

University of Suffolk

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR STUDENTS INVOLVED IN STUDENT MEETINGS AT COURSE VALIDATION AND RE-APPROVAL EVENTS

These guidance notes are intended to provide information for students who are due to take part in a student meeting at an event to either approve a new course or re-approve an existing course.

There are two forms of course approval: 'validation' for proposed new courses and 're-approval' for existing courses. Courses are normally reviewed and re-approved at least once every five years.

The (re)approval processes are used to ensure:

- ✓ that courses provide students with a high quality learning experience, comparable to similar courses at other universities
- ✓ that there is a sound rationale for offering the course, for example in terms of student and employer demand
- ✓ that the course is designed and delivered in a way that supports equality and diversity
- ✓ that the course is described to students and other stakeholders in a clear, accurate and complete manner (for example via course handbooks)
- ✓ that there are sufficient resources (including staff) to effectively deliver the course
- ✓ that the course complies with the University's academic regulations
- ✓ that the course meets national expectations, including those set by the Quality Assurance Agency and any professional bodies.

Why is my involvement important?

We are keen to capture students' views on their course and the way in which we support your learning and development. This is so that we can make sure you have the best possible experience here at the University of Suffolk. We value students' opinions and want to ensure that students are able to take an active role in developing and improving our courses.

The meeting with students is often the most valuable part of the course approval or re-approval event, as we get to hear what it's actually like to experience the course on a day-to-day basis, rather than just reading about it in documentation.

What happens at a course (re)approval event?

In the months leading up to the course validation or re-approval event, the course team will undertake a lot of preparatory work and will prepare documentation that describes their

proposed new or existing course. In addition, for re-approval events the course team will produce a self-evaluation document that reflects on how well the course has operated over the last few years and how they see the course developing in the future.

A panel is formed to consider the course under review. There are typically around 7-8 members of the panel, including teaching staff from other areas, administrative staff, students and external representatives (typically an academic within the same subject area from another university and an employer representative). There is also a panel secretary, who will be happy to answer any queries you have on the day.

The panel meets at the University or, for partner institutions within the Learning Network, at the relevant College. During the event, the panel gets a chance to view facilities, meet with students and discuss the course with the course team. At the end of the event, the panel reaches a decision about whether the course should be approved or re-approved. The panel also has the opportunity to commend positive aspects of the course and/or identify areas where there is room for improvement. The course team is expected to revise the course in light of any recommendations by the panel, and this is overseen centrally by the University.

What is expected of me?

Course validation and re-approval panels find it incredibly useful to meet with students, to get a real feel for how existing courses are operating and how they are viewed by students. For proposed new courses, it can also be very helpful for the panel to hear a student perspective on any existing modules that will form part of the new course.

During the student meeting, members of the panel will ask you a range of questions about your experiences on your course and within the University more broadly. For example, they might ask you:

- whether your course meets your needs and expectations
- whether the way in which you are taught and assessed is effective
- whether timetables and workloads are manageable
- whether you have adequate access to resources (e.g. labs, computers, the library)
- whether you feel that the course will prepare you well for future employment or future study
- whether information provided to you about your course (for example in course handbooks) is clear and accessible
- whether you get useful and timely feedback on your work from members of the course team
- whether you feel there is sufficient support (both academic and personal) to help you during your time at the University
- whether the course team seeks your views on the course on a regular basis, and how effectively they respond to your feedback
- what you like most about your course
- what you think could be improved.

Although it can seem a daunting prospect to meet with the panel, please do not feel intimidated. The panel will be keen to hear your views and to put you at ease. Please speak freely and honestly about your experiences on the course, highlighting any aspects of the course that you like and any areas where you think there is room for improvement. If the panel does not ask questions about something that you feel is important, do not be afraid to bring it to their attention.

Your feedback will be treated with discretion and your views will not be individually attributed to you in either the written report of the event or in verbal feedback to the course team.

What's in it for me?

Firstly, you will be helping to improve the course for yourself and your fellow students. You get to have your views listened to and taken seriously, and you will have a real input into decisions that are made that will affect your course.

You will get to meet new people, and it will also provide an opportunity to gain new skills and enhance your CV. In particular, it's a real chance to put your communication skills into action.

Where can I go to for further advice?

If you would like further information or advice on taking part in a course (re)approval event, please get in touch with the University of Suffolk Students' Union, who will be happy to advise you or point you in the right direction of someone who can help. Their contact details are available at www.uosunion.org.

Further information on course (re)approval processes is available from the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team. If you would like a member of the team to give you a briefing, if you would like clarification on your role or on how the processes work, or if you simply want an opportunity to chat about how you can best contribute to the processes, please feel free to contact the Head of Quality Enhancement, Mark Lyne (email m.lyne@uos.ac.uk).