

Guidance for DAG chairs and members at scrutiny events

1. DAG chairs

- 1.1 The chair plays a key role in approval arrangements and is entrusted to create a spirit of partnership and constructive debate throughout. As chair you will be involved in the Development and Approval Group (DAG) consultative stage, and will remain involved until the course team has addressed any conditions and recommendations. Throughout the academic approval process, there should be a close working partnership with the Centre for Academic Development and Quality (CADQ) DAG officer to assist you in your role.
- 1.2 During the academic approval process, a link is formed between you and CADQ, and through that link a relationship is established with the course team. You can expect to have both formal and informal involvement. Formal duties will involve, for example, chairing the DAG scrutiny event, participating in consultative stage and other key milestone meetings, and helping to decide upon particular approval issues during the process.
- 1.3 Informally you can become a 'critical friend' or 'mentor' to the course team in addition to your formal duties as chair of the DAG. Tasks that are more informal involve advising the course team on certain aspects of course development. Please give such advice if you feel able, but you should make it clear that, as chair, you have no special authority in this respect. This interaction can help in your role as chair in terms of balancing the interests of the DAG and the course team.

The DAG scrutiny event

- 1.4 At the scrutiny event, it is your responsibility – with the CADQ officer – to foster an atmosphere in which: critical professional discussion can take place; opinions can be freely and courteously exchanged; and a fair and balanced judgement can be reached.
- 1.5 Much of the tone and success of the event depends on your ability to enable the DAG to do its work as a team rather than as a set of individuals, and also to bring out the best in the course team who will be speaking to the documentation they have prepared. Although other members of the DAG may feel that it is more appropriate for them to concentrate on certain aspects of the proposal, you will need a thorough overall perspective in order to ensure a balanced agenda.

Preparing for the event

- 1.6 As chair you should:
- a. work closely with the CADQ officer to plan and finalise the details of the event;
 - b. liaise with the CADQ officer (and the course team) in order to resolve any key issues at earlier stages in the iterative process;
 - c. read the documentation thoroughly and identify in advance the main issues to be explored at the event;
 - d. use the DAG's preliminary private meeting to ensure that all DAG members are fully aware of the purpose of the event and understand their roles.
- 1.7 Working closely with the CADQ officer, you should aim to have a planned agenda for the event, which identifies the main topics to be covered. The main purpose of the preliminary private meeting is for DAG members to identify the issues that they wish to pursue with the course team or other groups, and to confirm an agenda for the event.

Managing the event

- 1.8 The skills in chairing an event of this nature often mean striking the right balance between purposefully addressing the agreed agenda and the need to be flexible if unanticipated issues arise. In all cases you should ensure that both the DAG and the course team are fully aware of decisions and direction.
- 1.9 It is good practice to take responsibility for initial introductions of the DAG to the course team. These may often seem ritualistic, but it is important for the tone of the meeting that both DAG and course team know to whom they are speaking.
- 1.10 At the beginning, it is helpful to provide staff with a summary of the major items which the DAG wishes to cover before detailed discussion begins, including drawing the attention of the DAG to any key issues that have been resolved at earlier stages in the iterative process so that these are not rehearsed unnecessarily. It may be that clarification is needed as a result of the outcomes of the Business Evaluation process – the CADQ officer will provide additional guidance and information if necessary.
- 1.11 On rare occasions where an event is complex enough to demand separate sub-meetings chaired by other DAG members, you should ensure that the sub-chair also has an agreed agenda and that the decisions of the sub-DAG are accurately reported for inclusion in subsequent sessions.
- 1.12 It is important that the atmosphere pervading the event is supportive and non-confrontational while being rigorous and fair; otherwise the process will be de-valued in the eyes of both the course team and the DAG. Simple devices such as an informal layout of the room and the interspersing of DAG and course team members around the table can help establish a constructive atmosphere.
- 1.13 As chair, you should be vigilant in keeping the flow of discussion to the timescale indicated by the agenda but at the same time alert to any member of the DAG or course team who may wish to contribute. Be prepared to intervene if the discussion is being diverted or trivialised, if 'hobby horses' are being ridden or if the discussion

is stuck on what is essentially a difference of opinion. Also, try to ensure that everyone who wishes to speak has an opportunity to do so.

- 1.14 On occasions where an event includes a meeting with students, you should be alert to those opinions that fairly represent the students as a whole, and those that may be views of one individual.
- 1.15 It is beneficial to summarise the discussions at regular intervals. This helps the DAG to keep a collective position. In particular, you should seek consensus on the conditions and recommendations arising from the final private meeting.
- 1.16 The University allows nominated staff representatives to observe private meetings of DAGs (except meetings with students). If, however, in the opinion of the DAG, the attendance of observers at any point is likely to inhibit discussion or the formulation of decisions, the chair has the discretion to ask observers to leave until recalled.
- 1.17 At the final private meeting, the chair should guide the DAG towards a decision that is appropriate and clear. You should ensure that all DAG members have an opportunity to contribute in terms of general satisfaction and specific points - all DAG members (including CADQ officers and students, where participating) are of equal standing. If there are conditions, they should be carefully thought through and stated. Where divergent views emerge, remind DAG members of the material factors to be taken into account and ask for a further round of comments or suggested compromises to resolve these.
- 1.18 The DAG's decisions should be explained briefly but clearly to the course team in a feedback session.
- 1.19 In reporting back, you should ensure that points of praise and instances of good practice encountered are given due weight as well as points of criticism, and that criticisms are stated constructively. As chair, you should not normally invite comments on the decision or discussions on the outcomes between the course team and the DAG at this stage; only points of clarification should be offered - formal arrangements exist where there is any contention of the decision.

After the event

- 1.20 The main responsibility of the chair after the event is to liaise with the CADQ officer to ensure that the final report is accurate and fair in all respects. Following this, the chair plays a key role in ensuring that any conditions imposed are met satisfactorily by the agreed dates. The CADQ officer will inform you of progress and liaise with you as necessary.

2. DAG members

- 2.1 DAG members are selected to provide the expertise and experience to enable the course to be scrutinised effectively. Collectively the DAG may have both internal and external members, student members, subject experts and non-subject experts, and members with academic and professional perspectives. It is important that the DAG works together as a team.

Prior to the event

- 2.2 As a DAG member, you need to read the event documentation thoroughly to familiarise yourself with the University's policies, procedures and criteria for quality, the purpose and possible outcomes of the event, and the details of the course(s) under scrutiny.
- 2.3 If possible, you should submit comments in advance on issues of particular interest or concern. This assists the chair and the CADQ officer to seek advice in advance of the event on any serious matters. Contact should be with the CADQ officer for this purpose.
- 2.4 The private meeting of the DAG before the event is the point at which you will have an opportunity to raise issues to be included in the agenda. The chair will probably wish to allocate to individual DAG members responsibility for leading on particular topics at this point. The chair will also draw the attention of the DAG to any key issues that have been resolved at earlier stages in the iterative process so that these are not rehearsed unnecessarily during the scrutiny event.

During the event

- 2.5 DAG members are asked to work with and through the chair in discussions. Sympathy with the chair's tasks and appreciation of his/her role in keeping the pace of the meeting matched to the size of the agenda may be needed.
- 2.6 At the event, the DAG will be trying to clarify areas of doubt and to give the course team a chance to explain and justify their proposals. Creating an atmosphere for genuine dialogue between the DAG and the course team is all-important. Questioning should be rigorous but fair and consistent. In particular, you will need to:
- explore discrepancies between what is written and what is said;
 - seek clarification and confirmation when required;
 - listen as well as ask;
 - concentrate on major rather than minor issues;
 - participate in a collaborative manner.
- 2.7 What matters most in approval is that the course team has a genuine commitment to the course, have the experience and ability to run it successfully, and that the course will meet (or is meeting in respect of a Periodic Collaborative Review) its aims and outcomes at the appropriate level and standard.

- 2.8 While the DAG needs to work as a team, you may want to focus your attention on particular aspects of the proposal based on your experience or expertise. For example:
- the chair and external academic peers may want to concentrate particularly on the curriculum (and the module specifications);
 - internal DAG members may wish to concentrate on issues such as course rationale, teaching and assessment strategies;
 - student members may consider the student experience of, for example, optionality, assessment and learning opportunities;
 - external practitioners or professional experts may explore relevance to the world of work and/or professional practice.
- 2.9 In designing and running a course there are many decisions to be made. The course team may not have made the same decisions that you as a DAG member would have made, but provided those decisions are rational and defensible and do not compromise standards, there is no reason for a DAG to stand in their way.
- 2.10 At the approval of new courses in particular, there is an inevitable temptation to re-design what is being proposed. Course teams should always welcome constructive suggestions for ways in which the course might be improved, but it is not the function of a DAG to re-design the course. Suggestions about course design are most appropriately discussed at the consultative stage.

After the event

- 2.11 As a DAG member, you will be asked to:
- check and agree the DAG report following the event;
 - take part in the scrutiny of responses to conditions and/or recommendations made as appropriate;
 - provide further inputs if further events or activities are necessary within the iterative process.

3. Indicative questions for a DAG scrutiny event

- 3.1 The following questions are a guide to some of the things that DAG members may want to reflect on when reviewing the documentation. This list is by no means exhaustive and should be seen as a prompt for the kinds of things that would be useful to focus on. In preparation for the scrutiny event, it may be sensible to allocate specific areas to DAG members for consideration.
- 3.2 Members are asked to consider the general style and clarity of the documentation. Course specifications are publicly available documents and need to present clear, concise and accessible summaries of the course's key features. Module specifications should present information which is consistent with the rest of the documentation.

Standards

- Do course outcomes fit the course aims and University generic level descriptors?
- Is there appropriate reference to Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) subject benchmark statement mapping and to any other external requirements and external reference points (including external examiner consultation)?

Curriculum design and content

- Is the curriculum design coherent within and across levels to support student progression?
- Are interim level or award outcomes specified?
- Does the curriculum prepare students for the world of work? Are there, for example, employer links informing the curriculum, careers education, or opportunities for work-based learning?
- Is placement learning clearly set out and consistent with University policy (where relevant)?
- How does staff research inform the curriculum?
- Is sustainability a feature of the curriculum?
- Does the curriculum integrate international content and, if appropriate, does the course facilitate international mobility?

Learning and teaching

- Are the learning and teaching methods appropriate for (a) the award? (b) delivering the learning outcomes?
- Are all course learning outcomes taught and assessed within individual modules? (refer to curriculum map)
- Will the learning and teaching methods ensure that students can progress through the levels of the course?
- What provision is there for e-learning?

Assessment

- Are the assessment methods appropriate for the award?
- Will the assessment methods adequately assess course outcomes?
- Is it clear that the assessment regulations conform to the University's Common Assessment Regulations – if not, is the proposed variation appropriate and justified?
- Is there a clear assessment strategy for the course?
- Are assessment tasks appropriate and well balanced?
- What are the course's standards for assessment feedback and moderation?

Admissions

- Are the admission requirements and procedures appropriate for the award?
- Are the accreditation of prior learning (APL) arrangements consistent with University and School policy?

Student support

- Are there appropriate plans for academic and pastoral support for students?
- Are there likely to be any particular needs of this group of students? How will these be addressed?
- How will students engage with career planning and employability?
- Are there appropriate plans in place for student induction?

Equality and diversity

- Are there any equality and diversity considerations arising from this approach to teaching and learning, assessment and curriculum design?

Learning resources

- Are the learning resources (physical resources and staffing) sufficient to deliver the course?
- Are there specific plans for staff Continuing Professional Development (CPD) where needed?
- Are structures in place to support peer observation of teaching?
- Is e-learning a feature of the course and is there indication of the course's intention to develop this?

Quality management

- Are appropriate systems in place to ensure that the course is monitored and evaluated?
- For collaborative provision, is there evidence that the course team is aware of the specific aspects of quality management that are required for collaborative provision?
- Is there evidence that the course team has considered how to best collate evaluation from students?

Policy owner
CADQ

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