Aston University

GUIDELINES:

PROGRAMME APPROVAL, MODIFICATION AND WITHDRAWAL

November 2011

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INTRODUCTION

Any programme leading to the following awards which fall within the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ – see **Appendix E**) drawn up by the Quality Assurance Agency should be approved according to the procedures set out in these guidelines:

- Certificate of Higher Education CertHE,
- Diploma of Higher Education DipHE,
- Foundation Degree FdSc/FdA/FdEng,
- Bachelor's Degree BSc/BA/BEng/LLB,
- Graduate Diploma, Grad Dip
- Postgraduate Certificate, PgC
- Postgraduate Diploma PgD,
- Integrated Master's Degree MEng/MPharm/MChem,
- Taught Master's Degree MSc/MA/MBA/MRes/LLM,
- Professional Doctorate EngD/OD/DBA

Programmes leading to awards outside the FHEQ are subject to different procedures (see **Appendix B).** These include Aston Diplomas and Certificates. Research programmes (MSc (by Research), MPhil, PhD) are approved by School Research Committees and the Aston Graduate School Management Committee.

The approval process aims to evaluate proposals against a range of reference points to ensure that:

- academic standards are appropriate to the award level;

- student experience will be of a quality likely to support the achievement of the award;

- the requirements of external stakeholders (e.g. employers, professional and statutory bodies, Quality Assurance Agency) will be met.

Key reference points include:

- The Criteria Underpinning Approval (**see Appendix A**);

- Statutory requirements, such as those relating to special educational needs, disability, equal opportunities and diversity and health and safety (see http://www.opsi.gov.uk);

- The Framework for Higher Educational Qualifications, Subject Benchmark Statements and QAA Code of Practice (see http://www.qaa.ac.uk);

- Ordinances and Regulations of the University (see http://www1.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/regsandpolicies/charter-statutes-ordinances/ and http://www1.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/regsandpolicies/general-regulations);

- Professional body requirements.

Proposals may diverge from these reference points, but a sound explanation of the reasons is likely to be sought.

OVERVIEW

a) The University's Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) delegates responsibility for programme approval to the Programme Approval Sub-Committee (PASC).

b) PASC holds 3 meetings a year, but can also consider proposals outside its scheduled meetings if they are urgent.

c) Collaborative proposals are usually considered by a Collaborative Programme Panel (CPP), which then reports to PASC. The Collaborative Provision Strategy Group (CPSG) also looks at these proposals in parallel to PASC and the School.

d) Proposers of new programmes are required to complete the following steps.

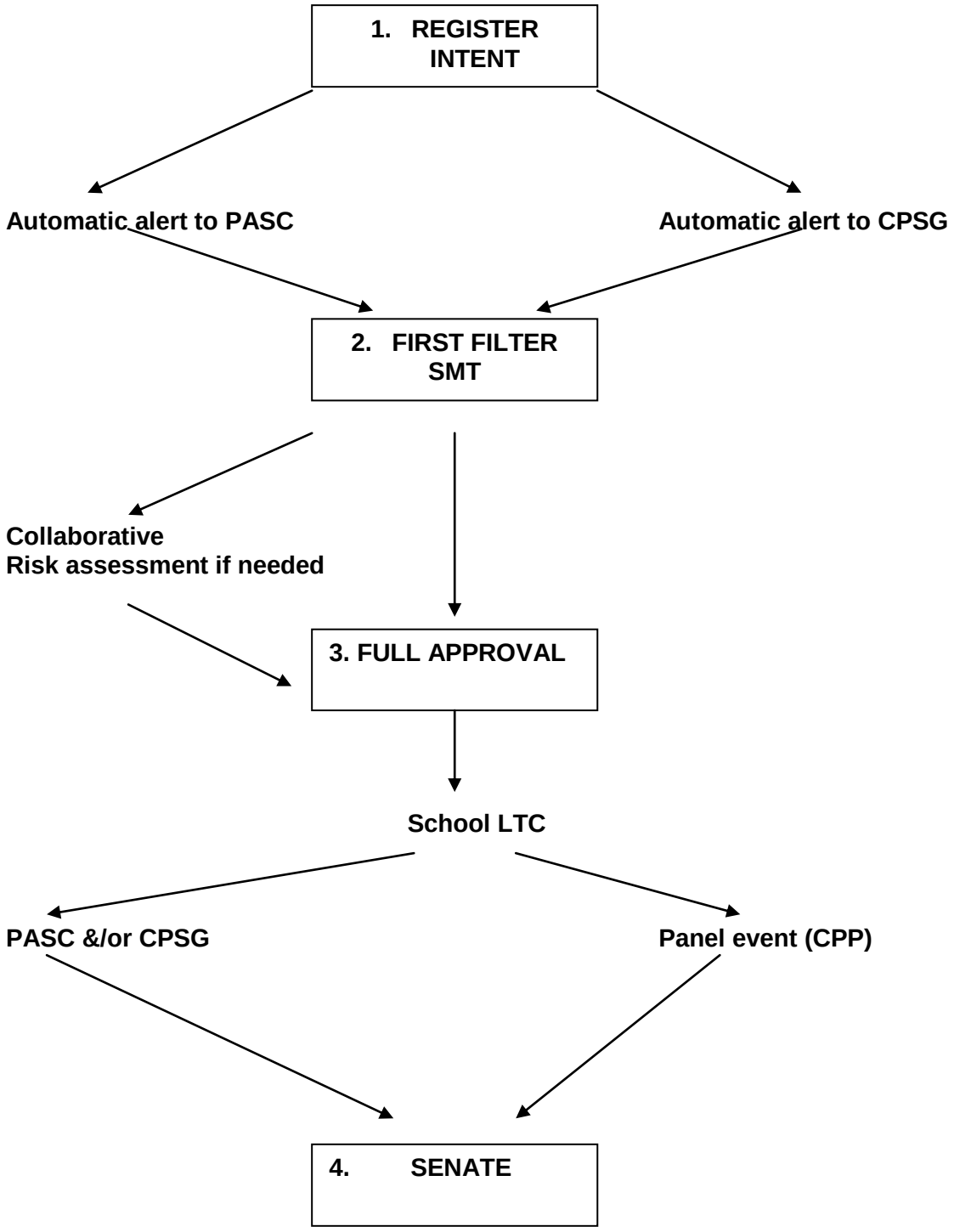
1. Register their intent via My Aston Portal (MAP).

2. Submit papers to the School Management Team (SMT) for a First Filter approval process. If successful, permission to advertise may be given.

3. Submit papers to the School LTC and to PASC for Full Approval. If successful, the programme may start 4 months later.

4. PASC recommends proposals directly to the Senate. Senate approval will usually be given speedily via Chair's Action.

FLOWCHART OF PROCESS



REGISTERING INTENT

As soon as you know that you will be developing a new programme please register this on My Aston Portal (MAP). Once online you will need to answer some basic questions and then your proposal will be logged. A number of people will be alerted, including staff in Registry and the Library.

The Secretary to the Programme Approval Sub-Committee (PASC) will allocate one of the Sub-Committee's members to liaise with you. PASC members are available to assist individual programme proposers through the approval process. It doesn't matter if your proposal is not fully formed at this stage. You do not need to have any documentation ready for submission. Advice at the earliest stages can be useful in preventing problems later on.

If there are any regulatory or collaborative issues arising from your proposal, the secretaries to the Collaborative Provision Strategy Group (CPSG) and the Regulation Sub-Committee (RSC) will also contact you to discuss them. ISA (Information Services Aston) may need to look at tailoring the student information system SITS for programmes which don't fit with standard entry points or term structures.

Collaborative provision is defined by the Quality Assurance Agency as 'educational provision leading to an award, or to specific credit toward an award, of an awarding institution delivered and/or supported and/or assessed through an arrangement with a partner organisation'. Please see http://www1.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/regsandpolicies/collaborativeprovision/ for information on collaborative programmes. If there is any element of collaboration in your proposal, please indicate this when you register on MAP.

You can look at the General Regulations for Programmes at http://www1.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/regsandpolicies/general-regulations/ to see if your proposal fits with them or if there are going to be differences. Some differences can simply be recorded in a programme specification and will not need to be scrutinised by the Regulation Sub-Committee. Examples are:

- Additional entry requirements;
- Additional attendance requirements,
- Requirements for and assessment of industrial/professional training;
- Detail of progression routes for Foundation Degrees and whether there is a requirement for a bridging programme.

However, if you are at all unsure, please indicate that there may be regulatory issues and this can be checked.

It may be that your proposal involves a new award title. See Section VIII of the Ordinances at http://www1.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/regsandpolicies/charter-statutes-ordinances/ for the awards currently offered by the University. The Secretary to the RSC can advise further on these.

Occasionally proposers will choose not to progress proposals beyond this registration stage, or at least, not for some time. That is fine.

FIRST FILTER

Once you have a clear idea of what your proposal will involve, you should submit it to your School Management Team for consideration at the 'First Filter' stage. You will need to complete 2 forms:

- First Filter Form;
- Form for Calculating Costs and Income for New Programmes.

If the programme is collaborative, you will need to complete an additional form:

- Risk Assessment Form.

The School Management Team will consider your submission, taking into account matters such as strategic rationale, academic rationale, market, resources and cost effectiveness. The Executive Dean or nominee is required to sign off approval at this stage and to confirm that the School will underwrite the resources needed and that the risk assessment (if applicable) is acceptable.

If the School Management Team approves the proposal, this should simply be reported to the School Board. There should not be a need for approval at School Board or at any other committee within the School at this stage, unless the School chooses to do this. The process is intended to be quick.

Once the School Management Team has approved the proposal at the First Filter, you can request permission to advertise the programme (but NOT recruit to it) from the Chair of PASC if you wish. (*Please note that there is no longer a separate 'in principle' approval process.*)

To seek approval to advertise, please forward the signed First Filter Form and attachments to the PASC Secretary at l.a.price@aston.ac.uk or QualityTeam@aston.ac.uk. If approved, the form will be signed by the Chair of PASC and a copy returned to the School.

The PASC Secretary will contact Schools periodically to remind them that programmes have been approved for advertising with an intended start date in the next academic year, but that Full Approval is still needed in order to recruit students.

MODULE APPROVAL

Please note that any modules created or adapted for the programme should be approved at the School Learning and Teaching Committee. It is the responsibility of the School to ensure that modules will be in place before programmes start. See http://www1.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/regsandpolicies/prog-approval/ for module specification forms and guidance.

FULL APPROVAL

Full Approval must be obtained from the Programme Approval Sub-Committee at least 4 months prior to the intended start date of the programme. **Students may not be recruited to the programme until Full Approval has been given.**

In order to make a submission for Full Approval you will need to complete a short form and attach some documents:

- First Filter Form and attachments
- Programme /Subject Specification or Professional Doctorate Form
- Curriculum Map
- External Advisor's Report

Your submission for Full Approval should go first to the School Learning and Teaching Committee. Approval of programmes should be simply reported to the School Board. There should not be a need for approval at School Board or at any other committee within the School at this stage, unless the School chooses to do this. Once the School has signed off the Full Approval submission, it should be forwarded with all attachments, to PASC.

Programme proposals will be considered by PASC at a scheduled meeting (one a term). If it is urgent, proposals may be considered at a special or virtual meeting. Occasionally professional accrediting bodies may require an approval event to be held. To avoid duplication of effort, PASC will align its processes to coincide as far as possible. You will be asked to attend the meeting to discuss your proposal. With good preparation, proposals can usually be approved at the PASC meeting, sometimes with provisos. PASC then makes recommendations to Senate.

Senate approval will normally be given via Chair's Action. This can be done quickly after the PASC recommendation is made. A signed copy of the Full Approval Form will be returned to the School. The original will be kept in Registry. **At this point the School should put the programme specification up on the shared University folder at \\nas\shared\progspec. A SITS code can then be allocated to the programme by Registry.** The programme is then fully approved and students can be recruited. The PASC Secretary will ensure that copies of documentation are provided to Registry staff dealing with SITS coding.

COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMME PANELS

Collaborative programmes will usually be considered by a Collaborative Programme Panel (CPP). You and representatives of the partner organisation will be expected to attend a meeting with the Panel. A report from the CPP meeting is provided to PASC. If approval is recommended, the PASC secretary and your PASC member will liaise with you to ensure that any conditions set by the CPP are met.

For collaborative proposals, you will need to provide additional evidence, including:

- A draft Partnership Agreement/Memorandum of Understanding and Financial Agreement;
- Information on the ICT, library and other learning resources available to support the programme;
- CVs of staff with teaching responsibilities;

- Audited accounts of partner (if new);
- Other documents as required by the CPSG.

MODIFICATIONS

The following modifications are regarded as 'major' and require approval from PASC in addition to the School:

a) a change to the programme title and/or award;
b) a change to the aims and/or learning outcomes of a programme;
c) a new mode of delivery e.g. introduction of flexible learning mode;
d) a new mode of study e.g. introduction of a part-time mode;
e) a (new) collaborative partner;
f) where complicated transitional arrangements are required.

These should be referred to the School Management Team in the first instance. Modifications which involve collaborative arrangements should be brought to the attention of the CPSG as soon as possible. A submission should be made to the SMT containing:

- An updated programme specification;
- A rationale for the modification;
- An explanation of how student support and administrative structures will be adjusted (for c, d, e, and f);
- Transitional arrangements for students (including resit students and those granted leave of absence), if required;
- A risk assessment (for e);
- Any other documents you think relevant.

If the SMT approves the modification, the approved documents can be submitted to the School LTC and then to PASC. Chair's Action may be possible. You will not normally need to attend the PASC meeting. PASC will make a recommendation to the Senate for Chair's Action and the Secretary to PASC will inform you of the outcome.

All other modifications are regarded as 'minor'. Detailed consideration of minor modifications may occur either at a Subject Group or a Programme Committee level, but must be forwarded to the School LTC for approval. Schools need to ensure that any changes that affect programme specifications are recorded in revised specifications and approved at the School LTC.

CONSULTATION WITH STUDENTS

Modifications which have retrospective effects on current students must not be introduced without full consultation of all the students affected. Changes may not apply to only part of a year group; they must apply to every student in any one year of a programme. In setting a timetable for introducing changes to programmes, Schools should allow for a period of consultation and discussion with the students affected, or their elected representatives, through the relevant School Committees (e.g. the Programme Committee, Learning and Teaching Committee, Staff/Student Consultative Committee).

The Senate has resolved that if objections to the proposed changes are raised by 10% or more of the students affected, then a vote must be taken of all those students affected. The changes may not then be introduced for those students unless two thirds of those voting are in favour of the change.

WITHDRAWAL

Requests to withdraw programmes should be referred to the School Management Team in the first instance. Those which involve collaborative arrangements should be brought to the attention of the CPSG as soon as possible. A short statement should be submitted to the SMT containing:

- programme title and the proposed date of withdrawal;
- the effect of the withdrawal on the planning and resources of the School(s) involved;
- the reasons for the withdrawal;
- details of any other programmes affected by the withdrawal, with evidence of liaison with other Schools regarding the withdrawal if appropriate;
- transitional arrangements for students currently on the programme, including resit students and those granted leave of absence.

If the SMT approves the withdrawal, the approved statement should be submitted to the School LTC and then to PASC. Chair's Action may be possible. You will not need to attend the PASC meeting. PASC will make a recommendation to the Senate for Chair's Action and the Secretary to PASC will inform you of the outcome.

APPENDIX A

Criteria underpinning approval

During the approval process, proposals for new programmes, or to modify existing programmes, should be considered against the following criteria by both the School and the Programme Approval Sub-Committee.

1. Principles

1.1 Academic standards in subject content, teaching, and in learning material, match the national standing of the award (including the Framework for Higher Educations Qualifications), the expectations of the relevant subject or discipline (Subject Benchmarks, regulations and guidance of professional, statutory and/or regulatory bodies) and the expectations of employers and other external partners and peers.

1.2 The programme has clearly articulated aims and learning outcomes which meet the needs of students.

1.3 The aims and learning outcomes are consistent with the mission of the University and the academic values and conventions of the discipline.

1.4 The programme conforms with the University's equal opportunities policy and approach to widening participation.

1.5 Students' ethnic and cultural/historical backgrounds are treated with respect and considered wherever possible in selecting curriculum content and teaching methods.

2. Academic resources

2.1 The School(s) in which the programme operates confirm the presence of academic, scholarly and professional activity adequate and appropriate to the support of the programme.

2.2 There are adequate numbers of staff with appropriate expertise at all levels to support the programme.

2.3 There is adequate accommodation for teaching and learning to take place within an environment conducive to learning.

2.4 There is appropriate and up-to-date specialist equipment to support learning.

2.5 There is adequate library, computer and other educational technology to support students' learning needs.

3. Admissions

3.1 Policy and practice in admissions provides equal opportunities to applicants and does not discriminate on the grounds of disability, race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

3.2 The admissions procedure conforms with the University's policy concerning the Assessment of prior learning.

3.3 The threshold competencies required for admission to the programmes are clearly specified and justified.

3.4 Students are admitted to the programme only if, with appropriate and available support, they are likely to be successful in gaining an award.

4. Market Need

4.1 Programmatic need: some analysis of the market and possible customers.

5. Structure

5.1 The structure is clearly defined and consistent with the aims and learning outcomes of the programme.

5.2 The sandwich or language placement is represented in the programme learning outcomes (where appropriate).

5.3 Learning outcomes are specified for each module and these are consistent with the learning outcomes for the programme as a whole.

5.4 Each module has a credit tariff specified in accordance with the University's regulations and there is a clearly defined method for awarding credits for students who leave at intermediate stages.

5.5 The degree fits in with other existing degrees and the strategy of the School.

5.6 There are the normal range of interim awards eg Certificate, Diploma, and that the titles of these awards is clear.

6. Content

6.1 The content of the programme is consistent with its aims.

6.2 The specialist content of the programme is up-to-date and comparable in its standards to similar programmes elsewhere.

7. Learning and teaching methods

7.1 Learning and teaching methods are consistent with the aims and learning outcomes of the programme and meet the needs of the students.

7.2 A range of learning and teaching methods is used to provide students with a variety of learning opportunities and experiences, as appropriate to help all students to meet the learning outcomes.

7.3 Students are encouraged to be active in the learning process and to take responsibility for much of their own learning.

8. Assessment

8.1 Assessment methods and arrangements are fair, reliable and valid, with assessment at the appropriate level.

8.2 A variety of methods of assessing student learning is used, as appropriate, to demonstrate whether students have met the learning outcome.

8.3 All learning outcomes for each module, including skill development, are appropriately assessed.

8.4 The methods and criteria for assessment are published and made available to students in advance.

8.5 Assessment methods allow timely feedback of an appropriate quality to students, including formative feedback.

8.6 External moderation of assessment takes place in accordance with University regulations.

9. Guidance and Support

9.1 There is an adequate academic guidance system in place to provide support for students which facilitates the planning, monitoring, reviewing, and recording of their learning.

9.2 Support is available to help students acquire key transferable skills (e.g. ICT skills).

9.3 There is a personal support system for students, appropriate to the type of programme (including part-time and flexible learning).

10. Progression and completion

10.1 The design and structure of the programme support appropriate progression and completion rates.

11. Information

11.1 Accurate and reliable information on the aims, learning outcomes, structure, content, admissions and assessment of the programme is readily available to all staff, students and potential students involved with the programme through the provision of programme and module specifications and special regulations.

12. Stakeholders' views

12.1 The views of employers and other stakeholders are actively sought and taken into account in the design, delivery and outcomes of the programme.

13. Regulations of accrediting bodies

13.1 If the programme is accredited/validated by an external body, it must also conform to the requirements of that body.

APPENDIX B

Approval of other types of programmes

Awards outside the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)

It should be noted that an award within the FHEQ should be offered in preference to one which is outside the FHEQ, if possible.

Courses which are not credit-rated
It is the responsibility of the School/s to assure that short courses which are not credit-rated are of appropriate quality.

Credit rated courses

Qualification	Qualification level	Credits required for the award
Foundation Diploma	Level 0	120
Aston University Certificate	Level 4, 5, 6 or 7 (Level must be specified on certificate)	10 – 50 credits (credit volume must be specified on certificate)
Aston University Diploma	Level 4, 5, 6 or 7 (Level must be specified on certificate)	60 – 100 credits (credit volume must be specified on certificate)
Aston University Record of Attendance	Any Level.	Any programme of less than 10 credits.

When using the terms 'Certificate' and 'Diploma' Schools should take care to use the proper name of the awards as given above. This is to avoid any accidental misleading use of the terms. Aston University Certificates and Aston University Diplomas should not be used in a context in which they could be confused with an award within the FHEQ. It is preferable that these awards should not appear in programme specifications or be formally linked to FHEQ awards.

Any short courses which are credit-rated should be approved by the School and recorded on SITS**.** This is because credit-rated courses can be counted towards a University award. Approval of credit-rated short courses is delegated to School Boards (or the designated School Committee). School approval should also be obtained to offer, for example, an existing module(s) on a freestanding basis. A credit-rated short course should have formal arrangements for the assessment of students and external examiners should be used to ensure that the standard is appropriate to the level/credit-rating proposed. This is because the credit can be counted towards an award-bearing programme. New credit-rated short courses approved should be reported to Senate (e.g. via School committee minutes).

Documentation needed for approval of a credit rated short course

A programme specification is NOT needed for credit-rated courses leading to awards outside the FHEQ. Where a short course comprises a single module the module specification alone is normally sufficient information for students. Where there is an assembly of several modules to create a course a form 'Information for Awards outside the FHEQ' is available for use within Schools http://www1.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/regsandpolicies/prog-approval/.

Research programmes

Proposals relating to programmes leading to the award of PhD, MPhil and MSc/MA (by Research) should be approved by the School Research Committee and recommended to the University's Aston Graduate School Management Committee. Those with a taught element should also be considered by the School Learning and Teaching Committee.

APPENDIX C

Dates of meetings and submission dates

http://www1.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/qualityhandbook/whats-new/

and

http://www1.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/quality-and-standards/

APPENDIX D

Contacts 2011/12

Programme Approval

Quality Team		QualityTeam@aston.ac.uk

PASC members

Chair: Dr Anne Wheeler (CLIPP)	ext 5227	a.wheeler@aston.ac.uk
EAS: Dr Trevor Oliver	ext 3656	t.n.oliver@aston.ac.uk
ABS: Ms Elaine Clarke	ext 3232	e.clarke2@aston.ac.uk
LHS: Mr Trevor Knight	ext 3968	t.knight@aston.ac.uk
LSS: Dr Uwe Wunderlich	ext 3755	j.u.wunderlich@aston.ac.uk
IDS: Dr Sukhvinder Phull	ext 4289	s.phull@aston.ac.uk
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Guild: Mr Ben Smith		guild.welfare@aston.ac.uk
Secretary: Mrs Lesley Price	ext 4656	l.a.price@aston.ac.uk

CPSG

Chair: Professor Helen Higson		h.e.higson@aston.ac.uk
Secretary: Mrs Sarah Davies	ext 4657	s.j.davies@aston.ac.uk

Programme Development

Market Research

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Ms Caroline Boucher	ext 4782	c.a.boucher@aston.ac.uk

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Mrs Debbie Salkeld	ext 4770	d.a.salkeld@aston.ac.uk

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Miss Wendy Yip	ext 4481	w.y.l.yip@aston.ac.uk
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Mr James Seymour	ext 4780	j.r.seymour@aston.ac.uk

Schools of Study

School Management Team Secretaries

LHS: Mr Trevor Knight	ext 3968	t.knight@aston.ac.uk
EAS: Miss Jules Richey	ext 3656	j.e.richey@aston.ac.uk
LSS: Ms Heather Phillips	ext 3992	h.j.phillips@aston.ac.uk
ABS: Ms Vanessa Hands	ext 3234	v.j.hands@aston.ac.uk

School Learning and Teaching Committee Secretaries

LHS: Mrs Gillian Cook	ext 4094	g.p.cook@aston.ac.uk
EAS: Miss Jules Richey	ext 3656	j.e.richey@aston.ac.uk
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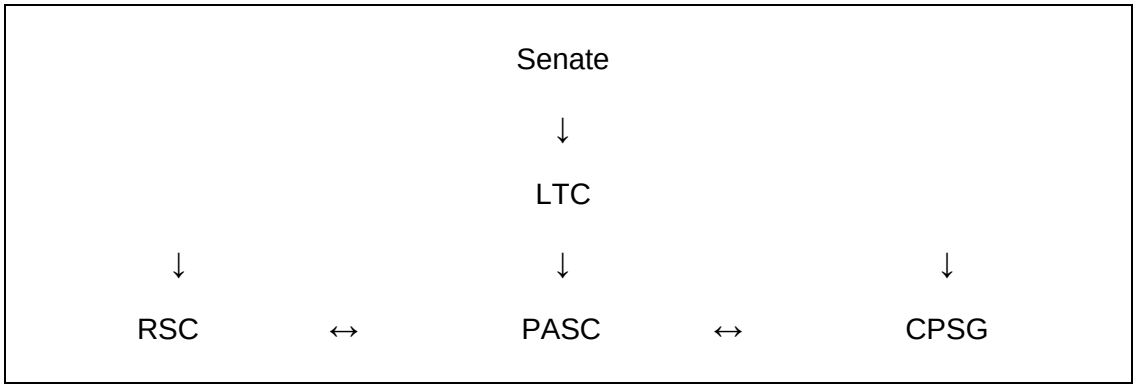
ABS PG: Ms Lindsey Allsopp	ext 3016	l.a.allsopp@aston.ac.uk

APPENDIX E

<u>Acronyms</u>

PASC	Programme Approval Sub-Committee
CPSG	Collaborative Provision Strategy Group
RSC	Regulation Sub-Committee
LTC	Learning & Teaching Committee



SLTC	School Learning & Teaching Committee
SMT	School Management Team
SB	School Board
CPP	Collaborative Programme Panel
JACS	Joint Academic Coding Structure
FHEQ	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
MAP	My Aston Portal
SITS	Student Information System

APPENDIX F

Forms and Documents

Registry Website References:

For the University's Calendar of Meetings:

http://www1.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/committee-system/

For programme approval guidance:

http://www1.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/qualityhandbook/whats-new/

For forms:

http://www1.aston.ac.uk/registry/for-staff/regsandpolicies/prog-approval/