

Title: **Enhancing learning by transforming curriculum approval and review**

Presenter: **Helen Beetham, Stephen Powell, Stephen Griffiths and Claire Eustance**
JISC, University of Bolton, Cardiff University and University of Greenwich

Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- ▲ explain how reform of curriculum approval and review processes can support better design practices among curriculum teams
- ▲ explain how trusted, shared and transparent course information can support curriculum design and enhance learning experiences
- ▲ consider how best to enhance the curriculum approval and review process at their own institution

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

- ▲ describing processes of curriculum approval and review
- ▲ exploring how these processes can support and/or hinder excellence and innovation
- ▲ benefits of reforming the processes of curriculum approval and review
- ▲ benefits of enhancing access to and trust in course-related information

Curriculum design is a complex educational and organisational process which has a profound impact on the learning experience of students (Sharpe & Benfield 2005, Dempster et. al. 2011). It is also an area of activity which academic staff associate strongly with their academic expertise and professional ethos (Beetham 2009). Projects funded under the Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design (JISC) programme have been investigating how reformed organisational processes such as approval and review can be a catalyst for other kinds of curriculum innovation. Institutional processes alone do not determine the shape of the curriculum, but these projects have produced strong evidence of a link between the formal review and approval process at an institution and the quality, transparency and stakeholder engagement in the educational decisions made (Cross et. al 2010; Parker & Quinsee, 2011)

During an initial collection of evidence in 2008, projects concluded that current processes were too dependent on form-filling and set-piece committee reviews. The culture at many institutions supported a conservative approach to learning and teaching practice, with senior staff piloting programmes through the system using approaches that had worked in the past. Ownership of the process was often bureaucratic or unclear, and information was not always

available to the right people at the right time. Nor did the documents used for course approval or review translate easily into educationally meaningful representations of what students would learn, and lecturers would teach.

This workshop provides participants with an opportunity to review their own institutions' approval and review processes against the experience of projects that have completed a number of reforms. The emphasis will be on alternative approaches rather than one right model, and participants will be encouraged to share their own ideas for supporting educational excellence through enhanced curriculum processes.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

Introduction: key elements of the curriculum design process (5 mins with time for reflection)
Short presentations: three educators involved in three different institutional projects describe how the reform of underlying processes has enhanced curriculum design (15 mins)
Workshop activity: participants choose one institution to work with in more detail, exploring staff development materials and course representations (15 mins)
Discussion and time for reflection (10 mins)

References

- Beetham, H. (2009) Baselineing the Institutional Processes of Curriculum Design. JISC. Available from <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/curriculumdesign>.
- Cross, S., Conole, G., Galley, R., Munding, P., Brasher, A., Clark, P. & Culver, J., (2010). The Learning Design Initiative Institutional Project Phase Two Report: Embedding learning design and establishing a reversioning culture. JISC. Available from http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/curriculumdesign/ouldiinterim_april10.pdf.
- Dempster, J., Benfield, G. & Francis, R. (2012) An academic development model for fostering innovation and sharing in curriculum design. *Innovations in Education & Teaching International*; May2012, Vol. 49 Issue 2, p135-147.
- Parker P. & Quinsee, S. (2011) Facilitating Institutional Curriculum Change in Higher Education. *International Journal of Learning*; 2011, Vol. 18 Issue 5, p49-60.
- Sharpe, R. & Benfield, G. (2005) Student experiences of e-Learning: a review of the literature. *Brookes e-Journal of Learning and Teaching*; Vol. 1 Issue 3. Available from http://bejlt.brookes.ac.uk/vol1/volume1issue3/academic/sharpe_benfield.pdf