Curriculum Review – briefing note for partners

1. Introduction

1.1 The University’s Education Strategy includes a commitment to undertake a review of the curriculum for all undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes. Curriculum Review is the process that has been agreed by Senate to ensure that all taught programmes delivered by the University and its partner institutions deliver a transformative educational experience as set out in our Education Strategy. This document is designed to provide an overview of the process and to guide partner institutions to commence the Curriculum Review process.

2. Objectives

2.1 Curriculum Review is the process by which University departments and partner institutions will ensure that all taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses are aligned with the Education Strategy. Curriculum Review has the following overall aim (Education Strategy, Objective O2.c):

“That all degree programmes are intellectually coherent and build students’ knowledge and skills incrementally over the life cycle of the degree thus enabling development of the intellectual independence and mind-set that is characteristic of an Essex education.”

Curriculum Review will also consider the following themes:

- **Research mind-set and skills** all honours and masters students undertake independent research both as an integral part of the curricular and supplemented by a range of extra-curricular support and opportunities.
- **Provision of a ‘capstone’ research project** that gives students the opportunity to demonstrate the research mind-set and skills that are integral to being an Essex graduate by undertaking a significant research project that is relevant to the discipline(s) they are studying.
- **Technology-enhanced learning** – the appropriate use of technology-enhanced learning to support delivery of teaching should be an underpinning theme through all aspects of curriculum design and delivery.
- **Distinctive assessment approaches** that support student learning as well as assessing student performance.
- **Global community and outlook**
- **Equality and diversity**
- **Embedding employability**
- **Review and rationalisation of modules** – work that seeks to focus curricula through the review and rationalisation of modules should also be considered within the remit of Curriculum Review.

3. Approach

3.1 There is no prescriptive approach to Curriculum Review and partner institutions will need to determine their approach and implementation plan for meeting the expectations of Curriculum Review. It is however, anticipated that where possible the implementation of Curriculum Review should be embedded within existing core processes for managing education, which include:

- Annual Review of Courses
- Periodic Review
• New Course validation
• Course variations

3.2 Partner institutions may opt to agree changes and implement these over a relatively short
time frame or identify a series of stages between now and the end of 2016-17 academic
year that address different review themes, cognate discipline areas or study levels in turn.

3.3 Partner institutions are expected to consult with their External Examiner, and with other
external stakeholders / advisory boards (for example employers) where appropriate, on
their Curriculum Review, and should ensure that any salient points related to their
programmes outlined by the examiner over their period of office are explicitly considered
within the Review. Similarly, student views should be sought and previous student
feedback considered.

3.4 Partner institutions are also expected to consider their review in the context of the QAA
Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, Qualification Descriptors, relevant subject
benchmark statements and other appropriate external regulatory and/or professional body
requirements.

3.5 The Curriculum Review will be overseen by each Partner institution and monitored through
Curriculum and Quality Group meetings and Partnership Management Boards, with annual
reporting to the Partnerships Education Committee (PEC).

4. Timescales and Reporting

4.1 Curriculum Review should be completed in order that all courses are aligned with the
University’s Education Strategy by the start of the 2017/18 academic year. This means
that all revisions to programmes and modules, should have completed the appropriate
approval processes by the end of the 2016/17 academic year.

4.2 All students who start relevant honours degree programmes in academic year 2015/16
should have been prepared for and undertaking a capstone project. The Education
Strategy requires academic departments to ensure the progressive development of the
mind-set and skills to undertake independent research, which will enable students to
undertake their capstone project. For students on undergraduate programmes they will be
required to complete their capstone project by the end of their third year of study (2017/18)
and for master’s students by the end of their final year of study (2017/18).

4.3 Partners are requested to complete the Curriculum Review Plan and Progress report
template, outlining the steps they will take and the key milestones for completing the
Curriculum Review process. This should be submitted by 30 April 2015, for discussion
and approval at the summer term PEC meeting and for onward reporting to Education
Committee. Thereafter partners will be asked to produce an annual progress report to
PEC. The report template has been designed to allow flexibility for partners to approach
curriculum review at the level of Faculty / School / cognate discipline area as appropriate
to each individual partner institution.

4.4 A summary of the key deadlines are provided below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Curriculum Review (verbal update provided at PEC)</td>
<td>November 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access to the Curriculum Review toolkit by partner institutions</td>
<td>January 2015</td>
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<td>Outline of Curriculum Review requirements and deadlines for partners</td>
<td>February 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completion of the Curriculum Review Plan outlining how each</td>
<td>30 April 2015</td>
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<td>Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>PEC discussion and approval of partners’ Curriculum Review Plans</td>
<td>May 2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>PEC to report on completion of partner institution Curriculum Review</td>
<td>June 2015</td>
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<td>Review Plans to Education Committee</td>
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<td>Conduct Curriculum Review</td>
<td>With immediate</td>
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<td>end of 2016/17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annual progress report to PEC by each partner institution</td>
<td>November 2015</td>
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<td></td>
<td>&amp; 2016</td>
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<td>PEC to report to Education Committee on progress by partner institutions</td>
<td>December 2015</td>
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4.5 As Curriculum review will overlap with existing processes, there are limited additional documentation requirements, however partner institutions are required to:

- Provide a report annually to PEC on the progress of its Curriculum Review
- During Curriculum Review, ensure that the Annual Review of Courses documentation provides an overview of the issues considered and actions taken
- During Curriculum Review, Periodic Reviews will provide an opportunity to review the curriculum and to document the issues considered and recommendations

5. Support

5.1 The Dean and Deputy Dean of Partnerships are able to provide academic advice to partner institutions about the Curriculum Review process. The Curriculum Review Toolkit is available to provide a number of tools to support partner institutions with undertaking Curriculum Review.

5.2 The Partnerships Team can provide assistance with the processes to be used to support programme and module development, approval and review. Further details can be found on the Partnerships Team webpages for existing partner institutions at: [http://www.essex.ac.uk/partners/existing/default.aspx](http://www.essex.ac.uk/partners/existing/default.aspx)

Partnerships Team

April 2016

Updated January 2017