ULSTER UNIVERSITY

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS FORUM
23 JANUARY 2018

Agenda Item: 9

TITLE: ANNUAL COURSE REVIEW 2016/17

Paper No: CPF/18/07

SUMMARY:

To consider a paper summarising the outcomes from the 2016/17 annual course
review.

ACTION REQURIED:

For consideration.

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SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES FROM THE 2016/17 ANNUAL COURSE REVIEW

1.   INTRODUCTION

        This paper is an extract of the report from the Sub-Group reviewing the annual
        course review submissions from partner institutions for the 2016/17 academic
        year. The report was approved by the Academic Standards and Quality
        Enhancement Committee (ASQEC) at its meeting on 4 December 2017.

2.   UPDATE ON ACTIONS TAKEN TO ADDRESS ISSUES RAISED IN THE
        2015/16 REVIEW

        The Sub-Group reviewed and approved the actions taken or proposed to
        address the issues raised in the 2015/16 review. They noted that an email
        trail is now provided as evidence that a response has been provided by the
        course team to the External Examiner and SPM reports.

        With regard to 2Y3S programmes the Sub-Group noted that Principles for
        2Y3S Foundation degrees were agreed through the Collaborative
        Partnerships Forum (CPF). The Forum will track implementation of these
        Principles at evaluations/revalidations.

        An audit of APEL had been undertaken during 2016/17 and the exercise will
        be repeated for the 2017/18 intake.

        Issues forwarded to Faculties for action were addressed and where
        appropriate the SPM will continue to monitor outcomes.

3.   GENERAL ISSUES ARISING FROM THE 2016/17 REVIEW

        The Sub-Group met on 16 November 2017 to discuss the outcomes from the
        review. Members are asked to note that this year a 'RAG' system was
        introduced whereby programmes were classified as 'Red', 'Amber', or 'Green'.

        Where the academic standards and/or resources available to deliver the
        programme did not meet the University's criteria for the award the programme
        was classified as 'Red'. Where the reviewer had a number of concerns about
        a programme it was classified as 'Amber' with the remaining programmes
        marked as 'Green', where Colleges will be asked to respond to issues in the
        normal way.

        Partner institutions have been notified of the classifications awarded to
        individual programmes.

3.1   Participation in the Review Process

There was full compliance this year with the annual course review process. Completed SERs were received for all approved programmes with submissions lodged with QMAU within the agreed timeframe. HKU SPACE is due to provide their submission in January 2018 as per the schedule agreed at the institutional re-approval panel meeting in March 2014.

The Sub-Group were pleased to see a continuing improvement in the quality and completeness of the SERs and in the supporting material provided by course teams. The reports were completed by the Course Director with input from the course team, ensuring ownership of the programme by all staff. Documentation was reviewed by senior management with evidence of requests for clarity/further information. The documentation required to support the reports was, on the whole, complete.

The Sub-Group noted that in the vast majority of cases the formal written responses to the External Examiner and SPM reports were provided this year. In some cases Colleges respond to matters raised on a template produced internally or they respond on the report itself. It was also pleasing to note that an email trail was provided as evidence that a formal response had been provided to the External Examiner and the SPM.

The Sub-Group welcomed the continuing engagement and commitment of College staff to the review process and thanked the HE Co-ordinators for their input to the review. There was clear evidence once again this year that action had been taken to address course-specific issues raised in the previous year's review. Where the External Examiner expressed a desire to meet with students, this had been facilitated, either in person or by video conferencing.

A number of External Examiner reports were not received in time by partner institutions for inclusion with their submission. New arrangements have been put in place within the University for the distribution of reports and it is expected that the new procedures will eliminate this problem in future years.

It was noted that some partner institutions were starting to involve students in the review process. The University accepts that the views of students either individually or collectively should inform quality systems with the purpose of improving their educational experience, however this can be difficult to achieve.

The Sub-Group were satisfied that senior managers were responding to resourcing issues and other institution-wide matters. They asked that this situation continue to be monitored, particularly for those programmes being withdrawn but where there are students still enrolled. They were pleased to note that the Head of the Institution now signs off the Institutional Overview to demonstrate their engagement in the annual course review process.

3.2 <u>Admissions and Statistical Data</u>

The Sub-Group noted variances in the statistical data on retention and progression provided by partner institutions from that generated by the University. It was accepted that minor discrepancies may be related to the statistics being based on data taken at different points in the academic cycle, to the impact of resits and appeals, or minor clerical errors. The Sub-Group asked that this matter be discussed throught the CPF.

There appears to be a systemic issue in that the College's internal statistics do no take proper account of non-returners. On some courses non-returners constitute a significant proportion of the student body and therefore produce a negative effect on the overall retention/success profile of the course. Non-returners do not appear to be tracked or recorded by course teams. **The Sub-Group recommended that the CPF reassert to HE Co-ordinators the need to track and record non-returners and implement strategies to encourage the return of these students to their studies thereby working to limit non-returner numbers.**

3.3 <u>Breaches of Contract</u>

The Sub-Group noted that over the year two significant issues had arisen where local partner institutions had been in breach of their contract with Ulster University.

C3.1 <u>APEL</u>

At its meeting on 23 October 2017 ASQEC received a paper outlining issues with the operation of APEL which had been identified as a result of an admissions audit conducted by the CPF. The issue of students being admitted onto programmes via APEL without the proper procedures being followed was also picked up during annual course review.

ASQEC agreed that urgent measures identified by the CPF to improve the application of the APEL policy be endorsed and that Committee receive a report on sanctions and further actions at its next meeting.

In relation to sanctions in this respect it was recommended that:

i)   A further admissions audit be conducted in the current academic year;
ii)   Any malpractice identified be reported to ASQEC and where Colleges have failed to implement agreed procedures in relation to APEL then further intakes to the specific course be suspended;
iii)   Where a course is offered as part of a network, or on more than one campus, only the course in breach of the procedures will be subject to sanction.

C3.1.2 Over-Recruitment

Maximum intake numbers for each validated programme are agreed as part of the evaluation exercise. This takes account of the partner institutions capacity to deliver the course, the associated human and physical resources, and the anticipated market.

The University's fee model is based on the maximum number of students for which the College will forward fees to us.

The Sub-Group noted that on a number of programmes Colleges recruit significantly larger numbers than that agreed at evaluation, in many cases without approval by the Faculty or University. The University receives fees for the agreed maximum number of students with the College retaining all additional fees.

It is proposed that in future if the maximum number agreed at validation is exceeded by more than 20% without Faculty approval then the following may apply:

i)   Suspend the next intake to the course;
ii)   Suspend several intakes until the maximum intake figure is achieved and permit further recruitment only on the basis of a guarantee from the College that the agreed number will not be exceeded in the future;
iii)   The University's validation fee be levied on Colleges for all students recruited above the agreed maximum.

The Sub-Group noted that over-recruitment will be more effectively monitored with the introduction of online admissions which is currently being piloted on all first year Foundation degree students at North West Regional College.

3.4   Assessment, Moderation and Feedback to Students

External Examiners confirmed that the documentation they received from course teams was useful and relevant, and that they received it in a timely manner. New External Examiners commended the University on the Induction Day event and the opportunity this provided to meet with the Course Director. They received adequate samples of examination scripts and coursework submissions. In general, they said that the Boards of Examiners were chaired to a high standard. External Examiners frequently referred to the professionalism of exam board meetings which allowed them to undertake their role effectively.

In general, External Examiners confirmed that the methods of assessment were appropriate, and the marking and classifications allowed for discrimination between candidates. A broad range of assessments were used, and a number of External Examiners commended the teamwork approach to delivery and assessment. They noted the increase in online assessment submissions and feedback to

students, but felt that more use could be made of electronic submission of assessments. Online assessment submissions reduces the level of illegible written feedback.

External Examiners were generally satisfied with the timely learner-related feedback provided to students. The feedback affords students the opportunity to close the gap between current and desired performance. SPMs reported that students were generally content with the level of formative and summative feedback provided. The continued development of standardised feedback sheets in subject networks was highlighted as an area of good practice.

The University's preferred model of programme delivery is through subject networks. External Examiners were generally positive in their comments regarding the management of subject networks and the assessment and moderation arrangements in place. There was documented evidence of cross-college moderation with a process in place for agreeing a final mark where there was a difference between markers. The increased use of standardised documentation for moderation purposes within subject networks was welcomed.

The Sub-Group were concerned that on a number of 2Y3S part-time Foundation degrees, student enrolments were very low with poor retention and success rates. The 2Y3S mode was originally designed for applicants with a good UCAS tariff who were deemed capable of undertaking a full-time study load over two years, whilst also working virtually full-time. The Sub-Group felt that Colleges could better screen applications to ensure that only suitable students were enrolled onto such programmes. The Sub-Group noted that new Principles for 2Y3S Foundation degrees had been developed by the CPF.

The Sub-Group endorsed the University's promotion of subject networks but were of the view that where a programme is offered on a number of campuses within the same partner institution more could be done to enhance cross-campus engagement between course teams. **They asked that this be monitored in future annual course review submissions.**

Where External Examiners met students, the feedback from them on assessments and resources available to support them was generally positive. They spoke of the high level of support offered by tutors. The Sub-Group noted that arrangements have been put in place on a number of programmes, in particular Access provision, for the External Examiner to meet students. In some cases, this has been facilitated via video/teleconferencing. The Sub-Group commended partner institutions on the very high levels of pastoral support provided to students.

The Sub-Group noted that SPMs are currently undertaking an in-depth audit of APEL submissions in 2016/17 and asked that this review be extended to include 2017/18. It was noted that the initial findings from the audit were presented to Course Directors at the annual staff development event at CAFRE. They asked that APEL admissions and

admissions in general continue to be monitored. **They also asked that the University's centralised Admissions Department be asked to provide staff development to admissions staff in partner institutions on the University's admissions policy and related procedures, including the use of qualification equivalences.**

On a number of programmes students had the opportunity to complete 'add on' qualifications and this was cited as an example of good practice. The use of compulsory Study Skills modules to prepare students for higher education study was also considered to be good practice. While a number of External Examiners reported on examples of poor referencing, the Sub-Group were satisfied that course teams were providing studies advice and tutorials to support students to improve their academic referencing.

3.5 Quality Assurance Processes

As per Ulster University's requirements, Course Committee and Staff Student Consultative Committee (SSCC) meetings were taking place once per semester. Minutes of these meetings were being taken, with copies normally being sent to the SPM. In most cases course teams were using the University agendas and minutes templates provided through the CPF. It was noted that in a small number of programmes, there was good practice whereby students were taking the minutes of the SSCC meeting. However minutes of meetings were still not being routinely forwarded to SPMs.

The Sub-Group were concerned that in a number of courses student names and personal details were still being minuted. However in some instances there was so much of the minutes redacted that it was impossible to follow what was discussed in the meeting. **They asked that further guidance be provided through the CPF on the need to redact personal information about students.**

Retention appears to be a problem on a number of programmes. This is an issue not only in terms of first year retention, but also retention between years one and two. Whilst the University would not wish to deny any student access to HE, or indeed a route into HE via Access provision, Colleges need to be aware of best practice within the sector in terms of monitoring retention, and ensuring students were made aware of the demands of the course and equipped with the skills to complete the course. The Sub-Group noted that retention and success continues to be monitored through the CPF.

It was noted that there were some discrepancies in the data provided by Colleges and that produced by the University's Cognos system. In most cases these were minor variances due to differences in the way the data is collected and produced in partner institutions. The Sub-Group noted that retention and success data is monitored through the CPF, where such discrepancies can be identified and corrected.

One of the duties of the External Examiner is to consider the standard of marking on examination papers and other forms of assessment. External Examiner reports are the principal means by which the University and partner institutions can assure the level and standard of awards as being

comparable with similar awards at other higher education institutions. The External Examiner report is a key component of the external examining process. It is a QAA requirement that the External Examiner report be shared with students.

The Sub-Group concluded that all Colleges have arrangements in place to share External Examiner reports with students. Course teams share the report with student representatives at SSCC meetings. This was evidenced through a check of the minutes of these meetings. Most Colleges make the External Examiner report available to all students on Moodle/VLE. In a number of Colleges, the report is shared with students at induction.

3.5   WBL

The Sub-Group were pleased to see that there was not a problem this year with regard to students having access to suitable WBL. One of the strengths of Foundation degrees offered in partner institutions is the interesting and industry-relevant WBL and the involvement of employers in the assessment process. This had been explicitly commented on in External Examiner and SPM reports. In particular, they noted the increase in the number of international WBL opportunities which help equip students with the necessary skills and understanding to live, work and study in the international context.

The Sub-Group recommended that, in light of the Competitions and Marketing Authority (CMA) requirements that the CPF give further consideration to the operational aspects of WBL. The Sub-Group commended course teams in their efforts to secure valuable WBL opportunities and for the supervision of students while on placement. It was also encouraging to see employers becoming more actively engaged in the assessment of WBL. College staff have forged very close links with industry.

3.7   Professional Body Accreditation

The Sub-Group were pleased to note that the Building/Architecture programmes and the Counselling programmes have professional body accreditation. There appeared to be a good working relationship between course teams and the Professional Body. The views of the professional bodies can be integrated into programme planning, development and review. The Sub-Group welcomed this development and encouraged other programmes to consider applying for professional body accreditation. They noted the good practice of students actively engaging with Professional Bodies.

3.8   Library/IT Resources

The Head of Library Services confirmed that there were no major issues with library provision in partner institutions. However, the Sub-Group realised that access to resources, both print and online, remains challenging. The Colleges have very limited budgets and libraries only buy what they must. The number of copies is never generous and in many instances they no longer have the current editions of all texts on their reading lists. Staff levels

are at a minimum and the library opening hours are finely tuned. Students did not appear to have an issue with regard to library access or to the availability of texts and journals.

The Sub-Group were concerned that students at a number of partner institutions complained about a lack of, or poor quality, Wi-Fi access. It was noted that Wi-Fi access was considered as part of the resources report prepared for course re-validation events. Course teams reported that due to the isolated geographical location where some students live it was very difficult to get good Wi-fi access from home.

The Sub-Group noted that Associate Students no longer have access to the University's online resources. While some students expressed concern in SSCC meetings about online access, the Sub-Group were satisfied that students were informed of the new arrangements.

3.9   Accuracy of Published Information

Indicator 18 of Charter B10 of the QAA Quality Code states awarding bodies must ensure they have effective control over the accuracy of all public information, publicity and promotional activity relating to learning opportunities delivered with others which lead to their awards.

It was pleasing to note this year that the vast majority of course teams were engaging with the SPM to ensure that all published information was approved by the University prior to publication. All partner institutions have provided a named contact within their organisation with overall responsibility for ensuring that all published material relating to programmes approved by Ulster University is approved.

4.   SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS 2016/17

	Recommendation	Responsible for Action
1.	That Subject Partnership Managers closely monitor actual intake against projected intake to ensure resources are adequate to meet the learning needs of students.	Collaborative Partnerships Forum
2.	That, in light of the Competitions and Marketing Authority (CMA) requirements, that further consideration be given to the operational aspects of WBL.	Collaborative Partnerships Forum
3.	That staff in partner institutions be reminded of the need to track and record non-returners and implement strategies to encourage the return of these students.	Collaborative Partnerships Forum
4.	That consideration be given to the variances in data provided by partners on retention and success with University generated figures.	Collaborative Partnerships Forum
5.	That senior managers be reminded of the University's expectations of staff teaching on Ulster University approved programmes.	Collaborative Partnerships Forum

6.	That, where appropriate, teaching staff be encouraged to use Turnitin for the electronic submission of coursework.	Collaborative Partnerships Forum
7.	That clarity be provided on the naming of staff and students in the minutes of meetings.	Collaborative Partnerships Forum
8.	That staff development be provided to admissions staff in partner institutions on the University's admissions policy and procedures.	Central Admissions Department

5.   AREAS OF GOOD PRACTICE

1.	The same Chair, with administrative support run the Boards of Examiners which is excellent practice as it ensures consistency and allows the HE Co-ordinator to have an oversight of the whole of HE in FE provision.
2.	The development of an online complaints/comments/compliments system.
3.	Staff and students contributing to the local community eg obtaining briefs from local community groups and organisations.
4.	Joint SSCC meeting across campuses.
5.	Students actively engaging with Professional Bodies.
6.	Students chairing SSCC meetings.
7.	Detailed analysis of the geographical locations of students.
8.	The embedding of a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation throughout programmes.
9.	An audit of Moodle with the provision of an award/grading.