

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 2 October 2015

**Report from Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) of the Meeting of
Conditions of the Revalidation of BSc Countryside Management**

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Revalidation of Environment and Countryside Undergraduate Degree Programmes:

Response Report from the Programme Team to Conditions and Recommendations

BSc (Hons) Environmental Resource Management

Conditions

- (a) The structure of year 3 and year 4 of the degree in Countryside Management should be reviewed following reconsideration of the BSc/BSc (Hons) Environmental Resource Management to ensure that the elective choices remain viable.*

Response

In response to discussions with the revalidation panel the Countryside Management core teams have discussed the impacts of the changes made to the Environmental Resource Management framework to the Countryside Management programmes. In reviewing the new year 3 and 4 Environmental Resource Management frameworks alongside those for Countryside Management agreement was reached that there would be no significant or detrimental impact on the Countryside Management framework, nor on SRUC's ability to offer and deliver this. As a result, it was concluded that there was no requirement for the originally proposed structure for years 3 and 4 of the Countryside Management Degree to be changed in as a result of the updated Environmental Resource Management frameworks.

- (b) When reviewing the elective choice in years 3 and 4, the degree should retain the option for students to select one elective module as a free choice from those on offer at their campus, subject to availability and timetabling.*

Response

Following due consideration by the revalidation team, the free choice elective module has been retained as an elective option in the BSc CM framework. This is seen as a positive addition and supports the provision of greater flexibility for students to pursue their own areas of specific interest and tailor their degree studies accordingly.

- (c) Enhanced and strengthened marketing activities should be undertaken for the two degrees. This will require impetus from the Education Marketing team, although support in terms of graduate profiles will be required from the programme teams.*

Response

Addressing this condition is not wholly within the control of the revalidation team and the core teams delivering the CM programme across SRUC. It is recognised that enhanced and strengthened marketing activities can only be delivered by team members working closely with the Education Divisions' marketing and recruitment team and supported by senior management to ensure that it is appropriately resourced. Initial discussions have taken place between the Head of Department, Programme/Team Leaders (P/TLs) and Marketing and Recruitment staff to agree wording for the 2016/2017 prospectus.

It is understood by the Core Team that to achieve the best marketing outcomes, it is imperative that the expertise and resources of the Communications Team are engaged to support the development and delivery of identified and agreed activities to maximise their impact, reach and benefits. It is also noted that communication must be two way to ensure accurate and factual supporting information is available to all of those supporting marketing and recruitment activities.

Core teams are considering their current graduating student cohorts and those of recent years, to identify appropriate individuals to include graduate profiles in promotional materials.

The output of Recommendation (I), identified USPs for each programme, will be a necessity for supporting the future of enhanced and strengthened marketing activity for the degree.

Whilst some initial progress has been made towards this condition further activity has been identified in the post revalidation action plan.

(d) Module descriptors for all modules under the control of the programme should be updated in accordance with the new Degree Module Descriptor template. This will provide:

- *information on the development, and where appropriate the assessment, of core skills and graduate attributes;*
- *details of appropriate reading in refereed journals and review articles;*
- *details on the approaches to learning and teaching which will be employed;*
- *more detail on the assessment methods used;*
- *reading lists separated more clearly into categories of 'required' and 'additional'.*

Response

This has been completed and submitted in Section C. There is recognition that more work is required across descriptors in the new format to ensure that the development of graduate attributes is realistically recorded, and that staff development/training is required to facilitate and support this activity.

(e) Funding should be available to support a core set of field trips and study tours – a key element within these programmes (and in many others across the education provision of SRUC). An SRUC Policy to support this is required, and should be in place for academic session 2015-16.

Response

The provision of funding to support a core set of field trips and study tours sits outwith the responsibility of the CM core teams and has impact across the Education Division. As such, this was taken to the Heads of Department group which established a short-life working group, originally comprising three Heads of Department (Environment and Countryside: Agriculture and Business Management; and Horticulture and Landscaping) with the remit to develop a Study Tour policy for the Education Division. The group has had initial discussions and met on two occasions to date, arising from one staff member leaving the organisation and another impacted by ill health. A further meeting date has been set in June to continue this work and progress a standard approach to funding study tours across the Education Division. It is intended that a draft SRUC policy will be developed during the summer of 2015.

Recommendations

- a) *A mapping exercise should be undertaken to indicate development of key topics, such as sustainable development and behavioural change, within modules.*

Response

The revalidation team recognises that there are significant benefits to understanding where and how, key topics and issues, core to each of the individual degree streams are delivered. An initial report has been produced on the delivery of sustainable development within the Countryside Management programme. To implement this recommendation fully, further activities are required including: establishing agreement of the specific broad themes which are appropriate to map in the degree programme; and reviewing the system employed by the University of Glasgow to ascertain how this can inform the work required across these two programmes. Details of how this recommendation will be progressed are included in the action plan.

- (d) *It was recommended that further consideration should be given to developing Countryside Management students' knowledge and understanding of finance and budget planning within the module Professional Practice and Project Management.*

Response

Within the Professional Practice and Project Management module, the Countryside Management core teams have met with members of the Rural Business Management team and agreed that the following be included in the delivery of this module to Countryside Management students to ensure that they have opportunity to develop their knowledge and understanding in relation to finance and business planning to aid in the critical evaluation of real life projects: Annual accounting; budget reports and relevant legislation. The existing Module descriptor has been updated to accommodate these proposals and develop a more focussed Module.

The Countryside Management core teams have also identified that through studies in previous years students will be continually building on and developing this knowledge from the Graded Unit in years 1 where project management and the costing of projects is introduced. In year 2, Introduction to Business Management includes budget and asset management, the use of spreadsheets for financial recording and management and understanding cash flow, for example. In year 3, Managing Community Projects will cover fundraising, use of contractors, detailed costings of projects, partnership working and consultation. This is further supported by the Conservation Management Planning Module which requires project costing, resource management, funding and budget control, as well as task management through the use of Gantt charts.

- (e) *It was recommended that the team consider the development of understanding of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) within proposals for revised HND qualification in Countryside Management.*

Response

Work towards revalidating the HN suite of Awards is progressing slowly with agreement of the frameworks and intended changes for the Countryside Management programme to be reached at a meeting of Programme/Team Leaders at the end of June. The revalidation team has noted this recommendation and through discussions which have already taken place regarding the HN award has agreed that this be incorporated into the HND programme. Teaching staff have commented that an initial introduction to GIS, even in year one, would raise awareness of the applications and possibilities of GIS within the broad environment and countryside sector.

Further discussion is required through the updating process of the HN Award, but it is anticipated that the GIS topic will be embedded within one or more of the common HN Units in such a way as to provide a clear and supportive lead into the core 3rd year GIS module.

The revalidation team will give careful consideration to what constitutes the appropriate subject material at the appropriate SCQF level of the HN Unit(s) in which it is embedded.

- (f) *Consider the perceived overlap between Interpretation: an Introduction and Interpretive Principles in the current delivery of these Units, and when reviewing/revalidating the HNC/D delivery.*

Response

The recommendation has been the focus of discussion through the initial meetings of the HN revalidation group. The Unit author has explained to the group that the intention of both Units is different and specific and has expressed that in approaching delivery of these Units in a different way the perceived overlap identified by students can be lost. The Unit author has discussed this with staff responsible for delivery of the two Units at other campuses to explore how this might be accommodated without alteration to the frameworks.

The implications of this recommendation for students requires further scrutiny by the HN revalidation group to ensure that there is no duplication of learning content for students at different levels of study.

- h) *that the team consider means for formal horizon scanning within their subject areas.*

Response

It is recognised by the revalidation team that this is a pertinent and important issue raised by the revalidation panel. Whilst some, informal approaches of horizon scanning activities are carried out within some Modules, there is a need and desire to embed this more formally within the studies of students in their third and fourth years.

The revalidation team has agreed that common practices will be established through the development of exercises, in which both staff and students will participate in appropriate year three and four modules. It is already recognised by the group that these exercises will be beneficial in the modules Action for Biodiversity (for the subject areas of conservation and biodiversity issues) and Rural Planning and EIA (for the subject areas of planning and EIA legislation).

The core team will further discuss the topic of horizon scanning and identify and agree an appropriate range of modules in which these activities will be embedded.

- i) *that the team review the range of assessment types in order to best develop essential skills and graduate attributes necessary for the workplace.*

Response

The revalidation team recognise the benefits to students of reviewing the range of assessment types, not only in order to best develop essential skills and graduate attributes necessary for the workplace, but also to provide students with access to a diversity of assessment opportunities which spread outside of 'typical' reports and essay type formats.

Progression of this work will be made in advance of the first delivery of years three and four of the revised degree programme. The review of assessment types for year three will be undertaken concurrently with the work towards aligning the assessments for years one and two, in time for delivering a diversified suite of assessment types to 3rd students in autumn

2015. The review of year 4 assessment approaches will be undertaken throughout the academic session 2015/2016.

An exercise will be undertaken to map the current range of assessment types and timings in years 3 and 4 of each of the degree programme during the summer of 2015. This exercise will be followed by the core teams giving consideration to how different assessment types may be best used in the overall assessment strategy and how these changes will impact on and contribute to the wider development of student essential skills and graduate attributes.

j) that the team consider the assessment schedule across the semester/year to best manage the students' workload.

Response

The revalidation team again recognise and understand the benefits to be derived for students in developing a clear assessment strategy for the programme by semester. In the first instance, this will identify what current practices are and will stand to highlight where assessment 'hot spots' are occurring. Following this initial review and evaluation of current practices, the core teams will work to agree a new and integrated assessment schedule. In responding to this recommendation, the assessment schedules will consider and integrate the work undertaken towards realising recommendation i) which should ensure a diversity of assessment types and contribute to spreading the assessment load on students more broadly across the academic year.

Again, work towards this recommendation will commence in the summer of 2015 to ensure that an assessment schedule is in place for year 3 of the Countryside Management programme at the beginning of the 2015/2016 academic session and the beginning of the 2016/2017 academic session for Countryside Management year 4.

The revalidation team are giving consideration to the potential benefits of sharing the relevant elements of these assessment schedules with each of the student cohorts, so as to provide students to plan for the anticipated assessment load through each of their years of study.

k) that the team consider developing an international study tour.

Response

The benefits to students of international travel and study are well understood and recognised by teaching staff across the Environment and Countryside Department. At present there is only one international opportunity provided to students in their second year of study at the Oatridge Campus through a long standing exchange programme with an upland agricultural school in Norway. In working towards meeting this recommendation, there is opportunity to explore the possibility of cross campus opportunities for each of the programmes to establish and participate in an international study tour, which could be developed through the established international links of staff at each of the campuses. It is further recognised that there is the opportunity to give consideration to developing a combined Countryside Management/Environmental Resource Management international study tour. This latter approach will help to ensure the accessibility to and viability of international opportunity to student cohorts which are sometimes smaller in number.

It is recognised by the revalidation group, that progression towards this recommendation will be influenced by the study tour policy being developed by the short life working group, as identified in the response to condition g) earlier in this document. When this policy is available and its impacts understood, it will be utilised to inform a more detailed exploration of possibilities for developing one or more international study tour in years three or four of the two degree programmes.

It is anticipated that an international study tour could be developed for delivery in the academic year 2017/2018.

- l) It was recommended that the team consider the USPs and produce exemplars for career pathways through the programme. These would be beneficial to students as guidance information and would also be useful to aid marketing.*

Response

This is a valuable recommendation and one that the revalidation team clearly recognises the significance and value of. A meeting of Department staff on March 18th 2015, allowed for staff from across all five campuses to explore their perceptions of the Unique Selling Points of the programmes offered by the Department at all levels of study. It is notable that many commonalities were identified, no matter the level of study and included:

- Practical application through strong field based elements of delivery
- Industry links
- Job ready graduates
- Active learning
- Strong academic guidance and pastoral support, supporting and fostering progression
- Flexibility

Further to agreeing a set of USPs common across the range of programmes delivered in the Department, it will be beneficial to revisit these initial ideas of USPs and clearly identify those which are specific to each of the programme areas to allow for specific supporting programme promotion through marketing activities as well as providing pre, in and post course guidance to students. The core teams for each of the programmes will review the feedback from the initial Departmental discussions to identify the USPs for Countryside Management. Using the career pathways highlighted in Section 3.1 as a basis, core teams are committed to producing the suggested exemplars for career pathways.