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# Learning and Teaching Committee

# Subject: Review of the Processes Involved in the Annual Review of Programme and Module Specifications

## Origin Dr Anne Mumford

# Background

The Senior Managers’ Forum in June was asked to identify areas where improvements and efficiencies could be made and, having done this, to prioritise these for action. One priority was the annual review of programme and module specifications. Anne Mumford was asked to take this forward on behalf of the Finance Director as a change project.

In order to start this a workshop was held with a wide invitation across the Schools and relevant support services. At the workshop the current processes were mapped out and a significant amount of discussion took place. Following this there have been discussions regarding how an electronic system might support the process and also how new proposals might be reviewed and brought forward for approval using this.

Members of Learning and Teaching Committee are asked to:

1. Discuss the outcomes of the workshop and the follow-up discussions as detailed in this paper, in particular:
   1. discuss the need to define what information is needed (both required and desirable), by whom and by when;
   2. discuss and agree how we might take forward the move to a more consistent approach using online tools noting that Anne Mumford could act as project manager for this alongside an academic lead (an ADT?);
   3. discuss changing the deadline for changes to enable academic input to be influenced by student feedback.
2. Note that some small changes are being taken forward this year to reduce duplication of information and to ensure that disability considerations are undertaken at a time when it is more effective than is currently the case.
3. To note that processes associated with the development and approval of new programmes and modules might be able to take advantage of the system.

# Review of the Processes Involved in the Annual Review of Programme and Module Specifications

# Introduction

This piece of work was identified as a priority at the Senior Managers Forum in June 2012 which looked at working more efficiently and effectively and identified areas for improvement. This project is being led by Dr Anne Mumford, Director of Change Projects.

The project has involved the following activities to date (November 2012) which are reported on here:

* Workshop to review existing processes and to discuss issues and process improvements held on 30th October 2012. A summary is provided in the main body of this report and the detailed write-up in Appendix 1.
* Discussion relating to providing online tools to support the process (see below). This included a meeting with Anne Mumford, Jennifer Nutkins, Tricia Breen, Martin Hamilton and Chris Garrod as well as a discussion with Jonathan Walters regarding the Web Content Management System.
* Discussion relating to the approval process (see below for summary) via email by workshop participants.

# Workshop Summary

A half day workshop was held at Burleigh Court on 30th October 2012. A review of the current processes was undertaken and there was an opportunity for extensive discussion regarding different ways of working across the University and the range of linked processes. A detailed write-up can be seen in Appendix 1.

The key themes which came out of the workshop were:

*Ensuring academic staff are engaged*

This is about seeing the process as being academic and not administratively led. Timing is crucial to getting engagement and there needs to be a link to addressing changes when feedback (both internal and external, e.g. NSS) is available. The current timescales do not appear to facilitate this.

*Moving to using online systems and more automation to support processes*

The current system is implemented very differently with some use of shared documents and systems to share comments (Learn, Intranet) but many processes are manual (hand-written comments required) or semi-manual (email exchange of documents and cutting and pasting with significant numbers of errors made). This move will reduce errors and may enable responsibility for final checking for the published version to sit with the school. Any system would probably be more successful if Schools had flexibility regarding the method of identifying changes with academic staff but edits would be made in Schools to the master copy drawn from the central repository with edits and approvals tracked prior to central confirmation and publishing.

*Identifying the different levels of information required*

Associated with the formal programme and module specifications are descriptions which are more student-friendly provided for current students to assist with module choices) and prospective students to assist in selecting an HEI and an appropriate course. This information is written by different people, is inconsistently provided across the University and information is sometimes inaccurate. Processes for collecting and storing information should be joined up.

*Practice across the University should reflect best practice*

There should be an opportunity to exchange best practice and to have ongoing improvement. This should include how to involve the range of people who need to be engaged with the process and how best to link with school and university processes.

*Review the current timescales*

There should be a review of the current timescales the processes involved and the links to other processes in schools and at university level ensuring that timescales reflect the need to review programmes and modules in the light of feedback and to ensure academic staff engagement.

*Support for students with disabilities*

Best practice for anticipating needs should be a standard part of the development of programmes and modules. Other requirements should be considered on an individual student basis. Both requiring support from the Disability Office. Consideration of this as part of this process should be removed.

# Moving Towards Using an Online System

The current situation involves schools using different systems and processes to meet the requirements of the centrally coordinated review. Some use online tools (Learn, Intranet), most distribute specifications to academic staff (mostly on paper) with coordination of marked up (paper or word tracked changes) being used for approval, entry into LUSI and forwarding to the Academic Registry.

Assuming we are not going to have a significant investment or reprioritisation of resources for LUSI, a pragmatic way forward may be to use the Web Content Management System for checking, reviewing, amending and approving changes. A workflow system is currently being piloted by Marketing and Communications for checking, amending and approval of prospectus content and this could be adapted for use for programme and module specification review. The text for the current year would need to be extracted from LUSI and the approved text for the following year returned (and the technical options for this have not been established). Programme specifications which are kept on the web as word files (not in LUSI) could live in the CMS though discussions have identified the potential advantage of Module and Programme Specifications and Programme Regulations being stored on LUSI and available via Learn. It might also be appropriate to develop some more student-friendly wording for school web sites with consistent linking to that and from there to the detailed module specifications. This could be automated.

It is proposed that the technical and resource implications should be investigated with the aim of having a new system in place in 12 months’ time.

# Improving the Engagement of Academic Staff

This was an outcome of the workshop and a topic which has been discussed by email by several participants since the meeting (in particular by Ray Dawson and Sandie Dann). The following points have been made in these discussions:

* Changes to specifications need to informed by feedback from students (LU, NSS, comments from external examiners).
* The timing of the review does not work for this as feedback is available after the closure of changes and too close to the start of the academic year. If changes are needed to address concerns they will inevitably either be undertaken close to the start of the year or delayed by a year.
* It has been suggested that module specifications may be less tied down than they might be to allow some flexibility for change if required without going through what is seen to be an onerous change process discouraging innovation and people being proactive and responding to feedback.
* It would be useful to review the length and content of module specifications, particularly the ILOs.

Using an online process for the development and approval of new and revised programme and module specifications has been discussed with the idea of CSC acting as a virtual peer review group. This is a similar suggestion to that made a little while ago by Ray Dawson and Ruth Kinna and could be developed alongside the proposed online system for the review process.

It is suggested that this is discussed further by members of L&TC and/or CSC.

# Appendix 1: Workshop Report

A half day workshop was held at Burleigh Court on 30th October 2012. The workshop was led by Anne Mumford with Ruth Casey facilitating the process mapping and support provided by Claire Bradshaw.

Operations Managers were asked to nominate participants and the following people attended:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Manuel | Alonso |
| Martin | Ashby |
| Claire | Bradshaw |
| Rachel | Breen |
| Tom | Carslake |
| Ruth | Casey |
| Lynn | Clulow |
| Meredith | Coney |
| Sandie | Dann |
| Ray | Dawson |
| Louise | Finney |
| Georgina | Gray-Ridgeway |
| Robert | Harland |
| Jane | Horner |
| Malika | Lawrance |
| Vicky | Meldrum |
| Anne | Mumford |
| Rob | Pearson |
| Keith | Pond |
| Keli | Smith |
| Meg | Stafford |
| Chris | Szejnmann |
| Jonathan | Walters |

This report includes:

* The processes which were identified
* Discussion points raised
* Action points identified by participants
* Ideas for further discussions identified as being important by participants

## Current Processes

***Start of the academic year***

Schools and Departments

* Review feedback from students from LU feedback and NSS and look at major issues that need to feed into programme and module revisions.
* Prompt the start of consideration of revisions for next year.

Academic Registry

* Review the memo
* Decisions regarding changes – e.g. boundary between minor and major revisions.

***End November***

Academic Registry

* Modules from previous year copied and rolled forward for next year.
* Issue memo to schools/departments (widely distributed)

Schools and Departments

* Distribute the information to relevant people (timing of this varies). Sometimes as is and sometimes with clear instructions regarding what individuals have to do.
* Distribute current programme and module specifications – some schools as link to existing online information, some schools use paper copies (easier to check progress re collection and mark up). Deadlines for returns set by schools based on their meeting schedule for programme and L&T meetings.

***Review Period – December to March***

Schools and Departments

* Programme leaders/groups undertake review of existing programmes (this varies across schools in how it is implemented with some taking an initial overview/strategic review followed by module review, others looking at programmes and modules in parallel).
* May involve the Teaching Centre QEOs to get guidance in drawing up the changes.
* Conversations involving ADT who needs to be aware of discussions regarding changes.
* Some schools use of online sharing of comments – Learn (Science), Intranet (SSEHS).
* Academic staff decide whether modules will continue to run, if new modules are required and if there are to be changes or not to existing modules. Changes either done online as track changes in word (using school copy or extracted copy (LUSI extract to PDF then converted to word) or handwritten mark up. This is not considered to be a good time to engage academic staff but getting their involvement is important – often seen as an administrative role at this point with interest and engagement from academic staff in revisions increased later in the year.
* Academic staff/departmental administrator completes covering forms to outline change to programmes and modules/new modules and context for changes.
* Dept. administrator coordinates the responses and amends the data sheet to indicate the module status for next year (same, changes (major/minor), suspended, deleted).
* Discussions required with relevant support services and ADT where there are major changes to programmes or modules which need to be provided to the ADT and depending on their nature chair of curriculum sub-committee.
* Changes to modules entered into LUSI by Departmental Administrator and Academic Registry (egs credit and exam weightings, semesters).
* New Modules set up by Academic Registry and populated by Dept. Administrator.
* Dean/Chair of School Learning and Teaching Committee approval.
* Administrators send consultation documents to other Schools & Services as appropriate.
* Submitted to ADT for approval and clarification sought/changes made.

Academic Registry

* Amend modules and set up new modules as requested

***April (checking continues through Summer)***

Schools and Departments

* ADT approves changes and forwards to Academic Registry.

Academic Registry

* Receive all spreadsheets indicating module regulation status, module change forms and programme change forms. Check all returned spreadsheets, module change forms, programme change forms, previous versions with marked up changes checked against new versions.

Modules:

* + Spreadsheets processed: Where there are only minor changes or non-controversial suspensions or terminations, modules activated/suspended/terminated accordingly.
  + Forms processed: Checks carried out including for appropriate approval, that changes made, all fields in new modules completed. Modules actioned as above.

Regulations:

* + Forms processed: Checks carried out including for appropriate approval and that changes are not major (requiring CSC approval).
* Issues, errors or inconsistencies discussed with schools. There are sometimes disparities between paper and online forms – sometimes copy/paste issue.
* Major changes to programmes should be submitted for consideration by Curriculum Sub Committee by January but this often slips to May. Where major changes to programmes are identified, Schools prompted to submit paperwork for consideration by CSC in May.

***May***

Schools and Departments

* Staff start to get allocated to modules as part of workload discussions.
* Students get information on next year’s module choices which may include specifications.
* Timetabling deadline end May – timetablers working on provisional list of modules – but also on initial student choices of options (which may change) and estimated numbers of first year and progressing students.

Academic Registry

* Consideration of major changes to programmes by CSC.
* Where no outstanding issues modules finalised on LUSI and activated on LUSI end May.

***June/July/August/September***

Schools and Departments

* Some modules pulled due to staff departures/absence and due to low numbers.
* Students return option choices.

CDANS

* CDANS receive paperwork for modules where SENDA code is A or B for checking – too late for implementing generic adaptation though individual students’ requirements will be discussed with schools.

Academic Registry

* Still receiving and processing changes.
* Arrange for major changes to programmes which come to light to be considered by virtual meetings of CSC.

***October onwards***

Academic Registry

* Still receiving and processing module and programme changes. From this point they are seen to be ‘Immediate Changes’ and require more detailed scrutiny by Academic Registry/Chair of CSC to ensure minimal impact upon students.

## Discussions at the Workshop

These points were raised at the workshop (no particular order of priority):

* Lots of information exists (not all consistent) in different places – for different purposes – formal module specifications, student-friendly and more exciting version to attract students to opt for modules, for prospective students which will be shorter but market-focused. Information generated at different times by different people. The module specification is the legal contract.
* The print prospectus is working 2 academic years ahead of this process yet must include information to indicate both the exciting opportunities on offer and the University’s formal offering and expectations of students.
* Some international students are making decisions well in advance of arrival due to their need to get a visa. Applicants to ATAS programmes need to acquire ATAS clearance before applying for their visa request. Their application for clearance will include details of what they will be studying .
* Things will change at the last minute due to staff leaving or being ill, equipment breaking down – these changes tend to be discussed with students which are invariably reasonable.
* Link to KIS data.
* Although we have this tight and well-established process some staff teaching particular modules want to make changes as late as October. ADTs have to make a judgement call as to whether this is acceptable. Staff may of course be new to the University.
* Students may change their minds after exam results regarding their options and flexibility is appreciated.
* Although late changes can be undertaken there is a need for finalising early for the student handbooks to be produced in schools.
* Students need to have a good understanding of the modules they can choose (lots of flexibility in many programmes) and also the pathways, particularly relevant for students moving to Part B.
* The NSS and LU student feedback needs to inform changes but the timing of this does not work well with the timing for the review of specifications – though it could do for semester 2.
* Should we be seeing this as an 18 month process with changes informed by the feedback from various sources – psychologically better if not seen as tied to academic year as now?
* Some schools (e.g. SBE) have an early start to their annual process with an early consideration of programmes – student focused review. School of the Arts have twice a year discussion of programmes and the modules related to these. SSEHS is programme-driven.
* Suggestion that we need to switch the focus of discussions from modules to programmes.
* We should look to get the skills matrix as part of the process and have this automatically flow from the module specification. We need to be able to extract this as well as assessment information automatically so that this can be pulled together for students and gaps/pressures identified.
* The engagement of academic staff is essential, yet they often see this as an administrative task and the timing is such that engagement is not easy. Some schools/departments (e.g. Geography) do circulate the full information to academic staff so that they can see where the academic input comes and how and why changes may not be possible at other times due to the inter-linking of institution-wide approval processes and quality-related obligations.
* Programme Coordinators are identified in different ways in schools and may or may not have accompanying job descriptions. The Learning and Teaching Committees in schools are where decisions regarding major changes to be made irrespective of the “level” of the programme coordinator. The L&T Coordinator will approve minor changes.
* Workload considerations may drive the allocation of responsibilities and teaching load.
* Schools work to their own deadlines within the review period due to their own team/committee schedules.
* Although most modules are not changed there is a requirement to indicate no change on the spreadsheet and not a presumption of no change – not considered to be a problem.
* Ought we to look at taking feedback and making changes to semester 2 modules based on this – might mean doing the process twice unless the whole process shifts.
* There seem to be different levels of responsibility given to L&T coordinators in schools. ADTs working both on behalf of the Dean and the PVC(T) – 2 different roles re this process?
* Noted that Science use Learn for the development of changes and approval and access given to documents and discussions and online approvals to Martine Ashby. Also used by SPG to some extent.
* SSEHS use the intranet for documents and internal discussions as changes develop.
* Errors in transferring the approved changes to LUSI are not infrequent and Academic Registry have to go back to schools re this.
* Information on Learn comes from LUSI and is updated.
* Online prospectus is an entirely separate process. There are disparities sometimes between the formally approved specifications and information on the institutional and school/department web sites.
* There seem to be at least 3 levels of information which are common – formal specification, a more student-friendly version to enable current students to make choices on options, market-focused description available via printed and online prospectus. We need to avoid different messages as a result of different people writing these descriptions.
* We need to have good generic practice with regard to anticipating and describing access for students with a disability to our programmes. We then need to address specific individual student needs. This should be the situation. The check in the summer of module specifications is thus poorly timed and inappropriate if we have these things in place. This step could be removed now.
* Some discussion regarding whether any of this was linked to timetabling or whether all data re modules and student numbers is provisional for timetabling anyway.
* No record on LUSI re links between programmes and modules.
* There is an issue regarding contact hours and whether we can deliver these with current staff and rooms as we move towards standard contact hours.
* Should module specifications be more engaging for students – describing the excitement and creativity of what they will study?
* Issue regarding 10 and 20 credit modules with same common content but different methods of assessment but no option to combine the common content on LUSI.
* Some students return in October and want to change an optional module but this involves a lot of checking and iteration as the student tries to find something that they like and will fit on their timetable. Would be good to have the module specifications linked with the timetable system.
* We need to look at the balance of work – lot of people doing smaller amount of work early on, small number doing a lot of work later on. Balance of effort and also risk and single points of failure need to be considered.
* Does the existing process encourage academic ownership?
* Could some of the quality control be undertaken in the schools?
* We need to ensure that we retain some level of pragmatism and allowance for common sense decisions – more easily made perhaps by experienced ADTs?

## Proposed Actions and Recommendations

All participants were asked to identify an action they would like to see happen as a result of the workshop. Their ideas were:

* Include the prospectus (print and online) in the process. The information we collect could include material for marketing purposes. There is a need to link marketing into the changes as they develop.
* Should departments be linking to module specifications from their web sites – what is the value? Some do (e.g. Computer Science, others do not).
* In developing our ideas we need to bear in mind the impact of changes on applicant and existing students, keeping Student Recruitment & Admissions and Marketing in the loop.
* In making changes we need to remember that we have provided students with a particular product and need to careful manage changes to that product. Any changes will have an impact on applicants seeking visas or ATAS approval. The changes can potentially lead to appeals if not well managed.
* When a new/reviewed process is agreed we should ensure that the process is clearly outlined for all staff.
* “The process is crying out for automation”. Look at having a single electronic vehicle for module information which would hold different levels of information for different audiences e.g. general overview for prospectus, information for current students, detail of module specification for academic oversight, details for accreditation bodies, KIS. Do this in such a way that data is input using standard fields and that information can be extracted including skills audit, methods of teaching/delivery, contact hours, assessment methods. Information to include details that are appealing and fit for practical purposes. Automate extraction to different systems from single core record. *(mentioned several times).*
* Review timings and consider moving to later in the year to allow/encourage more engagement from academic staff and also a more accurate view of who will be undertaking teaching as new staff start and workloads are assessed – particularly relevant as we move to standard contact hours. *(mentioned several times).*
* Provide tailored information centrally suitable for administrators, programme directors, module leaders.
* Look at changing the deadlines for changes to semester 2 and PGT “semester 3” modules – or at least enable later additional changes to respond to student demand – given increased expectations with higher fees.
* Put in place consideration of disability issues as part of core processes for each school (with guidance from disability office), continue to support individual students needs and remove SENDA considerations from the current annual process.
* Review definitions of major/minor changes.
* Give schools more responsibility for published versions – without compromising quality.
* Eliminate paperwork for “no change” modules
* Consider more frequent CSC meetings.
* Design all in one module specification that allows varied credit-rating, assessments etc of one module e.g. 10 and 20 credit versions of the same module.

## Further Discussions

All participants were asked to indicate an area where further discussions/conversations would be useful. Their ideas were:

* Clarity of information and who needs what, why, when and for whom *(mentioned several times)*.
* Interaction with the timetable and their deadlines and processes *(mentioned several times).*
* How to engage academics and encourage academic ownership of the process particularly at programme level. *(mentioned several times).*
* How to encourage schools to ensure reviews are programme led, taking into consideration progression pathways.
* Each school seems to have a different approach. Get people together to exchange best practice.
* Automation, getting things online, simple extraction, core records in LUSI with other systems linked – how to remove duplication, save time and minimise human error.
* Discussion round intended learning outcomes and how they are constructed/determined by responsible examiners.
* Develop standard terminology and definitions (e.g. minor/major changes). Sometimes the collective number of minor changes results in the changes being defined as major and this may be only recognised later in the year.
* Having changes at two points in the year instead of one.
* Look at culture change from supply led” to “demand led” taking a programme-centric rather than module viewpoint.
* Consider a different approach for closed programmes e.g. Executive Education. – swifter change process for new and revised programmes/modules.