

Proposed Revisions to Regulation 5B, Programme Approval and Review Committee Terms of Reference (PARC)

Summary

The purpose of this paper is to ask Senate to approve recommendations from Academic Governance Committee relating to the maximum membership of the Programme Approval and Review Committees as outlined in Regulation 5B.

AGC initially discussed and agreed to increasing the PARC membership from eight to nine in June 2018. However, during discussion it was noted that PARCs in some Schools might be operating outside of the Regulations. Given the inconsistency across Schools it was agreed that AGC would review the composition of the School PARCs at a future meeting and would discuss whether there was a case removing/amending the cap on members.

Soundings were taken from School PARCs over the summer and AGC reviewed the matter once more at their October meeting. All PARC secretariats agreed that increasing the membership would be beneficial for their committee. With this in mind three options were discussed by AGC:

- 1) Increasing the PARC membership beyond the current maximum of 9
- 2) Removing the cap on membership altogether
- 3) No change

AGC discussed each scenario in turn and on balance agreed to recommend to Senate that the membership of the School PARCs should be increased up to a maximum of 15 members. The enclosed paper outlines the background and rationale for the change.

In addition, Regulation 5B, PARC Terms of Reference, is attached at Annex A or reference.

One action required.

Recommended action

Senate is asked to **approve** the recommendation from AGC.

Publication: Open

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Summary

The purpose of this paper is to ask Senate to approve recommendations from Academic Governance Committee relating to the maximum membership of the Programme Approval and Review Committees as outlined in Regulation 5B.

Background

It was agreed at the June meeting of AGC that the terms of reference should be amended so that the composition from 18/19 should not total more than nine members (an increase from eight).

The change was initially proposed because the number of departments in SASS had increased since the Regulation was first devised. SASS did not have all departments represented at the Committee and the proposed change would therefore enable all seven departments in SASS to be represented, as well as a Chair and a student member.

Although the increase to membership was agreed by AGC, during discussion it was noted that there may in fact be a case for increasing the membership further still. It was reported that PARCs in some Schools might be operating outside of the Regulation and given the inconsistency across Schools it would be sensible to review the composition of the School PARCs at a future meeting and discuss whether there was a case for further increasing the membership or for removing the cap altogether.

Discussion

Since AGC first discussed the matter in June the secretariats for School PARCs were contacted and asked to confirm whether their membership exceeded the nine members as outlined in the updated terms of reference. In addition, School PARCs were asked to comment on how effectively they felt their committee was currently working.

We have additionally looked on-line for comparative sector data on the composition of PARCs at other HEIs. Unfortunately this has generally been difficult to locate as much of the information readily available relates to Programme Approval Panels and Groups at the University level rather than scrutiny at the School level. Should Senate require further information in this area a further update could be provided at a future meeting.

Feedback received from Schools however, has been helpful and has suggested that although only two PARCs were operating outside of the regulations all Schools felt that increasing the membership would be beneficial (some would prefer removing the cap altogether). A summary of feedback is outlined below:

- SMCSE felt that although their PARC was able to operate within the Regulation a removal of the cap would be helpful, particularly for Schools where the number of departments was particularly large. They noted that if membership was increased it was unlikely SCMSE would have any more than 10-12 members at any one time.

- For SASS, although the increase from eight to nine enabled them to conduct business within the confines of the Regulation they felt that increasing the membership would be beneficial particularly when moving towards new/expanding departments – it was reported that each SASS department liked to have a representative from their team who carried expert knowledge.
- CASS currently operate outside of the Regulation. The feedback received emphasised that Cass is large and complex, with a matrix structure across faculty and programmes; hence membership has for many years included programme (i.e., BSc, MSc, MBA and Charities) Associate Deans and faculty members from across the three Faculties (Actuarial Science and Insurance, Management, and Finance), together with student representation that also properly reflects this range. The Cass Board of Studies was of the view that their composition best secures input from, and shares across, the Cass academic community, and has produced effective consideration of approvals and reviews. Cass would therefore like to see the cap on membership removed for PARCs.
- In Law, the membership did exceed the number outlined in the Regulation, however, they have now updated their membership to ensure that the University Regulation is complied with. They find it very helpful to have a range of courses represented and as staff may teach on more than one programme they are often in a position to comment on areas of crossover, delivery and assessment. Law's preference would be for Schools to decide how many members were required to operate effectively and to ensure adequate representation from all programmes. They suggest that it may be helpful to have a minimum number of members rather than maximum number to ensure that issues are properly discussed and looked at from many perspectives. They reported that not having enough members runs the risks of approval being granted without necessarily considering all issues that should be considered.
- For Health Sciences, although they operate within the Regulation they would like to see the cap removed. They note that the cap has advantages such as consistency and level of scrutiny, however they note that the setup also has issues. Seven key members attend for most of their PARC meetings plus they have one invited member. The size limitation means that programme team members are not invited to the meeting which impacts on the learning process for the team submitting and sometimes delays in acting upon decisions made. There is little opportunity to ask for clarification and often the PARC is required to rely on someone with an affinity to the programme to help out with questions of context. To improve committee effectiveness the intension for 18/19 is to invite a staff representative to the meeting from any division submitting a paper. On occasion this may result in breaching the membership cap.

Options Discussed by AGC

The feedback from Schools prompted a number of reflection about possible ways forward, which were put to AGC for discussion:

- 1) Increase the PARC membership beyond the current maximum of 9.**
Increasing the cap beyond the current maximum of 9 members would allow for additional representation from programmes whilst also ensuring that the group was small enough to provide a high level of scrutiny, continuity and focus.
- 2) Remove the cap on membership altogether**

This would enable PARCs to establish the number of members that most effectively works for their School. However, there may be a risk that increasingly large PARCs could result in less focus and scrutiny.

3) No change

PARCs would be asked to operate within the confines of the current Regulation (the composition should not total more than nine members).

In discussing these options, AGC reflected that when the PARC terms of reference were initially devised in 2010/11 the membership was deliberately kept relatively small to provide a focussed group for detailed peer scrutiny on behalf on the Boards of Studies. Any decision to increase or remove the cap was considered within the context of whether this action would result in a risk to level of scrutiny, clarity and/or discussion focus.

AGC noted that PARCs were asked to scrutinise a substantial amount of paperwork and engaging more people on the committees would help to spread the workload. However, it was agreed that an increase in membership should not be at the expense of engagement and scrutiny of the proposals. There was some concern that if the membership of the committee became too large there may be some risk of diluting the focus of the committee.

For all the above scenarios it was also noted that 'the Committee has the authority to invite other members of University staff to meetings for discussion of specific matters. This may include colleagues from relevant Professional Services to support development of the programme/s and the student learning experience.' PARCs also have the authority to invite other staff to attend the meeting such as academic School staff putting forward proposals. It was agreed that it would be helpful to highlight this point once more to PARCs for future reference.

AGC Recommendations to Senate

AGC agreed that a change to the membership would help to improve the workings of the committee.

On balance they opted to recommend increasing the maximum membership rather than removing the cap altogether. Given the feedback received, AGC decided that a membership of up to 15 members would give Schools sufficient flexibility without risking the focus of the group.

In addition, AGC recommended that the membership of BoS Sub Committees should be reported to BoS each year (if BoS were not already actively monitoring sub committee membership).

Recommended Action

Senate is asked to approve the recommendation from AGC, as above.

Gemma Watt
Governance Administrator

5B Programme Approval and Review Committee Terms of Reference

Responsibilities

Programme Approval and Review Committees are responsible to the Board of Studies for the peer-review scrutiny of the development of new or amended programme proposals as well as for the preparations of periodic reviews. The Committee will also normally oversee preparations for PSRB visits for accredited programmes.

Specific Duties

- (i) To provide support to Programme Committees in undertaking the development of new or revised provision and for periodic review preparations.
- (ii) To ensure that proposals are underpinned by appropriate market research and link clearly to the University Strategy and any School sub-strategy.
- (iii) To ensure that the development of new or amended provision is in accordance with the University's academic policy and regulatory framework and any additional PSRB requirements.
- (iv) To monitor the ongoing coherence of programmes when considering programme amendment proposals, and to review annually the impact of cumulative change to programmes.
- (v) To ensure the quality of information contained within programme and module specifications that will be provided to students.
- (vi) To ensure the quality of information provided for University-level approval or review panels.
- (vii) To engage with external panel members in accordance with the University Programme Approval Policy.

Composition

- (i) Associate Dean - Education (Chair)
- (ii) Members of staff by reason of their role as determined by the Board of Studies
- (iii) Students by category of representation to be determined by the Board of Studies
- (iv) Appointed external member/s for consideration of specific proposals.

The composition should not total ~~more than nine members.~~ more than fifteen members.

A Committee Secretary shall be appointed by the Board of Studies.

The Committee has the authority to invite other members of University staff to meetings for discussion of specific matters. This may include colleagues from relevant Professional Services to support development of the programme/s and the student learning experience.

Frequency of Meetings

Three times per year, or more frequently as determined by the Board of Studies.

Standing Orders

Programme Approval and Review Committees operate in accordance with the Standing Orders for Boards of Studies and their Sub-Committees.