

Short Courses: Approval Process

1. Introduction

Short courses are units of study which are delivered by the university but do not lead to a formal qualification, such as a degree or postgraduate certificate. Short courses may be assessed or unassessed. Assessed courses aligned with levels 4-7 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) may lead to the award of credit up to a maximum of 15 ECTS.

The approval process is intended to assure the quality of short courses offered by Imperial by ensuring that:

- proposals align with Imperial's values and strategy;
- learning opportunities meet the needs of target learners and clients;
- relevant academic and professional standards are met;
- courses are appropriately resourced;
- risks to both learners and the university are identified and mitigated against;
- any partnership proposals are appropriately scrutinised.

The process culminates in the production of an approved short course specification, which acts as a definitive reference point for staff, learners and other stakeholders, and is held as part of a central catalogue of short course provision.

2. Categories of short course

Imperial offers a diverse range of short courses for different types of learners. Short courses normally fall into one of four categories: higher education (HE) short courses, pre-HE short courses, asynchronous (async) online short courses and non-credit-bearing short courses. Each of these categories is associated with different types and levels of risk, therefore the approval process varies accordingly.

Within the four short course categories there are different course types as illustrated in table 1.

Table 1: Short course categories

Category	Description / examples	Modes of delivery ¹	Assessed?
a. HE	<p>Leading to award of HE credit at FHEQ levels 4-7 or linked to existing HE courses e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Credit-bearing short courses or micro-credentials• Required pre-sessional courses• Existing HE modules offered with/without credit• Summer schools for undergraduate or postgraduate students	Live online / live in place / async online / async in place	Yes

¹ The modes of learning used are taken from the Jisc guide *Beyond Blended: rethinking curriculum and learning design* (2024), which describes four modes of participation:

- Live online (live sessions using audio or video, online functions and materials)
- Live in place (live sessions in place using co-located facilities and materials)
- Async online (independent study using online functions and materials)
- Async in place (independent study using facilities and materials in place e.g. on campus or in another environment, such as a workplace)

b. Pre-HE	Outreach programmes Summer schools for under-18s	Live in place / Live online / async online	No
c. MOOCs (and other async online courses)	Short, self-paced online courses such as massive open online courses (MOOCs) or small private online courses (SPOCs) – no credit/award but may have associated digital badges	Async online	No
d. Non-credit-bearing	Open and custom courses designed for professional development or personal interest – may have associated digital badges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courses commissioned for specific clients • Open CPD courses with no associated credit • After-hours classes designed for the general public Optional pre-sessional courses 'Hosted programmes' – custom courses for overseas universities	Live online / live in place / async in place	No / optional

3. Short Course Approval Process

The approval process is overseen by the Programmes Committee, which receives information about all newly approved short courses. The Lifelong Learning Education Committee also takes a strategic view of the university's portfolio of short courses.

The approving authority for a short course differs depending on its category and type. All short courses must be approved by the department or division responsible for its operation. HE short courses must receive subsequent approval from the Faculty Education Committee in the host faculty or the equivalent deliberative body in other central departments responsible for short course delivery (e.g. Lifelong Learning, CLCC, ECRI, MORA, CHERS). Async online courses require additional approval from the Lifelong Learning Education Committee.

The approval process for each category of short course is outlined below.

3.1. HE short courses

- a. Form completion: The course proposer must complete the online short course approval form, selecting 'HE' as the course category. A number of guidance documents are linked to the form to assist with completion. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement team will also provide individual guidance and ensure that the correct approval route is followed. The approval form asks for confirmation that relevant planning, consultation and checks have taken place at the initial development phase. This includes business planning, consultation with relevant Imperial departments and services and, where the course is to be offered in partnership with another organisation, due diligence checks.
- b. Department approval: HE short course development requires first stage authorisation from the relevant senior manager in the department or division responsible for delivery. This may be an academic department within a faculty, or a unit or division of the central department (such as Lifelong Learning, CLCC, ECRI or MORA) responsible for the course. In most cases, departmental authorisation will follow approval by the

deliberative body responsible for strategic approval at this level (for example a Department Teaching Committee). On submission of the online approval form, the authorising person in the relevant department will receive notification and a request to authorise or reject the proposal.

- c. Internal and external consultation: Once authorised by the relevant department, the proposal should be made available to at least one internal and one external academic reviewer, who will be invited to provide feedback on the currency of the proposal and its alignment with sector reference points (such as the FHEQ). The external reviewer should be a subject expert and may be the external examiner for a related course. Reviewers will be provided with access to the online approval form.
- d. Faculty Education Committee (or equivalent) approval: The HE short course must be authorised by the relevant faculty or central department, following approval by the Faculty Education Committee (FEC) or equivalent decision-making body. In making its decision, the committee should consider the content of the short course approval form and the expert internal and external feedback provided at step c. The committee chair or their delegate will receive notification and a request to authorise or reject the proposal via the online approval form.
- e. Conditions of approval: The FEC or equivalent may set one or more conditions of approval, to be satisfied before the course is delivered. Where conditions are set, the course proposer should provide evidence to the committee chair that these have been met before final authorisation is given.
- f. Programme Committee notified: The Programmes Committee will be notified of all new short course approvals by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team. Proposals for courses that fall outside of the scope of the short course regulations will require further approval by the Programmes Committee. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement team will advise on the correct procedure where this is the case.

3.2 MOOCs and other async online short courses

- a. Consultation with IETL: Departments wishing to develop an async online short course (such as a MOOC) should consult with the Interdisciplinary Edtech Lab (IETL) in Lifelong Learning, which is available to develop, design and deliver digital learning in partnership with other teams. This may include submission of a short project proposal form to help the IETL to tailor its support. The IETL can also advise on the use of third party online learning platforms such as Coursera and edX.
- b. Form completion: The course proposer must complete the online short course approval form, selecting 'MOOC' as the course category or 'async online' as the mode of delivery where it falls into one of the other course categories. A number of guidance documents are linked to the form to assist with completion. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement team will also provide individual guidance and ensure that the correct approval route is followed. Where the proposed online short course leads to the award of credit, additional approval at faculty level will also be required, as outlined in para 1 above. The approval form asks for confirmation that relevant planning, consultation and checks have taken place at the initial development phase. This includes business planning, consultation with relevant Imperial departments and services and, where the course is to be offered in partnership with another organisation, due diligence checks.
- c. Department approval: MOOC/async online short course development requires authorisation from the relevant senior manager in the department or division responsible for delivery. This may be an academic department within a faculty, or a unit

or division of the central department (such as Lifelong Learning, CLCC, ECRI, MORA and CHERS) responsible for the course. In most cases, departmental authorisation will follow approval by the deliberative body responsible for strategic approval at this level (for example a Department Teaching Committee). On submission of the online approval form, the authorising person in the relevant department will receive notification and a request to authorise or reject the proposal.

- d. Approval by Lifelong Learning Education Committee: Following departmental approval, the chair of the Lifelong Learning Education Committee will be notified of the proposal. The steering group will review the content of the proposal form and seek feedback from the IETL. The steering group chair or their delegate will receive notification and a request to authorise or reject the proposal via the online approval form.
- e. FEC (or equivalent) and Programmes Committee notified: The Faculty Education Committee or equivalent in the faculty or central department in which the proposal originated will be notified of the new short course. The Programmes Committee will also be notified of all new short course approvals by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team.

3.3 Pre-HE short courses

- a. Form completion: The course proposer must complete the online short course approval form, selecting 'Pre-HE' as the course category. A number of guidance documents are linked to the form to assist with completion. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement team will also provide individual guidance and ensure that the correct approval route is followed. The approval form asks for confirmation that relevant planning, consultation and checks have taken place at the initial development phase. This includes business planning, consultation with relevant Imperial departments and services and, where the course is to be offered in partnership with another organisation, due diligence checks.
- b. Department approval: Pre-HE short course development requires authorisation from the relevant senior manager in the department or division responsible for delivery. This may be an academic department within a faculty, or a unit or division of the central department (such as, CLCC, ECRI, MORA and CHERS) responsible for the course. In most cases, departmental authorisation will follow approval by the deliberative body responsible for strategic approval at this level (for example a Department Teaching Committee). On submission of the online approval form, the authorising person in the relevant department will receive notification and a request to authorise or reject the proposal.
- c. Safeguarding risk assessment: Any activity that involves students or staff working with children and young people under the age of 18 should have a safeguarding risk assessment completed. The course leader should complete the safeguarding risk assessment form, identifying risks and establishing practices to mitigate those risks. The short course approval form includes a link to the safeguarding risk assessment form and guidance, which must be submitted to the Outreach team for feedback before the short course commences.
- d. FEC (or equivalent) and Programmes Committee notified: The Faculty Education Committee or equivalent in the faculty or central department in which the proposal originated will be notified of the new short course. The Programmes Committee will also be notified of all new short course approvals by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team.

3.4 Non-credit-bearing short courses

- a. Form completion: The course proposer must complete the online short course approval form, selecting 'Non-credit-bearing' as the course category. A number of guidance documents are linked to the form to assist with completion. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement team will also provide individual guidance and ensure that the correct approval route is followed. The approval form asks for confirmation that relevant planning, consultation and checks have taken place at the initial development phase. This includes business planning, consultation with relevant Imperial departments and services and, where the course is to be offered in partnership with another organisation, due diligence checks.
- b. Department approval: Non-credit-bearing short course development requires authorisation from the relevant senior manager in the department or division responsible for delivery. This may be an academic department within a faculty, or a unit or division of the central department (such as Lifelong Learning, CLCC, ECRI, MORA and CHERS) responsible for the course. In most cases, departmental authorisation will follow approval by the deliberative body responsible for strategic approval at this level (for example a Department Teaching Committee). On submission of the online approval form, the authorising person in the relevant department will receive notification and a request to authorise or reject the proposal.
- c. FEC (or equivalent) and Programmes Committee notified: The Faculty Education Committee or equivalent in the faculty or central department in which the proposal originated will be notified of the new short course. The Programmes Committee will also be notified of all new short course approvals by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team.

The approval process is mapped out in full in appendix 1.

4. Proposals falling outside of the defined categories

The Quality Assurance and Enhancement team will advise the course proposer on the appropriate approval process for short courses that do not easily fit into the categories above, including those that straddle two or more categories. The short course approval process will be reviewed regularly by the university to ensure that it reflects the types of courses in development and remains fit for purpose.

5. Existing modules offered as HE short courses

Existing modules may be offered to individuals not registered as Imperial students. This may be by opening up existing learning, teaching and assessment activities to learners studying alongside a cohort of Imperial students, or where there are sufficient numbers, by offering an additional instance of the module for a distinct group of learners. Where learners are to study alongside students, particular care should be taken to ensure that learners are sufficiently prepared to fully engage with shared learning activities and do not negatively impact the wider student experience.

The short course approval form includes a route for existing modules offered to additional learners as a short course. The text from the existing module specification can be used to complete relevant fields, however a business case for offering the module as a standalone course will also be required and should be created in partnership with the Professional Development and Summer Programmes (PDSP) team in the Lifelong Learning.

Where existing module content is modified, or assessments are changed or removed in order to repackage the module as a micro-credential or non-credit-bearing short course, this should be made clear in the rationale section of the approval form.

6. Stackable micro-credentials

Approval for a series of micro-credentials that can be stacked towards a formal qualification should normally follow the main programme approval route. Where the qualification already exists and is to be repackaged as a suite of micro-credentials with a stackable award, approval may be possible through the major programme modification route.

Advice and guidance on the procedure for creating stackable qualifications should be sought from the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team.

7. Completing the short course approval form

The online short course approval form should be completed for all types of short course. The form prompts proposers to select the category and type of course, which will lead to the display of the relevant fields for completion.

For all short courses, proposers will be required to provide information about:

- The title and structure of the course
- Rationale for the course (market, competitor courses, business case, EDI, other)
- Marketing, recruitment and admissions
- Curriculum and delivery (content, learning outcomes, learning and teaching strategy, delivery methods, online learning, feedback)
- Resources (space, people, IT, equipment, IP/copyright)
- Learner support (pre-course information, IT, library, tutorial, other)
- Course evaluation arrangements
- Delivery partnerships (where relevant, involvement, due diligence, approval)
- Department authorisation

HE short course proposals will also include information about placements, credits, assessment and accreditation. Confirmation of faculty (or central department) approval will be required.

For async online courses and those with substantial digital content, the form requires the proposer to confirm that the IETL and relevant guidelines have been consulted. Confirmation of approval from Lifelong Learning will be required for async online courses.

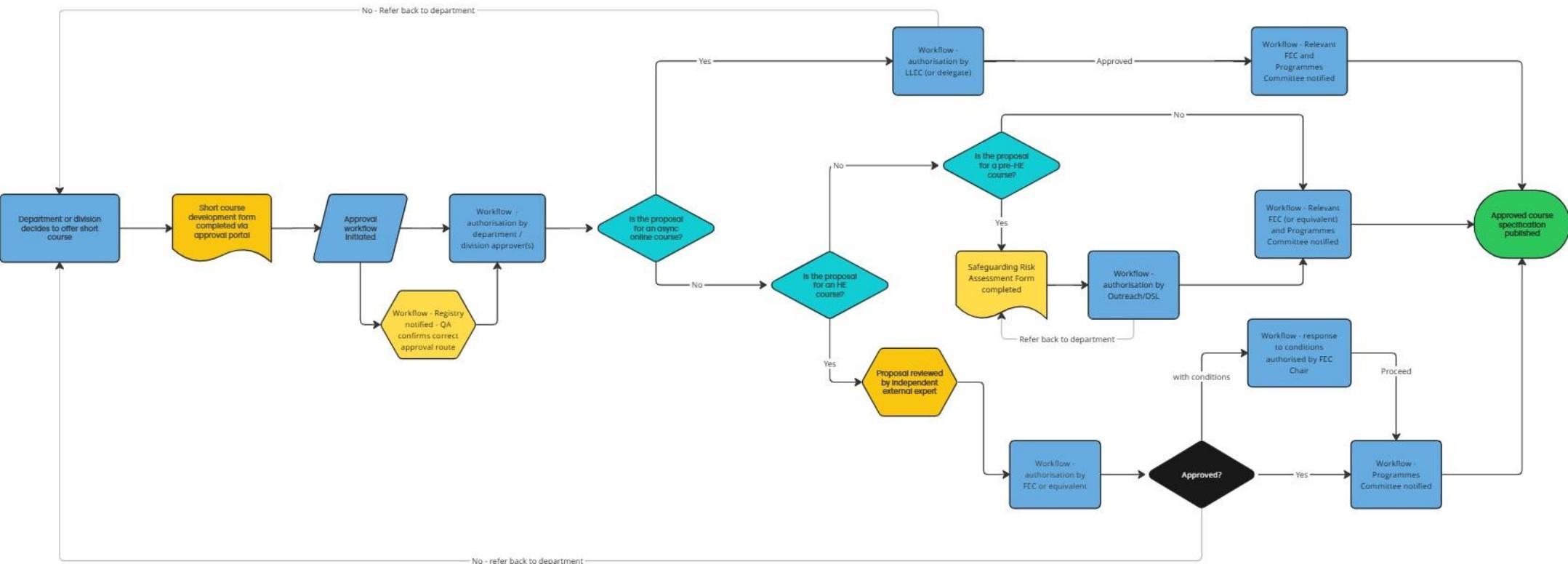
Pre-HE course proposals should include confirmation that a safeguarding risk assessment has been completed.

The short course specification will be populated from the relevant fields within the approval form. Following approval, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement team will place a definitive copy in the short courses document library and provide a link to the course proposer for publication on the department web page.

All short course queries should be sent to: short.courses@imperial.ac.uk.

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Appendix 1: Short course approval process



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