

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

Academic Standards and Quality Committee
minutes of a meeting held on 11 March 2015

Present: Dr A Collins
Mr I Denny
Dr C Edwards
Professor S Huttly (Chair)
Dr R Lauder
Professor C Milligan
Professor C Rogers
Professor M Shackleton
Professor S Skogly
Mrs L Wareing
Professor M Wright

In attendance:
Ms J Anstee (Secretary)
Mr S Cresswell
Dr J Howard
Mr A Okey
Ms R White

Apologies: Professor A Chetwynd
Professor L Hendry
Mr C Cottam

SECTION A INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

ASQC/2015/14 Minutes

Documents: SEC/2015/3/0146; SEC/2015/3/0106

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2015 were confirmed as an accurate record.

Document: SEC/2015/3/0147

Members received the updated report on progress with matters arising and outstanding actions. The following matters were noted in particular.

- 15.1 *Item 7: UGAR review* – this would be initiated over the summer vacation and would incorporate the 2015 results.
- 15.2 *Item 9: Study Skills Support* – the last meeting of the Thematic Review on Learning Support had now taken place. The report was being finalised and would be submitted to UMAG shortly. Recommendations relevant to the Committee's work would be considered at a future meeting.
- 15.3 *Item 14: PGR submission and completion data* – responsibility for the preparation and analysis of this data had moved from Student Registry to the Planning Support Unit (PSU). The Chair would liaise with the PSU over the future provision of this data.
- 15.4 *Item 16: Development of distance learning policy* – Dr Diane Potts from Linguistics and English Language had been seconded to develop this policy and work had now started. She would be making contact with staff in departments and faculties.
- 15.5 *Item 18: PGR development and training* – A task force group comprising PGR Faculty Training Co-ordinators and OED was undertaking a mapping of provision, reviewing synergies and identifying gaps.
- 15.6 *Item 19: Provision of feedback on exams* – USAG and PSAG had discussed this and agreed University guidance should be produced. This would include different models of feedback by way of examples. It was intended the guidance would be available for 2015/16 implementation.
- 15.7 *Item 45: HEFCE consultation on future approaches to quality assessment* – the Chair thanked all those who had commented on the consultation document. The University's response had been submitted to HEFCE and the Chair was hoping to attend a HEFCE meeting at the end of March on the outcomes of the consultation.
- 15.8 *January examination period*: Following initial consultation with faculties and within USAG, a small review group would be set up to consider the merits and logistics of instituting a January examination period.

- 15.9 *Part I Review*: Following recent consultation with faculties and within USAG, a Part I Review Group would be set up after Easter, to include representation from faculties.

ASQC/2015/16 Schedule of Business: 2014/15

Document: SEC/2015/3/145

The Committee received the updated schedule of business for the year.

SECTION B ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

ASQC/2015/17 Faculty Postgraduate Annual Teaching Review Reports 2013/14

The Chair thanked the Postgraduate ADTs for their reports, which provided much useful data. Readers reported on their findings and identified areas of effective practice. ADTs responded to comments and questions, as noted below.

17.1 Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

Document: SEC/2015/3/0150

17.1.1 This was a very thorough report which highlighted significant issues and provided examples of much good practice in departments; including: the conversion of low recruiting modules into Special Subject modules with amended delivery in order to retain their availability as specialist modules (English and Creative Writing); the approval of coursework extensions only by the MA director in order to ensure consistency of treatment (English and Creative Writing); the use of video-conferencing in all departmental research seminars which enables off-site doctoral students to participate as audience members and presenters (Educational Research); the engagement of PGR students in delivery of PGT programmes (three departments); writing retreats (two departments); and the use of a Personal Tutor for PhD students (Sociology).

17.1.2 It was noted the Faculty had commenced a preliminary review of its PGT provision whilst awaiting the outcomes of the University's review and had already identified a number of areas for change.

- 17.1.3 The Committee noted the survey work done on departmental practice in workload allocations for probationary staff undertaking the CAP programme. Substantial diversity existed here. The Chair reported that the VC was exploring workload models in his meetings with departments. It was agreed it would be useful for the Director of OED to report back to the Committee on what the current guidance was. The Director noted as a related matter that there would need to be similar guidance for non-probationary staff undertaking accreditation through the ATLAS scheme.
- 17.1.4 It was noted the Faculty has several distance learning courses and that whilst there was an informal University-wide forum on distance learning, run by OED, it would be useful to flag up consideration of the need for a more formal support system as part of the work on the development of a University distance learning policy. The postgraduate ADT for FASS confirmed that the Faculty was looking for more support than simply a formal forum: there was a lack of technical knowledge and a concern not to reinvent the wheel. The Chair confirmed that DL and online learning would be key elements in development of the University's education strategy.
- 17.1.5 The Faculty's report on the availability of bursaries and the impact on student recruitment was discussed. The Faculty felt it was at a disadvantage compared to other institutions, both in the number of bursaries on offer and in the fact that only home fees were waived – subsistence was not covered – and there were almost no bursaries available for overseas students. The postgraduate ADT confirmed that discussions on future scholarships strategy were taking place in FASS.
- 17.1.6 The Faculty report identified issues over staffing – both academic and non-academic – as impacting on its ability to recruit, support and supervise PhD students. The postgraduate ADT had investigated the concerns of individual departments on this and had found examples of where the University's guidance on supervision workload (6 FTEs) was exceeded. And in practice, 6 FTEs could mean significantly more students if team supervision and part-time students were factored in. The Chair noted that staffing levels were a matter for faculties to consider through the planning procedures. The ADT reported a bid had been made for additional administrative resource.
- 17.1.7 ***Institutional-level actions.*** Of the actions identified for the University, 1, 2 and 4 were already being addressed (it was confirmed the Thematic Review on Learning Support included PGT students).

Action 3: PGR appraisal system: The Faculty had reported concerns over the limitations of the system, although use of the new system was not reflected in the report. FST found the new system to be working well. It was agreed it would be helpful to keep it under review via PSAG.

17.2 Faculty of Health and Medicine

Document: SEC/2015/3/0151

17.2.1 This was a thorough and positive report. External Examiner reports had been very complimentary. The success of the Division of Health Research in attracting large numbers of students onto its blended learning doctorates programme was noted. The recent amendment to the University's policy on the accreditation of prior learning had produced positive outcomes for CETAD.

17.2.2 Concerns persisted in Biomedical and Life Sciences over the availability of research laboratory space for students in the context of growing PGT numbers. The Department was actively reviewing how this could be managed.

17.2.3 The supervision of doctoral students on the blended learning doctoral programmes was being managed effectively through Skype and experience showed that there was no significant difference here between the distance learning and campus-based students although there were challenges in managing the time differences for Skype conferences. Confirmation panels were also conducted by Skype. In addition to their supervisor, overseas students were assigned another member of staff who acted as a mentor to provide more generalised support and this extra level of support was working well.

17.2.4 ***Institutional-level actions***

Coursework marking and feedback turnaround: The Faculty had highlighted the difficulty of getting teaching staff delivering in clinical/professional settings to adhere to deadlines for turnaround time for marking and feeding back on coursework. All efforts were made to do so and the Committee noted the data showed that FHM's performance for the return of PGT coursework on time was good.

Guidance on the award of Distinction on Master's by Research programmes. The University regulations provide for the classification of Distinction on Master's by Research programmes. These are PGR programmes assessed by viva of the thesis. Currently there are no criteria for the award of Distinction on these programmes. The Committee noted that the Director of QAE already had this as a regulatory amendment to be addressed.

17.3 Management School (LUMS)

Document: SEC/2015/3/0152

- 17.3.1 This was an interesting, comprehensive and positive report. Feedback from External Examiners was particularly pleasing.
- 17.3.2 The development of students' employment-related skills through credit-rated activities which were integral to a number of the PGT programmes was noted.
- 17.3.3 The Faculty's continuing action in monitoring departmental arrangements for adhering to the four-week coursework turnaround time was noted. This was done via the Faculty teaching committees where Directors of Study were able to review progress.
- 17.3.4 The Committee noted the concerns raised by the accreditation body, the Association of MBAs (AMBA) in relation to the Global MBA, and that it had imposed a series of conditions which had to be met in order to maintain accreditation for the whole MBA portfolio. A stipulated minimum cohort size of 20 was a key issue. This was a challenging requirement to fulfil in relation to partner institutions and in the context of the very competitive market for the Global MBA. The Faculty was actively addressing the PSRB conditions.
- 17.3.5 Informal drop-in sessions organised by Directors of Study for students to receive feedback and participate in general discussions about the programme were noted by the Committee. These sessions were organised by a number of departments and were proving useful. Informality was the key, and feedback was not necessarily limited to a particular piece of coursework.
- 17.3.6 The Faculty was piloting the Graduway online alumni platform which it hoped would enable them to significantly increase its knowledge of, and tap into, alumni employment.

17.3.7 ***Institutional-level actions.*** Institutional issues identified for action were: the provision of further suitable teaching and PhD space, and the resolution of issues surrounding the delivery of MBA programmes to International Teaching Partners. These matters were being addressed through the relevant fora.

17.4 Faculty of Science and Technology

Document: SEC/2015/3/0153

17.4.1 This was a concise and readable report. The majority of the actions from the previous year's ATR had been completed. The Faculty was congratulated on its success in attracting external funding for new and innovative programmes at Master's level.

17.4.2 The summer internship programme run by the DTC in Statistics and Operational Research was highlighted as a very valuable initiative and an exemplar of best practice. As well as being instrumental in attracting strong UG and PGT candidates to undertake a PhD at Lancaster, it provided valuable experience for existing PhD students in their supervision of the interns.

17.4.3 In relation to the ongoing work at Faculty level to secure more placement opportunities for PGT students in Psychology, the Associate Dean reported that this was impacted by the amount of staffing resource available for this work.

17.4.4 ***Institutional-level issues.*** A number of these were similar to other faculties: a request for more marketing support, more language support, and the completion of estates projects to address space needs.

Electronic marking – the Faculty reported that a number of technical issues with the electronic marking system available through Turnitin needed resolving at University level (e.g. in relation to the anonymisation of work and printout of feedback). FASS reported no difficulties however, and it was suggested the two faculties liaise on their experiences of using the system.

ATR form – whilst not raised formally as an institutional issue, the Faculty had drawn attention to the ATR form where it was felt that changes to the original question set distracted discussion away from the main purpose of the review. As such, it was felt that discussion was no longer focussed on the core student experience. It was noted that this was being looked at as part of the review of the form.

Documents: SEC/2015/3/0148; SEC/2015/3/0126

- 18.1 The Director of QAE presented the institutional analysis of External Examiner reports received for postgraduate provision 2013/14 and noted that overall these were positive for the University. The Committee noted the statement under 3.1 (Comparability of standards) which stated that “the majority” of External Examiners had agreed that programme standards were comparable with similar provision and asked whether this meant there was a minority of programmes where standards were not comparable. The Academic Registrar agreed to investigate this with the author of the report.
- 18.2 It was noted that two issues had been raised for institutional consideration which would be referred to PSAG (and USAG) for discussion:
- (i) whether it would be reasonable to provide institutional guidance on the resolution of cases where there is a large variation in marks between first and second markers;
 - (ii) whether there should be an institutional policy on students’ access to Turnitin reports (currently the decision to let students see these rests with departments).
- 18.3 Two matters had been raised as matters for internal communication:
- (i) all markers to be reminded to use the full extent of the marking range, including the top end, up to 100% where appropriate;
 - (ii) external examiners can and should be given access to the relevant courses on Moodle.
- 18.4 The report noted a “relatively large number” of Examiners had commented that courses would benefit from a wider range of assessment methods other than the standard essay assignment. The Chair queried how big a problem this was as it had not been carried through to the section in the report on issues identified for institutional action. The Academic Registrar agreed to investigate this with the author of the report.
- 18.5 The postgraduate ADT Dean for FHM noted that the highlighted example by an External Examiner of a mark of 72 being awarded without any negative feedback (which was given as an example of not using the full range of marks) was more likely to indicate

imprecise feedback rather than a reluctance to use the higher end of the marking scale. She also reported that External Examiners, as requested, had now been invited to the Autumn Academy, provided for students on the distance learning doctoral programmes.

ASQC/2015/19 External Examiner Procedures: Progress Report on Enhancement Work

Documents: SEC/2015/3/0156; SEC/2015/3/0128

- 19.1 *Availability of External Examiner reports:* The Committee noted the view that the provision of these reports on a confidential basis could best be done centrally rather than by departments. It was agreed to revisit the matter.
- 19.2 *Mentoring of External Examiners new to the role:* The Committee considered the draft guidelines on the mentoring arrangements for External Examiners new to the role and noted that the mentor should be proposed by the department at the time of nominating the new External Examiner and be drawn from the existing team of External Examiners for that department. It was expected that the mentor would act independently of the department in guiding and advising the mentee. The Committee also noted that OED had developed materials on mentoring which could be helpful. The Committee **approved** the mentoring guidelines **subject to** clarification of the division of responsibility between the department and the mentor in respect of the mentee and the addition of information on the support available to the mentor.

ASQC/2015/20 Report on Monitoring of Turnaround Times for Coursework Marking and Feedback (Michaelmas Term Assignments)

Document: SEC/2015/3/0159

- 20.1 The Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement introduced the report on the monitoring of turnaround times for coursework marking and feedback for Michaelmas Term assignments which showed how effective departments had been in meeting the four-week deadline. The report had been presented to UMAG and sent to all Heads of Department. There were some excellent results as well as some room for improvement. Sometimes there had been valid reasons in cases where the deadline had not been met (e.g. staff sickness).

- 20.2 Departments would be asked to undertake a similar exercise for Lent assignments in the Summer term. Later in the year the overall results for the session would be looked at and departments asked to comment explicitly on these in their ATRs for 2014/15.
- 20.3 In the interests of transparency departments were encouraged to publish to students the return-by dates alongside the submission dates on LUSI.
- 20.4 The Chair noted wider issues in relation to NSS scores on assessment and feedback which she was in discussion with the Provost about (e.g. the timing of module-level feedback which mostly takes place before assessment happens; the usefulness of seeking programme-level feedback at stages earlier than the final year). She commented on the need to reflect more on the data provided.
- 20.5 The Vice President Education for the Students' Union reported that LUSU Academic Council had recently discussed the impact on students of the move to letter grades and had concluded that:
- it was harder for students to get a feel for their progression as letter grades were not as granular as percentage marking;
 - there was inconsistency across the University in the use of marks, with a mix in the use of percentage grades, letter grades and the aggregated scores 1-20;
 - more clarity was needed around the use of marking criteria.
- 20.6 The Committee noted that a number of items around assessment and feedback approaches had been raised in the meeting. The Chair agreed to consider whether there may be value in setting up a working group, noting that FASS were also reviewing some aspects and that LUMS had recently concluded a review of feedback approaches. The Academic Registrar agreed to seek out a working group on assessment report from a few years back.
- 20.7 The Committee requested the correction of an error in the spreadsheet relating to the Psychology return.

ASQC/2015/21 Amendments to Assessment Regulations for Taught Programmes of Study

Document: SEC/2015/3/0160

- 21.1 The Committee received recommendations from USAG and PSAG for amendments to the assessment regulations for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes of study, as detailed in the document.

- 21.2 The postgraduate ADT for FST reported that there had been further discussion within the Faculty on the amendment to the PGT assessment regulations concerning the requirement to undertake reassessment in failed modules prior to condonation (amendments to MARP 12.6.1 and 12.7.1) and that half of the departments were not happy with the proposed change. The Committee agreed to refer this amendment back to PSAG for further discussion.
- 21.3 With the exception of the amendments referred to in M.21.2 the Committee **approved** the amendments to the assessment regulations for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes of study as detailed; to take effect from 2015/16 (for inclusion in MARP 2015).

ASQC/2015/22 Learning, Teaching and Assessment Principles

Document: SEC/2015/3/0157

- 22.1 The Director of QAE presented a draft University statement on its learning, teaching and assessment principles. These had been derived largely from the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy (previously laid down) and associated Assessment Policy. The Chair noted this was a high-level set of principles rather than a strategy or policy document.
- 22.2 It was agreed the reference to academic staff should be expanded to include teaching-related staff who had input into learning, teaching and assessment activities.
- 22.3 The statement was **approved, subject to** the amendment noted above (M.21.2 refers).

SECTION C: ITEMS TO NOTE

ASQC/2015/23 QAA HER Update: HER Steering Group Notes and Other Matters of Report

Documents: SEC/2015/3/0158; SEC/2015/3/0123

The Committee received for information the notes of the HER Steering Group meeting held on 21 January 2015.

ASQC/2015/24 New Integrated Master's Awards (MArts Hons and MPsy Hons)

Document: SEC/2015/3/0161

- 24.1 The Committee noted that Senate had approved the two new Integrated Master's awards of MArts (Hons) and MPsy (Hons) proposed by FST. A report had been made by the Chair to Senate on these awards following consultation of the Committee by correspondence.
- 24.2 It was confirmed that the award of MArts (Hons) could be used by FASS without further recourse to the Committee or Senate, should it wish to do so.

ASQC/2015/25 Any Other Business

- 25.1 *Use of Twitter* – the Undergraduate ADT for FASS requested guidance on whether or not it was acceptable for a department to require students to use Twitter as a social media platform as part of their studies. Such a requirement would mean students would have to sign up to the company's data and security requirements in order to participate.
- 25.2 The Committee noted that the University had a social media policy, which should be adhered to, and that there were potentially other similar platforms which could be used. It was suggested that FASS consult with ISS to see if an alternative to Twitter could be set up.

The Vice President Education was asked to obtain the view of the Students' Union on the matter.

ASQC/2015/26 Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on 7 May 2015 at 2.00 p.m. in the John Welch Room, University House.