

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Monday 22 November 2010

Programme Approval – Follow-up on Internal Audit Recommendation 5 – Report of a Meeting with College Deans of Learning & Teaching

Ms H Clegg, Senate Office

Introduction

In March and April 2009, there was an internal audit of the University's programme approval process, conducted by Deloitte. The audit report and recommendations were considered by ASC in October 2009. ASC's Programme and Course Approval Working Group (PCAWG) considered responses to the recommendations. All of these have been addressed, with the exception of Recommendation 5, for which it was agreed that action should be deferred until the new University structure was in place – this was because it involved consideration of Faculty processes in programme approval.

Recommendation 5 states:

A number of variations were noted in the way Faculties perform the initial review of new programme proposals prior to referral to the PAGs, in particular in relation to the level of authorisation and review. Management should consider identifying and communicating areas of good practice or introducing a standardised approach.

Meeting with Deans of Learning & Teaching

On 8 November 2010, the Convener of the Programme and Course Approval Working Group met with the Deans of Learning and Teaching from each of the Colleges, plus one Head of Student Administration. At that meeting, it was ascertained that current practice in each of the Colleges was as follows:

Arts	The new structure has been mapped directly onto the previous structure, with one Board of Studies for undergraduate proposals and one Board of Studies for Postgraduate proposals. The College Learning & Teaching Committee scrutinises proposals prior to transmission to Boards of Studies, which then forward proposals to the ASC Programme Approval Group (PAG).
Medical, Veterinary & Life Sciences	One College Learning & Teaching Committee acts as a Board of Studies and transmits all proposals to the PAG. Each of the three Schools also has a Learning & Teaching Committee/Board of Studies, and there is one College-wide Graduate School Board. These scrutinise proposals before sending them to the College Learning & Teaching Committee. There are also lower-level committees which informally discuss proposals at an initial stage, although these are not considered to be part of the formal approval process.

Science & Engineering One College Learning & Teaching Committee acts as a Board of Studies and receives all proposals (with the exception of minor course changes, which are dealt with out of committee by the Dean of Learning & Teaching and a small group).

Social Sciences Five Boards of Studies operate – one for PGT proposals and four for undergraduate proposals (MA SocSci, Education, Interdisciplinary Studies (Dumfries) and a joint board for the LLB and BAcc degrees). Each has delegated authority from the College to take approval decisions.

Although it was recognised that there was diversity of practice, this was not believed to be necessarily a negative point. It was considered that current practices allowed for flexibility but that they were robust, ensuring only satisfactory proposals were accepted. Additionally, it was considered that the variations could be justified academically, with different Colleges having different needs due to their varying academic structures. It was also agreed that time was required to test the approval procedures within the new College structure.

Recommendations

1. Colleges should implement their procedures as described above, and these would be monitored by the PAGs. Should difficulties, or unnecessary layers of scrutiny, be revealed, changes could then be agreed and implemented in the next academic year.
2. Regarding the more informal parts of the procedure (for example, lower-level groups or committees undertaking discussions about proposals at the initial stages of development), it was not considered necessary to standardise these. Provided there was a reasonable amount of consistency at College level (and absolute consistency at PAG level), it was agreed that local practices could take any form considered justifiable by the College and Schools.

ASC is asked to approve these recommendations.

ELIR Action Plan – External Consultation in Course and Programme Approval

ELIR Panel Recommendation

An issue was raised by the ELIR panel (sections 87 and 157 of the final report), regarding external input to course and programme approval. It had been suggested by the ELIR Panel that the reliance on External Examiners in the consultation process should be reviewed to ensure the University adhered to Section 7 of the QAA Code of Practice.

Discussion of the Recommendation - Deans of Learning & Teaching

The Deans recognised that replacing External Examiners with other external consultants would place a significant burden on external specialists. Additionally, taking into account the difficulty of having an external specialist attend meetings, this would most likely dictate that only one meeting could be held to discuss proposals. This therefore reduced the flexibility currently afforded to proposers. Deans considered that the current system was adequate, with external members giving detailed comments where they felt this was required. They acknowledged that perhaps more work could be done in terms of demonstrating how proposers responded to the comments, however.

It was agreed that this issue would be considered in more detail by the Programme and Course Approval Working Group.