

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

Academic Standards and Quality Committee:
minutes of a meeting held on 7 November 2013

Present: Professor A G Chetwynd (Chair)
Professor G Blower
Dr B Costea
*(for Professor Hendry and
Professor Shackleton)*
Dr C Edwards
Professor G Johnes
Dr R Lauder
Professor C Milligan
Mr J O'Neill
Professor C Rogers
Mrs L Wareing

In attendance: Mr C Cottam
Mr S Cresswell
Ms K Fenton
Ms A McFarlane (Secretary)
Mr A Okey

Apologies for absence were received from: Dr G Brown, Mr I Denny, Professor L Hendry, Dr J Howard, Professor M Shackleton

Section A **Introductory items**

ASQC/2013/36 Minutes

Document: SEC/2013/3/0695

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2013 were confirmed as an accurate record.

ASQC/2013/37

Matters arising

International Masters in Practicing Management (LUMS): proposal for grade conversion (minute ASQC/2013/32 refers)

It was reported that a revised proposal was expected to come to a future meeting.

ASQC/2013/38

Report on Chair's Action

The Committee noted the following proposals approved by the Chair on behalf the Academic Standards and Quality Committee since the meeting on 5 September 2013:

(i) Approval of regulations for the Lancaster University MBChB

The regulations had been approved by the Dean of Undergraduate Studies

(ii) Revisions to the regulations for the BA and MA/PGDip Social Work programmes

Revisions to programme-specific regulations to meet the requirements of the Health and Care Professions Council.

The revisions had been approved by the Dean of Undergraduate Studies and by the Dean of Graduate Studies.

Section B

Items for discussion

ASQC/2013/39

National Student Survey 2013

Document: PSU/2013/0134

- 39.1 The Committee **received** an initial report on the National Student Survey and **noted** that it had been discussed by the Senate on 30 October 2013. A fuller analysis would be presented at the next meeting of Senate, which would include the subject-level results, an assessment of the University's success in responding to the issues for action identified in the 2012 results and the planned actions for the coming year in response to the latest results.

- 39.2 The Committee noted that summaries of 2013 NSS data had been sent to departments in September. Departmental responses and action plans would be considered at faculty teaching committees this term. Professor Chetwynd had written to departments regarding the positive feedback from last year's first year students regarding the academic tutor system.
- 39.3 The attention of the Committee was drawn to a consultation currently being undertaken by HEFCE on the future of the National Student Survey.

ASQC/2013/40 Undergraduate External Examiners' Reports 2012-2013

Document: SEC/2013/3/0697

- 40.1 The Committee **considered** annual institutional summaries of themes and issues arising from external examiner reports on undergraduate programmes. The summary report was presented in three sections:

- A: reports for Lancaster-based programmes
- B: reports for programmes delivered at the University's international teaching partners: Sunway University in Kuala Lumpur; COMSATS Institute of Information Technology in Lahore; G D Goenka World Institute in New Delhi
- C: reports for programmes delivered at the University's regional teaching partners: Blackburn College and Blackpool and The Fylde College.

40.2 Section A: Undergraduate programmes delivered at Lancaster University 2012-2013

The Committee noted that the reports of external examiners had been overwhelming positive. Significant numbers of reports had highlighted the quality and standards of the curriculum, the high levels of student achievement, the evidence of a high standard of teaching and the commitment of staff to teaching and care of the students, with some of them identifying the programme as being amongst the best in the country.

The following points were made by the Committee in relation to areas identified for further consideration and possible action:

- (a) Part I/Part II structure. The Committee noted the comment by one external examiner that the University should 'weigh up the advantages of providing a broader education at first year against the disadvantages of students not being able to concentrate full-time on their major interest'. This was not thought to be an issue at present, though it was noted that a review of the structure of the Lancaster degree had been suggested, in the context of enhancing opportunities for international experience and employability.
- (b) A check would be made on advice given to departments regarding information to be provided to external examiners and a note sent to departments.
- (c) It had been suggested that the University may be out of step with institutions elsewhere in not requiring anonymous marking for coursework and the presentation of results at the examination board. It was agreed that the latest QAA guidance would be checked, and if necessary the committee would return to this issue at a future meeting.
- (d) The Committee would return to comments regarding enhancing use of the VLE at the next meeting, as part of its scrutiny of faculty ATR reports. The committee was aware of good practice in this area and there may be opportunities to share such expertise.

40.3 Section B: International Teaching Partners: Sunway, Goenka and COMSATS 2012-2013

The Committee noted that the external examiner reports for the international teaching partners (ITPs) were considered in departments and faculties, however it was felt that it would be useful to bring together the points made in relation to the ITPs, for consideration as a group.

The following points were made in discussion:

- (a) since external examiners were sometimes diplomatic in the language they used to express their concerns, some of the issues raised might potentially warrant further investigation by the University;
- (b) the importance of ensuring that any concerns raised were effectively pursued was emphasised;

- (c) departments and faculties, along with the faculty Directors of International Teaching Partnerships, were responsible, in the first instance, for pursuing points raised by external examiners with the partners concerned;
- (d) a check would be made to ensure that the process for consideration of and response to external examiner reports relating to ITPs was operating as intended.

Action: Secretariat/Faculties/Departments to check that the above process is operating as intended

40.4 Section C: Regional Teaching Partners: Blackpool and the Fylde College and Blackburn College 2012-2013

The Committee received the summary report on themes and issues arising from external examiner reports for Blackpool and The Fylde College and Blackburn College and noted that it would be considered in detail by the Collaborative Provision Teaching Committee (CPTC) in January, alongside reports on the outcomes of the annual programme review process. There were no issues that the Academic Standards and Quality Committee wished to draw to the attention of the CPTC.

ASQC/2013/41 Annual Teaching Review Process

41.1 Faculty reports for 2012-2013

The committee **noted** that consideration of the faculty annual teaching review reports was scheduled for the following meetings of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee

Undergraduate reports:	28 January 2014
Postgraduate reports:	6 May 2014.

41.2 Annual teaching reviews in International Teaching Partnerships

Document: SEC/2013/3/0693

The Committee **endorsed** a modification to the conduct of Annual Teaching Reviews in the University's International Teaching partnerships, that was proposed in order to make the ATR process more applicable to the individual partners and ultimately, therefore, more useful to the University in determining the equivalence of standards and quality across its full range of provision. It was agreed that faculties should exercise flexibility in their timing for initial scrutiny of the ATR reports in order that any urgent or emerging issues could be addressed in a timely manner.

41.3 Summary of responses to institutional issues identified by faculties

Document: SEC/2013/3/0698

The Committee **noted** an update on progress regarding issues identified by faculties in their ATR reports for academic year 2011-2012.

The following points were drawn to the attention of the Committee.

- The Planning Support Unit was looking at ways that ATR datasets could be made available in phases, so that departments would have earlier access to the majority of the data.
- APEL/APL. New sections of the QAA UK Quality Code relating to this area had been published in the last few days and a paper would be brought to a future meeting of the Academic and Standards Quality Committee.
- Lift access in the Faraday building continued to be a problem. The Chair undertook to check on progress.

ASQC/2013/42 Review of the Committee of Senate

Document: SEC/2013/3/0696

The Committee received the report of a review of the Committee of Senate and discussed the options presented.

The review had been undertaken to consider whether the responsibilities of the Committee of Senate for confirmation of final results for undergraduate awards should continue to be exercised through its annual July meeting, or could be fulfilled on its behalf by a smaller committee or by a named officer of the University such as the Dean of Undergraduate Studies.

The majority of the discussion at the Committee of Senate was around 'special cases' (students where the examination board wished to recommend a degree outside the one derived from the application of the classification algorithm), particularly borderline cases. New assessment regulations had been introduced in October 2011 and the first cohort to graduate under the new regulations had completed in July 2013. The new assessment regulations had brought clearer criteria and had reduced the number of borderline cases requiring discussion.

Members' views on the options presented were mixed, however the majority opinion was that it would be preferable to continue with the meeting of Committee of Senate as presently constituted for at least one more year. It was felt that the meeting was useful to departments in developing a shared understanding of the new classification regulations, particularly in the first years of their application.

It was **agreed** to look again at the issue in a year's time.

Action: Secretary to add to schedule of future business

ASQC/2013/43

Review and Appeals, Student Complaints and Fitness to Practice procedures

Document: SEC/2013/3/0684

The Committee received a paper proposing a review of the University's procedures for Review and Appeals, Student Complaints and Fitness to practice. Introducing the paper, the Academic Registrar reported that though an initial review had shown that Review and Appeals procedures broadly met the requirement of the *QAA Quality Code Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints*, an analysis of comparable institutions (Appendix 1 of the above paper) had indicated that Lancaster was out of line with sector practice in some key areas. A full review of procedures would therefore be timely and would give an opportunity for the University to assess its procedures in greater depth and enhance the advice and guidance given to students and staff. For similar reasons, the University should also review its procedures for Student Complaints and Fitness to Practice.

Members welcomed the proposal.

The Committee:

- (i) **approved** a recommendation to review the Review and Appeals, Student Complaints and Fitness to Practice procedures;
- (ii) **agreed** that the Academic Standards and Quality team in the Secretariat would consult widely with colleagues across the University, including LUSU and produce recommendations for the Academic Standards and Quality Committee.

Action: ASQ team, Secretariat

ASQC/2013/44

Amendments to Undergraduate Regulations

Document: SEC/2013/3/0671

The Committee received a proposal from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies to amend the Undergraduate Regulations, relating to:

1. scaling of marks;
2. maximum condonable credits.

Members noted that the proposal was being put forward in light of operating the new undergraduate assessment regulations through their first cycle. The effect of both changes was in favour of students, and it was proposed that they be approved for immediate implementation. The changes had been welcomed by DUGS-AG, though not all faculties had yet had the opportunity to comment. It was requested that examination boards be alerted to the changes.

The Committee **approved** the proposal for immediate implementation **subject to** confirmation that faculties were in favour.

Action: Secretariat to amend Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures

ASQC/2013/45

Compulsory class attendance and associated penalties at GD Goenka World Institute

Document: SEC/2013/3/0694

The Committee was asked to approve a proposal from the Academic Registrar to make class attendance at GDGWI compulsory, with the penalty that failure to achieve the required level of attendance would prohibit students from participating in assessment and examinations.

The Academic Registrar reported that the proposal was being made at the request of GDGWI in light of ongoing attendance problems that were adversely affecting student retention, progression and achievement. Approval in principle was being sought, subject to a workable means of implementation being devised in consultation with Lancaster staff, and evaluation of the impact after one year. If approved, the new requirement would be implemented at the start of the 2014/15 year.

The following points were made in discussion.

- Mr O'Neill (LUSU Vice President Education) expressed his concern regarding the proposal. He believed that insufficient account was being taken of student welfare; there was usually an underlying reason for poor attendance and this should be explored.
- The Committee heard that there was already pastoral support for attendance at GDGWI, and that several other initiatives had already been tried without success. Compulsory attendance requirements and penalties for failing to meet them were common practice in Indian universities.

The Committee was broadly sympathetic to the proposal, provided that further assurances were received and written into the procedures relating to (i) the pastoral support available to students; (ii) exploration of any underlying reasons for poor attendance; and (iii) the opportunity for discretion to be applied in exceptional circumstances. The committee **agreed** to return to discussion of the proposal once this information was received.

ASQC/2013/46

Postgraduate Regulations

- 46.1 The Faculty of Health and Medicine teaching committee requested that the following issues be discussed by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee.
- I. Suitability of the Alternative Format PhD for some disciplines.
 - II. Reviewing the requirement for an oral examination for the MA/MSc by Research.
- 46.2 Colleagues in the Faculty of Health and Medicine had questioned the suitability of the Alternative Format PhD in their disciplines, and had pointed particularly to difficulties regarding co-authorship. The Committee heard that departments were not obliged to accept this form of submission if they preferred not to do so, however in some disciplines the Alternative Format PhD was increasingly becoming the norm internationally. The Dean of Graduate Studies confirmed that his approval for submission in Alternative Format was not required, and that this was a decision for the Head of Department.

- 46.3 With respect to the MA/MSc by Research, the Committee **agreed** that the requirement for an oral examination must be retained, however arrangements could be made for the oral examination to be held away from Lancaster, via teleconferencing, Skype, or similar, if there was good reason.

Professor Milligan undertook to report back to the Faculty of Health and Medicine teaching committee.

Section B

Items to note

ASQC/2013/47

Periodic Quality Reviews 2013-2014

The Committee **noted** that the following departments were scheduled for periodic quality review in 2013-2014, in accordance with the schedule agreed with the faculties. All departments had been contacted and arrangements were being made for the reviews to take place in the Lent and Summer terms.

- Biomedical and Life Sciences
- Health Research
- Lancaster Environment Centre
- Management Development Division
- Natural Sciences
- Politics, Philosophy and Religion (PPR)
- Sociology.

ASQC/2013/48

Lancaster University Ghana

The Academic Registrar reported that a group had been established, chaired by the Dean of Undergraduate Studies, to co-ordinate the approval of undergraduate programmes to be delivered at the Ghana campus next academic year.

ASQC/2013/49

Departmental student representatives

Mr O'Neill (LUSU Vice-President Education) reported that the departments of History and Marketing had taken part in the pilot of online elections for departmental student representatives, and that the pilots had gone well. It was noted that LUSU had provided training for over 300 student representatives this year, and Mr O'Neill recorded his thanks to staff in LUSU.

ASQC/2013/50

Date of next meeting

Dates of further meetings of the committee in academic year 2013-2014 are as follows:

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, University House.**