# Periodic Programme Review Report:

# School of Business and Economics - Response

August 2012

1. **Overview**

The School is very satisfied that the panel conducted the review objectively and sought appropriate evidence on which to base its recommendations.

The process of strategic and operational planning within the School over the past two years (since the School came into being) had identified all of the key issues raised by the panel and most of the minor issues too. Actions are currently underway to address the issues raised (see below), although the panel’s comments do help to give focus and detail.

As University and School face the challenges of a new funding regime it is clear that quality assurance will remain as a high priority part of the School’s mission.

1. **Examples of good practice and innovative features of the provision**

The panel **commended** the School for its high standards with regard to employability skills development and placement opportunities for students on business programmes (7.3).

The panel **commended** the introduction of a DPS option for economics programmes for new students commencing in 2012/13 (7.4).

The panel **commended** the School for having robust mechanisms in place to identify areas for development and to take appropriate actions in response.

These commendations and accolades are very welcome and recognise the investment of resources in placement provision over many years. Systems and procedures are being harmonised between the two former departments in order that the best points of each are carried forward and applied as appropriate across the full portfolio of programmes.

1. **The School’s future plans**

The provision of existing modules and programmes in new locations formed a key strand of the School’s internationalisation strategy. The School believed that the development of a strong Loughborough brand, on a global scale, would allow them to compete effectively with other UK institutions in the overseas markets.

The panel **encouraged** the School to implement a sustainable internationalisation strategy using an appropriate combination of Loughborough staff, local staff and e-learning resources. The panel recognised that the School was subject to certain restrictions imposed by their accreditation bodies with regard to methods of teaching delivery on overseas programmes, but **encouraged** the School to review the use of e-learning opportunities and how these could be used to good effect in an otherwise staff and resource intensive system.

These comments relate particularly to the programmes delivered in Singapore. A review of the curriculum and operation of the Singapore programmes is on-going and the focus on accreditation is a key driver. Staff availability for teaching in Singapore is problematic and is currently incentivised rather than being part of the normal staff role. Whilst the School recognises the logic of staffing these programmes as part of the normal staff role certain legal and operational issues must be overcome before making this possible.

E-Learning innovation (programme portals) in the Executive Education area will also be harnessed to support development of a blended learning approach as part of the School’s internationalisation strategy. Branded portals, or gateways, are envisaged to support DL and other off-site teaching, helping to focus student attention onto key resources.

The School stressed the importance of quick responses in enabling them to meet market demand and compete effectively with other UK HEIs, in particular with regard to the provision of tailored executive education courses and PGT programmes. ‘Time to market’ for these courses was considered to be a key factor in determining their success. The School requested greater support from the University, when establishing new international affiliations, by way of more streamlined processes. The School suggested that changes, such as smaller and more frequent meetings of Curriculum Sub-committee would increase the speed at which new programmes could be introduced.

The panel noted that the School had considered alternative ways to further its international development through the introduction of Summer Schools. These would be managed by the School’s newly appointed International Development Officer.

Resource implications currently presented a barrier for development and staff-student ratios were noted as some of the highest across university, especially in the areas of accounting and finance. The School suggested that the introduction of a staff secondment system, specifically for the purposes of taught course development, could help to facilitate future change to its programme portfolio.

The panel noted the strength of the School’s links with external organisations through its extensive use of bought in teachers. The School planned to reinforce and prolong these affiliations by appointing such staff as ‘associate faculty members’.

1. **Recommendations**

The panel saw evidence that steps had been taken to bring the Economics and Business divisions of the School together within the senior management structure and that the School encouraged the sharing of good practice between the two disciplines. The panel **encouraged** further integration and sharing of good practice.

1. The panel **recommended** that elements of good practice seen in the School’s business programmes, with regard to applied study and integrated employability skills, were shared more widely with economics (6.2).

A review process of Economics undergraduate provision, led by the School’s ADT and Learning & Teaching Facilitator, was commenced in March 2012. The review includes a mapping of employability skills; discussion with Economics tutors, and changes (where needed) to modules and programmes in the 2012/13 Annual Update. Access to employers via the School’s Strategic Advisory Board, Careers and Employability centre and our own internal expertise in placements will support this review.
2. The panel **recommended** that the good practice shown by business programmes with regard to the delivery of key transferable skills was adopted by economics programmes (6.3).

Please see response (i) above.
3. The panel **suggested** that the School reviews its current curricula and teaching provision for Marketing modules (6.4).

The School feels that it needs to understand far more the comments on which the panel based its suggestion as it is not clear whether this relates to undergraduate or postgraduate students. Whatever the source of these issues our annual review process whereby module feedback, programme feedback, exam board reports and SSLC minutes are scrutinised will seek reports from the Head of Discipline for Marketing, where appropriate, and take action to remedy any issues raised.

It may be that the induction and management of bought-in teachers will be core to understanding the issues raised. Point 3 above notes the School’s wish to create an “associate faculty” system. Part of this process will be consistent and clear briefing and management of associate faculty members.

The heavy reliance on bought-in-teachers in 2011/12 was, substantially the product of a shortage of core staff. Recent recruitment has begun to address this imbalance with expected improvements in quality and consistency of teaching provision.
4. The panel **encouraged** the School to clearly communicate the benefits of peer assessment with regard to personal development and employability skills, to the students (6.5).

A School-wide group coursework policy was agreed by the School’s Learning & Teaching committee in June 2012. The policy will be communicated to all staff so that consistency in treatment of peer review / peer assessment is established across all modules where this mechanism is used.
5. The panel **recommended** that the School reviewed the contact hours currently offered for economics programmes and considered student expectations with regard to this (7.2).

The School recognises the importance of this for KIS purposes as well as student learning and support. Actions are being taken for 2012/13 to increase contact hours on Part A and some Parts B and C Economics undergraduate modules, in particular, as part of a broader review of teaching provision by the Economics Discipline group. Longer-term solutions will need to be found where programme contact hours are impacted negatively by low contact in modules offered on joint honours degrees. The School’s joint programmes director will liaise with partner Schools to improve the position.
6. The panel **encouraged** the school to put in place additional support for current part A and B students who may then want to take up the opportunity of a placement after the DPS is introduced for new students. (7.4).

This specifically relates to Economics students who will benefit from the considerable expertise and support of the Schools placements office. A placements officer will be appointed from amongst the academic staff to provide a focus at programme level for placement support. Comments at (i) above also relate to this area as employability will become embedded in the curriculum as a further support. Lastly, personal tutors will be fully briefed on the needs of students seeking placements and should be prepared to support them not only by writing references but also by steering them towards resources at University and School level.
7. The panel **recommended** that the School induction was modified to include more information on the availability of electronic resources, in particular for file sharing (7.6).

This comment relates to Management PGT students as the provision for undergraduates is embedded in the curriculum for Business students and is being reviewed (point (i) above) in relation to Economics students. Economics PGT has embarked on an extended process of ‘continuing induction’ through programme meetings.

The School conducted a review of its Management PGT programmes in 2011/12 and has put forward a number of recommendations that are under discussion for implementation from the 2013/14 academic year onward.
8. The panel **recommended** that the School’s induction programme and early skills training provision was reviewed in order to support international students in their understanding of Loughborough’s assessment criteria (7.8).

Please see comments for (vii) above.
9. The panel **recommended** that the School ensured it had a consistent policy for obtaining feedback from students (8.1).

Any inconsistency noted in Annual programme Reviews for the years to 2011/12 have now been eliminated with the School-wide adoption of the University module feedback system. After wide consultation internally the School agreed to use the same optional questions for modules at all levels and in all disciplines.
10. The panel **recommended** that the School distributed the minutes and outcomes of SSLC meetings to students across all relevant programmes (8.2).

This is routine for the School and it is difficult to think where any suggestion of omission originated. In addition to SSLC minutes the reports of annual programme boards are posted on Administrative modules on Learn.
11. The panel **commended** the School for its high standards with regard to employability skills development and placement opportunities for students on business programmes. (7.3).

It is acknowledged that in its 35 year history of placements the School has amassed a great deal of experience in this area – and that this comes only with the willingness to invest resources. Expansion of placements into Economics programmes will require relationship building in new areas together with the monitoring and visiting of larger numbers of students. In tandem the School will be exploring the potential to integrate work-based learning opportunities into postgraduate Business programmes.
12. The panel **commended** the introduction of a DPS option for economics programmes for new students commencing in 2012/1 (7.4).

Please see response for (xi) above.
13. The panel **commended** the School for having robust mechanisms in place to identify areas for development and take appropriate actions in response.

The School owes a debt of gratitude to Professor Malcolm King in this regard in his post as Director of Learning & Teaching up to May 2010. The School has built on the sure foundations of this work and has extended its impact through the School’s governance structure.