

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 24 March 2017

Report and Follow-Up Response from Scotland's Rural College on the Revalidation of the MSc, PgDip, PgCert in Countryside Management Programmes

SRUC and the University of Glasgow

Master of Science, Postgraduate Diploma, Postgraduate Certificate in:

Countryside Management

Report of Revalidation Meeting held at SRUC, Edinburgh, 22nd Nov 2016

1 Revalidation panel

Dr Kyrsten Black	Assistant Principal Higher Education, SRUC [Convener]
Dr Cheryl Woolhead	Associate Dean for PGT, College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences, University of Glasgow
Dr Peter Graves	Enterprise Fellow, Department of Geography, Northumbria University.
Nick Wright	People and Wildlife Manager, Scottish Wildlife Trust
Dr Alison Murray	Head of Engineering, Science and Technology Dept, SRUC, Ayr Campus
Gemma Jones	SRUC Students Association Vice President, BA (Hons) Outdoor Pursuits Management, SRUC, 2016
Dr Chris Smith	Academic Development Manager Higher Education, SRUC [Reporter]

2 Summary

Subject to the team fully addressing the conditions set out in section 5.2, the revalidation panel (the panel) agreed to recommend to the SRUC Academic Board and the Academic Standards Committee of the University of Glasgow that the Master of Science / Postgraduate Diploma / Postgraduate Certificate in Countryside Management should be validated as awards of the University of Glasgow for six years from session 2017-18.

The panel set four conditions and six advisory recommendations, which are summarised in section 5. Evidence that the conditions have been satisfactorily addressed, along with a finalised programme specification, should be provided to the Convenor of the Panel **by Friday 17th February.**

3 Introduction

The MSc/PgDip/PgCert Countryside Management was first validated in May 2010 for six years from session 2010-11 and this was approved by the University of Glasgow. The programme, in common with all the University of Glasgow validated PGT

programmes in SRUC¹, is delivered by part-time distance learning. Students would normally complete the MSc over three academic years (60 SCQF credits per year).

The programme did not recruit sufficient students to run in academic years 2010-11 and 2011-12. The first cohort of students was registered in October 2012 and the first students to graduate with the MSc did so in July 2015. The review and revalidation of the programme was due to take place in 2015-16 with the revalidated awards first delivered in academic year 2016-17. However, due to significant challenges with progress towards revalidation, SRUC asked the University in March 2016 for leave to delay the revalidation of the programme until early in the 2016-17 academic year and hence to extend the existing validation of the awards for one more year since there were continuing enrolled students; this was granted and noted by the University Academic Standards Committee.

SRUC Academic Board considered a detailed review of the programme in July 2016 which included consideration of measures to enhance the marketing and promotion of the programme in order to improve future recruitment and viability. In addition the review addressed a number of matters, some noted as requiring urgent attention, which the External Examiner had raised in his annual reports. SRUC Academic Board considered the proposals satisfactory and approved that a revalidation be held in autumn 2016.

The panel was provided with a revalidation document which gave details of the proposed revised programme. The role of the panel was to scrutinise the proposed revalidated programme, and to report to the SRUC Academic Board and the Academic Standards Committee of the University of Glasgow on the suitability of the revalidated programme leading to the awards of Master of Science, Postgraduate Diploma and Postgraduate Certificate of the University of Glasgow.

The timetable for the day's meeting, held on the 25th November 2016, and details of the academic staff in the programme team (the team), are given in Appendices A and B respectively.

4 Meetings with the programme development team and current students

The panel met the key members of the team who had been responsible for the review and redevelopment of the programme in order to discuss a range of issues identified following the panel's consideration of the revalidation document. The panel also met with some current students.

4.1 Programme rationale and focus

The team noted that the existing programme was focussed on ecological management, largely of protected areas rather than of the wider countryside. They agreed with both the panel and the observations of the External Examiner that this was probably too narrow a focus to allow the programme to become fully sustainable. It was noted that the number of students enrolled on the programme since it was first delivered in 2012-13 was small (only 19 over the first three sessions, not all of whom had completed their first year of study). A broader scope would also make the programme a better fit for CIEEM accreditation which was a medium term aim of the team (see 4.3).

The team clarified that the programme was not intended to be a progression route from SRUC's existing BSc Countryside Management, but rather it was mainly intended to attract candidates either currently in employment in the sector wishing to upskill or

¹ Currently; Organic Farming, Applied Poultry Science, Rural Business Management and Agricultural Professional Practice as well as Countryside Management.

candidates from unrelated subject areas wishing to change careers. Whilst the programme considered countryside management in a largely UK context, the team clarified that case studies from outwith the UK were also included and recruitment of EU and international students was not precluded.

The panel supported this broad rationale and focus; however, they were not convinced that the programme framework proposed was entirely consistent with them (see 4.2).

4.2 Programme aims and objectives

The panel were content that the programme was consistent with SRUC's mission, vision and long-term aims and objectives as well as SRUC Education's overall aims for its learning programmes. The 'General aims' of the revised Countryside Management programme were considered to be broadly appropriate. However it was noted that the 'specific objectives' provided in the revalidation document referred only to the MSc and PG Cert awards and not additionally to the PG Dip award. It was also noted by the panel that 'Specific objectives' could not readily be mapped to the Learning Objectives in individual modules nor were they comprehensive – not all Module LOs could be mapped to the Specific Objectives. The panel made it a **condition** of revalidation that the 'Specific objectives' should be reviewed by the team and presented as Programme Learning Outcomes which should be specific to the MSc, but also make reference to the PG Dip and PG Cert respectively.

4.3 Accreditation by professional and statutory bodies

The team's marketing plan included the intention 'to seek accreditation from the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)'. Whilst the team had considered recent guidance from CIEEM on improving the skills gap amongst environmental professionals whilst redeveloping the programme they confirmed that no detailed and comprehensive mapping of programme content to CIEEM criteria for accreditation had been undertaken. The panel strongly supported the team's intention to seek CIEEM accreditation and were of the view that the mapping should be undertaken prior to completing the revalidation of the programme. If the mapping identified the need for minor changes to programme content in order to satisfy CIEEM criteria then it was desirable and sensible that these changes should be made prior to revalidation. The panel therefore **recommended** that the team should map programme and module learning outcomes to the CIEEM criteria for accreditation and revise the programme framework as appropriate to facilitate its future accreditation.

4.4 Programme viability

Given the low number of enrolments onto the programme in its first three years of delivery (see 4.1); the panel explored the actions recently taken by the team to increase enrolments and retention of students. It was noted that there had been significant recent changes in the leadership and membership of the team, and that actions to address student experience and programme viability were still being implemented and would take some time yet to fully take effect.

The team reported that there had been 16 enrolments at the start of the 2016-17 academic year – almost double that of any previous year and much closer to the target of 20 which was deemed to be the minimum for financial viability. This improvement had been achieved by implementing a number of actions including: improving the website prospectus information; working more closely with the PGT Marketing and Student Recruitment Officer; more vigorous liaison with employers in the sector by the team; reviewing programme marketing materials; growing a social media presence.

The team reported that actions to minimise early withdrawals from the programme, which had been a particular problem in autumn 2015, had been implemented; in particular the Year Tutor was able to spend more time with enquirers and potential applicants during the recruitment cycle to help them understand the requirement and expectations of the programme and the cost and time commitments which would be required, and then to follow-up student progress post-enrolment to provide focussed pastoral and academic support. The panel were supportive of and reassured by the actions taken by the team and accepted that it would take more than a full academic year to be able to fully assess their effectiveness.

Given that many students were returning to higher education after a break of several years and would additionally be unfamiliar with modes of on-line distance learning, the panel **recommended** that the team should consider making a few small (sub-module) units of learning available to potential students via the SRUC website for them to be able to sample and experience the learning and teaching approach.

4.5 Programme structure

The panel agreed with the team's intention to broaden the content of the programme which was also consistent with recommendations from the External Examiner. The main vehicle proposed to broaden content was the inclusion of elective choice into the programme framework. However, the panel felt that this was not appropriate given the increased cost involved in light of the current challenges in meeting target numbers for programme viability (see 4.4). The panel challenged the team to defend the content of the curriculum and explored a number of alternative approaches which could be adopted to ensure that existing Programme Learning Outcomes relating to habitats and species could be satisfactorily achieved whilst new Outcomes relating to broader issues outwith protected areas could be included and expanded. It was suggested that the latter could be facilitated for example by including the module *Farming, Forestry and the Environment* in the core. The panel were content to leave the detail of the required changes to the team and therefore made it a **condition** of revalidation that the programme framework should not include any elective modules and should be revised in such a way that the scope of the programme is broadened.

4.6 Modules and descriptors

The panel scrutinised all modules and discussed each with the team to clarify their understanding. The panel were broadly satisfied with the content of the modules and the format of the module descriptors notwithstanding any changes which will be required consequent to modifications to the programme structure (see 4.5). A few specific issues were considered and these are outlined below.

The panel discussed with the team the validity of their proposal to include a non-credit bearing 'half' module (equivalent to 7.5 SCQF credits) titled *Experimental Design, Data Analysis and Interpretation*. Whilst the need to help students to develop such knowledge and skills was not in doubt and had been noted as an area of weakness in feedback from students, the panel felt that the approach suggested was not workable and could lead to students opting out of this essential learning. It was suggested that the learning could be provided, as an on-line module, as part of the induction for the MSc Project. It was noted that students could present a range of existing knowledge but that it was important that they were all able to reach an appropriate level of understanding before fully embarking on the Project. The panel suggested that this learning could be assessed within the Project and bear credit (up to 10 SCQF credit points) within the project plan and the Project report. The panel therefore made it a **condition** of validation that the development of knowledge and skills in research methods and data

analysis should be an integral part of the MSc Project and should be assessed within this module.

It was noted that the modules *Professional Leadership and Management*, *Topical Issues in Countryside Management*² and *Issues in Environment and Farming*³ were shared with, and could be jointly delivered with other SRUC PGT programmes. This was seen as being beneficial from a cost point of view and the panel were reassured that the mode of delivery and nature of assessment allowed an appropriate degree of focus on countryside management issues.

The panel had concerns over the assessments for the module *Topical Issues in Countryside Management*. During the module students were expected to engage in constructive debates on topical issues in countryside management and their impacts on wider society. The module is designed to develop the student's critical evaluation skills whilst dealing with complex issues and making informed judgements. The panel were supportive of the rationale and that some of the assessment should be based on the student's own presentation as well as their contribution to debate and discussion, however, they were concerned that this alone would not provide sound evidence for LO2 and particularly of critical evaluation which was crucial at SCQF Level 11. The panel therefore made it a **condition** of revalidation that the weighting of marks in the module *Topical Issues in Countryside Management* should be increased significantly for the reflective report to ensure there is balanced evidence of the attainment of all LOs.

The panel were concerned about the relevance of the module *Planning and the Policy Framework* to the programme. It appeared to be very specialist in content and covering areas of detail which would rarely be handled in the workplace by countryside/environmental managers but rather by specialist planners. The team provided an eloquent defence of the modules and made the point that many countryside managers and 'ecologists' work within teams and contribute to environmental impact assessments, climate change actions, flood alleviation planning, etc. In addition knowledge of the planning framework allowed graduates to interact more effectively with other land managers. The panel were convinced by the argument and the module content but felt that the rationale in the module descriptor did not adequately represent the purpose, content or context of delivery of the modules and that this should be revised.

The panel identified three issues with module descriptors which they considered should be attended to prior to validation of the programme and hence they **strongly recommended** that prior to final validation the module descriptors should be refined. This work should include:

- Clear assignment of learning outcomes to assessments for all modules to avoid the risk of over assessment, or double assessment of learning outcomes.
- Consistent use of module titles both in the revalidation document, the programme framework and specification and as the titles of module descriptors.
- Review and where appropriate revision of the Rationale section in all module descriptors to ensure that it clearly describes the content of the module, the

² Elsewhere in the revalidation document this module is referred to as Topical Issues in Land Management.

³ Elsewhere in the revalidation document this module is referred to as Farming, Forestry and the Environment. The panel were of the view that the title *Sustainable Land Use* might be more appropriate and attractive. The team should ensure consistent use of titles for modules throughout the revalidation document and final programme framework.

approach to learning and assessment and the context in which it will be delivered⁴.

4.7 Learning and assessment approaches

4.7.1 Study weekends

Both the team and students were firmly of the view that attendance at study weekends was extremely beneficial to student in terms of developing a group ethos, student-staff communication and relationship building, maintaining student motivation, developing and practicing practical skills, etc. However, it was recognised that for some potential students, attendance at study weekends presented challenges in terms of cost, time away from work and caring commitments, etc. There is circumstantial evidence that mandatory attendance at study weekends might reduce the number of potential enrolments particularly from outwith Scotland. The team suggested that attendance at study weekends was not mandatory and that it was possible to achieve the Learning Outcomes without attending, however, the panel felt that this was not sufficiently explicit in the revalidation document and presumably guidance provided to potential students. Nor was it clear what measure the team were taking to provide parity of learning opportunities for students who could not attend study weekends. The panel felt that information for students should more clearly explain the learning approach that students would need to take in order to compensate for the study weekends. The panel consequently **recommended** that the team should clarify whether attendance at study weekends is mandatory, and if not, describe what alternative learning approaches which can be taken by students.

4.7.2 Assessment

The panel were satisfied that the assessment methods employed were appropriate to the Learning Outcomes and additionally the development of industry-relevant professional skills and attributes. Recent feedback from the External Examiner and during the meeting itself from current students identified some inconsistency both in both the content of assessment briefs, and the nature and most particularly the promptness of feedback. The students articulated the challenges in this regard faced by a student cohort which included many students who were returning to higher education after a number of years. Discussion with the team confirmed that there is clearly much good practice within the team and strategies including the provision of generic feedback to the group before marks had been moderated and confirmed, managing student expectations by clearly setting dates for feedback return on assessment briefs, providing detailed criteria on assessment briefs for the allocation and weighting of marks were all discussed. The panel hence **recommended** that the team should develop, document and share with the students, a consistent approach across all modules to clarify the way in which marking criteria, marks and feedback are provided to the students.

Student feedback identified that a greater degree of consistency of approach in other areas of programme management would also be welcomed including; the recording of GoToMeeting sessions, the information provided at induction before the start of each module (including reading lists), the range and organisation of learning materials on the VLE. Recognising that the Programme Leader and many of the teaching team were recent appointments the panel urged the team were therefore urged to take action to increase consistency of approach across all areas of programme management.

⁴ SRUC Education Manual Section [A2.1.7 Degree Module Descriptors](#).

4.7.3 Equality and diversity

The panel noted feedback from students suggesting that *'care needs to be taken in module design to maintain a good level of equality and diversity – e.g. images used in presentations often had a singular gender illustrated'*. The panel explored strategies employed by the team to promote equality and diversity both in recruitment, delivery approaches and the design of learning and assessment, including the nature of fieldwork and study weekends. It was clear that the team were both conversant with and mindful of equality and diversity issues. The panel **recommended** that the team should develop, and share with students, a policy statement on equality and diversity

5 Conclusions, Conditions and Recommendations

- 5.1** Subject to the team fully addressing the conditions set out in section 5.2 below, the validation panel agreed to recommend to the SRUC Academic Board and the Academic Standards Committee of the University of Glasgow that the Master of Science / Postgraduate Diploma / Postgraduate Certificate in Countryside Management should be revalidated as awards of the University of Glasgow for six years from session 2017-18.

The validation panel set four conditions and made six recommendations which are listed below in paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 (further details and context for these can be found in the earlier sections referenced in square brackets).

- 5.2** However, the panel had concerns about some aspects of the proposal and set the following **conditions**:

- a) The 'Specific objectives' should be reviewed by the team and presented as Programme Learning Outcomes which should be specific to the MSc, but also make reference to the PG Dip and PG Cert respectively [4.2]
- b) The programme framework should not include any elective modules and should be revised in such a way that the scope of the programme is broadened [4.5]
- c) The development of skills in research methods and data analysis should be an integral part of the MSc Project and should be assessed within this module [4.6]
- d) The weighting of marks in the module Topical Issues in Countryside Management should be increased significantly for the reflective report to ensure there is balanced evidence of the attainment of all LOs [4.6]

These conditions must be fully resolved to the satisfaction of the convenor of the panel before the final panel report can be sent to the University of Glasgow to seek approval for the revalidation. Evidence that the conditions have been fully considered and satisfactorily addressed, along with a finalised programme specification, should be provided to the convenor of the panel **by Friday 17th February**.

- 5.3** In addition the panel made the following advisory recommendations:

- a) Map programme and module learning outcomes to the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) criteria for accreditation and revise the programme framework as appropriate to facilitate its future accreditation [4.3].
- b) Consider making a few small (sub-module) units of learning available to potential students via the SRUC website for them to be able to sample and experience the learning and teaching approach [4.4].

- c) The panel ***strongly recommended*** that prior to final validation the module descriptors should be refined [4.6]. This work should include:
- Clear assignment of learning outcomes to assessments for all modules to avoid the risk of over assessment, or double assessment of learning outcomes.
 - Consistent use of module titles both in the revalidation document, the programme framework and specification and as the titles of module descriptors.
 - Review and where appropriate revision of the Rationale section in all module descriptors to ensure that it clearly describes the content of the module, the approach to learning and assessment and the context in which it will be delivered
- d) Clarify whether attendance at study weekends is mandatory, and if not, describe the alternative learning approaches which can be taken by students [4.7.1].
- e) Develop, document and share with the students, a consistent approach across all modules to clarify the way in which marking criteria, marks and feedback are provided to the students [4.7.2].
- f) Develop, and share with students, a policy statement on Equality and Diversity [4.7.3].

Appendix A

Timetable of Validation Meeting held at SRUC, Edinburgh on 22nd November 2016:

10:00	Arrival <i>Introductions and coffee/tea</i>
10:15	Private meeting of the revalidation panel <i>To discuss the proposals and identify the major issues for discussion</i>
11:30	Meeting with programme team <i>To discuss the proposals, rationale, educational aims, learning objectives, content, teaching and learning approaches, assessment issues, etc.</i>
12:30	Lunch
13:00	Meeting with students
14:00	Private meeting of panel
14:30	Further meeting with programme team
15:15	Private meeting of panel
16:00	Meeting with programme team <i>To report back panel recommendations</i>
16:30	Finish and depart

Appendix B

Members of the Programme Team who met the revalidation panel:

Dr Collette Coll	Programme Leader, MSc Countryside Mgt, SRUC Aberdeen Campus:
Mrs Cath Seeds	Adviser of Studies, MSc Countryside Mgt, SRUC Ayr Campus
Ms Nicky Penford	Lecturer, SRUC Aberdeen Campus
Dr Chris Smillie	Lecturer, SRUC Oatridge Campus
Dr Ian Lewis	Lecturer, SRUC Oatridge Campus
Mr John Macdonald	Lecturer, SRUC Aberdeen Campus
Mr Colin Hardacre	Lecturer, SRUC Aberdeen Campus
Mr Niall Evans	Head of Environment and Countryside Department, Education Division, SRUC

Also in the Programme Team but not meeting the panel:

Mrs Caroline Daniel	Programme Leader in Agriculture and Lecturer in Business Management, Agriculture and Business Management Department, SRUC Aberdeen Campus
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RESPONSE TO MSc COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT REVIEW

Conditions

- a) The 'Specific objectives' have been reviewed and have been presented as Programme Learning Outcomes for the MSc, the PG Dip and PG Cert respectively (Section B5.1).
- b) Elective options have been removed and the programme has been broadened by amalgamating four of the ecology modules into two modules and adding in two new modules – Farming, Forestry and the Environment and, Interpretive Principles and Education for Sustainability. It is suggested that this will give a fuller picture of wider countryside issues and directly responds to the recommendations of the revalidation panel.
- c) The development of 'Skills in research methods and data analysis' has been included as an integral part of the MSc Project and will be assessed within this module.
- d) The weighting of marks in the module Topical Issues in Countryside Management has been revisited in collaboration with the programme management team (MSc Agricultural Applied Practice) who are currently responsible for this unit and who have previously successfully validated this unit as part of a Glasgow University Programme. The seminar, which was previously allocated as 50% of the overall marks will be allocated 25% for seminar delivery and 25% for breadth of research relating to the seminar. A reflective report will also be required and will be allocated 20% of the overall marks. The remainder of the marks will be allocated for facilitation of other seminars and demonstration of participation skills. This means that the delivery of the seminar will be worth 25% of the overall marks available. Whilst the presentation remains a significant presence in the assessment, the majority of marks will be allocated to research related skills. It is also noted that reasonable adjustments would be made for students who for any reason are unable to talk in front of a live audience.

Recommendations

- a) The module learning outcomes on the programme have been mapped to the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) criteria for accreditation and discussion is underway with CIEEM.

Currently CIEEM have confirmed that they normally only give accreditation to MSc's where the MSc is a follow-on to the degree programme of the same name. This MSc is targeted at new entries to the Countryside Management industry and is not a follow on to the BSc in Countryside Management, so currently CIEEM have agreed to look at the programme and consider ways to address this current issue. The programme framework has been revised to facilitate its possible future accreditation given our understanding of the current requirements.
- b) Small (sub-module) units of learning are being developed in conjunction with other MSc programmes and these will be made available to potential students via the SRUC website for them to be able to sample and experience the learning and teaching approach.

The module descriptors have been refined to include clear assignment of learning outcomes to assessments for all modules to avoid the risk of over assessment, or double assessment of learning outcomes.
- c) Alternative learning approaches to material covered at the study weekends have been agreed and have been stated in the document so that students who are unable to attend study weekends are not disadvantaged (Section 6.1).

- d) Marking criterion and feedback has been considered across all modules and a consistent approach has been agreed and will be shared with all students.
- e) A policy statement on Equality and Diversity has been included in the document in Section B 7.3. The document has also been assessed as part of SRUC's requirements for equality and human rights impact assessment (EHRIA).