University of Suffolk

COURSE VALIDATION GUIDELINES

These guidelines are intended to help course teams to prepare for validation events for new courses. While the main focus is preparation of the documentation for the validation event, we also provide an outline of the overall process exploring preparation for, the format of, and the activities that follow the validation event.

This guidance should be read alongside other documents and the templates provided to support course teams preparing for validations, which are available on the course approval, modification and review page on the University website:

Procedure
- Procedure for the validation of new courses

Guidance
- Guide to preparing course handbooks
- Course handbooks: communicating your learning, teaching and assessment strategy
- Guide to writing module specifications

Templates
- Validation document
- Course handbook
- Definitive course record
- Module specification
- Learning outcome mapping
- Staff CVs
- HEAR description template
- Assessment regulations variation request form

Contents

1. Overview of the validation process

The primary reference for teams developing a new course and preparing for validation is the University's procedure for the validation of new courses. This document is designed to complement the procedure, with the intention of providing guidance for course teams on the course validation process.

Often, preparation for validation events can degrade into a document preparation task where the single focus of the team is the preparation of the material for submission to the validation panel. While this is an important task that takes significant effort, the purpose of validations is to ensure that what is delivered to students, how they are assessed and supported, and how the course is resourced, is appropriate to the subject area, the course's context, and to the wider environment in which the students, staff, and external course links exist.

Where a new course is being devised for validation, the team will need to take time to identify or review the intended aims of the course, consult with industrial, business or community stakeholders and experts, and review subject specific academic and professional standards. These processes will then inform course design processes that follow.

Validation preparation

The course team is expected to consult widely to inform the design and development of the course. This work will result in the production of documents for submission to the validation panel. Minimally, these will include the validation document and a student handbook. In addition, teams delivering work-based learning or including placements in their proposed programme will also prepare a work placement handbook. Other documents that the team believe would be useful to the validation panel may also be submitted.

The Validation and Exams team are available to provide guidance on document formatting, and members of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team are happy to meet to discuss aspects of the course design and implementation, particularly with respect to the development of the course's learning, teaching and assessment strategy. Course teams are encouraged to liaise at an early stage in order to make best use of this service. Course teams are also encouraged to liaise with Learning Services staff to explore opportunities to integrate digital literacy into the curriculum, with the Digital Learning Specialists within the team able to advise on e-learning approaches and associated assessment strategies.

A schedule for document submission and review will be drawn up by the Validation and Exams team along with the validation schedule. This will include a requirement for a draft set of the documents to be submitted in advance of the final submission deadline. For some proposed new courses, a phase one validation event will be staged (see next section for further details); for other events, the documents will be reviewed by a member of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team. As a result of either review process, the course team will be provided with feedback to consider before final submission of the documentation.

The validation event

Validation events normally take place at the location at which the course will be delivered and will take the majority of a day (typically from 9.30am through to 3.45pm). The validation panel will be usually be chaired by an academic from University of Suffolk, and will include:

- an external subject specific expert
- an employer or sector representative
- an internal subject specific academic representative
- Head of Quality Enhancement or their representative
- a student representative.

During the event, the validation panel will be scheduled to have meetings with students currently studying related local provision (where possible) and with the course team (including further employer representatives where appropriate). They may also be given a tour of the facilities relevant to the proposed course's delivery.

Discussions with the course team should take the form of a peer-to-peer conversation about the course, rather than taking a more confrontational nature: the validation process is designed to enable the panel to provide advice and support to the course team in order to create the best course possible.

At the end of the validation event, the course team will be invited to receive feedback from the panel in which they will be informed:

- whether the course has been approved for delivery.
- of any conditions that the team must meet prior to approval being ratified
- of any requirements - actions that must be taken by the team but not necessarily before approval is ratified
- of any recommendations that the validation panel would like the team to consider
- of those aspects of the course that the validation panel felt were worthy of commendation and wider dissemination.

The course team will normally receive a written version of the feedback within five working days of the event and a copy of the full validation report within four weeks.

After the validation event

If the proposed course is approved for delivery by the panel, the course team will need to act on the feedback from the validation panel by a given deadline, usually agreed at the end of the validation event. This will usually result in the submission of a revised set of documents along with a formal response in which each of the conditions, requirements and recommendations are addressed, and any resultant changes explicitly detailed. Usually following this, and subject to approval of the Chair of the validation panel, approval for the course is granted.

2. Support for course teams preparing for validation events

There are three specific mechanisms to provide additional support for course teams developing new provision:

- *External academic support:* In order to provide expert guidance for course teams in areas where we have limited or no current provision in the subject area, academics from other institutions should be identified to provide guidance and support to the teams undertaking course design and development.

- *Mentor support:* For a number of courses, a mentor from within the University will be allocated to provide the course team with support from an experienced subject related academic member of staff. This mentor will provide advice and guidance on course design and development, and on the validation process and associated expectations.

- *Phase one event:* For some courses, a phase one event will be required whereby draft course documentation will be reviewed by a small panel. Informed by this review, a conversation about the documents and the course team's preparations for validation will be held. This is expected to enable the identification of essential actions to be completed before submission of final documents, the provision of supporting feedback, and the formation of a judgement on the readiness of the team to undergo validation.

The decision on which of the three mechanisms should be implemented for each validation will made through the Quality Committee, normally when the relevant course proposal form is considered.

External academic support

The external academic advisor will be asked to provide feedback at two stages in the course development process:

i) At an early stage they will be asked to comment on an outline of the course's proposed modular structure and design, course learning outcomes and the proposed approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. A draft definitive course record may be provided and the external academic should comment on alignment with any relevant external reference points including QAA subject benchmark statements and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).

ii) The second stage of consultation should involve a review of draft validation documents from a subject perspective, including the course handbook and module specifications, taking into consideration the criteria that will be used by the validation panel.

It is expected that external academic advisors will provide a brief report on their interactions with the course team to the Head of Quality Enhancement, which will be provided to the validation panel as evidence of the course team's consultation and development activity.

Mentor support

The course team should make contact with their nominated mentor to agree the specific nature of support that they require. It is expected that the support provided by mentors will be suited to the particular needs of each course team, but typically may include:

- guidance on the activities involved in developing a new course proposal including:
    - the use of subject and qualification benchmarks
    - the expectations of University of Suffolk policies and frameworks
    - the identification of, and consultation with, relevant stakeholders and external academics
- the opportunity to seek and receive opinions on particular aspects of the planned course provision
- guidance on the development and formatting of documentation in preparation for the validation event
- explanations of, and support through, the validation processes
- support for the team in responding to conditions, requirements and recommendations following their event.

Phase one event

A phase one event should be held at least four weeks before the deadline for final submission of validation documents to the Validation and Exams team. The phase one event should be organised by the academic department or partner college developing the provision. This will involve:

i) The establishment of a panel consisting of:
- a senior academic (chair of panel)[1]
- two academics with subject familiarity[2] or from related disciplines
- a member of Learning Services
- a member of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team[3]

In addition, a clerk to the panel should be identified to record the meeting and provide a report promptly following the event.

ii) The agreement of a mutually convenient date and venue for the phase one event, allowing all panel members and key members of the course team to attend.

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[1] This should be a member of academic staff with previous experience of validation preparation nominated by the Head of Department or Head of HE.
[2] One of the two academics should be based at within the academic department or partner college that will be delivering the proposed course. The other academic may be internal or external to the University of Suffolk.
[3] As nominated by the Head of Quality Enhancement.

iii) Communication of panel membership and the date and venue of the event to the Validation and Exams team.

iv) Submission of a full set of draft documents as would be required for the actual validation event. These should be provided in electronic form to the Validation and Exams team for distribution to the panel at least two weeks in advance of the phase one event.

v) Conduct of the phase one event, which should not normally take more than two hours. Panel members should have had an opportunity to consider documentation in advance in order to identify and gaps or areas for improvement. While it is up to the panel chair to determine the actual format of the event, it is expected that it would normally be consist of four elements:

- a panel meeting where the key issues each panel member has identified are noted, and those that the panel wish to explore with the course team are agreed

- a meeting between the panel and key members of the course team and management to discuss the issues identified and agree any steps to needed to enhance the submission

- a brief meeting of the panel where an overall judgement is made on how well prepared the team is for the validation event. The panel should agree any actions that are considered necessary to ensure that the team is ready for the validation event. If the panel has any concerns regarding the readiness of the course to progress to validation, these should be brought to the attention of the Head of Quality Enhancement immediately.

- the Chair of the panel should meet briefly with the course team to summarise the panel's findings.

vi) Following the completion, a report on the panel's findings should be produced and shared with the course team, the panel members and the Validation and Exams team.

3.   Preparation of validation documentation by the course team

While, as stated above, the preparation of the documents for submission should be the result of the course team's development activities rather than forming the totality of their efforts, considering how the team should prepare for a validation is best explored by looking at what information will be needed within the documents. In this section we look at the elements of the submission that will need to be prepared, clarifying the nature of the information required, the considerations the team will need to make in their preparations, and the formats in which the information may be helpfully presented. Throughout, we present examples (real and fictional) to illustrate the discussion and to provide course teams with examples they can consider and select from, revise and then include in their documents.

The validation document template should be followed in order to ensure that all required information is included. However, teams can expand on the template, adding sections that

explore subject or sector specific issues. Similarly, a course handbook template is provided, with accompanying guidance on its preparation.

The development of the course should be informed and guided by relevant academic and sector specific benchmarks and guidelines. All teams should identify the relevant subject benchmark statement(s) for their course to inform their course design. These statements are available on the [QAA website](). Similarly, the [Framework for HE Qualifications (FHEQ)]() and relevant [qualification characteristics statements]() should be consulted to ensure that the course is pitched at the appropriate level. Sector specific bodies and organisations may also provide reference points for course provision and, if these exist, reference to them must be made within the validation documents.

In 2014 the QAA published [guidance on the integration of sustainable development into higher education curricula](). Course teams are advised to consult with this guidance in order to inform consideration of how their provision might best enable students to be equipped with the knowledge and understanding, skills and attributes needed to work and live in a way that safeguards environmental, social and economic wellbeing, both in the present and for future generations.

Course rationale

Courses do not exist in a vacuum but are provided for a purpose in relation to the world outside the educational deliverer. The rationale is an opportunity for the course team to provide reasons why the course should be provided by the University of Suffolk and identify how both the University and the wider community could gain through the provision. Looking at a course, the course team might identify a number of ways in which it will or does interact with a wider community. For example, the course may:

- meet an identified employment demand or need (perhaps as evidenced by recent employment sector or regional reports)

- fill a regional gap in educational provision or offer provision that is not met elsewhere locally

- provide a specific progression route for an existing University of Suffolk course

- be popular with local school leavers, having a history of good sustained recruitment

- enable students to progress towards or access higher level provision at the institution or elsewhere

- provide a mechanism by which local employers can ensure their employees are kept up-to-date and up-skilled

- act as a communication device to ensure local employers or sector communities share and develop good practice and policies through their involvement in and links to the course delivery team and the students.

Identifying these types of relationships with the wider community is not always easy for a course team to do fully – often there are valuable links that are never explicitly acknowledged but form a vital resource to the course or to the community. It may be worth

the team taking time out to consider who would notice if the course were not to be validated, or who would be likely to be interested if a proposed course were to be advertised.

In developing a rationale for a course, the course team should endeavour to paint a picture of the course, depicting it in terms of the nature of the anticipated students, the educational approaches and priorities to be employed, and highlighting any distinctive characteristics of the course. Where possible, the team should note how the course provision relates to the University of Suffolk's vision statement and any other relevant faculty, departmental or partner college vision statements and/or strategic plans.

Foundation degree course documentation should include consideration of how the proposed course is effective in relation to the defining characteristics of a Foundation degree as set out in the QAA Foundation Degree Characteristics Statement. This is usually done by exploring each of the seven distinctive features of Foundation degrees (as listed below) and including further discussion on how the proposed content, learning, teaching and assessment aligns with the characteristics statement:

- design
- employer involvement
- accessibility
- progression

- flexibility
- partnership
- monitoring and review

The QAA Master's Degree Characteristics Statement briefly sets out characteristics and forms of Master's degrees. Where such provision is being proposed, this statement should be explicitly discussed, exploring why the course team believe the proposed provision aligns with the expectations in the statement.

The rationale acts as a summary for many issues that are explored in more detail elsewhere in the document, and so a fairly brief and concise style is usually appropriate.

Course aims

Course aims form part of the course handbook, and should be aligned with the course rationale. The course aims are a series of statements of intent for the provision. They should not only relate to the students and their experience, but should also explore how the course will interact more widely. Appropriate aims may state how the course is intended to meet wider needs, disseminate sector information and practice, provide for a particular market, or enable updating of knowledge and skills locally or beyond. Where appropriate to the course, it is worth attempting to include at least one aim that says something about each of the following:

- The range, characteristics or profile of students that the course will aim to provide for. For example, '*to provide a means for local students to access employment in the Games industry*'; '*to enable nursing practitioners to extend and certify their academic abilities and skills;* '*to give those unfamiliar with higher education an opportunity to explore their potential to succeed';* or '*to provide apprentices in the Construction industry with an academic qualification*'.

- The course content. For example, '*to provide students with a broad understanding of the range of practices and processes involved with managing people within organisations*'; '*to enable students to explore specialist areas of content pertinent to their individual interests and career aspirations*'; or '*to develop professionally competent social workers who are able to make a positive and constructive contribution to addressing the diverse personal and social needs of the community*'.

- Students' development of generic or transferable skills. For example, '*to enable students to develop a range of cognitive, analytical, critical and reflective skills*'; or '*to provide students with opportunities to develop and demonstrate their transferable skills*'.

- Sector specific priorities. For example, '*to promote principled, value-led and ethical practice*'; '*to emphasise the need for practitioners to engage with CPD meaningfully*'; '*to improve the availability of key ICT skills amongst landscape and garden designers in the region';* and '*to promote the cultural and social value of artistic expression in the local area*'.

- Linking to professional bodies, employers, and local communities. For example, '*to prepare students for admission to the General Social Care Register for social workers and professional practice*'; '*to develop links between academic and professional practitioners*'; and '*to disseminate developments in theory and practice to local practitioners*'.

Learning outcomes

As with course aims, learning outcomes are presented in the course handbook. The learning outcomes are the central definition of a course – they define the purpose of the course by stating what the final qualification's award actually means in terms of student attainment. While the student experience is important, the qualification is defined by the learning outcomes: the knowledge and theory the students must demonstrate awareness of or competence in, the skills and techniques that they show ability to employ, and the level at which all this is applied and assessed.

Consequently the team should aim to agree the course's learning outcomes as early as possible within the course development process. To do this, they will need to:

- take into account the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and relevant qualification characteristics statements to ensure that the course is pitched at the appropriate level

- take into account the relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statement. The course team will not normally duplicate the contents of the benchmark statements: the course being developed will usually be more focussed than the more generic subject benchmark, not exploring the complete range of subjects and specialist areas that are associated with the subject area. However, course teams should ensure that there is a clear relationship between course learning outcomes and the threshold standards provided by relevant subject benchmark statement(s), and that this relationship is made explicit in the documentation.

- integrate professional body or sector specific guidelines

- identify the subject specialisms that will be included in the curriculum

- consider how the course will introduce and develop students' knowledge and skills. In some courses, the curriculum is knowledge and skills dominated such that each module looks at disparate parts of the curriculum and so each will have their own learning outcomes allocated to them. Other courses may propose learning outcomes indicating the ability to use generic skill sets in different contexts or application areas, and then have a number of modules in which these are employed and assessed. For example, some arts based courses may find that having a limited spine of core skill development modules allows them to explore and assess students' ability to apply the key subject skills. Then students will select from a variety of modules where these skills are applied as they judge best suits their own subject exploration. Thus many learning outcomes are assessed in the core modules, and learning outcomes where students demonstrate their ability to select and apply the skills in different arenas are assessed in the other modules.

Learning outcomes should be devised to describe the abilities that students will have demonstrated to successfully complete each level of each named course (and, where appropriate, each pathway). Award learning outcomes (those set for the final year of the course stating what a student will have demonstrated to achieve graduate status) should be presented in a form that enables both students and potential employers to gain a clear understanding of students' achievement and abilities.

The number of learning outcomes for each level or award should not be too high. In general, courses should aim to capture the learning expected of their students at a given level or for an award through between 6 to 10 fairly general statements, rather than defining the learning in more explicit detail. This allows more flexibility in course development and makes the statements more accessible to students and external stakeholders.

Where a number of related courses are grouped in a single validation, it may be appropriate to structure presentation of the learning outcomes to emphasise how some are common to all courses and some are particular to a single course or pathway.

As noted above, the course level learning outcomes should articulate with both the external reference points including the FHEQ and relevant subject benchmark statements or any sector skills statements. Course teams will also need to ensure that level learning outcomes align with the course's module learning outcomes, and demonstrate this through a mapping table showing how the modules contribute to students' demonstration of each of the award's learning outcomes. Course teams should complete the learning outcome mapping document at an early stage of course development to ensure the appropriateness of each award's proposed learning outcomes. The mapping process should also ensure that where courses offer module choice, all successful students will demonstrate their achievement of all their course's overall learning outcomes at each level.

Exit awards

Many courses enable students to be awarded named exit awards to certify achievement where students are unable to complete the full award (typical exit awards include Certificates

of HE, Diplomas of HE, Postgraduate Certificates and Postgraduate Diplomas). If this is the intention for the proposed course, each exit award should be explained through the provision of a clear specification of the learning outcomes that achievement of the award indicates the student has demonstrated. For Certificates of HE and Diplomas of HE, these will often be the appropriate level learning outcomes, but for other exit awards, specific sets of learning outcomes that differentiate the proposed awards from the full awards will need to be specified.

The minimum achievement required to enable a student to receive the exit award (in terms of the amount and level of academic credit that the student must have achieved and the mandatory modules that must have been passed) should be in accordance with the Framework and Regulations for the relevant type of award.

Course structure

The structure of a course is effectively the collection of modules that students will study, along with any further study activity such as placements or work-based learning. This should be presented clearly, making obvious where any aspects of the course are mandatory or optional.

Course teams are expected to designate all modules as either 'mandatory', 'requisite' or 'optional':

- Mandatory modules must be taken and passed by all students, and cannot be subject to module condonement in the event of marginal failure.

- Requisite modules must be taken by all students. However, they can be subject to module condonement at Level 4 only. Additionally, if a student was to fail a requisite module twice (and thus not be permitted further opportunities to take it), they may be able to take an alternative optional module at the same or a higher level to gain sufficient credit to achieve their intended award.

- Optional modules are ones that students may choose to take, usually selecting their preference from a range of optional modules. They can be subject to module condonement at Level 4 only.

In general, modules that form the only opportunities for students to demonstrate course learning outcomes, and those that provide knowledge or skills essential to higher level mandatory or requisite modules, should be designated as mandatory.

The various Frameworks and Regulations for taught programmesset out further expectations with respect to course structures. In particular, all honours degree courses should include a 40 credit mandatory dissertation or major research project at Level 6 and a mandatory 20 credit research methods module at Level 5. Similarly, Foundation degrees should have a mandatory 20 credit research methods module at Level 5 and a 20 credit personal development skills module at Level 4 (as a requisite module). Foundation degrees should also include a minimum of 40 credits of work-related learning across Levels 4 and 5 (ideally 20 credits per level) as mandatory modules. Both Master's and Postgraduate Diploma

courses are required to include a mandatory 20 credit research methods module, and a Master's should include a mandatory 60 credit dissertation or research project module.

The course team will have discussions on what knowledge and skills should be included in the course, making decisions that will lead them to the proposed curriculum presented in the validation documents. These discussions may be influenced or guided by a number of external factors such as feedback from employers or subject experts and practitioners, subject benchmarks or sector guidance documents, and the nature and content of similar courses within University of Suffolk or at other HE institutions.

In presenting the proposed course structure, the team should make explicit how they have arrived at their proposal. Where the proposed course will share modules with other courses that are not part of the validation, this should be noted explicitly. How such modules will be integrated into the new course should be discussed, along with exploration of how they may be contextualised for students on the proposed new course. Teams may have identified key themes for their course that are particularly relevant for the local context or reflect the team's experience and expertise. How such themes have driven or determined the curriculum design, and how this impacts on the student experience, should be explored too. Explicit reference should be made to course decisions that have been determined by specific guidelines or consultations.

To support the presentation of module structure in a tabular format, it is helpful to provide a few paragraphs that explore how a student will experience the course. A description of the roles of each level of study in the development of the students may be appropriate[4], and text explaining how the various modules' content will develop the students' understanding and skills, prepare them for later study, and link into any work-based or placement activities, is also valuable.

Teams should think carefully about the best manner of presenting the module structure that is proposed. Where there is little module choice for students, this is not a big issue. However, where there is significant choice or where there are identified specialisation pathways available for students, these should be presented so that the choices are clear. In validations where a number of different courses are being validated together, effort should be made to ensure each course's individual structure is easy to pick out. This can be effectively achieved using tables and colours. Ideally, any unusual or specific pre-requisite relationships between modules should also be clearly indicated. Any modules that involve or require students to embark on work-based activities should also be indicated. The provision of a delivery timetable along with module structure depictions is encouraged: these can add valuable information, showing the order of module delivery, and making more explicit the experience that part-time students can expect.

Requirements for progression between levels of study should be in accordance with the Framework and Regulations for the relevant type of award. In the course's module specifications, the team should also indicate any specific pre-requisites for each module (i.e.

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[4] For example, taken from a Foundation degree: "These modules are of two levels: 4 and 5. In general, the level 4 modules focus on giving the students a thorough grounding in the skills and concepts of the subject area, while the level 5 modules encourage the students to expand their knowledge and skills, combining separate elements to produce complete solutions and encouraging students to evaluate solutions in a broader context."

modules that must be successfully completed before a student can progress to a subsequent, related module). If the course team intend to include specific assessment rules to, for example, limit progression or take account of professional body requirements, they will need to obtain approval for such a 'variation' from the standard Framework and Regulations for the relevant type of award (using a variation request form). The Validation and Exams team will be happy to advise course teams on this and should be contacted at the earliest opportunity to allow this process to be completed prior to the validation event. Any variations should be clearly set out in the course handbook.

Module specifications

The module specification template should be used for all modules within the course, with separate guidance available on their preparation (see the course approval, modification and review page on the University website).

Within the course handbook, there should be a specification for each module that will form part of the course. Teams should take care to ensure that where a module is delivered in different forms (for example, to some students with a work-place element and to others without), that this is made clear. Usually this is best achieved by providing two different module specifications, one for each. Where modules which form part of another course, and so have already been validated, are being presented as part of the proposal, this should be made clear within the validation document.

It is wise for a course team to adopt a consistent approach to developing module specifications. Some of the presentation can be done in a variety of styles, and to have too much variety in approach makes the course look disparate and lacking in cohesion. One possible approach is for one team member to write a sample specification that the team considers before embarking on their own writing tasks, adopting a similar style.

Where many courses are being validated at the same time, with modules shared between the courses, teams may choose to present the module specifications in a separate document forming a supplement to be distributed with each of the different course handbooks. In such situations, the supplementary document should make it clear which modules are relevant to which course, possibly through grouping specifications by course relevance.

Learning, teaching and assessment strategy

Learning and teaching is the major substance of a course, and should also be aligned to and complemented by the assessment proposed for the course. In the section above looking at course structure, the team will have discussed how the curriculum enables the students to develop their knowledge and skills over the course, possibly noting the different stages of development that are central at each level of study. This section is where the means by which this is to be achieved and demonstrated should be explored and illustrated. This is an opportunity for the team to demonstrate the range of learning, teaching and assessment approaches employed in the course delivery.

In developing the content of this section, the team should be seeking to develop and depict a cognate and consistent strategy that underpins all their teaching, reflecting the subject area, the course level, and the environment in which learning and assessment is to take place. Consideration of how students are enabled to progress through the course, developing both subject and academic skills, should be evident, with exploration on how independent study skills are encouraged and enabled as students reach higher levels of the programme. Careful consideration of the University of Suffolk Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and the Teaching and Learning Framework should also be evident in the course team's explorations, demonstrating how the team expect the proposed course will meet the strategic aims and framework expectations.

While the validation document should explore the strategy and overarching rationale for the team's approach, the course handbook should provide students with a clear depiction of the course team's intentions for learning, teaching and assessment. This should enable students to know the reasons for the course team's approaches, and to understand how they might make best use of the opportunities that they are provided with (see staff guidance on communicating learning, teaching and assessment strategies within course handbooks).

The team should attempt to paint as broad a picture of their learning and teaching activities as possible, and to illustrate this through examples from their current practice on related courses to illustrate intentions where possible.

Subject areas that could be explored in this section include (not exhaustively):

- delivery formats employed (for example lectures, seminars, workshops, lab sessions)
- the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) to support learning
- how subject tutorials form an integral part of the students' learning opportunities
- how students with a variety of backgrounds and experience are supported (perhaps noting particular characteristics of the expected student cohorts, for example many mature students or returners to study)
- how students are encouraged to link theory to practice (for example through the use of visits, guest speakers, practical sessions or case studies)
- techniques the team employs to enable large or small groups in their learning
- how work-based learning or work placements form an integral part of the students' experience
- the use of group work to enable deeper learning
- peer feedback and peer assisted learning
- student led sessions.

In this section the team should also endeavour to explain and illustrate:

- their general approach to assessment
- the interaction between assessment and teaching and learning
- the range of assessment techniques employed (both formative and summative)
- the students' experience of assessment
- the nature of assessed group work on the course and how it is managed.

In preparing this section, the course team should ensure their familiarity with the University's Assessment and Feedback Framework and the Policy for the Assessment of Group Work (and the associated staff guidance). There is an expectation that the course's assessment will reflect this.

As part of this section, the course team should discuss their assessment philosophy. This may include exploration of the principles that the team have identified, or approaches that are particularly valued given the course aims and subject matter. For example, some courses may emphasise the importance of developing practical skills through both formative and summative assessment in the early parts of the course. Another course may express their desire to give students freedom in their selection and use of subject specific tools and approaches, and may have decided to express this freedom in the design of many of their assessment tasks.

Some discussion on how the assessment loadings are balanced through the course would be appropriate, and explanation of how the team believes the assessment encourages the development of students and matches their progression through the course's levels can also be helpful. Exploring how electronic systems will be utilised in facilitating or enabling assessment should also be highlighted. Within this discussion, reference should be made to the use of plagiarism detection tools and, if appropriate, how the course will safeguard assessment processes where electronic detection is not employed.

Where there is a work-based or placement element of the course, how this contributes to, informs, or forms, student assessment should be explained. In particular, if it is expected that the assessment process will involve employers or mentors, the arrangements for approving and preparing these people for their role should be explained.

The assessment strategy will be further illustrated through the expected inclusion of the following elements in the course handbook:

- *Module assessment grid.* A table in which all the module's summative assessments are listed should be provided. This table should include a summary of the nature of each assessment task and an indication of their size and whether they are core or non-core (noting that where students marginally fail non-core components, they may be eligible for in-module compensation in order to pass the module overall, in accordance with the requirements in the Framework and Regulations for the relevant type of award). Expectation within the University of Suffolk is that the total summative assessment on a 20 credit module at any level should be equivalent to 3,000 words of academic writing at undergraduate level, and 5,000 words at Master's level.

- *Sample assessment schedule.* A schedule showing how the assessment of all modules will be distributed across the academic year. This will allow the validation panel to see that the student experience is fair and there are not any excessive workload expectations at any point in the calendar. The schedule should also demonstrate how feedback (both formative and summative) will be provided to inform student development and learning.

- *Marking criteria*. These should be presented to indicate how work will be awarded a mark. The University of Suffolk has adopted a generic set of marking criteria that apply to all undergraduate provision across all subject areas. The criteria used on any course should either be these generic criteria or be criteria that are derived from them to suit the subject area. Some courses employ sets of criteria for each level that are adapted to provide explicit criteria for each assignment, whilst others use a set of criteria for each level of study, using these for all assignments at the level.

Admissions

The section should note that the team will follow University of Suffolk admissions and equality and diversity policies and will seek to enable all appropriate students to access the course. Discussion should stipulate minimum entry qualifications for each entry point of the course, including indications of academic achievement (or demonstration of equivalent abilities) and any expected work experience or abilities. Where applicants are expected to demonstrate non-academic levels of experience or skills, the means by which this may be demonstrated (such as interviews or portfolio reviews) should be explained. Reference to the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) opportunities should also be made. This may be helpfully illustrated through examples that have been applied for similar provision in the past, or through common use of professional qualifications to aid RPL procedures.

Where students will be required to be in employment to support their study activities, the document should identify any expectation for applicants to be employed or have a placement arranged before being admitted on the course. Similarly, the need for DBS checks to be completed prior to admission, or as part of the admissions process, should be made explicit.

For a few courses, it may be necessary to consider the availability of the course to those with specific disabilities, and how those who have particular disabilities can be catered for within the provision. This may be a particular issue where the course involves a work placement or work experience.

Personal tutorials

There are two different types of tutorials that students encounter at the University of Suffolk: subject based tutorials and personal tutorials. The use of subject tutorials should be discussed in the learning, teaching and assessment strategy section above; this section should focus on personal tutorial practice.

The University of Suffolk Tutorial Policy should be referred to here, and how it is implemented by the course team should be explored. The discussion may explain how students are allocated personal tutors, how long these allocations last, how often personal tutors and students meet up, and how meetings are arranged. In addition, the nature of the discussions that take place in personal tutorial meetings should be detailed.

The validation panel will include people unfamiliar with University of Suffolk systems, and so it is useful to illustrate the role of personal tutorials in supporting students in their progress through the course, identifying study support needs, planning future study, and tracking key skills. Reference to how students can be supported through difficult personal circumstances

through extenuating circumstances processes should be included here, with reference to the University of Suffolk Extenuating Circumstances Policy.

The role of personal tutorials in encouraging students to use other University of Suffolk support services (for example study support or counselling) should be made explicit, possibly with some illustrative examples. Similarly, how tutorials are employed in the support of disabled students and those with particular learning needs should be detailed, with reference to policies on equality and diversity and reasonable adjustments.

Commenting on how tutorials are relevant to the widening participation agenda may be useful in some courses.

Study skills

It is expected that all University of Suffolk courses will provide mechanisms to enable students to develop their study skills. In this section the team should discuss and illustrate their approach to ensuring all their students are prepared for and supported in their study activities.

There are a number of issues that may need to be discussed, depending on the nature of the course and the student profiles:

- the methods employed for providing study skills learning and support. Examples could include:
  - explicitly within module delivery
  - through additional group sessions
  - within subject or additional tutorial sessions
  - via general University provision.
- how individual student's study skill deficits are identified and addressed
- whether there are particular characteristics of the anticipated students on the course that lead to particular study skill issues that the team will address
- how local study support teams are involved.

Strictly, this section should include discussion of personal development planning and employability skills, but most teams find that separating that aspect into a separate section (see below) makes sense to the document's presentation.

Personal development planning

It is expected that University of Suffolk undergraduate programmes integrate the Graduate Headstart framework into their provision as a mechanism to prompt and support student engagement with personal development planning. In a limited number of vocational programmes closely related to professional bodies, the use of an externally recognised personal development framework can be proposed in place of Graduate Headstart.

Employability skills should be an integral part of all undergraduate courses within the University of Suffolk, delivered through the Graduate Headstart framework. As the validation panel members will not all be aware of Graduate Headstart, the document should explore

and explain it in the context of the course being validated. It is usual to provide a list of the employability skills in this discussion.

This section should explain how the Graduate Headstart framework is implemented in the course, and the support that students will receive towards the certification of their skills achievement. The section should also explore how the course team will prepare their students for post-course opportunities and the work they will do in partnership with the University of Suffolk careers team and employers to enhance their students' employability.

Work-based and placement learning

In the learning, teaching and assessment strategy section, there should be a discussion on how the use of work-based learning or work placements contributes to the students' learning experience. In this section, the mechanisms for arranging, approving and supporting student placements should be explained.

For many courses, work placements or work-based learning is a mandatory element of the curriculum, while in other courses students may be able to choose to take up a work placement or have no specific placement opportunities provided. In this section the place of work-based learning or work placements in the course should be clearly indicated. Where work-based learning is an integral part of specific elements of the course, such as particular modules, this should be specified.

To explore how the students encounter work-based learning or work placements, this section should address each of the following points:

- How are placements arranged? Do the team provide placements, indicate placement opportunities, or simply leave the students to find their own placements?

- Are placements or work locations checked and approved by the course team? If so, what criteria are applied? If not, how does the team ensure that students are in receipt of an adequate and equivalent experience?

- How are part-time students already in employment dealt with? What happens if they leave their employment during their time on the course?

- How are students supported in their workplace or while on placement? Are they provided with mentors?

- How is the students' learning while on placement or within work-based learning assessed, or how do the students' activities in the work environment contribute to assessment? Care should be taken if there is an expectation for employers or work managers/peers to be involved in the assessment processes, as this will raise questions on their suitability and preparedness for such a role.

Where courses have work-based learning or work placements, a handbook for students explaining this should also be prepared and submitted with the validation documents. The team should ensure that the handbook aligns with this section of the validation document, but that it is written in a style that supports the students and provides the information in a form that is accessible and understandable to them.

For courses where there are no specific work placement elements in the course, it is worth exploring how students who are employed or involved in relevant activities may be able to use the experience to inform their studies or assessment. Examples that could be considered for inclusion here include:

- the use of placement or employment context information to inform assessment activities (such as providing case studies or evidence on which to reflect)

- integration of student experience in classroom discussions

- provision of project problems or areas of investigation from work situations.

Resources

There are two areas of resources to discuss – physical and staffing – and these should be covered in separate sections.

Physical resources

The majority of this section will often be made up of generic descriptions of the facilities and resources as provided by the University or partner college. These will cover aspects such as the teaching accommodation, IT resources and the Library. Some courses will simply need to add a special note of particular resource needs in one or more of these areas due to the particular subject area. For example, courses that require students to engage with literary analysis may have special library facilities. However, many courses will need to extensively explore particular resource requirements that are essential for the course to run. In these cases, teams should be explicit in what the course requires, mapping resource needs to learning, teaching and assessment activities that students engage with. Consideration of how students are able to practice skills outside scheduled contact time may also need to be explored. It may be appropriate to present a future resourcing plan to demonstrate how current resources will be supplemented to meet planned future course requirements.

Staffing

In this section the team should present a list of the staff allocated to the course, and indicate how each will contribute to the programme. This list should also include administrative, management and technical staff. Where there are deficits in staffing that will be addressed in the future as cohorts of students are enrolled on the course, this should be made explicit (possibly through a recruitment plan) to reassure the validation panel that resources will be available for the course's operation.

Staff CVs

Up-to-date staff CVs should be provided for all staff who are expected to be involved in the delivery or assessment of the course. The current University of Suffolk standard format should normally be employed. However, the team may choose to deploy an abbreviated version of the template omitting the appendix and the personal details of staff, and the use of local templates at partner colleges is also permitted. Whichever template is employed, it is

important that all CVs are presented in a consistent format. Teams are advised to ensure that each individual reviews their CV, particularly ensuring the inclusion of any development activities that they have attended within the previous three years. This is particularly important as the validation panel may wish to review the management approach to staff development and how effective it is in equipping the staff on this particular course.

Management of the course

Whilst all courses are expected to be managed as set out in the University's Management of Courses Policy, the delivering institution will have their own management structure that should be identified at this stage. There should be discussion of how the management roles impact on the course provision, illustrating how these appear to students, inform resource decisions and impact on course delivery and assessment.

Statements recognising the team's commitment to following the University of Suffolk's Complaints Procedure, Academic Appeals Procedure and Management of Courses Policy should be made.

Staff development should also be explored in some detail here. Identification of the priorities that have been identified to inform the staff development plans should be made, recent staff development should be explained, and future development plans should be set out clearly.

External agency / employer involvement

There is an expectation that all courses in the University of Suffolk will have active links with external agencies and communities. The nature of these links will depend on the subject area, but would normally include some sort of employer engagement. In this section, the team should present a discussion about the forms of engagement that have taken place, particularly to inform the development of the proposed course, and the planned programme of engagement activities that will be employed to ensure that the course is linked to relevant stakeholders.

Engagement activities that could be explored in this section include:
- employer or external representative attendance at course committees
- the use of guest speakers in course delivery
- the provision of case studies by employers, with students getting involved with real activities (possibly through placements or work-based learning elements of the course)
- student visits to local employment providers
- consultations with employer groups on proposed elements of the course
- academic consultations with peer institutions
- direct consultation with employers committed to providing students to the course
- subject based good practice sharing events involving external agencies and students
- employment talks and fairs
- school visits
- public exhibitions or performances of student work
- professional body accreditations or inspections.

Quality assurance and enhancement

The standard University of Suffolk Risk-Based Monitoring and Enhancement (RiME) processes for course maintenance, monitoring and enhancement should be explored, describing how the provision will be monitored and how the student voice will be elicited and employed in enhancement activities. The validation document template includes standard text on RiME processes. This may need to be supplemented to explain how other local mechanisms and professional body monitoring and involvement are integrated into the RiME processes.