Periodic Review of Henley Business School
Post-Experience Postgraduate Programmes

Introduction

1 An internal review of programmes in the Henley Business School Post-Experience Postgraduate Programmes was held on 20 and 21 June 2012. The members of the Panel were:

Dr Elizabeth McCrum, School Director of Teaching and Learning, Institute of Education (Chair)
Dr Carol Padgett, ICMA Centre, Henley Business School (internal member)
Professor Liz Williamson, School of Pharmacy (internal member)
Professor Geoffrey Wood, Sheffield University, School of Management (external member, subject specialist)
Professor Frank McDonald, Bradford University Business School (external member, subject specialist)
Mr Ben Haines, Sabbatical Officer, RUSU (student representative)
Mrs Eleanor Rose, Faculty Academic Services Manager (Review Panel Secretary)

2 The Panel met the following:
   • Professor John Board, Dean, Henley Business School
   • Dr Richard McBain, Head of Post-Experience Postgraduate Programmes
   • Dr Elena Beleska-Spasova, Programme Director, Flexible MBA Programme
   • Dr Martin Bicknell, Director, Professional Management Programmes (MA)
   • Dr Patricia Bossons, Director of Henley Coaching Services
   • Dr Vaughan Michell, School of Business Informatics, Systems and Accounting
   • Dr Jean-Anne Stewart, Director, Corporate Qualification Programmes

3 The Panel met both students and alumni who represented the following degree programmes:
   • MBA (Taught, Flexible and Corporate modes of study)
   • MSc in Coaching & Behavioural Change
   • MSc in Enterprise Information Management
   • MSc in Strategic Marketing Leadership
   • MA in Applied Management
   • MA in Health & Social Care Management.
The Panel spoke by telephone with corporate sponsors from:
- Deloitte (Denmark)
- Deutsche Telekom (Germany).

**General observations**

4 The Panel met with a wide range of staff and wished to express its gratitude to all those who participated in the review process. It commended the Programme Group for the provision of the Blackboard Organisation, which facilitated members’ access to documentation before the Review, and for the detailed information provided during the Review itself. The Panel was very grateful for the efficient and helpful administrative support that it received both prior to and during the review.

The Panel recognised the particular context within which this review took place, particularly the merger of Henley Management College (HMC) and the University of Reading in 2008, and the restructuring of Henley Business School in August 2011 into six Schools, four Programme Areas and a Programme Administration function.

The Panel welcomed the involvement of current and former programme members, alumni and corporate sponsors all of whom gave very positive endorsements of the programmes under review and the Panel wished to thank them for their input.

The Panel reviewed the full range of Post-Experience programmes. The MBA Programmes: Flexible MBA, Executive MBA, Full-Time MBA, and Corporate MBA. The MSc Programmes: MSc Coaching and Behavioural Change; MSc Enterprise Information Management; MSc Strategic Marketing Leadership. Professional Management Programmes: MA Applied Management; MA Health and Social Care Management.

The Panel was particularly impressed by the strong sense of shared collective identity within the Henley Business School’s learning community of staff, programme members and stakeholders with both recent graduates and alumni remaining loyal to, and involved with, the Business School.

Henley Business School clearly has a strong reputation, brand and standing in the sector which attract high calibre programme members. Post-Experience programmes are characterised by a distinct pedagogy that has a strong focus on the active participation of learners and clear industry orientation. Programmes clearly help programme members not only make progress academically but also make a contribution to their professional and personal development.

There are areas of development which are underway in relation to the incorporation of University policy and procedures and to the establishment of formalised mechanisms for involving the full range of stakeholders in the development of provision.

**Academic standards of the programmes**

**Educational aims of the provision and the learning outcomes**

5 The Panel was provided with evidence in the form of programme specifications, module descriptions, programme handbooks, External Examiners’ reports and samples of programme members’ work. These, along with meetings with key staff, programme members and (by telephone) with the corporate sponsors of two programmes, enabled the Panel to confirm that the academic standards of programmes are being met.
The Panel reviewed the educational aims and learning outcomes of the programmes. The Panel confirmed that aims and outcomes on all programmes were clearly stated and that there is a good articulation between programme and module learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are informed by QAA subject benchmarking statements for General Business and Management and by the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications. External Examiners’ reports verify that aims and outcomes are obtained.

The Panel noted the strong links with employers on programme design and recruitment; and the ongoing role of the corporate sponsors of the MSc in Enterprise Information Management, the MSc in Strategic Marketing Leadership and the Corporate MBA (Deloitte Programme) in reviewing learning outcomes.

Curricula and assessment
Curricula

6 The Panel confirmed that the programmes reviewed are coherent and have appropriate breadth and scope. The curriculum, and its delivery, is appropriate to the high calibre of programme members recruited. The curriculum is at an appropriate level, being sufficiently challenging, and relevant to programme members’ specific needs and experiences. There is a strong focus on the learner, and close industry orientation.

The Panel noted that the provision for the development of soft management skills appears excellent. [Good practice a] However the Panel also noted, in the sample of programme members’ work reviewed, that while students used a lot of data in their work, their analysis sometimes lacked rigour, and there was less evidence of hard quantitative skills. The Panel recommends that the Programme Area review its provision of teaching in quantitative methods with a view to improving programme members’ hard quantitative skills. [Desirable recommendation a]

The Panel found that there was scope for the redevelopment of course materials and some course content on the MBA programme and the MSc in Coaching and Behavioural Change. Programme members noted a lack of contemporary materials, models and readings. The Panel recommends that course materials and curriculum content on these programmes be reviewed to ensure that it is up-to-date. [Advisable recommendation a]

Assessment

7 The Panel was provided with examples of programme members’ work including assignments, examination scripts, Management Challenges/dissertations and External Examiners’ reports. As well as considering this documentation, the Panel also discussed assessment-related issues with current and former programme members.

The Panel finds that assessment design and processes enable programme members to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes as stated in module descriptors and programme specifications. External Examiners verify that the standards achieved by programme members meet the expectations of relevant awards.

The Post-Experience Postgraduate programmes currently use a good range of assessment methods, including examinations (MBA Programmes, MSc Enterprise Information Management and MSc Strategic Marketing Leadership only), individual (and, where appropriate, group) assignments and learning journals. MBA and MSc programmes include an individual research project - the Management Challenge. A variety of methods of formative assessments are also incorporated into programmes, for example: feedback on presentations related to case studies on MBA and MSc programmes; and feedback on coaching practice on the MSc in Coaching & Behavioural
Change. The Panel commends the good range of assessment methods deployed on the programmes. [Good practice b]

Turnitin Originality checking software is used across all submissions on Professional Management Programmes. Given the possibility of plagiarism and assignment commissioning, the Panel recommends that the Programme Area give consideration to the feasibility and potential benefit of using Turnitin on all submissions on MBA and MSc programmes. [Desirable recommendation b]

The Panel notes that Post-Experience Masters programmes are currently awarded on a pass/fail basis. The Panel found that this was not clearly understood by current programme members and that programme members would welcome a move towards classified degrees. The Panel agreed that it would be advisable for the Programme Area to consider making final awards classified rather than pass/fail. [Advisable recommendation b]

Use of student management information

8 The Panel notes that each subject area within the MBA has a designated External Examiner. Subject Area Leaders tend to have good informal relationships with their respective External Examiners, responding to issues as they are raised. MSc and MA programmes each have a programme External Examiner. MBA Programmes also have a Chief External Examiner who looks across the programme. The Panel recommends that the role of Chief External Examiner on MBA programmes is formalised to include involvement in the scrutiny of programme level outcomes and to have input, as appropriate, on programme enhancement issues. [Desirable recommendation c]

Feedback from External Examiners is considered at regular Programme Examiners’ Meetings. Responses to issues raised are documented in Annual Programme Reports and are considered in Annual Subject Reviews. The Panel recommends that the Programme Area considers introducing formal written responses to External Examiners addressing the issues raised and any action to be taken in response. [Desirable recommendation d]

The Panel found programme members to be highly appreciative of the quick responses received, and action taken, to issues that they raise on their programmes. Annual Surveys are conducted on the Flexible MBA programme and these are reviewed by the Programme Director. Programme members complete formal written feedback questionnaires on all workshop sessions. The Panel recommends that the Programme Area consider introducing module and programme evaluations across all programmes. [Desirable recommendation e]

The Panel noted that the Professional Management programmes have regular Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) meetings. The Corporate MSc programmes have Steering Groups, which include programme members. Approaches to student feedback and evaluation on the MBAs and MSc in Coaching and Behavioural Change are more informal and rely on the good working relations with Programme Directors and Programme Support Staff. The Panel recommends that the Programme Area ensure that all programmes have in place a formal mechanism for programme members to meet with staff to discuss the operation of their programme, to review the aims and objectives of the degree programmes, to review issues relating to teaching and learning and student support and to consider other matters such as health and safety and resource provision. [Desirable recommendation f] These might be facilitated (as on Professional Management Programmes) using the Virtual Learning Environment for part-time and distance learning programmes.

The Panel notes that the Programme Area is moving towards increasing student representation, for example, including programme members in the membership of the
Board of Studies. This will necessarily entail a more formalised role for Course Representatives which could usefully be articulated; and course representatives should be encouraged to attend training on their role.

Enhanced student engagement through extending internal feedback mechanisms and greater student representation will require the Programme Area to have formal mechanisms for responding to issues raised and for ensuring programme members are informed of the actions taken. The Programme Area should also ensure that there is an appropriate forum for engaging with external student management information e.g. the Postgraduate Taught Experience (PTES) survey. [Desirable recommendation g]

Quality of learning opportunities offered by the programmes

Teaching and learning

9 The Panel commends the quality of teaching and learning across the Programme Area. Programme members highly value the workshop-style sessions. These are characterised by a high degree of participation by programme members, drawing on their skills and experiences and enabling them to learn from their peers. Programme members appreciate the support of both adjunct and full-time members of staff. They also value the incorporation into teaching programmes of well-chosen visiting speakers. [Good practice c].

A feature of good practice is that workshop leaders are aware of, and refer to, the organisations/industries in which programme members work. [Good practice d]

The Panel noted excellent practice in the very high quality of feedback provided to programme members on most modules. Feedback is individualised, structured, and clear and highlights opportunities for development. [Good practice e]

The Panel noted differing opinions as to the relative importance of research informing teaching, and much diversity within the Programme Area in this regard. A main focus is drawing out the relevance of research in informing practice. The Panel recognises that, in part, the move towards a more research-intensive focus has begun to take place. The Panel recommends that the Programme Area enhance ways in which research can inform teaching and ensure programmes are research-informed. [Desirable recommendation h]

The Panel noted much good practice in teaching and learning and recommends that the Programme Area consider ways in which this can be disseminated more widely. In their written submissions, some staff expressed concern that they have little time to reflect together on teaching and learning. It would be useful if “away days” or other events could be built into the academic year. The Programme Area should also ensure that it conforms to University policy and practice in relation to the peer review of teaching. [Advisable recommendation c]

Student admission and progression

10 The Panel notes that the current environment is challenging for MBA recruitment. The programme directors are clearly aware of this and realise the need for more active marketing of programmes. Alumni praised the information events for potential students, in which they were pleased to be invited to take part. They commented, in particular, that they were given the opportunity to speak to prospective programme members without Business School staff being present. [Good practice f]

Starter or Orientation workshops are provided across all programmes. As well as introducing programmes and key members of staff, these address key study skills. Once
admitted, programme members quickly see themselves as members of an active learning community. [Good practice g]

Personal development planning is seen as a key part of the Henley approach by both academic staff and programme members. Some of the programme members the Panel met were able to give examples of promotions/changes in career direction which they could attribute to the personal development programme followed at Henley. [Good practice h] As programmes and participants change, the Programme Area should consider other forms of career development guidance that are in keeping with the age and experience of programme members. [Desirable recommendation i]

The Panel noted some variation in the provision of pastoral support. Programme members were clear about the routes to follow to obtain academic support but there was less clarity in relation to pastoral support. The Panel noted conflation of academic and pastoral responsibilities. In particular, the personal tutors on the MBA programme fulfil several functions. There is a need for greater consistency and clarity in the personal tutor role, in order to ensure increased support for programme members, and greater parity of experience. The Programme Area might also consider the provision of a senior pastoral support role to co-ordinate the pastoral work of personal tutors. [Advisable recommendation d]

The alumni with whom the Panel met expressed concern that the full-time MBA will now recruit students with fewer years of work experience, and will move to the Whiteknights campus, potentially changing the content and ambiance of the programme and giving mixed signals to the market. The alumni felt that they had not been adequately informed or consulted about this change. Given the role of alumni as potential recruiters and sponsors of future programme members, the Panel recommends that the Programme Area gives further consideration to the role of alumni in their management of this change. [Desirable recommendation j]

Learning resources

11 Current students and alumni agree that the general environment at Greenlands is a key learning resource, allowing them to get away from day to day pressures and to focus on study. [Good practice i]

Learners on flexible programmes praised the University library’s electronic systems and appreciated excellent access to databases. [Good practice j]

The Panel noted that programme members benefit from access to a range of appropriate learning resources including on-site Academic Resource Centres and on-line resources. [Good practice k]

HenleyConnect and, to a lesser extent, Blackboard, were mentioned in a negative light in both the written submissions and during discussions with programme members. The Panel notes plans to move towards Blackboard as the sole platform for the virtual learning environment. The Panel welcomes this move. This will go some way to addressing the issues raised by programme members. The Programme Area should ensure that staff and programme members receive appropriate training on the system. [Advisable recommendation e]

The Panel noted that the collective experience of the full-time and adjunct faculty is appropriate to the programmes and adds to the student experience.

Employer engagement

12 The Panel noted that all projects undertaken are company projects. On the part-time degrees, these usually focus on the programme member’s employer. On the full-time degrees, the company could be a past employer or a corporate sponsor which has
approached Henley to set up a project. There is no formal mechanism for placing full-time programme members with firms to do their project; full-time programme members take the primary initiative in this regard.

The Panel noted strong links with the sponsors of corporate programmes. Sponsors have a role in curriculum design, describing the process as “collaborative”, and spoke highly of the quality of experience provided by, and communication with, Henley Business School. These sponsors valued the mix of practical and theoretical content in the programmes and, in one case, commented specifically on the improvements in management practice which have been noted in employees who have completed the programme. [Good practice I]

The Panel noted that alumni links are strong. The Panel met with a large group of alumni and were impressed by their on-going relationship with Henley Business School and their advocacy for its programmes. The Panel considered that this support could be harnessed more systematically with more formalised forums for engaging alumni, for example, to involve them in curriculum development. [Desirable recommendation k]

The Panel noted that there is currently only one exemption granted to members of professional bodies, this is in the area of accounting. The Panel recommends that the Programme Area establish formalised dialogues with professional bodies. [Desirable recommendation l]

Enhancement of quality and academic provision

13 Discussions with programme leaders revealed that staff are involved in a cycle of curriculum improvement in which student feedback from one cohort leads to changes in the offering to the next.

The Panel notes that staff have clearly engaged with the Pathfinder process and have provided useful written and oral submissions to the review team.

As highlighted elsewhere in this report, there are opportunities to further develop opportunities for staff to engage in the sharing of good practice and to work together on development opportunities. Some programme members expressed concern over the quality of supervision of the Management Challenge, others were full of praise for their supervisors. This is an area that academic staff could usefully explore together.

Main characteristics of the programmes under review

14 The programmes reviewed are highly regarded by programme members, alumni, employers and corporate sponsors and are also highly regarded within the sector. Programmes attract high calibre participants. Student satisfaction rates are high, programme members enjoy studying in Henley Business School and find their programmes academically engaging and appropriately challenging and applicable in their professional lives. There is a strong sense of belonging amongst staff and programme members to a shared learning community. Programmes have a distinct pedagogy appropriate to post-experience programmes, characterised by a strong focus on the learner and industry orientation.

Conclusions on innovation and good practice

15 The Panel commends the following areas where the Programme Area has particular strengths:

   a) the excellent provision for the development of soft management skills;
b) the good range of assessment methods deployed on programmes;
c) teaching in workshop style sessions characterised by a high degree of participation and drawing on programme members’ skills and experiences;
d) workshop leaders’ awareness of, and reference to, the organisations/industries in which programme members work;
e) the very high quality of feedback provided to programme members;
f) the attendance of alumni at information events for potential students;
g) the strong sense amongst staff and programme members of belonging to an active learning community;
h) the personal development programme;
i) the learning environment of the Greenlands campus;
j) the University library’s electronic systems and excellent access to databases;
k) learning resources including on-site Academic Resource Centres;
l) strong links with sponsors of corporate programmes.

Conclusions on quality and standards

16 The Panel was assured that the academic standards on the programmes that were reviewed have been achieved. Intended learning outcomes are obtained by programme members, and programme specifications are appropriate.

Recommendations

17 The Panel recommends to the Henley Business School Faculty Board for Teaching and Learning that the following programmes be re-approved to run for a further six years.

The Flexible MBA
The Executive MBA
The Full-Time MBA
The Corporate MBA
MSc Coaching and Behavioural Change
MSc Enterprise Information Management
MSc Strategic Marketing Leadership
MA Applied Management
MA Health and Social Care Management

18 The Panel does not consider that any recommendations must be addressed as a condition of re-approval.

The Panel makes the following recommendations to the Programme Area:

Advisable

a) Course materials and curriculum content on the MBA programme and the MSc in Coaching and Behavioural Change should be reviewed to ensure they are up-to-date;
b) The Programme Area should give consideration to making final awards classified rather than pass/fail;
c) The Programme Area should ensure appropriate mechanisms are in place for the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning. This might include the incorporation of ‘away days’ or other events into the year and should include the establishment of a formal mechanism for all academic staff to engage in peer review of teaching;

d) The Programme Area should ensure greater consistency and clarity in the personal tutor role in order to ensure increased support for programme members, and greater parity of experience. The Programme Area might also consider the provision of a senior pastoral support role to co-ordinate the pastoral work of personal tutors.

e) The Programme Area should ensure a uniform and appropriate virtual learning environment and ensure that both staff and programme members receive training in its use.

Desirable

a) The Programme Area should review its provision of teaching in quantitative methods with a view to improving programme members’ hard quantitative skills;

b) The Programme Area should give consideration to the feasibility and potential benefit of using Turnitin Originality on all submissions on MBA and MSc programmes;

c) The Programme Area should give consideration to formalising the role of Chief External Examiner on MBA programmes to enable them to play a role in the scrutiny of programme level outcomes and to have input, as appropriate, on programme enhancement issues;

d) The Programme Area should consider introducing formal written responses to External Examiners addressing the issues raised and any action to be taken in response;

e) The Programme Area should consider the introduction of module and programme evaluations across all programmes;

f) The Programme Area should ensure that all programmes have in place a formal mechanism for programme members to meet with staff to discuss the operation of their programme, to review the aims and objectives of degree programmes, to review issues relating to teaching and learning and student support and to consider other matters such as health and safety and resource provision;

g) The Programme Area should ensure that there are formal mechanisms for considering and responding to issues raised by programme members and from external student management information;

h) The Programme Area should enhance ways in which research can inform teaching and ensure programmes are research-informed;

i) As programmes and participants change, the Programme Area should consider other forms of career development guidance that are in keeping with the age and experience of programme members;

j) The Programme Area should give further consideration to the role of alumni in their management of changes to the full-time MBA programme;

k) The Programme Area should establish more formal forums for engaging alumni;

l) The Programme Area should consider establishing formalised dialogues with professional bodies.