Purpose of Document
1. To describe the Curriculum Development processes of the University of Ulster
2. To align the project to the curriculum development processes and activities of the institution
3. To inform the programme synthesis project and to allow the JISC to place projects in a realistic institutional context.
Introduction
The Viewpoints project is funded as part of the JISC Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design Programme. The context to this funding call was to assist institutions and the sector as a whole to respond to a number of agenda and challenges that exist in society, the sector and within universities (Circular 05/08: Institutional Approaches to Curriculum Design).

In total, twelve projects were funded (link). These projects have been assigned to one of three thematic clusters. The Viewpoints Project, the Principles in Patterns Project (University of Strathclyde) and the OULDI Project (Open University) have been assigned to Cluster C. This cluster has a focus on influencing academic practitioners who are engaged in the review, planning and / or adaptation of the educational aspects of curriculum design process to meet the needs of the subject / learners. This report will review the factors and processes that influence, support and report this pedagogical aspect of curriculum design.

Institutional context
In 2008, the University introduced a number of strategic initiatives – a new Teaching and Learning strategy, revised Standards and Quality Assurance Arrangements and guidelines for First Year Undergraduate Teaching to respond to challenges which were also highlighted within the JISC call for funding.

A key focus of the Teaching and Learning strategy is to seek to promote and foster creativity and innovation in curriculum design and delivery. "During the course of the implementation of the Strategy, alternatives will be sought to reduce the burdens of bureaucracy (without compromising academic standards and quality) and to free-up academic and research staff time to focus on excelling at the core activities."

Alongside the introduction of this new Teaching and Learning strategy, a review of Standards and Quality Assurance Arrangements was undertaken.

This review resulted in a number of measures to streamline bureaucratic processes in order to encourage risk-taking and more flexibility in the curriculum and to promote multi- and inter-disciplinarity.

These initiatives were complemented by a formal set of guidelines for First Year Undergraduate Teaching, which have been approved by Senate. A key element of this paper is the co-ordination of the first year, in particular:

- A first year course team should strategically plan, co-ordinate and implement an integrated first year experience for students.
- Curriculum, study skills development and assessment strategy should be coordinated across the range of (core) first year modules.
- The curriculum should recognise the diversity of prior student qualifications.

The Viewpoints project is well-timed in that it will provide the University with a number of tools and services that will allow course teams (and learners) to reflect upon, plan and coordinate the learner experience in a supportive and efficient manner. The projects proposed use of simple student-centred timeline scenarios will allow course teams to identify key strategic objectives and use these as drivers for curriculum change.

The strategic Teaching and Learning related initiatives highlighted above are in operation within the University of Ulster and will be subject to internal review and
evaluation during the lifetime of the Viewpoints project.

This report will examine the formal curriculum related processes and align these in the context of the project with broader processes and factors, which influence, inform and report the development of curriculum design within the University of Ulster.

**Curriculum Development Processes at the University of Ulster**

A number of factors influence curriculum development at the University of Ulster. These can be categorised as those which have a strategic influence, those that influence a process and those which have potential to influence practice.

**Strategic Influences**

Strategic influences to curriculum development include the University's Corporate Plan, the Teaching and Learning Strategy, University Committees, Student handbook, Student Charters, Academic Office, and Quality Assurance processes. All staff must be guided by these. The Viewpoints project aims to build upon their influence and help staff by promoting and enhancing good curriculum design which puts learners at the centre of the process.

The **Corporate Plan** defines ‘what the University is about’. It sets out the University’s overall Vision, Core Strategic Aims, Crosscutting Aims and key supporting objectives for the five-year period from 2006/07 to 2010/11.

The **Teaching and Learning Strategy** (2008/09 – 2012/13) articulates what is required to help realise the Vision set out in the Corporate Plan. Professor Denise McAlister, the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Learning, has indicated within the strategy document that, “*Any successful strategy needs the support of staff, students and managers across and within the institution. Like every good strategy its outcome depends on effective implementation.*”

Alongside the introduction of this new Teaching and Learning strategy, a review of Standards and Quality Assurance Arrangements has been undertaken to “*establish as a guiding principle the creation of a safe environment for experimentation and risk-taking for curriculum development and teaching and assessment practices and for students.*”

Professor McAlister also highlighted in the JISC proposal document that this Viewpoints project is timely as it provides “…*the University with added capacity and a distinctive learner focus to the curriculum change agenda during the lifetime of this strategy.*”

The project will provide the University with a flexible suite of tools and workshops that will assist staff to reflect upon and plan the orchestration of the learner experience in a supportive and efficient manner in line with University strategies.

There are a number of University committees which also contribute to curriculum development in different ways, such as the Academic Planning Sub-Committee (APSC), Academic Development and Enhancement committee (ADEC), Course Approval Sub-Committee (CASC), which have influence throughout the typical planning and approval process. Other committees such as the Teaching and Learning Committee and the Research Degrees Committee have endorsed ‘*Principles of Standards, Assurance and Quality Management*’. Their purpose is to make sure there are integrated principles which can effectively contribute towards the
achievement of the University’s Mission and also underpin the academic planning process.

All students are given a Student Handbook. This handbook contains essential information for them throughout their university career. There is also a Student Charter and Student Support Charters, which explain the academic and other services available to students. The University is committed to continually improving the quality of its service to students and charters help outline that commitment.

The Academic Office has advisory and developmental roles in relation to all aspects of academic policy, procedures and regulations for taught award-bearing provision.

The Quality Management and Audit Unit has responsibility for reviewing the quality of taught provision by external agencies, internal subject and collaborative provision annual monitoring, internal themed / process audit, module monitoring, Institutional audit, academic governance (including servicing of Senate), student feedback surveys, staff / student consultative committees, student charters and student complaints etc.

Both the Academic Office and the Quality Management and Audit Unit also have a role that provides resources and support to help staff complete the necessary paperwork and processes.

**Process related support resources**

The University provides a large volume of information and resources, such as handbooks, documents, templates and web resources which staff must refer to, use or complete throughout the curriculum development process. These very much influence how courses are designed for the approval process and how they are later managed and reviewed.

This Viewpoints project aims to provide staff with a fresh approach to reviewing and enhancing course curricula and to help them engage with learners and other stakeholders in the process. The tools produced will provide course teams with an efficient and effective approach to reviewing the learner experience. The use of simple student centred timeline scenarios will allow course teams to identify key strategic objectives and use these as drivers for curriculum change.

When developing a new course proposal or revising an existing one, faculties must use the Programme Approval, Management and Review Handbook. This process is administered by the Academic Office. The Quality Management and Audit Unit provide the sections on monitoring. Other handbooks are also provided by Academic office on topics which include Collaboration in the Provision of Programmes of Study, Assessment, Members of University Evaluation Panels, Members of University Revalidation Panels, External Examiners Handbook etc.

The Academic Office also supports the course approval process through the establishment and servicing of evaluation / revalidation panels, scrutiny of documentation, provision of reports and monitoring of the implementation of conditions of approval etc.

The process for ‘new course validation’ and ‘course revalidation’ is illustrated in Appendix 1.
The following diagrams further illustrate the process framework, reference information, process support and outputs for the ‘new course validation process’, the ‘minor revisions process’ and the ‘course revalidation process’.

Click [here](#) to view the PDF version of the diagram, with embedded links.
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Both processes currently require a critical but constructive and detailed appraisal of the course proposal or provision. Findings and recommendations are reported to the Teaching and Learning Committee of the University through its Course Approval Sub-Committee.

The Viewpoints curriculum reflection tools offer the potential to help academics innovate and justify their course and key decisions during initial evaluation or revalidation meetings. These tools can help staff to reflect on and prepare to answer the sorts of questions raised within the aide memoire guidance provided by the Academic Office, and in this way become embedded in the curriculum development process.

The Quality Management and Audit Unit provides support and information in relation to the external review of subjects, internal subject monitoring, collaborative provision monitoring, internal audit, external continuation audit / institutional review, staff development, educational development and equal opportunity policy and practice.

Student feedback is considered fundamental to the operation of the University, its departments and faculties. The main methods used to collect feedback from students include: the National Student Survey, Internal Review which includes Annual Subject Monitoring and Module Monitoring, and Staff / Student Consultative Committees, student focus groups (where these are used), and student representation on Course Committees.
The diagrams, which follow, illustrates both the ‘Course Management Process’ and the ‘Quality Management and Audit Process’.

Click [here](#) to view the PDF version of the diagram, with embedded links.
Support and resources which influence practice / pedagogy

**Staff Development** is responsible for the provision of appropriate developmental opportunities supporting all staff in their various roles within the University. As part of its open provision it provides a range of pedagogic workshops (either as open provision or at the behest of individual Schools and / or Faculties): these may be further tailored to meet the particular needs of participants in terms of both discipline and practice. Staff Development also provides a series of Academic Induction workshops for those involved in teaching and learning, and these lead into the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice.

The **Centre for Higher Education Practice** is responsible for implementing aspects of the Teaching and Learning Strategy (2008/09-2012/13) in collaboration with existing departments. Closely allied to Staff Development, the Centre’s three project areas seek to provide opportunities for enhanced pedagogic practice:

- The Creativity Project team works closely with Schools and / or Faculties to seek ways in which the curriculum may be enhanced through innovative practice;
- The Pedagogic Research Project seeks to support and encourage staff in development of pedagogic practice and in the research thereof;
- The Teaching and Learning Funding Project allocates funding to innovative pedagogic projects on a bi-annual basis.

In addition to the Projects above, the Centre provides a rolling seminar and discussion fora programme, comprising invited speakers both external and internal to the University.

Both Staff Development and the Centre for Higher Education Practice offer support to teams in preparing for evaluation and revalidation. The department of Access and Distributed Learning provides a leadership role and supports the design and development of e-learning programmes across the University.
Viewpoints project perspective

The tools and services developed by the Viewpoints project will provide staff with a simple and intuitive means to reflect upon, design and plan innovative changes to the curriculum. They will help staff articulate their aspirations and strategies to learners, colleagues and institutional course approval, management and review processes including quality enhancement.

This baseline report of institutional curriculum development related processes has identified the following key issues for the project and other groups looking to inform and influence curriculum design:

- Curriculum design is an ongoing activity, which can be driven by a number of different agendas (personal, module, course and institutional)
- There is potential to influence curriculum development during three main phases (during initial course approval, when courses are delivered / managed and during course revalidation)
- Most curriculum innovations take place in the period between course (re)validations and the educational context to these changes may be influenced by quality related processes and / or staff developing their own practice.

To highlight the relationships between the activity of curriculum design and the formal institutional processes of the University, the Viewpoints team has used a process concept mapping approach to describe the relationship between curriculum design and key institutional processes (Appendix 2)

These approaches enable Viewpoints to:
- describe how institutional processes support and inform curriculum design;
- identify the support resources and activities available to assist staff;
- identify the curriculum design related outputs (and associated audiences) generated by these processes;
- identify potential courses and stakeholders to target and engage with.

The use of process concept maps and the Curriculum Development Processes Matrix (CDP matrix – Appendix 3) provides a framework that aligns the activities of the project to the curriculum development, review and enhancement processes of the University of Ulster. The CDP matrix is a spreadsheet, which provides an overview of factors/components, which influence Curriculum Development at the University. This resource illustrates who components are targeted at and the relationships between those who use or receive them and those who initiate or provide them. It is intended to be a working document/resource, which will be adjusted throughout the project to record relationships, connections, potential and development opportunities.

The use of these and similar process mappings will provide a focal point for the project to relate its work with individuals to the institutional context. In particular, this approach will allow the project to better understand:
- Processes and factors that motivate practitioners to initiate curriculum change;
- Information and drivers that staff are aware of and that influence them in their choice of curriculum (re-)design;
- Support resources and activities that staff are aware of and avail of to assist them in their curriculum (re-)design;
- Outputs generated by the curriculum (re-)design activity and their dissemination among colleagues and through institutional processes.