Graduate Level Apprenticeships
Proposal for Validation Events

As part of the contract with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) for the Graduate Level Apprenticeships (GLAs), a validation event is required for each new GLA programmes which Heriot-Watt University aims to provide starting in September 2018, and any future new GLA programmes for which HWU is awarded funding.

This proposal is presented for endorsement by the University Committee for Quality and Standards (UCQS) in the first instance, with a view to a recommendation for approval being made to the Senate[i]. The proposal will be presented to the Undergraduate Studies Committee for information.

Background
In the HE sector, validation events – whereby a programme, course or module is evaluated and judged to be of an appropriate standard and quality to contribute to or lead to an award – tend to be held in instances where an awarding body is entering into a partnership with another organisation which will develop and deliver the approved programme, course or module. Under the current system in the UK, a provider without degree awarding powers which aims to offer higher education programmes must secure a validation agreement from a degree awarding body (usually a university).

Most pre-92 HEI's, whose awards were originally validated by the Council for National Academic Awards, continue (even after securing their own degree awarding powers) to have a validation type process for approval and re-approval of programmes: a separate approval event is conducted by a specially constituted panel of internal and external experts, who meet with staff and students involved in the programme, and then make recommendations for approval (or re-approval) to the institution's most senior academic body (Academic Council, Senate).

At Heriot-Watt University, programme approval is the responsibility of the Senate, which has delegated consideration and approval of programmes on its behalf to the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies Committee. Prior to consideration by USC or PSC, new and modified programmes are endorsed by School Studies Committees. USC and PSC consider programme approvals in batches at their scheduled meetings. There are no separate programme approval events.

In terms of HWU processes, a validation event is similar to HWU's Academic Review process: a series of documentation is prepared for consideration in advance by a team of experts (including externals), who identify a series of key themes for discussion with staff involved in developing and delivering the programme; the team will also meet with students. Academic Review is the process by which HWU re-approves programmes.

Proposal for GLA Validation Events
Irrespective of the format of approval, the Senate remains the ultimate academic authority for approving the programmes offered by HWU. Therefore, the proposal set out below for the GLA programmes preserves this authority and responsibility of the Senate.

As required by the contract with SDS, it is proposed that validation events be held at HWU for the new GLA's which the University will offer. The validation event will follow the standard model for such events (similar to HWU's Academic Review Process), but will additionally proceed through standard HWU approval procedures:

- Date, venue and agenda of meetings to be arranged;
- Advance documentation to be produced;
- Validation team of internal staff and external experts to be set up;
- Chair to be appointed from HWU senior academic staff;
- Series of meetings with HWU staff (and GLA students, for re-validation) to be held over 1 or 2 days;
- Validation report to be produced by the validation team, including recommendations for approval and any conditions to be met;
- Report to be considered by USC in the first instance and then UCQS[1]
- Recommendations for approval to be made by UCQS to the Senate.

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[1] Under the new governance arrangements, the UCQS has responsibility (delegated by the Senate) for programme approval. At the present time, this function is still being discharged by both Studies Committees until the new (single) Studies Committee, which will report to UCQS, is in place. The Minutes of the USC and PSC are currently being presented to the UCQS as part of the transition arrangements. The proposal outlined above provides a role for USC, but acknowledges that programme approval is being transferred to the remit of the UCQS.

Validation Team
It is proposed that the internal members of the validation teams should comprise a selection of existing USC members (to be approved by the UCQS, which currently approves review team composition) and the relevant GLA programme lead(s); the Clerk to USC should be in attendance at each event to ensure due processes are followed. It is proposed that the Chair of the events should alternate between the current Chair of USC and the current Chair of UCQS. External members of the validation team will include up to two representatives from SDS and a representative from each of a number of relevant employers. There should also be student representation on the Validation Team. The UCQS will be responsible for approving the composition of the validation teams (internal and external members).

Re-validation
A re-validation event will be held every five years to evaluate the GLA's and to make recommendations on their re-approval to the Senate. Attempts will be made to align re-validation events with the internal Academic Review schedule. This process will ensure that the GLA's are in line with HWU's standard programme re-approval procedures (currently conducted through Academic Review). The re-validation event will proceed in accordance with the same arrangements as proposed above for the initial validation.

Management of the Process
The validation/re-validation process will be managed and operated by the Graduate Level Apprenticeships Team. Appropriate links will be maintained with the Quality and External Partnerships Team, to ensure connections with the University's Academic Approval process.

M,King, R.Westacott, 21 November 2017

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i Endorsed by UCQS 13 December 2018; Approved by the Senate 7 February 2018