

LTC15D104

Title: HIGHER EDUCATION REVIEW ACTION PLAN
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Issue

Recipients are invited to consider the appended Action Plan responding to the recommendations arising from the Higher Education Review.

Recommendation

The committee is asked to approve the steps outlined in the Action Plan

Resource Implications

The recommendations are all of a relatively minor nature and so contain no resource implications for the University.

Risk Implications

The University is required to implement its Action Plan in accordance with the timescale laid down by the QAA: the Action Plan must be hosted on our website and all actions must be in place by September 2016.

Equality and Diversity

N/A

Timing of decisions

Endorsement by LTC at its March meeting will allow all necessary actions to be undertaken within the necessary timeframe.

Further Information

For further information regarding the issues in this paper please contact Dr Jon Sharp (Head LTS (Quality)) on 01603 9597374 jon.sharp@uea.ac.uk

Higher Education Review – University of East Anglia – Action Plan

1. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) carried out the Higher Education Review of UEA in the week commencing 12th October 2015. The final report was issued in January 2016 and contained the following recommendations, that the University:

- Take steps to address inconsistencies in its stated positioning of the Medical Bachelor /Bachelor of Surgery (MB BS) degree on the FHEQ (Expectations A2.1, A1 and A3.1)
- Take steps to address the approval and completeness of its programme specifications (Expectations A2.2 and A3.1)
- Ensure that external academic expertise is consistently obtained, documented and considered as part of the course approval process to verify threshold academic standards and to demonstrate that the appropriate external reference points have been considered (Expectations A3.4, A3.1 and B1)
- Ensure effective oversight and monitoring of cumulative changes and deviations to programmes (Expectation B1)
- Review assessment board regulations and their application to ensure greater consistency and equity of treatment of students (Expectations B6 and A2.1)
- Define, articulate and implement arrangements for the approval of cotutelle partners for dual awards, including taking steps to ensure that a cotutelle agreement has been signed before the relevant activity commences (Expectations B10 and B1)
- Put in place mechanisms to ensure effective oversight to manage the variability in practice in the provision of programme information to current students (Expectation C)
- Communicate effectively to students' information about programme learning outcomes at the start of, and throughout, their studies (Expectations C and A2.2).

2. The University has established a working group including academic staff, professional services staff and student representatives to draw up an action plan which addresses each of the recommendations and provides for their implementation. At its initial meeting the working group allocated responsibility for the development of specific responses to each of the recommendations. It is expected that all necessary actions will be concluded by September 2016 as recommended within the QAA Higher Education Review Outcome Report.

3. The Action Plan in relation to the recommendations is detailed below. Recommendations have been linked together in those instances where multiple recommendations are being addressed by a single development project :

4. Take steps to address inconsistencies in its stated positioning of the Medical Bachelor /Bachelor of Surgery (MB BS) degree on the FHEQ

5. The stated positioning of the MB BS degree is being updated in all documentation where the FHEQ level of the award is referenced. All relevant University documentation will be corrected by no later than 31 July 2016 to reflect the fact that the MB BS constitutes a level 7 Award. The operational delivery against this recommendation is a straightforward matter of text correction and is being undertaken by Learning & Teaching Service (LTS) staff in consultation with academic staff from MED.

6. Take steps to address the approval and completeness of its programme specifications

7. Ensure effective oversight and monitoring of cumulative changes and deviations to programmes

8. The Higher Education Review noted that in some instances programme specifications were not fully completed and that minor changes could be made to courses without committee oversight. The ability to make minor changes without committee approval could potentially lead to significant course changes occurring over time.

9. A number of related actions are being undertaken to address these linked recommendations:

10. The University's regulations will be amended with effect from the commencement of the 2016-17 academic year such that minor changes are monitored and where a cumulative process of change would result in a course profile that has varied by a factor of 20% or greater since the last committee approval would be required to be considered by the Learning & Teaching Committee (LTC) of the University.

11. LTS will ensure that all programme specifications are complete prior to uploading to the University's website and where omissions exist these will be resolved in a timely manner with the relevant Course Director.

12. The above actions will directly address the two recommendations regarding the management and recording of programme changes in programme specifications. However, the

University is also keen to introduce further enhancements to the programme specification form and to that end has established a working group that is reviewing the course approval process and associated documentation (including the programme specification). The working group will make proposals to LTC with a view to introduce the new process and improved documentation in the 2016-17 academic year. The redesigned documentation will include a requirement for course level information to be provided to students.

13. Ensure that external academic expertise is consistently obtained, documented and considered as part of the course approval process to verify threshold academic standards and to demonstrate that the appropriate external reference points have been considered

14. The University already requires that external academic expertise is utilised effectively in the course approval process. However, this requirement has not always been enforced uniformly to date. The guidance notes accompanying the revised course approval process (see para. 12 above) will be explicit about this requirement and any proposal that does not evidence appropriate engagement with external academic expertise shall not go forward for consideration by LTC.

15. Review assessment board regulations and their application to ensure greater consistency and equity of treatment of students

16. There are a small number of areas of variable practice in relation to assessment outcomes in terms of progression and awards. Specifically, there are different thresholds for progression on Study Abroad and Year in Industry courses and the Starred First boundary is currently set by each Examination Board. The Academic Director of Taught Programmes (ADTP) is pursuing the issue of variant progression and the absence of a University Starred First boundary. A set of proposals to remove these inconsistencies will be presented to LTC by the ADTP before the end of the current academic year.

17. Define, articulate and implement arrangements for the approval of cotutelle partners for dual awards, including taking steps to ensure that a cotutelle agreement has been signed before the relevant activity commences

18. The University's Postgraduate Research Executive has acted on the recommendation to define, articulate and implement arrangements for the approval of cotutelle partners for dual awards, including taking steps to ensure that a cotutelle agreement has been signed before the relevant activity commences. The Executive considered a related paper in December 2015 and approved the introduction of a two stage process for the approval of cotutelle agreements: the first stage being approval of the partner organisation (due diligence); the second stage being academic approval of the individual cotutelle agreement. As a result, if the University and partner institution have not collaborated before on cotutelle arrangements, the University will carry out due diligence checks to ensure that the partner institution can fulfil its role in the arrangement. Approval of cotutelle agreements will be reported to both the Postgraduate Research Executive and the Learning and Teaching Committee. Up-to-date registers of cotutelle arrangements are maintained by the Postgraduate Research Service. Schools will be responsible for annual reviews of any cotutelle arrangements they are involved in.

19. Put in place mechanisms to ensure effective oversight to manage the variability in practice in the provision of programme information to current students

20. Communicate effectively to students' information about programme learning outcomes at the start of, and throughout, their studies

21. The University is addressing the recommendations detailed at paragraphs 19 & 20 above by establishing a Working Group that will be focused on enhancing the provision of course information for students.

22. This Group will draft proposals for consideration by LTC at its September 2016 meeting with a view that amendments to the way in which information is provided to students are implemented with effect from the 2016-17 academic year.

23. One specified deliverable that will emerge from the working group's deliberations will be a Standard Template for Course Handbooks. This template model will ensure that there are no inconsistencies or gaps in information between the University Student Handbook and Course Handbooks.

24. In addition, the Working Group will ensure that course information includes sufficient detail regarding course level outcomes and in so doing will draw on the developments made to the programme specification form discussed in paragraph 12 above.