Proposal: Curriculum Approval Framework

Executive Summary
Curriculum approval arrangements in CSE are increasingly inadequate in the context of the breadth and complexity of emerging approaches to new programmes. Programmes are increasingly blurring the lines between taught and research, as well as involving collaborative or joint arrangements more frequently. The quality and sustainability of the College’s programme offerings is strategically important, and it is essential that we revise our processes for ensuring appropriate breadth and standards to meet evolving internal and external requirements.

This paper sets out a proposed approach to curriculum approval from 17/18.

How does this align with the University/Committee’s strategic plans and priorities?
Aligns with the Strategic Objective of Leadership in Learning.

Action requested
CLTC is invited to discuss and comment on the proposed approach.

How will any action agreed be implemented and communicated?
This paper will also be presented to College Researcher Training Committee for discussion and comment. In addition, it will be circulated to College Quality Assurance Committee, the Teaching Organisation Managers’ and Graduate School Managers’ Forums, and feedback will be sought from Academic Services. Feedback and suggestions gathered will be incorporated into an amended, final proposal, which will be presented for approval prior to the end of academic year 16/17, for implementation in 17/18.

Once final approval has been confirmed, the revised approach will be widely communicated to CSE Schools prior to academic year 17/18.

Resource/Risk/Compliance

1. Resource implications (including staffing)
Curriculum approval procedures are currently inefficient and inadequate, incorporating extensive scrutiny for lower risk activity (courses) at the expense of comprehensive and coordinated examination of activity with strategic impact and therefore higher risk (programmes). The approach proposed recommends amending the focus of our efforts and streamlining procedures. It is anticipated that this would result in a negligible increase in resource expended; however, more and different effort may be required in some areas.

2. Risk assessment
The risks associated with not acting in this area are significant, including, but not limited to: external compliance (CMA), negative reputational impact (students,
potential students, collaborative partners), poor student experience, and administrative inefficiency.

3. Equality and Diversity
   This paper proposes a change to procedure which should enhance mechanisms for ensuring equality and diversity matters are given due consideration as we develop our curricular offerings.

4. Freedom of information
   Open

Key words
Curriculum development, programme approval, curriculum framework

Originator of the paper
Alex Laidlaw, Head of Academic Affairs, May 2017
Introduction

Curriculum development and approval at the University is currently governed by the Programme and Course Approval and Management (PCAM) Policy, which ensures activity is aligned with external requirements, including UK Quality Code Chapter B1 (QAA) and Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) guidelines. Although guidance exists at University-level on the key considerations relevant to curriculum approval, decisions on operational and procedural structures are devolved to Colleges (for now).

Work associated with at least two current University-level initiatives, the new Student Recruitment Strategy and the Service Excellence Programme, is examining our mechanisms for developing, approving and reviewing our curricular offerings. The creation of University-wide processes in this area is currently being considered, with Academic Services examining existing procedures across the institution. It has been suggested that approaches in CAHSS and CMVM are more coordinated and robust than current practice in CSE.

These emerging developments can be set within the context of an increasingly complex picture of external sector trends and a more innovative approach to programme structure and design, particularly at postgraduate research level. With the continuing interest of research councils in integrated and collaborative PGR programmes, the lines between taught and research are increasingly blurred. In addition, it is becoming increasingly complex and challenging to ensure robust and transparent programme structures given the more frequent requirement to create programmes that align within the regulatory frameworks of partner institutions as well as our own.

Current approach

The University's PCAM Policy covers all credit-bearing provision, including taught and research programmes, whether on-campus, distance, collaborative/joint, or any other model. Proposals requiring University-level approval (e.g. those involving an opt-out from the Curriculum Framework) are considered and approved by Senate Curriculum and Student Progression Committee. At College-level in CSE, we do not have an equivalent to CSPC.

Taught

New programmes (and major changes to existing programmes) are currently considered and approved by a Programme Approval Subcommittee of College Learning and Teaching Committee. In addition, all new courses (and major changes to existing courses) are also considered by CLTC's Subcommittee.

Taught courses are proposed via CCAM in EUCLID. Taught programmes are proposed using an existing template form produced by the College Office, along with supporting documentation produced centrally by GaSP (costings spreadsheet and narrative).

In 16/17, the following proposals have been considered by CLTC/are in progress:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Programmes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>8*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amended (&quot;major changes&quot;)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>255</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* A further 9 new programmes for Visiting Research Students were approved by Convener’s Action; these are “umbrella” programmes based on months’ duration, and have no academic content.

**Research**

In recent years, research councils have increasingly encouraged cohort-based PhD programmes combining taught elements within integrated research degrees, via Centres for Doctoral Training, Doctoral Training Partnerships, etc. (hereafter referred to as CDTs). The upsurge in CDTs has been matched by a continuing trend away from the model of individual PGR students studying for a traditional PhD in a given discipline, and we are seeing an increasing number of PhDs awarded jointly with a partner institution.

Every new non-standard PhD, whether integrated, joint or visiting, requires a new programme and programme code to be set up. The same applies for additional variants of existing programmes.

New research programmes (and major changes to existing programmes) are currently considered and approved by College Researcher Training Committee. In addition, all new taught courses (and major changes to existing courses) that contribute to integrated PhD programmes are also considered by CLTC’s Subcommittee.

We are anticipating a significant number of proposed new integrated and/or collaborative programmes to be received at College over the coming months, as the result of emerging and ongoing internal and external activity.

In 16/17, the following proposals have been considered by CRTC/are in progress:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>‘Non-standard’ Research Programmes (e.g. Joint MScR/PhD, visiting)</th>
<th>Integrated Programmes (e.g. CDTs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amended (“major changes”)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Changes/replacements for 3 taught courses, as elements of integrated PhD programmes, are due to be considered by both CRTC and CLTC

**PROPOSAL**

It is proposed that the College streamlines its curriculum approval procedures across all levels of study, unifying and simplifying our approach, whilst creating efficiencies that will allow us to focus on strategically important developments with the potential for most impact.

In CAHSS, the approval of individual courses has been devolved to School Boards of Studies, with Schools routinely submitting Boards of Studies minutes to the College Office to facilitate sampling of approved courses to ensure appropriate rigour for QA purposes. (NB. during the same period, the requirement of the University’s Quality Framework for Schools to submit Boards of Examiners minutes to Colleges has been relaxed.) This has given CAHSS the space to focus its efforts at College-level on giving greater scrutiny to the development and sustainability of programmes. In addition, this approach has reduced the administrative burden for Schools, by removing an additional layer of bureaucracy, and has greatly reduced delays in turnaround time between the development and implementation of new courses.

It is proposed that CSE adopts this model, for a trial period of one academic year (17/18) in the first instance.
College-level approval of courses in CSE currently supports wider awareness amongst our Schools of courses available across the College that may be of interest to students on related programmes (or as outside courses). In order to ensure continuing visibility of new courses, as well as wide awareness when courses close, it is recommended that the Academic Affairs team extracts information from Boards of Studies minutes to compile a regular list for presentation to CLTC. Any School considering closing a course popular with students outside their School are invited to raise such proposals with CLTC for discussion, prior to commencing closure procedures.

**Question for discussion:** is the committee supportive of the proposal to develop a unified approach to the approval of programmes at all levels of study?

**Question for discussion:** is the committee content to devolve consideration and approval of individual courses to School Boards of Studies, with QA sampling undertaken at College?

**Governance structures**

Under this new model, College would establish a single, comprehensive Curriculum Approval Board, to consider all new (and significantly amended) taught and research programmes. The nomenclature would align this body, in governance terms, with Boards of Studies and Boards of Examiners – indicating its decision making powers.

Membership of the Board would be drawn from a range of experienced staff in Schools and the College Office, including Directors of Teaching and Heads of Graduate Schools, to benefit from existing knowledge of taught and research programme development and approval processes. Input from School Directors of Internationalisation would ensure the committee was aware of emerging collaborative developments. This would have the added benefit of ensuring that staff representing the College overseas are kept abreast of the College’s programme portfolio. Membership would be for a term of two academic years, to promote consistency and continuity. In addition, membership would include colleagues from Recruitment and Admissions and Finance and Planning, to ensure that market viability, recruitment and sustainability aspects benefit from expert consideration.

The new Board would be chaired by the Dean QA, with either the Dean L&T or Dean of Students/PGR acting as deputy convener as necessary, and supported by a member of staff from Academic Affairs. The Board would report to CLTC on taught programmes and to CRTC on research programmes, providing twice yearly reports to CSMC to raise awareness of curricular developments at senior management level. College QA Committee would continue to have responsibility for ongoing programme monitoring, when programmes go live.

Full Board meetings would be held twice per academic year, in November and February, with a third “mop-up” meeting in June optional. This timeframe would allow us to meet CMA requirements.

However, urgent proposals – such as CDT bids required to meet research council deadlines – could be considered virtually. In particularly complex cases, such as new collaborations, a subgroup of the Board could convene as necessary, inviting School colleagues directly involved in the proposal to attend, for a fuller discussion.
The aim of the Board’s operations would be to remain nimble and responsive, whilst maintaining the robustness of our curriculum approval mechanisms.

A suggested draft Terms of Reference for the proposed new Board can be found at Appendix A.

**Suggested composition of CSE Curriculum Approval Board:**
Dean QA (Convener)
Dean L&T
Dean of Students/PGR
Three Directors of Teaching
Three Heads of Graduate Schools
Two Directors of Internationalisation
Two student representatives
Representative of College Finance and Planning
Representative of College Recruitment and Admissions
College Head of Academic Affairs
Academic Policy Officer, Academic Affairs (Secretary)

**Question for discussion:** is the suggested structure and composition of this proposed Board appropriate? Does the draft Terms of Reference (Appendix A) adequately reflect this?

**PROCEDURES**
College proposes creating three template forms to support Schools to prepare and submit new programme proposals to the Curriculum Approval Board. These forms would cover taught programmes, non-standard research programmes (e.g. joint PhDs or MScRs), and integrated research programmes. The rationale for creating two separate research programme forms is to reduce administrative effort in Schools; forms used for proposing integrated programmes, such as new CDTs, invariably need to be significantly lengthier than those used to propose joint PhDs. Forms would include all relevant guidance and GaSP’s costing spreadsheet; there would be no requirement to refer to additional documentation.

Dates of annual Board meetings would be widely published prior to the start of the academic year, including deadlines for receipt of proposals (normally 10 working days in advance of each meeting). Ad hoc and virtual meetings would be organised as necessary, although it is anticipated that these would be minimal due to the need to meet CMA timelines.

Support for Schools in developing programmes and preparing documentation would be provided by the College’s Academic Affairs team.

Schools would no longer be required to submit individual course proposals to College for approval, and could confirm level two approval in EUCLID on the basis of the decision of the relevant Board of Studies. However, Schools would be required to submit Boards of Studies minutes to College within 10 working days of the Board meeting. Sampling of approved new courses would then be undertaken at College, by the convener of the Curriculum Approval Board and the Dean of Learning and Teaching.

**Question for discussion:** is the committee satisfied with the proposed operational approach? Should arrangements for course approval at School-level and QA sampling at College-level be detailed in the Board’s Terms of Reference?
IMPLEMENTATION AND TIMEFRAME
This proposal is being presented to CLTC and CRTC, as the academic committees currently responsible for curriculum approval – and the committees to which the new, single curriculum approval body would report.

College Quality Assurance Committee (CQAC) and College International Group (CIG) will also be invited to comment on the proposal (electronically). School Teaching Organisation Managers and Graduate School Managers will also be consulted, as key stakeholders involved in procedural aspects of curriculum approval.

If, further to the incorporation of feedback gathered during consultation, the resulting proposal is approved, it will be implemented for academic year 2017/2018. The first meeting of CCAB would be held in November 2017. Both dates for 17/18 would be widely communicated to Schools at the earliest opportunity.

REQUESTED ACTION
CLTC is invited to discuss and comment on this proposal. Specific questions for consideration are included in this paper to prompt discussion on key aspects of the proposal.

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Alex Laidlaw
May 2017
APPENDIX A

College Curriculum Approval Board
Terms of Reference 2017-2018 (DRAFT)

1. **Purpose and Role**
The College Curriculum Approval Board (CCAB) is a joint subcommittee of the College Learning and Teaching Committee (CLTC) and the College Researcher Training Committee (CRTC), with responsibility for approving new programmes in line with the University’s Programme and Course Approval and Management Policy.

CCAB will have responsibility for College level academic scrutiny and approval for all taught programmes (including MOOCs and placements), all new Student Exchange Agreements, all non-standard research degree programmes, all online provision and for all collaborative provision.

Non-standard research degree programmes are any research programmes requiring a new programme code, including, but not limited to, new joint PhDs and new integrated/cohort-based doctoral training programmes, and similar.

2. **Remit**
CLTC and CRTC delegate authority to CCAB to make decisions on its behalf in relation to the following matters:

2.1 Programme and course approval for the College, in line with the UK Quality Code, as described in University Policy, the University’s Curriculum Framework, Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and as decided by policy decisions of the College’s academic committees.

3. **Governance**
3.1 The Board will act with authority, as delegated by the College Learning and Teaching Committee and the College Researcher Training Committee, in order to take decisions within the scope of its remit.

3.2 In taking forward its remit, the Board will consider each proposal on its merits whilst seeking consistency, ensuring academic standards, and promoting curricular development in line with College and School strategic plans.

4. **Operation**
4.1 The Board will normally meet twice in each academic year, in November and February, and will conduct its business by meeting in person. A third meeting in June is optional and can be convened as necessary. In exceptional circumstances, CCAB may meet electronically to consider and decide upon urgent matters.

4.2 At the request of the Convener, a smaller sub-group of the Board can be convened to discuss particularly complex proposals in detail.

4.3 Agendas and approved records of decisions will be published on the College’s web pages in accordance with the University’s agreed publication scheme. This will include details of the membership of the Committee.

5. **Composition**
5.1 Membership of CCAB will be:
- Dean (Quality Assurance) [Convener]
- Dean of Learning and Teaching [co-Vice Convener]
- Dean of Postgraduate Research (Dean of Students) [co-Vice Convener]
- Three Directors of Teaching
- Three Heads of Graduate School
- Two Directors of Internationalisation
- Two student representative (one taught; one research)

5.2 Administrative colleagues attending in an advisory capacity, with no voting rights, will be:
- Academic Policy Officer [Board Secretary]
- Head of Academic Affairs
- Head of Recruitment and Admissions, or nominee
- Head of Planning and Finance, or nominee

5.3 The Convener of the Board may approve items by Convener’s Action between meetings. The Convener is advised on such decisions by the secretariat of the Board and/or the Head of Academic Affairs. This advice draws on previous Board decisions and on issues agreed in principle with delegated authority granted to the Board Convener, while ensuring the maintenance of academic standards and the appropriate consistency of programmes approved.

5.4 The Convener may invite individuals for specific meetings or agenda items, e.g. proposers of new programmes.

5.5 Quorum for a decision will normally be the Convener, one of the two co-Vice Conveners, plus at least one School Director of Teaching and at least one Head of Graduate School.

5.6 In cases where members representing Schools are required to consider an approval request from their own School, the decision of the majority will be adhered to, to the exclusion of the originating School.

5.7 Appointments of academic members from Schools will be for two academic years’ terms, extendable for one year. Maximum period of service is 3 years.

5.8 In exceptional circumstances, when the Convener is unable to attend, one of the two co-Vice Conveners will chair the Board.

5.9 Substitutions of members (e.g. due to an inability to attend) shall be at the discretion of the Convener of the Board.

6. Responsibilities and Expectations of Board Members

6.1 Members are expected to be objective, collegial and constructive in approach, and to ensure consistency in decision-making.

6.2 Board members are expected to consult with, and raise any concerns or issues on behalf of, their Schools in relation to proposals submitted.

6.3 Members should contribute equally in the work of the Board.

6.4 Members will need to take collective and individual ownership for the issues under the Board’s remit and for the discussion and resolution of these issues. In taking ownership of the work of the Board, members must take steps to ensure the maintenance of academic standards and quality of provision.