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**Report of a Periodic Programme Review**

**Department of Design and Technology**

**14 May 2010:**

**Departmental Outline Response**

1. The **Report on the Periodic Programme Review** conducted in 2010 was through and positive. We are grateful to our reviewers, both external and internal, for their positive approach to the process and the useful feedback offered. The conclusion to the report included observations that:

*“The department had established a very strong reputation for both its teaching and research, its external examiners were highly complimentary about the quality of the programmes, the standard of admissions and progression rates were very good and graduate employability figures excellent. The department was also to be complimented on the friendly and supportive learning environment it had created for its students. Staff/student contact hours were high and students found the workload challenging, but the department was to be commended on understanding and managing student expectations and in effect establishing a shared contract with its students at the outset as to what they would achieve by the end of their programme”.*

1.1 The panel made a number of **recommendations** within their conclusions. These are listed below with their original reference numbers from pages 13 and 14 of the report. Each is addressed in section 2.0.

1. *revisit the ILOs for the* ***Master’s programmes*** *to ensure that they reflected an appropriate level of intellectual vision and challenge and aligned more closely with the Master’s qualification descriptor in the FHEQ (6.1)*
2. *clarify aspects of* ***programme specification for the Master’s*** *programmes (6.1)*
3. *to adjust the* ***module specification for the final year UG dissertation*** *– in line with statements which appeared on the Learn site – to indicate to students that whereas the outcome would normally be an extended essay, it could by negotiation take other appropriate forms, and to* ***review the word count*** *for the extended essay vis-a-vis the credit rating of the module (6.7)*
4. *to reflect on the programme portfolio at* ***Master’s level and its market positioning*** *(6.9)*
5. ***to evaluate the changes in the personal tutoring system*** *(7.2)*
6. *to continue efforts to* ***ensure that******students understood and were comfortable with the department’s assessment processes*** *(7.7)*
7. *to draw on* ***central services wherever possible to assist staff in the department and enhance student support*** *(eg Careers, Library, Teaching Centre) (6.1, 7.9, 7.13, 8.4)*
8. *to ensure that a* ***more formal quality management structure and robust procedures were adopted*** *by the new Loughborough Design School and that steps were taken to share good practice amongst the staff involved (8.6)*
9. *to build on the* ***synergies between the disciplines that were being brought together in the LDS*** *to develop the portfolio of programmes and increase student numbers, particularly from overseas (10.2).*

1.2 In addition, two other points were made within the body of the report, but not mentioned specifically within the recommendations, which require a response:

*i) BSc students perceived their workload as higher than BA (6.10)*

*ii) Sustainability of programmes and teaching and learning model (11.2)*

1. **The Departmental Response**

The eleven recommendations or observations have been grouped into seven sub-sets for response.

* 1. ***Master’s programmes:***

The Department has noted the comments of the panel relating to the Masters provision in Design and considers them to be related, and strongly linked to the marketing positioning (6.9). Historically the high employment rate of its own graduates has proven to be a particular hurdle in recruiting home students. Consequently, to establish and maintain financial viability the Department has developed an attractive programme for a wider audience which has drawn relatively high numbers of students from overseas. As well as aligning the content with staff research interests and expertise the developmental process has involved continual elicited feedback from students to gain a better understanding of their needs. The continuing popularity with overseas students has prompted the Department to maintain this adaptive approach towards the portfolio of programmes to ensure they remained attractive to this market.

A suite of programme routes has evolved that whilst attempting to meet the needs and aspirations of different audiences, may be seen to struggle to find a clear market niche. Although a number of routes may offer limited opportunities for graduates from the Department’s own UG programmes, the recent Product Design in Business programme is an attempt to address this.

The Department is very concerned about the panel’s view that the ILOs were not appropriately constructed to differentiate the PG programme sufficiently from the UG programmes, and that the existing Masters provision is too closely aligned with the UG skill sets and did not demonstrate a higher level of intellectual challenge. The Department considers a significant numbers of Masters students without many of the core skill sets of its own graduates as being a principle cause of this perception. Course content has been adjusted in an attempt to address this in a relatively short teaching period to enable students to engage in more advanced design activity. But whilst teaching is sometimes combined, assessment is distinguished by Masters level outcomes.

The Department is clearly committed to addressing and improving on this situation through extensive programme review, initiating international Masters exchanges and extending programmes where appropriate. The present Learning & Teaching Committee of the Design School is closely reviewing the programme and module specifications to ensure that they are more closely aligned with the Masters qualification descriptor in the FHEQ (6.1) and to ensure that the ILOs allow a clear differentiation between the strands of the existing PG programme.

The panel noted that clarity in the PG programme specification (6.1) regarding the availability of the MDes degree across the named routes was required, and it was also unclear whether the programmes could be taken on a part-time basis. Whilst the Department has created detailed supporting documentation it acknowledges the potential for confusion within its relatively complex structure. Both these issues will be clarified along with further revisions of the programmes.

The Design School, through it Learning & Teaching Committee, is currently looking into potential opportunities for its Masters provision in design which includes emerging academic interest in such areas as, interaction design, sustainable design, enterprise education and product commercialisation. The School is naturally constantly open to collaborative discussions with other departments and Schools within the University.

* 1. ***Final year UG dissertation*** *(6.7)*

The Department acknowledges the observations of the panel that students perceive there to be a limited opportunity earlier in the Design programmes to practise research or writing skills in preparation for the Dissertation module. The programmes and its modules are under continual review and Programme Leaders are mindful of ensuring appropriate levels of practice are offered in a complementary fashion. Writing skills have been historically controversial and staff/student committees have discussed this at length. The Department acknowledges that the Dissertation is unique within the programmes and is presently reviewing the nature of written work in supporting modules at prior levels with a view to enhancing the required skill set for the Dissertation in Part C. Nevertheless, the Department is strongly committed to retaining the distinctive nature of the Dissertation as part of its undergraduate programmes.

In line with the panel’s comments, the module specification will include a statement to indicate to students that whereas the outcome would normally be an extended essay, it could by negotiation take other appropriate forms. With the formation of the Design School it has been more feasible to align student dissertations with a wider range of Research Group interests and activities, which in turn highlights the context and value of the dissertation to students.

The panel has remarked that the word count of the undergraduate Dissertation was ‘*relatively high for a 20-credit module’* and that this might be reviewed. It is unclear from this comment however whether the suggested reduction of the word count is intended to decrease the workload or increase the challenge. Nevertheless, the stated word limit in the module specification is to be scrutinised and will be considered along with the provision for module support.

* 1. ***Continue to ensure that******students understood and were comfortable with the department’s assessment processes*** *(7.7)*

We are grateful for the acknowledgement and recognition by the panel of the continuing Departmental efforts in communicating module assessment procedures to students. The Department has invested great deal of work in making the assessment processes as open and transparent as possible and will of course continue to deliver informative documentation and deal with student concerns in a timely manner through tutorial sessions.

Within the Design School a consistent policy is to be adopted providing students with accurate information on module specific assessment procedures on Learn. Students are also supported by Year Tutors and are of course at liberty and indeed encouraged to contact module and programme leaders if there is a need for any further clarification.

* 1. ***Evaluate the changes in the personal tutoring system*** *(7.2)*

Over the period covered by the PPR the Department reported on a number of changes to student support in response to feedback from staff and students in assessing the efficacy of the personal tutoring system. Over the last year the Department moved from the tracking of students as personal tutees through programmes to having nominated year 1 personal tutors and then changing to year 2&3 tutors. This was in response to students not having contact with their personal tutors at a teaching level and automatically contacting the Year Tutor or their immediate lecturers in the event of academic and/or pastoral queries. As a trial the Department assigned Year 1 Personal Tutor roles to those who had regular lecturing contact with the cohort. However, following a specific evaluation exercise there is evidence that this made little if any perceptible difference. In fact, for a number of staff it proved to be an increased burden coupled with the loss of an opportunity to follow student development over their whole course of studies.

Since the formation of the Design School and with a number of staff changes the Learning & Teaching Committee took the opportunity to review the staff/student support across the programmes and in particular the personal tutor roles. As the Ergonomics programme utilises personal tutor groups at a wider teaching level (necessitating wholesale disruption to change) and it seems sensible to adopt a consistent policy within the School, the committee proposed a move back to the original system. An enhancement is the allocation of students and tutorial groups within specific programmes to help in timetabling personal tutorial sessions.

* 1. ***Draw on******central services wherever possible to assist staff in the department and enhance student support*** *(6.1, 7.9, 7.13, 8.4)*

Following the PPR and the observations concerning the alignment of Masters Programmes more closely with the FHEQ, the newly formed Learning and Teaching Committee within the Loughborough Design School will be consulting the Teaching Centre to support the development of these courses.

The panel had noted that relatively low module feedback scores for questions on the Library were evident. The Department has maintained constant links with the library through the support of its Dissertation module but will endeavour to involve the use of the Library and its facilities as appropriate in other modules. The School will consider inviting Library staff to Staff/Student Committees, when deemed timely and appropriate, to emphasise the value of the library resources.

The Careers Centre has been utilised through a series of bookable sessions in the Department over the last year seem which have been positively received by the students. The Careers Centre has continues to provide valuable support for students preparing for DPS, graduands and post graduates looking for future employment.

With internationalisation high on the agenda of the newly formed Design School, links with Erasmus exchange schemes, Mundus Master Programmes and International Summer Schools will necessitate close support of the University International Office.

* 1. ***Develop formal quality management structure and robust procedures*** *(8.6)*

The Department has noted that the panel was not convinced of the effectiveness of its learning & teaching managerial strategy in some areas. However, as was discussed, the formation of the Loughborough Design School in August 2010 has necessitated a more formal structure to accommodate the expansion of programmes and modules at all levels. Separate Learning and Teaching Committees for undergraduate and post graduate level has been formed with joint meetings appropriately phased to promote synergy across the taught programmes within the School.

Meetings have already taken place with Programme Leaders from Ergonomics and the Ergonomics Safety Research Institute (ESRI) and the School is developing robust quality procedures & documentation and implementing staff awareness sessions to ensure that they are applied consistently across the School.

* 1. ***Build on the******synergies between the disciplines that are being brought together in the LDS*** *(10.2)*

The strategic decision to develop a new undergraduate programme in Design Ergonomics (BSc) and postgraduate programmes in Road and Vehicle Safety (MSc) and Design in Business (MSc) had already been taken prior to the formal start of the Design School. As well as broadening the spectrum of programmes on offer it is envisaged that this will provide a strong cross-disciplinary approach to design degrees proving attractive to a wide range of prospective students. The School is well poised to open further new opportunities at Master’s level with the new structure facilitating more efficient teaching and a possible increase in student numbers.

The school’s Enterprise and Marketing initiative will aim to disseminate the quality of the programmes and facilitate further links internationally. Working with the International Office, the School aims to exploit existing international links to support recruitment and growth of the undergraduate, but especially, the postgraduate programmes.

**3.0 Additional Responses**

3.1 **BSc students perceived their workload as higher than BA** (6.10)

The perception amongst BSc students that their workload is higher than students on the BA programme is an issue that is expedited by the close working links between the Industrial & Product Design programmes. The nature of the work in the core modules of each programme necessitates different approaches to teaching and assessment. The challenge is to educate the students as to the appropriate ways of learning in specific subject areas whilst maintaining the parity in academic rigour. Close collaboration between Programme Leaders and respective module leaders will aim to ensure students are adequately prepared in understanding these issues.

3.2 **Sustainability of programmes and teaching and learning model** (11.2)

The panel questioned the sustainability of the workload model and its heavy demands on staff and students alike. The Department is of course aware of the changing nature of the design field and it considers the formulation of the Design School as being instrumental in meeting the challenges of delivering an appropriate undergraduate and postgraduate design curriculum both nationally and internationally.

Strategic staff appointments to support cross disciplinary working and the support of the School’s Enterprise initiative will contribute to making the programmes adaptive to changing external contexts and in future proofing the School’s taught programmes.

1. **Concluding Remarks**

The Department would like to express its gratitude to the examiners involved in the PPR and for their attention to detail and thoroughness of the report. The process was very well organised and the discussions very constructive.

In general the Department is pleased with the positive outcome and is very much looking forward to future developments as part of the newly formed Loughborough Design School.

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On behalf of

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