

**University of Glasgow****Academic Standards Committee – Friday 4 October 2019****Feedback from College Deans of Learning & Teaching/College Boards of Studies on the Programme & Course Approval Process 2018-19****Mrs R Cole, Senate Office****Introduction**

In line with previous years, College Deans of Learning & Teaching have been invited to comment, on behalf of their College, on the operation of programme and course approval processes, indicating what had worked well and what might need further consideration.

**Summary of Feedback Received****College of Arts**

This summary is based on detailed comments from those involved in College and School Boards of Study in Arts, both UG and PGT.

**Positive**

Some commented that approvals ran more smoothly this year than in the past. Some commented on the helpfulness of the relevant College and Senate Office colleagues when Schools have queries or tricky problems.

Staff appreciate the devolution to Schools several years ago of approval responsibilities, but note that this relies on local admin teams having sufficient support.

Staff find the information on the College of Arts L&T Moodle site very useful. It was also commented that the College of Arts crib sheet on completing course specifications (UG and PGT combined) is clearly set out and very useful in avoiding errors.

**Matters for further consideration**

Staff find the PIP system very unwieldy in a number of ways. In particular, it is frustrating that so many forms have to be completed/uploaded/downloaded/amended for even small changes. It is suggested that an electronic system that allows everything to be compiled on one webform would be preferable. This may also alleviate the problem of version control which some Schools have found.

Generally, it is felt that software tools could help. A system that allowed the clerk/convener to download all the paperwork for a Board in a user-friendly format and email it to participants would streamline processes. Microsoft Teams may also be useful in allowing collaborative work on shared documents (if the specification forms can be adapted to allow tracked changes).

The PIP system runs very slowly if accessed from off-campus.

It can be difficult to arrange School Board of Study meetings at times that allow cognate members to attend. Schools often rely on virtual input from cognate members, and would like that possibility to be made clear as an alternative in the guidelines.

One School convener noted that it feels like a waste of time for School L&T conveners to have to approve even minor things like withdrawals.

Staff would like clarification of the distinction between course corrections that do not require consultation and course changes that do. They would also like a clear statement of the difference between minor and major corrections at course level, and the corresponding requirement for consultations. In general, it is felt that we over-consult, especially with External Examiners. Indeed, some EEs have commented that UofG consults them more often and on more trivial matters than other institutions. As incomplete consultations are one of the main reasons for delays in approvals, if we could reduce the expectations somewhat, and make it much clearer when consultations are needed, then we would simplify the whole process significantly.

There continues to be some uncertainty over verbs that are appropriate in ILOs (e.g. *demonstrate*), and some staff find the LEADS documentation on writing ILOs to be hard to digest. While relatively minor in itself, this is the sort of question that can lead to Boards spending unnecessary time on form-filling matters rather than more substantive questions of the appropriateness of assessment, etc.

More generally, the processes for course and programme approval are quite opaque to staff who do not engage with them on a regular basis. The value of student and external consultation is not always appreciated by staff, and a more emphatic rationale would be useful.

Similarly, differences between course and programme approvals, and between UG and PGT, are not well understood. [In Arts, we expect to harmonise UG and PGT more over the coming year, in line with the changes to PGT governance.]

One convener suggested that a checklist for common mistakes in each of the documents required for approvals would be useful.

More generally, staff commented that little or no central training is available for clerks or conveners. This might focus on keeping the Board's attention on pedagogical issues rather than matters of administrative detail, and introducing effective pre-scrutiny processes. Some felt that a clearer statement of the responsibilities of staff in different roles would also be useful.

We make use of 'mirror' or 'piggyback' courses in some areas of Arts. These can be particularly unwieldy in PIP, as when changes are needed they have to be made in multiple places at once. Is there a way of linking such courses in the system?

Similarly, Summer Schools can present problems, and guidance on how to complete specifications for credit-bearing courses would be useful. Particular problems centre around term sessions. Advice from External Relations may be useful here.

Finally, some commented that it is not clear when and by whom Section B of the support document should be completed. It can seem a bit of a "tick-box" exercise, and guidance would be appreciated.

### **College of MVLS**

MVLS College Board of Studies (BoS) business was limited to approving changes to a small number of existing UG programs this year. The MVLS graduate school Board of Studies is responsible for all PGT program specifications and course approvals and reports directly to the ASC.

**College BoS - approval of UG Programme specification documents.** In general, the documentation was completed satisfactory and where necessary the schools made further adjustments prior to final approval. Without having knowledge of the courses that contribute to a program the College BoS committee found it difficult to make an informed judgement on whether changes to curriculum design were appropriate and whether appropriate assessment methods were being applied across the program of study.

**Suggestion for improvement:** For programme approval we would find it useful to have more detail about the individual courses that contribute to a program (including options) and more specific information on how each of these is to be assessed.

**UG School course approval process:** The SoLS reported having successfully processed about 80 course changes this year and indicated that they had found having the extra level of scrutiny provided by College BoS members at their approval meetings to have been very useful. The SoMDN and SoVM also processed several approvals and reported that the process had generally also run well. However, there were concerns that 1) the bulk of the work still tends to fall on just a small number of staff who have a good understanding of how to complete the documentation and 2) there is a general lack of awareness of the timelines involved.

**Suggestion for improvement:** Further training to engage more staff and improve efficiency and help to raise awareness of why there is need to adhere to specific timelines. Clearer guidelines on what constitutes a major versus minor change has also been requested.

The SoMDN also reported that they still felt that the overall process was still too slow - as a rule of thumb to make a change you need to be thinking about the PIP process a year in advance. This they felt restricted their ability to change courses and programmes in as agile a manner as some of their competitors seemed to be able to do. This can also cause issues for example where external regulatory bodies require changes to be implemented at relatively short notice or where courses need to respond to NSS criticisms or market changes.

**Suggestion for improvement-** greater flexibility to introduce changes to courses than the current system allows.

**Annual Audit:** In the main, the college BoS committee were satisfied that the documentation that was audited this year had been completed satisfactorily. However, with the high volume of school approvals going through this year there could be a risk that some inaccuracies may have occurred. The college BoS currently has no visibility of the courses that are being approved at school level.

**Suggestions for Improvement:** Minutes from the School BoS meetings to be submitted to the college BoS convenor detailing what courses or programs have been approved and when. A further recommendation is that all approval documents should include a flow chart indicating where an individual course sits in relation to the overall program of study. This would be useful for a) the school approval process; 2) College BoS members auditing approved courses. Further guidance (flowchart) on what actions to take if audited documents are found to be deficient would also be useful.

### **College of Science & Engineering**

The College had held a review of Board of Study processes in Science & Engineering in Feb and May 2019, which encompassed UG and PGT. Both PGT and UG programmes were submitted for consideration. In some cases, College support staff had to work extensively with proposers quite late on in the process to modify a program so it could be approved at the Board of Studies. In one case this was not possible, and there will be a significant delay in the introduction of a PGT program as a result. It was recommended for action that School staff

approach central College support staff at an earlier phase to facilitate. A small number of UG programme proposals had been submitted, with PGT proposals being more common. There were a number of issues that could have been detected at School level, and we have an action to develop a College FAQ to support staff.

We will again run a training event for Conveners and Administrators before Christmas.

Convenors have reported that the course approval process within the Schools is going well including the critical friend approach, although this means a certain oversight at College level is not in place and this has led to some mistakes. We are working toward processes to avoid this in future.

We have also consulted with LEADS on a possible workshop for Convenors to try to move the exercise from a ticking box one to one which integrates fully into curriculum mapping, and universal course design principles as well as accrediting needs within the various schools.

### **College of Social Sciences**

Within the College of Social Sciences, each School has its own process to review new course/programme proposals. Underpinning each of these is the idea of peer feedback as a way to generate improvements in these proposals. Feedback covers a range of topics including academic content, practical and governance requirements and learning design including consideration of graduate attributes, use of technology-enhanced learning and diverse forms of assessment. Peer feedback is welcomed by academics and is viewed as a positive way to help shape courses, course design and link courses within programmes.

Some academic staff believe the current process is overly bureaucratic, rather than creative. And that the PIP form emphasises the content and procedure over learning design and the overall student experience. In their view there is too much focus on the wording, presentation and accuracy of documentation, rather than on learning design, learning activity and assessment. It is possible that the way the PIP form is designed guides colleagues to focus on these areas or it may be that the PIP, as an essential output, is viewed more narrowly than might be hoped. CoSS recognise that we could improve the experience of the process e.g. increased partnership working between academics, professional services and students in co-creating courses/programmes, use of market intelligence to better inform and shape proposals and review of timelines (advanced/ pipeline planning) and enhanced support for academics from professional services teams within schools/College.

We believe that a process of learning design where staff and students work together to draft a course/ programme design, with PIP completion not viewed as the main activity, would be beneficial for the student experience. This will form part of our College Learning & Teaching Action Plan for AY 19/20.