Summary of the Periodic Review of Real Estate and Planning

Programmes covered by the Periodic Review

The programmes covered by the Periodic Review were:
- BSc in Real Estate
- BSc in Investment and Finance in Property
- BSc in Rural Property Management
- MSc in Corporate Real Estate and Facilities Management
- MSc in Development Planning
- MSc in Development Planning and Research
- MSc in Real Estate
- MSc in Real Estate Appraisal
- MSc in Real Estate Finance and Investment
- MSc in Real Estate Investment and Finance
- MSc in Rural Land and Business Management
- MSc/Postgraduate Diploma in Urban Planning and Development

Date of the Periodic Review

The Periodic Review took place on 23 and 24 November 2009.

Objectives of the Periodic Review

The objectives of the Periodic Review were to:
- Review the effectiveness of the means by which Schools manage and assure the academic standards of the degree programmes under Review and the quality of the learning opportunities provided;
- Enable the School of Real Estate and Planning to consider how they might enhance their portfolio of taught programmes and the learning experience of their students, and to consider the effectiveness of their approach;
- Consider the future plans of the School of Real Estate and Planning for their taught programmes
-Enable an independent Panel to review this self-evaluation through consideration of documentation and discussions with staff and students;
- Provide a means by which the School of Real Estate and Planning were able to reflect on the success, enhancement and future development of the taught programmes that they offered;
• Identify examples of good and effective practice;
• Consider whether the programmes under Review should continue to run for a further or initial period of up to six years, as appropriate.

Conduct of the Periodic Review

4 The Periodic Review was conducted by a Panel chaired by the Director of Teaching and Learning for the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. In addition to the Chair, the Panel comprised two internal members of academic staff (from the School of Management and from the School of Chemistry, Food and Pharmacy) and two external members of academic staff (from the University of Sheffield and from the University of Ulster). The Faculty Director of Administration acted as Secretary to the Review Panel.

5 The Panel received a range of documentation in advance of the Review, including a Self-Evaluation Document prepared by the School, relevant programme specifications and External Examiners’ Reports. During the Review Visit, the Panel considered other documentation and met with a number of staff from the School. In addition, the Panel met with students registered for degree programmes under Review, with former students and with a group of employers.

6 The Panel was provided with a tour of the Henley Business School building at Whiteknights, including the Academic Resource Centre. The Panel was very impressed by the new building and agreed that it was a significant development for the School.

Evidence base

7 In addition to the meetings held with academic staff, with current students, with alumni and with employers, the Panel considered a wide range of evidence, including examples of student work, copies of programme and project handbooks, minutes of relevant Committee meetings (including Annual Boards of Studies Reports), statistical data and the School’s ‘Pathfinder’ Action Plan. The Panel was able to see External Examiners’ Reports for the three previous years, as well as the School’s responses to these Reports. The Panel also considered relevant programme specifications and module descriptions.

External peer contributors to process

8 External members of the Review Panel were appointed by the Henley Business School Faculty Board for Teaching and Learning, after considering nominations from the School of Real Estate and Planning. The role of these External members was to provide subject expertise and to provide an expert judgement of the validity and appropriateness of the programmes under Review. The External members were present for the duration of the Review.

Overview of the main characteristics of the programmes covered by the Review

9 The School offers number of degree programmes in the areas of Real Estate and of Planning. The programmes are highly market-focussed with the aim being to produce graduates who are appropriately equipped for careers in real estate and planning. There are a significant range of opportunities exploited by the School to engage with
employers, through a pervasive incorporation of careers and industry-focused material and input into all of the programmes, and indeed the ‘life’ of the academic community. All programmes delivered by the School are accredited by appropriate professional bodies.

The School has a highly collegiate environment and is very student-focussed, with the interests of all of its students at its heart. In addition, it is very well-connected to the sector and to the professions, resulting in programmes which are relevant for students and for their future careers.

Conclusions on innovation and good practice

The Panel identified the following as representing particularly good practice:

(i) Opportunities for Group work;
(ii) Curriculum design to develop independent and confident learners;
(iii) The range of assessment methods and the emphasis on real world assessment within the School’s programmes;
(iv) The thorough and rigorous Annual Programme Review process;
(v) The high level of formal (and informal) external input into the programmes;
(vi) The work of the Reading Real Estate Foundation and the support it provides for students in seeking work experience and employment;
(vii) The establishment of a mentoring scheme, whereby current students are allocated a mentor from amongst the School’s alumni.

Conclusions on quality and standards

The Review Panel concluded that:

(i) The academic standards of the Undergraduate programmes were appropriate and that the programmes were delivered at the appropriate Level;
(ii) The academic standards of the Postgraduate Planning programmes were appropriate and that the programmes were delivered at the appropriate Level;
(iii) Whilst the Full-time and Flexible Masters programmes in Real Estate were, in practice, being delivered and assessed at the appropriate Level it had concerns about the programme and the module learning outcomes, as set out in Programme Specifications and some Module Descriptions. These showed a high degree of similarity to those set out for the Undergraduate programmes and the Panel therefore recommended that the School review learning outcomes at both a programme and a module level in order to appropriately differentiate between the Undergraduate and the Postgraduate programmes, particularly in relation to the skills that students should be able to demonstrate.

Conclusions on currency and validity of the programmes under Review

The Panel commended the breadth and relevance of the curricula across all programmes offered by the School. In particular, it welcomed the increasing internationalisation of programme content and the emphasis on ‘global relevance’,
both in terms of preparing UK students to work in a global context and in ensuring that the curricula were appropriate for international students. It felt that the significant number of opportunities for work in groups was a particular feature of good practice in the curriculum.

14 The Panel was informed on a number of occasions and by a range of staff and students of the high level of formal external input into the programmes. This input encompassed both invited speakers from relevant professions and companies, and frequent fieldtrips to relevant organizations. The students that the Panel met highlighted how much value they placed on these initiatives.

15 More broadly, the Panel welcomed the accreditation of relevant programmes by the RICS and the RTPI. In particular, it recognised the considerable challenge for the School in acquiring and maintaining accreditation of programmes by two professional bodies and, in particular, that certain programmes were dually accredited by both the RICS and the RTPI. The Panel would wish to congratulate the School on this achievement.

Recommendations

16 The Panel recommended that all degree programmes included in the Review be re-approved to run for a further six years. In addition, the Panel identified the following actions which it recommended that the School address:

(i) That the School review learning outcomes at both a programme and a module level in order to appropriately differentiate between the Undergraduate and the Postgraduate programmes, particularly in relation to the skills that students should be able to demonstrate;

(ii) That the School consider drawing up an explicit School-wide statement of its educational philosophy, in order to highlight the distinctiveness of its graduates and their skills;

(iii) That the School consider mapping the core competencies of relevant professional bodies and also the learning outcomes both against each programme and across all parts of the programmes in order to demonstrate student progression and to use as a management tool for future programme development;

(iv) That the School monitor the effectiveness of its innovative project approach at Parts 1 and 2 and continues to maintain a dialogue with representatives from other Schools responsible for delivering Part 1 and 2 material in order to ensure relevance, quality and engagement with the provision;

(v) That the School review the documenting of responses to and actions arising from student feedback and evaluation, particularly in relation to Staff-Student Committee minutes;

(vi) That the School publish the dates for return of work in order to align with University policy, whilst ensuring that those dates are realistic in order to manage student expectations and that the dates are timely in terms of providing feedback for students’ future assignments;

(vii) That the School ensure that staff acknowledge the full range of feedback currently given to students, whether formal or informal, so that students are aware of and understand the full quantity and nature of feedback provided;

(viii) That the School explore its pedagogic approach to e-learning;
(ix) That the School develop a guiding set of principles that will form a standard baseline for module convenors to use and build on in managing group assessments, so enhancing consistency and ensuring that within group work individual excellence is recognized and that non-contribution is appropriately penalized;

(x) That the School continue to monitor the arrangements for ‘team teaching’ to ensure that cohesion exists within and across module delivery;

(xi) That the School consider exposing students to a wider range of types of employers to include the corporates and the investors, as well as consultancies;

(xii) That the School considers the establishment of an external advisory committee to support its future strategic direction.