CONFIRMED

ST GEORGE'S, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

VALIDATION AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

Foundation for Medicine – periodic review

18th April 2007

Room TH110, Penrhyn Road Campus, Kingston University

Membership:

The panel was chaired by the Head of a School not involved in the delivery of the programme. The panel included an external member at the Thames Valley University (nominated by the course team), a representative of the local NHS trust (nominated by the chair of the panel), a potential employer of graduates from the BSc Biomedical Science programme.

Graham Morgan (Chair)	Head of School of Radiography, KU & SGUL
Dr Judith Ibison	Division of Community Health Sciences, SGUL
Dr Keith Shepherd	Faculty of Engineering, KU
Professor Sibel Roller (External)	Head of Subject in Human Sciences, Faculty of Health and Human Sciences, Thames Valley University
Clare Lovell	Assistant Registrar, KU
Derek Baldwinson	Planning and Secretariat Office (secretary)

Dr Elizabeth Miles from the Centre for Medical and Health Care Education at SGUL was unable to attend the meeting but made available written comments on the programme documentation.

Introduction

1. The Foundation for Medicine (FFM) Programme was approved for three years in June 2003. The first intake joined the programme in September 2003 and there have been three subsequent intakes. The primary purpose of the review was to determine whether the approval period of the FFM should be extended to allow further intakes to join the programme.

2. It was clarified that seven of the modules included in the FFM programme are also offered on other Kingston University programmes. Because of the knock-on effect on these programmes, the Validation and Review Committee would not require changes to the Kingston modules. If the Committee thought the modules were inappropriate, it could ask for new modules to be developed. Any changes to existing KU modules proposed by the Committee would need to be ratified under the appropriate Kingston University procedure.

3. The VRC received a self-evaluation document and a volume of supporting documents in advance of the meeting. This volume included the:

   - Programme Specification,
   - Course Guide,
   - Programme regulations,
   - Scheme of assessment,
   - Annual programme monitoring reports – 03-04, 04-05, 05-06,
   - Visiting examiner reports 04, 05, 06,
   - Minutes of each Course Committee meeting.

4. Module boxes were also available for scrutiny prior to the meeting. These boxes contained *inter alia* examination papers, assignment briefs and samples of student work.

Conduct of the review

5. The VRC held a private meeting at which it confirmed the issues that it would discuss with the FFM team. The VRC then met with three students from the current intake. After its meeting with students, the VRC met with the following members of the FFM team:

    Dr David Mackintosh (Dean of Science, KU)
    Dr Alan Seddon (Acting Head of Life Sciences, KU)
    Dr Sue Cotterill (SGUL Course Director)
    Dr Karen Whiting (KU Programme Leader)
    Dr Vincent Lau (Module leader, KU)
    Dr Simon Carrington (Module leader, KU)
    Dr Joan Jarman (Module leader, KU)
    Dr Gary Forster-Wilkins (Module leader, KU)
    Dr Gillian Venn (Module leader, KU)
    Margot Turner (Module leader, SGUL)

6. Finally, the VRC held a second private meeting at which it agreed the decision recorded in paragraphs 23 to 26.

Meeting with Students

7. The students were very supportive of the programme and spoke very positively about their experiences. Many students had been out of formal education for some time and were very uncertain when they came onto the programme. The students were very well supported by staff and were able to build up their confidence quickly. In particular, doing well in the first semester assignments helped build student confidence.

8. The programme was very demanding in terms of the amount of time that students needed to put in to be successful. The demands are made clear to students at the outset and the Course Guide is useful in helping students plan their time. Staff are accessible if students need extra advice and support. To the best of their knowledge, the students thought that approximately a third of the students were working as well as studying.

9. FFM students shared lectures with other undergraduate students and the total number of students in a lecture could exceed 200. A small number of students could be noisy and the noise could be a distraction. However there were benefits for the FFM students in sharing lectures with other students; the FFM students could by observation adopt the study skills habits and techniques used by other undergraduates. The FFM students were taught separately in tutorials and practicals.

10. The following specific points were noted:

    a) Chemistry was new for most students and they have had very little experience of laboratory and practical work. The FFM students were given extra tutorials to help them come to terms with chemistry.

    b) Attendance of students is monitored – students sign attendance registers in most teaching sessions. FFM students attend regularly and inform the module leaders if they are unable to come to a particular session.

    c) Students were aware of the requirements for progression to the MBBS and understood that that if they did not meet the requirement they may be eligible to enrol on the BSc Life Sciences at Kingston with advanced standing.

    d) The students had found out about the programme on the internet, either by searching the web or through on-line discussion forums used by applicants to higher education.

    e) Students were very impressed by the Blackboard virtual learning environment.

f) During the FFM, contact with SGUL is limited to the Introduction to Health Care module which includes hospital and community placements. The links with SGUL work well and students particularly enjoy the placements because they enable students to place their learning in context.

g) Students suggested that it would have been useful if they had been given reading lists when they were accepted onto the programme. They could then have used the summer period to carry out preparatory reading and this would have helped them to 'hit the ground running' when they enrolled on the programme in September. Students would also have benefited from a session in the Induction Week on laboratory work. Students were unfamiliar with the names and uses of much of the laboratory equipment and a basic introductory session would have helped them overcome this unfamiliarity. Students would also have welcomed a session on how to present coursework during induction.

h) Regarding assessment, students confirmed that they receive useful written and oral feedback on their assessed work. Teaching finishes three weeks before the semester 2 examinations. The deadline for the submission of the Introduction to Health Care module falls in the first of these three weeks. From the student perspective, it would be useful if the submission date for the portfolio could be brought forward to give students three clear weeks to prepare for the examinations. The FFM does not include any formative assessment.

Credit level of the FFM modules

11. The VRC queried the credit level at which the FFM modules are offered. The modules have been given a credit rating of 15 CATS points at level 0 (the equivalent to level 3 in the National Credit Framework). However students who successfully complete the modules as part of Kingston University's BSc Life Sciences programme are awarded level 1 credit even though the FFM students complete more assessments and are required to achieve a higher pass mark. The VRC also understood that the assessment and marking criteria are broadly the same. From the Committee's viewpoint, this was unfair to the FFM students. Also, if the modules were offered at level 1, students who passed the programme but were ineligible or chose not to continue onto the MB BS, might be admitted with advanced standing to a degree programme at Kingston or elsewhere. This facility might aid recruitment to the programme.

12. The course team explained that FFM students who did not proceed to the MB BS were considered on a case by case basis. Subject to interview and dependent on their performance on the FFM modules, students may be admitted to level 2 of the BSc Life Sciences. The course team understood that the modules were offered at level 0 for regulatory or funding reasons. The team agreed that it would be useful to check whether this was still the case.

Recruitment and selection

13. The VRC was aware that the programme had not recruited to target in any of the years in which it had been offered. In this context, the course team was asked if its marketing strategy had evolved to generate more applications. The course team was also asked whether recruitment and selection procedures had been reconsidered to allow more suitable applicants to come onto the FFM. The course team explained that its first priority had been to establish the programme successfully. Now that the FFM had bedded down, the team hoped to take stock of a number of areas, including recruitment and selection, to determine whether improvements could be made. The team was intending to develop a new course prospectus and would be running an open day at which applicants would have the opportunity to meet with current students.

14. The team currently had good links with Widening Participation staff at SGUL and hoped to build on these links. SGUL had also recently appointed an Associate Dean for Widening Participation and it was hoped that the appointee would bring fresh ideas to recruitment.

15. The programme had recruited students from the army, from the police and from within the NHS. The team did not want to market the programme exclusively to these sectors because it hoped to recruit students from as wide a base as possible. At present the programme attracted students nationally and not just from the south west London region.

16. The course team expressed the view that the entry requirements for the programme were appropriate. Students who withdrew from the programme usually did so because their personal circumstances had changed and not for academic reasons. The course team was intending to adopt the entry questionnaire developed by Bart's and the London which enabled staff to evaluate the learning style of students. The questionnaire would help staff to identify and support students who might need extra help. As part of the induction programme, students might also be asked to provide a brief written statement explaining why they had applied for the programme and what they hoped to achieve. This would allow staff to identify students who might need extra help with their written communication skills.

17. The VRC noted that applicants need to have made 'good progression in their chosen career' in order to be accepted on to the programme and asked how this was measured. The team explained that the work experience of applicants was discussed at interview and was verified by taking up employer references. Applicants who had carried out voluntary work in a health-related field would also be considered.

Visiting examiner comments

18. The VRC confirmed that it found evidence the course team had responded to issues raised by the visiting examiner. Visiting examiner reports had, for example, queried the way in which claims for mitigating circumstances were processed and the arrangements for double-marking. Subsequent reports confirmed that these matters had been addressed by the course team. The course team did not write a formal written response to issues raised by the visiting examiner. Instead, actions taken were reported to the next meeting of the Board of Examiners.

Student support issues

19. The course team described a range of initiatives that had been introduced to support students. Students were given extra tutorials in the Chemistry and Genetics modules. For all modules, the marking of assessed work for FFM students was prioritised so that the students could receive prompt feedback and, for the Introduction to Health Care module, students received written feedback from the placement providers.

Assessment

20. The FFM does not at present include any formative assessments although for some modules students do have the opportunity to attempt brief formative tests on-line on a fortnightly basis. Past papers and assignments are available to students on Blackboard and for each module a seminar session is usually set aside so that the assessment requirements can be explained to students.

21. Students who have struggled in the first semester assessments are counselled on a one-to-one basis. Students whose poor performance can be explained by mitigating circumstances may be advised to withdraw from the programme and recommence in the subsequent academic year.

22. The documentation available to the VRC suggested that the assessment strategy for the FFM had a bias towards coursework. Although the Committee had heard from students that doing well in coursework assessments had helped them to become more confident, the Committee felt that the emphasis on coursework might be inappropriate because formal examinations (including MCQs, EMIs and SAQs) predominate on the MBBS. In response, the course team explained that emphasis on coursework was less apparent than the documentation suggested. Coursework was a shorthand term that encompassed

a variety of assessment methods, many of which took place in examination-type conditions.

Decision

23. The VRC recommended to Senate that the period of approval of the FFM programme should be extended for five years. The next review of the programme will therefore take place in 2111-2112. The VRC also made the follow recommendations for future action:

    Advisable action points

    a) The course team should implement a strategy for identifying and supporting at an early stage students who may be struggling academically;

    b) The course team should prepare a pre-course information pack so that applicants can, if they wish, use the summer period for preparatory reading. It would be useful if applicants could access the information pack on Blackboard;

    c) The course team should rethink the decision to give the FFM a credit-rating at level 0;

    d) The course team should formalise a recruitment and selection policy that outlines the team's strategy for generating more applications and enrolments from suitably qualified applicant groups who are currently under-represented in Higher Education can be encouraged;

    e) The course team should ensure that the Visiting Examiner receives a formal written response at the appropriate time to issues raised in his or her report;

    Desirable action points

    f) The course team should consider including a session on basic laboratory techniques in the induction week;

    g) The course team should consider whether the hand-in date for the portfolio in the Introduction to Health Care module can be brought forward to give the students three weeks of revision time before the semester 2 examinations;

    h) The course team should consider the feasibility of introducing formative assessment to the programme;

    i) The course team should ensure that the data that its uses to evaluate the success of the programme, especially the data that relates to student progression and achievement, is accurate and reliable.

24. The VRC confirmed that the FFM programme is compliant with relevant parts of the QAA's academic infrastructure.

25. The VRC identified the following areas of good and commendable practice:

    a) The course team's past success in opening up the study of medicine to applicants from under-represented groups;

    b) The strength of the working relationship between Kingston University and St George's, University of London;

    c) The intention to introduce an Open Day at which applicants will have the opportunity to meet with current and past FFM students;

d) The course team's willingness to provide students with extra support, for example by timetabling additional tutorials, to build up the confidence of students and to give them every opportunity of being successful;

e) The success in establish a strong and cohesive sense of identity and common purpose amongst the FFM cohort.

26. The deadline for responding to these recommendations for action is 2nd July 2007.

DB
April 07

Q:\Quality Issues\Quality Issues\TQI stuff\18 april 07 FFM review.doc