LTC09D046

SSF Feedback Regarding Pilot of the 'New' New Course approval / amendments process

Following the provision in April 2009 of draft forms for the pilot exercise in SSF, three new course proposals have been approved using this process and we are in the process of considering two more.

The Faculty welcomes the move to an electronic system. It also recognises that ensuring a new course is well planned and explicitly considers a business perspective is a significant development. The New Course Proposal process follows a logical order - detailed comments on the process are covered in the second section of this document.

SSF cannot comment on how well the new course approval process will operate via Process Manager as the Faculty has only considered a paper version of the process.
The feedback has been derived from various sources - members of the Faculty Executive, Teaching Directors, LTQC, course proposers, the Associate Dean LTQ, the Faculty Manager (Teaching Office) and the Senior Administrator LTQC.

The new process for brand new proposals was demonstrated to Faculties in early 2009 but at the time of writing the Fast Track version of this process had not been demonstrated. Whilst the three proposals considered through the piloted process have been treated as new proposals, the Faculty has also processed a number of updates to Courses and have therefore had the opportunity to consider the implications of the introduction of the new process against the full and Fast Track versions.

Concerns about the Procedure

1) The procedure assumes that consulted offices will turnaround paperwork within 10 business days however there is no formal requirement for them to do so. Whilst an automated chase process exists in Process Manager, it is essential that the course proposal keeps moving and the Faculty feels that something more than a process of automated email chases is required.

2) Fast Track – the new Fast Track process requires very similar consultation to the full process and it is not in terms of process a 'fast track'.

3) Course amendments

   a) The Fast Track procedure currently includes what are effectively new courses comprised of existing modules and course changes which meet the criteria to be   classed as a 'major' change. The procedure for both is the same. The consultation for the amendment side of Fast Track changes in terms of a business case is excessive e.g. a change in credit values has to be considered by Information Services, MAS etc. A requirement to consult with offices   where there is no added benefit to the School/Faculty or the office in question will unnecessarily increase complexity, the workload for all parties and possibly discourage the likelihood of useful engagement.
   b) Using Process Manager for changes to a course will have significant implications in terms of the work load e.g. cutting and pasting an existing programme specification to fit the new system. This may discourage courses being updated and compliance with the annual course update process.
   c) Amendments falling under the current Fast Track definition require Faculty Exec. approval. This is excessive where proposed changes are academic without a business implication.
   d) The distinction of the 'Major' / 'Minor' changes criteria drives the decision of which procedure should be followed for course amendments. The 'major' criteria list currently contains some amendments where it would be more appropriate to consider these as

'minor' changes using the shortened Fast Track process e.g. changing the form of assessment of a core/compulsory module.

Recommendations:

1) Where offices do not engage in a timely manner with the consultation process for the procedure to include a contingency to ensure that consideration of proposals is not unduly delayed. For example, the procedure could be developed so that either a) a proposal can progress to the next stage without receiving comment or b) mechanisms developed to trigger action at a higher level if no response has been received despite reminders.
2) To no longer use the term Fast Track in the existing context.
3) To only use Process Manager for Fast Track new courses and consider amendments using existing proformas but with an additional for 'smart' consultation (also see point 4).
4) To reconsider the classifications of 'major' and 'minor' change and to redefine some of the 'major' criteria as 'minor' e.g. change in assessment, change in credit value. To dovetail this consideration into the annual monitoring process and revisit the list of changes for which School Directors of Learning and Teaching can approve. Define a 'smart' consultation list for the remaining 'major' changes which identifies the key offices to be consulted given the nature of the proposed amendments.
5) Remove the requirement for the Faculty Exec. to consider and approve amendments to existing courses.
6) To permit a concession for a sub committee from the Faculty Exec. to scrutinize new proposals and to then feed back to the committee.

Process Detail:

1) Section BC4 a),b),c) deals with student numbers and comments that the proposer should consult with HoS, Dean of Faculty, Planning dependant on whether additional numbers are required. A space for comments is required to record more specifically where numbers are coming from i.e. numbers might be from a combination of sources. Space is also needed for Planning and/or the Dean to make a comment regarding this. A 'tick' is insufficient.
2) At the moment the Faculty Finance Manager might have first sight of a proposal at the Faculty Exec. however the Finance Manager could usefully have an input at an earlier stage i.e. in the 'Resources' section – commenting on student numbers and tuition fees. A space for comment would ensure consultation.
3) There remains strong concern that Process Manager will be introduced on a single author / non editorial basis. Completion of a significant number of fields within the course proposal form requires some familiarity with the process and there is a strong case to permit editing rights to defined members of administrative staff. If this cannot be offered then viewing rights should at least be made available. We accept that this might come at the price of decreased functionality.
4) A step is required to ensure that a Head of School views the Summary and Business case before any consultation outside of a Faculty takes place.
5) A step is required to ensure that a Director of Learning and Teaching views the academic case before any consultation outside of a Faculty takes place.
6) For the three new courses, Faculty LTQC thought that it would be useful to include some template for any new modules to support the case and a requirement to include module descriptions for existing modules. This may be resolved under Process Manager.
7) It is noted that on occasions it would be useful to receive input from the Exam's Office and as this relates to the academic case, it would seem appropriate that comments from LTQO should include any specific feedback from the Exam's Office.
8) The referencing in the guideline document will need to be updated as for the pilot form some references do not correspond to the form. New modules are under AC4 not AC6. The procedure document makes reference in 8.1 to section 6.5 – it should be 6.6.
9) The University now makes programme specifications available via a web link. As the majority of changes to a course tend to relate to the course profile, which forms part of the academic case under the piloted system, will we be making this form or the programme specification available online?