

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

Academic Standards and Quality Committee:  
minutes of a meeting held on 15 May 2013

**Present:** Professor A G Chetwynd (Chair)  
Mr R Clark  
Professor L Hendry  
Professor G Johnes  
Dr R Lauder  
Professor C Milligan  
Professor A Rashid  
Mrs L M Wareing

**In attendance:** Mr S Cresswell  
Ms C Geddes  
Ms K Fenton  
Ms A McFarlane (Secretary)

**Apologies:** Professor J Balogun, Professor G Blower, Dr G Brown, Mr I Denny, Mr A R Okey, Professor C G Rogers.

**Section A**                      **Introductory items**

ASQC/2013/6                      Minutes

*Document: SEC/2013/3/0093*

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2013 were confirmed as an accurate record.

ASQC/2013/7                      Matters arising

7.1                      Undergraduate Annual Teaching Reviews: LUMS

*Minute ASQC/2013/2.3.1 refers*

At the February meeting, LUMS had reported that annual teaching review reports for Sunway and Goenka had not been received in time for consideration by the faculty teaching committee at the

usual time. Sunway's reports had since been received. It was **agreed** that faculties would consider any reports received after the normal point in the cycle through their teaching committees, and would provide the minutes of their discussions and a list of action points to the September meeting of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. As previously reported to the Committee, it was noted that LUMS' Director of International Partnerships was working with Sunway and Goenka so that future ATR reports could be considered alongside the Lancaster campus programmes at the usual point in the cycle.

7.2 Undergraduate Annual Teaching Reviews: Faculty of Health and Medicine

*Minute ASQC/2013/2.5.2 refers*

At the February meeting, the Committee had been concerned to hear that problems regarding lift access within the Faraday Building had yet to be resolved and that a firm timetable for improvement works had yet to be received. Members agreed that an urgent resolution to the problem was needed. The Chair **reported** that an additional lift would be installed during 2013, as part of Phase 2 of the Faraday project, and that the existing lift would be refurbished as part of Phase 3 of the project.

7.3 Issues raised in Blackburn College External Examiner Reports

*Minute ASQC/2013/3.3 refers*

At its January meeting the Collaborative Provision Teaching Committee (CPTC) had noted that the Blackburn College internal overview report on external examiners reports, which had been presented to Blackburn's Academic Council, did not seem to have picked up on some issues raised. Blackburn agreed to look into this and report back to the April meeting of the CPTC. Unfortunately Blackburn College members were unable to attend the April meeting of the CPTC. It was **reported** that the CPTC had therefore asked Blackburn to provide a written response to the University.

## Section B

## Items for discussion

ASQC/2013/8

Postgraduate Annual Teaching Reviews: Faculty Reports 2011/2012

*Documents: SEC/2013/3/0216, SEC/2013/3/0217, SEC/2013/3/0218, SEC/2013/3/0219*

The Committee received faculty summaries of annual teaching review reports. Each report was considered in turn and the following points were made.

### 8.1 Management School

8.1.1 Members commented that the report was well written and comprehensive. All issues had been addressed.

8.1.2 Support for study skills and English language had again been identified by departments and external examiners as an issue for further attention, particularly in light of the increasing numbers of students who are non-native English speakers. LUMS had made an additional appointment in this area, but departments had asked whether such support might be provided centrally by the university.

8.1.3 Module evaluation response rates by PGT students had been disappointing in some cases. It was suggested that the possibility of 'survey fatigue' should be revisited.

8.1.4 LUMS was currently undergoing its EQUIS re-accreditation review.

8.1.5 Members commented on the integration of employability into syllabuses in LUMS as an area of good practice.

8.1.6 It was noted that the quality of available teaching spaces for large groups had led to difficulties, particularly for premium fee programmes.

8.1.7 Members supported LUMS comments about revisiting the timing of registration and Induction for PGT students, in order to allow sufficient time for identification of English language and other study support needs.

## 8.2 Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

8.2.1 Members commented that the report was thoughtful and reflective. The Committee noted with particular interest:

- the 'Visioning Day' held by Applied Social Sciences that had fed into the revision of the new social work programme and had helped the department build relationships with potential graduate employers;
- development of distance learning programmes by several departments and the willingness of departments (e.g. PPR) to share best practice with others looking at developing on-line PGT courses;
- encouragement for the use of shared modules and consortially taught modules, which were less vulnerable to staff absences and also encouraged students to develop inter-disciplinary interests.

8.2.2 Though it was noted (section 3b) that concerns raised by an external examiner had been answered, the Committee would have welcomed a more detailed account of the response made.

8.2.3 The faculty had identified PGR submission rates as an area for review. Departments had pointed to a number of factors that detracted from the ability of students to complete on time, including financial pressures and lack of sustained English language support for overseas students.

8.2.4 In relation to financial support for students, the Dean of Graduate Studies reported on the progress of an AHRC block grant application made in partnership with six other universities.

8.2.5 The faculty had reported concerns coming through from departments and external examiners about support for English language and study skills arising from the increase in overseas student numbers. Members also pointed to the specific needs of distance learning students and part-time students. Members agreed that a review of learning support would be timely, looking at the different forms of support needed and what was better located centrally and at faculty level.

### 8.3 Faculty of Health and Medicine

- 8.3.1 The faculty had commented that the current method of reporting student numbers associated with part-time study, distance learning and non-standard start dates was unhelpful. The Committee heard that the Deputy Vice-Chancellor was currently discussing this issue with the Director of Planning.
- 8.3.2 Problems had been identified with levels and quality of support available for students on part-time and distance learning students. Members agreed that distance learning required different types of support and that there was scope for more sharing of experience across faculties. Members again queried whether moving to a faculty based service was the best model for learning support.
- 8.3.3 The faculty had commented on the limited size of its administrative team relative to its admissions related functions. This was also an issue for LUMS. PGT and PGR markets were increasingly competitive and in LUMS' experience this was not resolved by greater investments in internet marketing and systems. Direct engagement with students remained important. It was noted that the new conversion system being developed would still require significant investment by admissions staff and programme directors to be effective.
- 8.3.4 The faculty bursary scheme had proved successful and should be continued.
- 8.3.5 The distance learning doctorate successfully launched by Health Research could provide a useful model in seeking to increase the numbers of doctoral students.
- 8.3.6 The Committee noted the comments from an external examiner (CETAD) on the advisability of increasing the amount of credit that could be obtained through APL/APEL. The Committee heard that a draft policy had been discussed by the Dean's advisory groups and would be brought to the next meeting of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee.

#### 8.4 Faculty of Science and Technology

8.4.1 Members noted in particular the faculty's comments on low response rates from PGT students through the electronic module evaluation system and the concerns that results could therefore be unrepresentative. It was reported that paper-based systems seemed to be more effective with smaller groups, though it was acknowledged that they were not feasible for larger groups. The faculty postgraduate deans were invited to reflect on the issue further. It was noted that the Dean of Undergraduate Studies was looking into similar concerns in relation to some undergraduate modules.

8.4.2 The faculty continued to be concerned that fees were being set too late and that this affected recruitment. Members felt that fees should be set by the end of October at the latest. It was reported that the Deputy Vice-Chancellor was keen to resolve this matter for next year, and the Committee's view would be conveyed to him.

**Action: Chair**

8.4.3 Members noted the faculty's comments about improving the funding model for distribution of postgraduate-related income to departments involved in consortial programmes. Administering departments currently received all the income, which was often not passed on to other departments. This did not encourage the development of consortial programmes between departments and faculties.

**Action: Faculty to review**

#### 8.5 Common themes

8.5.1 It was agreed that it would be useful to put together an overview of the outcomes from the annual teaching review process (both postgraduate and undergraduate) for the July meeting, and to consider outcomes in terms of the University's strategic plan. It was suggested that an institution-level action plan be drawn up that could feed into the discussions of the University's planning and resources group, as well as be a means of reporting back to departments and faculties on progress made against the points they had raised.

8.5.2 All faculties had identified language and learning support as an issue for attention, and this had also been raised in undergraduate ATRs. There were questions about the overall level of support available, the types of support needed by overseas students and by part-time and distance learning students, as well as the balance between central and faculty-based support. It was agreed that this should be raised at senior levels.

**Action: Chair**

8.5.3 There was support for revisiting the timing of registration and Induction for PGT students to ensure that best use was made of the time available. The Dean of Graduate Studies undertook to discuss the matter with the Student Registry.

**Action: Dean of Graduate Studies**

8.5.4 Several departments had reported on the development of distance learning programmes, and would welcome the opportunity to share experience and good practice with other departments. Members noted the support available in this area from OED and it was agreed to send on a copy of the minutes.

**Action: Committee Secretary**

8.5.5 Two faculties had commented on lower module evaluation response rates by students. It was noted that the Dean of Undergraduate Studies and the PVC were reviewing module evaluation feedback to students.

**Action: Chair/Dean of Undergraduate Studies**

8.5.6 It was agreed to look again at the ATR report form and guidance to encourage departments to comment more fully on PGR matters. The Secretariat would discuss this with the Dean of Graduate Studies.

**Action: Dean of Graduate Studies/Secretariat**

ASQC/2013/09

Overview of Postgraduate External Examiner Reports 2011/2012

*Document: SEC/2013/3/0207*

The Committee received an overview report on themes and issues arising from the Postgraduate External Examiner reports from 2011/2012. The following points were noted.

- (i) The strength of Lancaster's provision at this level was evident from external examiner reports.
- (ii) External examiners had again commented favourably on the quality of the feedback being provided by Lancaster departments.
- (iii) More comments were being made on provision of information to students. Members heard that HEFCE was undertaking further work on the information needs of PGT students.
- (iv) The level of written English displayed by some students had been identified as a concern by several examiners, and this was also coming through in ATR reports.

**Action: Chair (see also minute 8.5.2)**

- (v) An area noted for consideration related to the assessment and marking of group work. Members confirmed that this was an issue for all faculties. The Committee was interested to hear that LUMS had set up focus groups to look into it in more depth, and asked LUMS to bring their findings to a future meeting of the Committee.
- (vi) Members heard that late submission of reports by externals had been a concern in some departments, and there had been some instances of non-submission. The Academic Registrar confirmed that the Secretariat routinely sent out reminders to external examiners who had not submitted their reports.

**Action: Secretariat to investigate and report back**

ASQC/2013/10      External Examiners

10.1      External Examiners and Course Approvals

*Document: SEC/2013/3/0220*

- 10.1.1 The Committee received a proposal on external input into the course approvals process.
- 10.1.2 It was noted that the report of the last QAA Institutional audit of Lancaster (March 2009) had made a number of recommendations for consideration by the University. Among these was a recommendation that it would be desirable for the University to require an element of formal

external academic input to programme approval. Subsequent to the receipt of the QAA report containing this recommendation consideration had been given to ways of gaining external academic input including:

- (i) the appointment of an external academic assessor for the programme approval process (which is standard practice in some other HEIs);
- (ii) asking existing external examiners for comment and input during the programme approval process.

It was agreed that (ii) would be preferable given that the then course approvals process already required departments to have consulted their external examiners about proposed new or significantly modified programmes.

The University had responded in these terms as part of its mid-cycle report to the QAA (see document SEC/2012/3/0220). To reflect agreed procedures, a question about consultation with external examiners was incorporated into the online course design and approval tool (CAIT) when it was introduced in 2012-2013. However, faculties had since reported concerns amongst departments about this requirement to consult external examiner as part of the course approval process.

10.1.3 The Committee was asked to discuss the QAA recommendation that the University require formal external academic input to programme approval, and either approve a requirement that departments consult their external examiners when making proposals for new or modified degree programmes (or contributory modules which significantly alter the structure or nature of the degree programmes), or consider alternative ways of obtaining external academic input to the programme approval process which would meet the QAA's requirements.

10.1.4 The Committee noted that a check on the procedures of comparable universities had shown that without exception external input was fully integrated into their course approvals processes. In the majority of cases external input was sought from an external academic other than a current or recent external examiner, and there was also provision for consultation with relevant professionals or industry experts.

10.1.5 The following points were made in discussion:

- (i) in its new *Quality Code*, the QAA placed increased emphasis on independent and external participation in the management of academic standards;
- (ii) concern was noted that in highly competitive markets such as PGT, departments might be uneasy about passing on details of new courses to academics from competitor institutions. In some subjects, input from industry would be more helpful;
- (iii) consideration needed to be given to the nature of the comments required from external advisors, as well as the point in the approvals process when comments were received;
- (iv) Lancaster's alumni networks could provide a useful source of external input into course approvals.

10.1.6 The Committee felt that further discussion on how to consult externals was needed and it was **agreed** that faculty teaching committees should be asked to include an item on the agendas for their June meetings.

**Action: Faculty Teaching Committees**

## 10.2 External Examining Regulations and Procedures

*Document: SEC/2013/3/0221*

10.2.1 Following publication of Chapter B7 of the *QAA Quality Code* on external examining, the University made a number of changes to its regulations and practices to align with the *Code*. The Committee received a paper setting out changes already implemented and points for further review.

10.2.2 The Committee **noted** the changes already implemented with respect to:

- (i) revising the term of appointment to align with the *Code*;
- (ii) publication of details of external examiners to students;
- (iii) making external examiner reports available in full to students.

10.2.3 The Committee heard that the *Quality Code* now contained comprehensive national criteria on the appointment of external examiners covering the person specification, conflicts of interest, and terms of office (Indicator 5). The Committee **approved** a proposal to incorporate the national criteria into the University's regulations and guidance, noting that the national criteria covered the same ground as the University's current criteria and guidance, though there were some differences in wording.

**Action: Secretariat**

10.2.4 The attention of the Committee was drawn to the following issues that might warrant further review.

(i) Appointment of first-time external examiners

The Committee noted the QAA's guidance (Indicator 5) on supporting first-time external examiners and discussed whether a more systematic approach to mentoring and supporting first-time external examiners would be worthwhile. Members suggested that this issue might usefully be brought together with reviewing the University's current arrangements for the induction of all external examiners. It was agreed that Faculty Associate Deans for Teaching would ask their departments for information on their current arrangements, in preparation for setting up a small group to take discussion further and make recommendations.

(ii) Institutional support for staff acting as external examiners elsewhere

The Committee noted that the *Quality Code* now included guidance for institutions on supporting their own staff who act as external examiners elsewhere (Indicator 11). Members discussed how external examining was taken into account in work allocation models and promotions, but felt that it would be helpful to have more information about how external examining duties were already recognised and supported in departments. It was agreed to gather more information and return to discussion at a future meeting.

**Action: Secretariat to refer to DoGS-AG and DUGS-AG for discussion**

*Document: SEC/2013/3/0222*

- 11.1 The Committee received a paper from Richard Clark (LUSU Vice-President, Academic) *Working together to improve assessment and feedback at Lancaster University*. Introducing the paper, Mr Clark commented that whilst feedback at Lancaster was broadly good, it remained a concern for a significant number of students. Lancaster's approach and commitment to assessment and feedback quality was embedded in a number of existing policies and documents, including the Academic Contact Policy, the Student Charter and the Assessment Policy. However from a student perspective, it was perhaps somewhat hidden, and it was felt that more could be done with regard to expectations on feedback quality. The paper proposed that the University work together with LUSU to explore the idea of a code of practice for departments.
- 11.2 The Committee welcomed the opportunity for further discussion with LUSU. Members recalled that there had been a review of this area in 2010, and suggested that a good starting point would be to review its conclusions. The following ideas were put forward for possible consideration:
- developing a code of practice that could be contextualised at the departmental level, as well as setting institutional requirements;
  - understanding what 'good' feedback is, and where and how it is given;
  - introducing a 'due back date' for feedback on student work, in addition to the four-week turnaround requirement.

**Action: Chair and LUSU**

**Section C**                      **Items to note**

*Document: SEC/2013/3/0223*

At the end of each academic year the Academic Standards and Quality team updates the Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures (MARP), in consultation with colleagues, to

incorporate any changes in regulations and procedures agreed during the year. The Committee **noted** for information the structure of MARP, as attached, which had been revised slightly for the 2013-14 edition.

ASQC/2013/13      New Periodic Quality Review Procedures and Schedule

The Committee **noted** that following the last meeting of the Committee, further revisions to the schedule of PQRs had been agreed and had been circulated to the Faculty Associate Deans for Teaching. The first year of the new cycle of reviews would be 2013-2014.

ASQC/2013/14      Higher Education Achievement Report

*Document: SEC/2013/3/0224*

The Committee **noted** a paper on the Higher Education Achievement Report, which would be introduced at Lancaster for the 2013 graduating cohort.

ASQC/2013/15      Date of Next Meeting

**Wednesday 10 July at 1.00 pm in the John Welch Room.**

Schedule of meetings for academic year 2013-2014:

5 September 2013 at 2.00 p.m.  
7 November 2013 at 2.00 p.m.  
28 January 2014 at 10.00 a.m. (Faculty UG ATR reports)  
6 May 2014 at 10.00 a.m. (Faculty PG ATR reports)  
9 July 2014 at 2.00 p.m.

All meetings will take place in the John Welch Room.