact of COVID-19. This expedited process remains in place for 2021/22 RBL changes and other COVID modifications.

RBL changes to course delivery and course assessment do not need to go through the University’s standard approvals process.

All structural modifications, both to programmes and courses, must go through the University’s standard approvals processes so that the changes can be recorded in PAMS (and then GCM) and Banner for timetabling and student enrolment purposes. These modifications are due by 30 April 2021 (with Banner updates by 17 May 2021), having been through both the Programme Management Board and the University Studies Committee. If structural changes are unable to meet a scheduled USC meeting, they 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, so that the deadline of 30 April 2021 can be met.

More information on the process for making programme and course structure changes are provided in the COVID-19: Guide to Programme and Course Structure Changes.

At its meeting on 9 March 2021, the University Executive approved that the session dates, including start dates, for Academic Year 2021/22 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 using Responsive Blended Learning again as the institutional approach.

As part of the suite of procedural arrangements which need to be put in place or modified to support the continuing adaptations due to the pandemic and to the continuation of RBL, this paper sets out the institutional process for approving RBL and other COVID-19 programme and course modifications. As per arrangements for 2020/21, the process is again responsive to the current situation.

Approaches to Approvals: Continuing Adaptations

The global HE sector is continuing to adapt in response to the lasting impact of the pandemic in planning for AY2021/22. Organisations such as the Quality Assurance Agency UK, in-country accreditation authorities and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) recognise that learning, teaching and assessment will not return to “normal” next academic year, and that measures introduced for 2020/21 will need to remain in place.

As a consequence, there is an acceptance that traditional full programme/course approval processes would be “overly bureaucratic” at a time when academic staff will have to repurpose courses and programmes once again, and probably in different ways to those undertaken last year, if large numbers of students are expected to return to campus. HEIs are continuing, therefore, with streamlined approval processes which provide institutional oversight and accountability, but allow temporary, rapid changes to be made and implemented.

Approvals Process for RBL and other COVID-related Changes

In view of the above, the streamlined approvals process which was introduced last academic year will continue for 2021/22 changes and so 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 will continue for AY 2020/21 in relation to RBL changes to learning, teaching and assessment:

1. The institutional baseline requirements for all courses to be delivered through the RBL approach (via Canvas), has previously been endorsed by Chair of the University Committee for Quality and Standards and the Chair of the University Studies Committee, having taken 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 is no need for Schools to produce the standard programme/course modification submissions. The 2021/22 version of the institutional baseline, which will be developed by the Learning and Teaching Academic Year Group and approved by the University Committee for Learning and Teaching, will again be submitted to both Chairs for approval by Chair’s action and RBL 2021/22 paper will, thereafter, 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 for 2021/22, i.e. in addition to the institution-wide course baseline requirements, and including any accreditation-specific requirements (the MQA 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 UCLT, 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. The Annual SFC Quality Report is also submitted to QAA Scotland and is considered at the University’s Annual Discussion meeting prior to the start of next academic year; this will provide scope for external verification of the University’s approach. The University’s approach in 2020/21 was commended in its fourth Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR), November 2020, and so it is anticipated that QAAS will continue to be favourable to these measures.

Not all programme and courses modifications can be approved en masse as Responsive Blended Learning changes (as outlined in bullets 1-3 above) to teaching, learning and assessment approaches. These are critical changes which must be processed expeditiously for AY 2021/22, but require to go through PAMS/Banner and so cannot be routed through the generic RBL approval procedure.

There are various categories of changes related to temporary (or indeed permanent) course/programme structural modifications undertaken in responses to COVID-19 for AY 2021/22. See diagram on the last page for a summary.

The categories of change which are excluded from the above 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 programmes or courses as a result of the portfolio modernisation activity;
- introduction of new programmes;
- programmes with permanent January start dates

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 must be undertaken on PAMS by 30 April 2021, with courses having gone through School approval processes and programmes having gone through University approval processes (both business and academic approval, Programme Management Board and University Studies Committee).

If any changes for 2021/22 are not able to meet the scheduled USC meeting, these will be fast-tracked, i.e. changes will be reviewed promptly by the Clerk to USC and 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.
COVID-19 Approvals Process: 2021/22 Programme and Course Modifications

### 2021/22 Course delivery/assessment changes due to Responsive Blended Learning

- **ONE PAGE NARRATIVE**
  - Summarise School-specific RBL approaches and accreditation requirements
- **School**
  - School to send summary to K. Wallace, Clerk to USC, by 30 July 2021
- **School (+ University) summaries**
  - approved by Chairs of USC + UCQS
  - School (+ University) summaries sent to USC, UCQS, UCLT and AQ for information
- **University Summary**
  - Appended to Senate Report
- **School notified of any comments**
- **Summaries appended to SFC Quality Report**

### Other COVID-19 Changes to Courses + Programme Structures for 2021/22

- **School to make changes on PAMS/Banner and consult with other Schools by 30 April 2021**
- **Changes reviewed K. Wallace, Clerk to USC**
- **Change to programme start dates to USC meeting or 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 by 17 May**

### Programme/Course Withdrawal from 2021/22 due to Portfolio Review

- **Permanent programme or course withdrawals from 2021/22 due to portfolio review**
- **School to make changes on PAMS/Banner and consult with other Schools by 30 April 2021**
- **Changes reviewed K. Wallace, Clerk to USC**
- **Programme withdrawals to considered PMB and USC at scheduled meetings/by correspondence (course withdrawals approved by Schools)**
- **Schools notified of approval or requests for re-submission**
- **Changes made live on Banner by 17 May**

### All other changes to programmes and courses for 2021/22 and beyond

- **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 30 April 2021**
- **Changes reviewed by K. Wallace, Clerk to USC**
- **Programme proposals to be considered by PMB and USC at scheduled meetings or additional meeting/by correspondence**
- **Schools notified of approval or requests for re-submission**
- **Changes made live on Banner by 17 May**

Full details are provided in Summary of 2021/22 Approvals Process and Guide to Making Course Changes 2021/22