

## **ASTON UNIVERSITY**

### **LEARNING & TEACHING COMMITTEE**

#### **OVERVIEW OF PERIODIC REVIEW REPORTS**

##### **Introduction**

This report is a summary of the University's Periodic Reviews of taught programmes undertaken between April 2012 and April 2014 during which time fifteen separate reviews were undertaken.

##### **Recommendation for continuation of programmes**

The review panels have recommended to University Learning and Teaching Committee in eleven out of the fifteen reviews that the programmes be continued for a further six years. Of the remaining four programmes, one was approved for three years, two for two years and one programme for one more academic year.

Programme areas reviewed	Approved for	Date of next review
Foundation Degree Business and Education management	6 years	2018/19
Foundation Degree Electrical Power Engineering	6 years	2018/19
PGT Applied Linguistics	3 years	2016/17
MSc International Business (Extended)	6 years	2018/19
MSc Pharmacy	6 years	2018/19
UG Programmes in Electrical Engineering	6 years	2018/19
MA Europe and the World	6 years	2019/20
PGT Psychiatric Pharmacy	2 years	2015/16
International Foundation Programme	2 years	2015/16
UG in Logistics and Transport	6 years	2019/20
MBA	6 years	2019/20
Podiatry	1 year	2015/16
UG and PGT in Product Design	6 years	2019/20
UGT in Audiology	6 years	2019/20
Biology	6 years	2019/20

It should be noted that amongst the programmes recommended for six-year approval, several contained provisos, conditions, and/or recommendations for mid-cycle reviews to provide assurance to Learning and Teaching Committee that required steps for improvement are duly implemented and monitored.

## **Good Practice**

Features of good practice were identified in all of the reviews and across a range of areas within the programmes including: pedagogy, administration, supporting students and placement management.

### **Teaching, Learning & Assessment**

Examples of good practice of Learning and Teaching were identified in eight of the reviews conducted. Examples include:

- a) Critical engagement with issues such as teaching large classes, evidenced by innovative practices in assessment and feedback, together with a creative approach to delivery (Biology)
- b) Academic staff awareness and commitment to learning and teaching, as demonstrated by the number of staff who are HEA Fellows and who have recognised teaching qualifications (MBA)
- c) The strong approach to learning and teaching as reported by the external examiner (Audiology)
- d) There are some good examples of team teaching by the three institutions on the core modules (MSc International Business)

There were other areas associated with Learning and Teaching which were more specialist identified in other reviews and are worth bringing to the attention of Learning and Teaching Committee. These are:

- a) the study skills support and additional mathematics support provided by the University's Learning Development Centre (Foundation degree in Electrical Power Engineering)
- b) The creation of the Study Skills module, tailored to ESM students (Transport and Logistics)
- c) There is a pool of significant experience and expertise in distance learning provision and support in the TESOL programmes (Applied Linguistics)

### **Staff Commitment**

The commitment and dedication of staff was identified as a feature of good practice in all fifteen of the reviews undertaken. This included a range of academic, managerial, administrative and support staff being recognised for enhancing the student experience.

- a) the dedication of the core academic and administrative staff in addressing the challenges of a complex programme, a commitment appreciated by the students who met the Review Panel (MSc International Business)
- b) the commitment of the Programme's director and support staff in providing additional support and advice to students. (PGT Psychiatric Pharmacy)
- c) the responsiveness of the programme team in providing additional support when requested, in the areas of academic writing and referencing (Foundation degree in Business and Education Management)
- d) The proactive, engaged and effective technical team which has contributed a self-devised, successful skills workshop to the programme and is highly thought of by students and staff (UG and PGT Product Design)

### Placements and Student Employability

Placements and employability were identified as good practice in nine of the reviews. These elements varied widely from embedding entrepreneurship in the curriculum, through to ensuring placement supervisors are given sufficient support to maximise the benefit of the placement for students. Further examples include:

- a) The excellent placement provision (Podiatry)
- b) The programme, with its links to Europe and integrated internships, meets the University's strategic objectives of increased internationalisation and student employability (MSc International Business)
- c) The provision of information on job opportunities using Blackboard and the termly seminars given by alumni now working in related industries (MSc Pharmacy)
- d) The three-year accreditation by the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) (Foundation degree in Electrical Power Engineering)

### Curriculum Development and the impact of Research

One review was commended for the progress they have made since their last review:

- a) The panel commended the team on the progress made, under difficult conditions, in addressing the outcomes of the 2011 review and improving provision, whilst noting that some further work was needed (Transport and Logistics)

Seven reviews identified the development of an engaging, valued and valuable curriculum. Examples included:

- a) the initiative being taken to review and improve the curriculum (MBA)
- b) the development of an impressive suite of programmes that provide the knowledge and skills required by industry and employers, and that are flexible and responsive to changing needs (Foundation degree in Electrical Power Engineering)
- c) the development of an innovative programme in a competitive market, which is attracting highly qualified students (MA Europe and the World)
- d) The clear strategy for the future development of the programme taking into account opportunities overseas and for home/EU students (MSc Pharmacy)

It should be noted that in only one of the reviews was the impact of research or research led teaching identified as good practice. (MA Europe and the World)

### Externality

Review panels identified the use of externality in the enhancement of programmes in seven programmes. Examples include:

- a) The employer-led curriculum, especially in the case of the Postgraduate Certificate, which fulfils a clear professional development requirement. (MSc Psychiatric Pharmacy)
- b) the proactive sourcing of commercial partners (Podiatry)
- c) The industry-led approach to the curriculum demonstrated in the role of the Industrial Steering Committee, and the use of industry representatives as visiting lecturers and external examiners (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)
- d) the excellent learning opportunities provided through the team's contacts within the UK and Europe through ACE (MA Europe and the World)

## Common Themes

The periodic review process continues to provide the University with a mechanism to evaluate and reflect on the progress and development of its programmes. Whilst the diverse nature of both the University's programmes and its students present a diverse range of challenges, when looked at in conjunction with multiple reviews, periodic review panel reports provide a strong indicator as to current practices in schools and students' experiences which are presenting as common themes.

The need for continual reflection on curriculum development is a common theme throughout nearly all of the fifteen reviews undertaken between April 2012 and April 2014, including programmes which were recommended for six-year approval. Within these fifteen reports it becomes clear that reflection is needed because of three drivers: to reinforce academic standards, to meet student expectations and to ensure optimisation of opportunities presented to students in relation to employability.

With regards to academic standards, one recurring theme in many reports was the need to evaluate whether the number of assessments was appropriate for the learning outcomes at module level.

Whilst none of the reports explicitly identified significant shortcomings in programme team's willingness to engage with the student voice, several reports did identify it as an opportunity to further enhance the quality of the programme. Systems and processes are embedded at Aston University to capture the student voice but it seems that there are instances where it is not being utilised to its full potential.

The periodic review process has established the importance of the placement and/or embedding of employability/entrepreneurism in the curriculum and the benefit these are perceived to have by students and employers. As would be expected this is most prominent in the vocational programmes but other programmes are moving towards this strategic level focus. In these academic programmes, some reports identified the uptake of placements to be lower than the University average and have recommended that programme teams consider other methods of promoting the benefits of integrated placements.

The appreciation students have for staff at the University is a common theme throughout these fifteen reports. Ranging from teaching quality (*In 2013 Biology scored 92% and Biomedical Science 95% in the NSS for teaching.* – Biology); technical staff (*The proactive, engaged and effective technical team which has contributed a self-devised, successful skills workshop to the programme and is highly thought of by students and staff* – Product Design); and support staff (*knowledgeable and committed support staff* – MBA) demonstrates how the efforts of Aston University staff are noticed and appreciated by students and should not be doubted.

A further common theme identified is regarding the accuracy and effectiveness of information to students. With the implementation of Part C of the QAA Quality Code this is an area which has rightly received an increased amount of scrutiny from the periodic review process and will continue to do so. This round of periodic reviews identified issues and concerns for both prospective and current students which the panels have made recommendations for improvement. The periodic review process will continue to put significant scrutiny on published information as required by the Quality Code.

## **Engineering and Applied Sciences – Summaries of reviews**

### **UG and PGT Product Design**

The panel recommended to the Learning and Teaching Committee that the following programmes should be approved for a further six year period:

- BEng Design Engineering
- BSc Industrial Product Design
- BSc Product Design Management
- BSc Automotive Product Design
- BSc Transport Product Design
- MSc Product Design Innovation
- MSc Product Design Enterprise

Examples of good practice identified:

- The in-room interaction and active practical engagement of students which develops the capacity for independent learning
- The focus on engaging students in their own learning, encompassing both academic and ‘real world learning’

The panel made seven recommendations to the programme team of which four were essential and required to be implemented within twelve months. These were: A subject-appropriate studio learning environment is needed to ensure the programme learning outcomes are met; the number of user-licences for specialist design software is insufficient for current student numbers and should be increased; a clear statement on any fees for additional materials or other requirements should be made available for applicants; and A clear plan should be in place to address aspirations for future growth and associated resource implications.

### **Foundation Degrees in Electrical Power Engineering**

The Review Panel recommend to the University’s Learning and Teaching Committee that the following programmes should be approved for a six-year period to 2018/19:

- FdEng Electrical Power Engineering (Distribution)
- FdEng Electrical Power Engineering (Power Systems Management)
- FdEng Electrical Power Engineering (Transmission)

Examples of good practice identified:

- the design of the programmes which enables students to develop as independent learners and which cater successfully for a very diverse cohort qualified to very different levels
- well organised and effective mechanisms for sharing information between stakeholders, particularly the Annual Review process which is to be highly commended

The panel made seven recommendations to the programme team to enhance the provision. These included designing a strategy to secure the future of the programme; embed more formal and standardised procedures to obtain student feedback; and establishing and monitoring the correct quality control procedures.

## **UG Electrical and Electronic Engineering**

The panel recommended that the following programmes should be approved for a further six year period:

- BEng Electrical and Electronic Engineering (full time, with or without placement)
- MEng Electrical and Electronic Engineering (full time, with integrated placement)
- BEng Electronic Engineering and Computer Science (full time, with or without integrated placement)
- MEng Electronic Engineering and Computer Science (full time, with integrated placement)
- BEng Communications Engineering (full time, with or without placement)

Examples of good practice identified:

- The industry-led approach to the curriculum demonstrated in the role of the Industrial Steering Committee, and the use of industry representatives as visiting lecturers and external examiners; paragraph 2.1
- The clearly articulated learning and teaching strategy; paragraph 3.1.

The panel made three recommendations to the programme team and four to the School/University. Recommendations to the School include: that the School is requested to ensure academic managers in Electrical and Electronic Engineering continue to have sufficient oversight of the budget to achieve their strategic goals; and the future location of the subject group should be clarified as soon as possible.

## **UG Transport and Logistics Management**

The review panel recommended that the following programmes should be approved for a further six year period:

- BSc Transport Management
- BSc Logistics Management

Examples of good practice identified:

- Students found staff to be supportive and responsive to queries; they reported that feedback from students was acted upon
- The creation of the Study Skills module, tailored to ESM students, is commended

The panel made five recommendations to the programme team. These included: a review of teaching of mathematics skills throughout the stages of the programme be conducted, to assist with student progression; information to students, for example in the handbook and module specifications, be reviewed, to ensure that it is up to date and relevant to students on these programmes; and that attention should be paid to planning and optimising marketing of the programmes, so that the broad relevance and appeal of the discipline is promoted and using all avenues, including social media.

## **Life and Social Sciences – Summaries of reviews**

### **MA Europe and the World**

The Review Panel recommend to the University Learning and Teaching Committee that that the MA Europe and the World Double Masters collaboration with Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Lille, should be approved for a further six-year period.

Examples of good practice identified:

- the strength of the personal relationships between academics within ACE and the institutional lead at IEP, and the initiatives being taken to involve academic staff in the delivery of the partner's qualification
- the excellent learning opportunities provided through the team's contacts within the UK and Europe through ACE and the research-led curriculum (2.6, 3.1);

The panel made four essential recommendations for improvement to the programme team. These were: a need to embed processes and procedures to ensure the future sustainability of the programme and provide the normal range of management information; a formal review of the form and range of assessment across the Aston and IEP programmes; a more active promotion of the programme and the link with IEP via the website, and more information about study in Lille added to the student handbook; re-examine the sequencing of assessment and the transfer of students to IEP.

### **PGT Applied Linguistics**

The panel confirmed that the following programmes should be approved for three years:

- MSc by distance learning in Applied Linguistics;
- MSc by distance learning in Forensic Linguistics;
- MSc by distance learning in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages;
- MSc by distance learning in Educational Management in TESOL;
- MSc by distance learning in Teaching English for Specific Purposes;
- MSc by distance learning in Teaching English to Young Learners;
- MA in Applied Linguistics;
- MA in Applied Linguistics (Corpus Linguistics);
- MA in Applied Linguistics (Forensic Linguistics);
- MA in Applied linguistics (Literary Linguistics);
- MA in Applied Linguistics (Sociolinguistics);
- MA in Applied Linguistics (TESOL).

Examples of good practice identified:

- The quality of feedback to students on their work is very good and in many cases exemplary;
- There are some excellent examples of practice, in terms of information provided to students and teaching materials, in the TESOL programmes in particular.

The panel made recommendations to the University, School and programme team. It recommended that the University work with programme administration teams to ensure that systems to support programmes, such as SITS, are fit for purpose for non-standard and flexible provision, such as the distance learning programmes under review. It recommended that the School: develop a business plan and review staff workload; and that administrative support for the programmes be kept under close review. It recommended to the programme team that it should provide better evidence of their processes for consideration of student

feedback, external examiners' reports and annual review of programmes by recording discussion of these matters more comprehensively at subject group (ASG) level

## **Life and Health Sciences – Summaries of reviews**

### **Audiology**

The panel confirmed that the following undergraduate programmes in Audiology should be approved for a further six year period:

- BSc (Hons) Healthcare Science (Audiology)
- Foundation Degree Hearing Aid Audiology

Examples of good practice identified:

- Positive, open relationship between the student body and staff (para 2.1);
- The strong approach to learning and teaching as reported by the external examiner (para 3.1).

The panel made eleven recommendations across the areas of: Academic Standards; Learning Opportunities; Quality Assurance and Enhancement; and Information

### **UG Biology**

The Review Panel confirmed that the following programmes should be approved for a further six-year period:

- BSc Biomedical Science,
- BSc Applied Biomedical Science,
- BSc Biological Sciences,
- BSc Human Biology,
- BSc Cell and Molecular Biology
- BSc Microbiology and Immunology

Examples of good practice identified

- Critical engagement with issues such as teaching large classes, evidenced by innovative practices in assessment and feedback, together with a creative approach to delivery;
- Timetabled personal tutorials;

The panel made recommendations such as allocating resource to provide central support for placement students; conduct a review of how students are encouraged and supported in identifying and securing placements; and monitoring the government's Modernising Scientific Careers initiative and its potential impact for placement students and graduates.

### **PGT Psychiatric Pharmacy**

In order to ensure that their concerns around learning opportunities are addressed robustly and expeditiously the panel agreed that the programmes should be approved for a further two year period:

- Postgraduate Certificate in Psychiatric Therapeutics
- Postgraduate Diploma in Psychiatric Pharmacy
- MSc in Psychiatric Pharmacy Practice

Examples of good practice identified:

- The commitment of the Programme's director and support staff in providing additional support and advice to students. (para 3.2)
- The employer-led curriculum, especially in the case of the Postgraduate Certificate, which fulfils a clear professional development requirement. (para 2.2)

The panel made recommendations to the subject group/programme area and also made two recommendations to the School which were: ensure a member of School's management team participates in the programme committee; and conduct a survey to identify areas of improvement to both the student experience and learning and teaching of the programmes.

### **BSc Podiatry**

The Review Panel recommends to the University and School of Life & Health Sciences Learning and Teaching Committees that the BSc Podiatry programme should be re-validated for the 2014/15 academic year to 31 August 2015, with a further review to take place in May 2015.

Examples of good practice identified:

- the commitment of the teaching staff (3.2)
- the level of individual student support provided (2.1,3.2);

The panel made three essential recommendations to the School which were: the immediate appointment of an Aston University Programme Director; to consider how the programme could be better integrated with the University's inter-professional learning and learning resources; and to consider how both staff and students could be better integrated with the University. The panel also made nine recommendations to the programme team.

### **PGT Pharmacy**

The Review Panel confirmed that the following programmes should be approved for a further six-year period:

- MSc Drug Design
- MSc Drug Delivery
- MSc Pharmaceutical Sciences
- MSc Pharmacology
- MSc Molecular Toxicology

Examples of good practice identified:

- The development and fostering of a strong community of staff and students involved in the MSc programmes (paragraph 3.2)
- The programmes' Assessment Strategy which promotes a balance of different assessment methods appropriate to the programmes (paragraph 2.2)

The panel made six desirable recommendations to the programme teams which included: putting more emphasis on the importance of student feedback through channels such as PTES; the promotion of staff involvement during induction; and ensuring that support staff are kept well informed of changes to courses decided by academic staff.

## **Aston Business School – Summaries of reviews**

### **International Foundation Programme**

The Review Panel recommend to the Learning & Teaching Committee that the International Foundation Programme, delivered in collaboration with Birmingham Metropolitan College, be approved until summer 2015, at which point a further interim review should be undertaken to review the new curriculum.

Examples of good practice identified:

- the initiative being taken to review and improve the curriculum and the range of resource that is in place, to allow the team to maximise its potential (Section 2);
- the high level of academic and pastoral support provided to students in a period when the programme has been subject to significant change in ownership and leadership (3.4);

The panel made four recommendations jointly to the School and subject area: that the programme team pursued proposed changes to curriculum and delivery, involving CLIPP; that information to potential applicants and students be made clearer and most consistent; that the programme team structure opportunities for the cohort to meet other Aston University students; that the programme team put in place a strategy to support students with additional learning needs and disabilities.

### **Foundation Degree Business and Education Management**

The Review Panel recommend to the Learning and Teaching Committee that the programme should be approved for a six-year period to 2018/19.

Examples of good practice identified:

- an approachable and enthusiastic teaching and support team who are passionate about the delivery of the programme and have a good relationship with students.
- the responsiveness of the programme team in adapting to a student intake from more diverse employment backgrounds (2.3);

The panel made five recommendations to enhance the programme of which one was essential. This was that the programme team develop a new strategy for student mentoring in time for changes to be implemented for October 2013.

### **MSc International Business (Extended)**

The Review Panel recommend to the University's Learning and Teaching Committee that the programme should be approved for a six-year period to 2018/19, or until such time as the partners should decide that the collaboration will end if sooner than 2018/19.

Examples of good practice identified:

- the dedication of the core academic and administrative staff in addressing the challenges of a complex programme
- there are some good examples of feedback to students on their work, which could usefully inform other areas of the programme's provision

The panel made eleven recommendations to the programme team of which one was essential. This was that, for the Aston University MSc award and for all progression decisions, the Examination Board be constituted as set out in the Agreement signed

between the three institutions, with minuted meetings and the demonstrable involvement of an External Examiner at the programme level.

## **MBA**

The Review Panel recommended to the Learning & Teaching Committee that the following programmes be approved for the full six-year period, with the next scheduled Periodic Review in 2019/20:

- Full time MBA
- Online MBA
- Part time (Executive) MBA

Examples of good practice identified:

- the overall student experience, which includes excellent pre-induction and careers support and has given students good employment prospects;
- academic staff awareness and commitment to learning and teaching, as demonstrated by the number of staff who are HEA Fellows and who have recognised teaching qualifications, and the sharing of good practice around on-line delivery;

The panel made six recommendations to the School and subject area of which two were deemed essential. These were: immediate steps should be taken to review the amount of assessment in the current curriculum and its alignment to the programmes' learning outcomes and the credit earned by students; and the programme team pursue the proposed changes to curriculum and delivery for the 2015 intake, with a key objective being to develop a coherent strategy for the constructive alignment of learning objectives and teaching, learning and assessment, and to more clearly articulate employability and entrepreneurship within the curriculum.