CURRICULUM DESIGN AND PEDAGOGIC PRINCIPLES FOR POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION

The following areas derive from a reading of the Smith Report (One Step Beyond: Making the most of Postgraduate Education, 2010) for curriculum design and pedagogic implications and from ongoing discussions with academic colleagues within the institution and the sector.

“Making postgraduate provision more responsive to employer needs and encouraging more people to train to postgraduate level will ensure that the UK has the higher level skills needed to succeed in a global knowledge economy.” (Smith, 2010, 4)

Many of the points below overlap with the undergraduate curriculum and are applicable for redesign at any level (see ‘Learning Works: Curriculum design’).

Research informed environment
The government has sent a clear message that it will only support postgraduate study where there is a proven supportive research environment.

Where appropriate, linked Research Institutes, Centres and the Professoriate should be involved in the postgraduate design and delivery.

All courses need to have demonstrable current or recent professional expertise evidenced within the overall design, the content and the assessment. Opportunities to incorporate current staff expertise in vocationally applied research should be particularly considered.

“Taught postgraduate courses provide people with the skills they need to work in a range of careers and play an important role in translating postgraduate research into practice” (Smith, 2010, 9).

Transition from undergraduate to postgraduate
All courses need to be designed to build on the undergraduate experience, while sharing with students the significance of the post-graduate experience as promoting a different level of study. (Appendix 1, QAA, 2008)

Particular thought should be given to a carefully scaffolded introduction which embeds an academic literacy approach to address the fact that a number of postgraduate learners may speak English as a second language or have been away from formal education for some time.

Flexibility
All postgraduate opportunities are best designed with flexibility of delivery in mind. This includes consideration of the frequency of face to face contact, the use of evening, weekend, block and distance learning frameworks with the possibility of a variety of delivery models.
Where appropriate, discussions with employers during the design phase and throughout the programme, particularly where designing courses or modules which are part of continuing professional development.

The model for any Masters course should ensure that it is possible for a full time student to complete within one year. It is recognised that there may be a variety of part-time models in order to respond to particular students and to maximise achievement.

“Increasingly, postgraduate level continuing professional development is being developed with and for employers and delivered in flexible ways. This model of responsive and tailored postgraduate provision will play an important role in upskilling and re-training the UK workforce” (Smith, 2010, 9).

**Blended Learning**

All courses should be designed with rich blended learning opportunities for maximum flexibility.

**Diversity**

The design, content and assessment of postgraduate courses should recognise and build on the diversity of our students.

**Assessment and feedback**

Through dedicated sessions, evidence has shown that tutors need to actively engage students in understanding the assessment criteria, particularly for dissertations and research projects. Students need to have feedback on dissertations and research projects before any final submission.

Assessments need to be designed in ways that reduce the risks of plagiarism.

**Employability and business awareness**

Each School and subject area needs to define the meaning and context of employability and market awareness at postgraduate level.

There needs to be due sensitivity to the fact that some of our learners may be undertaking postgraduate study for personal development and pleasure (e.g. retired learners).

The integration of specific careers advice sessions, using the University Careers Centre staff should be considered.

*Postgraduate education should be “producing people with the necessary balance of skills to conduct high quality research and development in industry, universities and the public sector. …’ HEIs should ensure that transferable skills training is embedded as standard in the funding and design of all postgraduate research programmes. In addition, HEIs should work closely with Vitae, employers and other stakeholders to provide better information, advice and guidance on career choices for postgraduate research students’* (Smith, 2010, 6)
Interdisciplinarity
Links across subjects and Schools should be encouraged in the design and development of postgraduate courses.

Languages
Students should be encouraged to consider language enhancement which could be offered as a value added ‘opportunity’. Within the course, consideration should be given to language enhancement supportive resources such as recorded lectures, subtitled, hyperlinked with particular discipline-specific words explained.

‘Employers expect postgraduates to have a range of skills that go beyond the discipline which they have studied. These include business awareness, languages, numeracy and quantitative methods skills’ (Smith, 2010, 6).

Internationalised curriculum
Where the UK course is also taught as transnational provision, forms of virtual exchange with Wolverhampton based students should be encouraged.

Consideration should be given to ‘pre study’ materials, particularly for p/g international students whose first language is not English.

Core modules - Research methods, project management, communication skills
Materials for generic areas which may be of use across the subject, school or university may be considered.

Smith, A. (2010). One Step Beyond: Making the most of postgraduate education. London: BIS.
Appendix 1

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (QAA, 2008, 20)
(http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/FHEQ/ENN08/FHEQ08.pdf)

Descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 7: Master's degree
The descriptor provided for this level of the framework is for any master's degree which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor can also be used as a reference point for other level 7 qualifications, including postgraduate certificates and postgraduate diplomas.

Master's degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:
- a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice
- a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship
- originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline
- conceptual understanding that enables the student:
  - to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline
  - to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:
- deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level
- continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.

And holders will have:
- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
  - the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
  - decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations
  - the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

Much of the study undertaken for master's degrees will have been at, or informed by, the forefront of an academic or professional discipline. Students will have shown originality in the application of knowledge, and they will understand how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research. They will be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, and they will show originality in tackling and solving problems. They will have the qualities needed for employment in circumstances requiring sound judgement, personal responsibility and initiative in complex and unpredictable professional environments.

Within each appropriate subject area, reference should also be made to:
Master's level benchmark statements
http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/masters/