

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

Academic Standards and Quality Committee
Minutes of a meeting held on 22 January 2015

Present: Professor A Chetwynd
Dr A Collins
Mr I Denny
Dr C Edwards
Professor L Hendry
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 S Airey (*for item 10*)
Ms J Anstee (Secretary)
Mr C Cottam
Mr L Davis (*for item 10*)
Dr J Howard
Mr A Okey
Ms R White (*deputising for the Teaching Quality Support Officer, LUMS*)

Apologies: None

SECTION A INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

ASQC/2015/1 Welcome

Professor Skogly, FASS Associate Dean Teaching (Postgraduate Studies) and Dr Alan Collins FST Associate Dean Teaching (Undergraduate Studies) were welcomed as new members to the Committee.

ASQC/2015/2

Minutes

Documents: SEC/2015/3/0019; SEC/2014/3/815

The Academic Registrar reported that minute 56.2.1 needed to be amended to ensure it reflected more accurately actions taken in response to the External Examiner's report. The amended minute would be approved by the Chair. Subject to this amendment the minutes were confirmed as an accurate record.

Action: Assistant Registrar

ASQC/2015/3

Matters arising from the minutes and outstanding actions

3.1 Update report

Document: SEC/2015/3/0022

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

Item 5 – Students' Union guidance on plagiarism. The Education Manager for the Students' Union confirmed that this guidance had now been amended in line with the new Plagiarism Framework.

Item 14 – Provision of PGR completion data. The Academic Registrar would now be investigating this over the course of the Lent term.

Item 16 – Development of distance learning policy. The Chair reported a member of staff had been seconded to work part-time with her on this as part of the Digital Lancaster initiative.

Item 18 – PGR students training programmes. The Chair reported that a task force had been formed of Faculty Research Co-ordinators and OED to develop a proposal for the development of PGR students more generally, of which training programmes would form a part. This would be discussed at PSAG.

Item 29 – Provision of Study Abroad marks. ADTs reported they had communicated to departments the importance of providing marks to incoming Study Abroad students by 31 January.

Item 37 – New MLang programme, DELC. Professor Rogers confirmed the review of this new programme structure would be carried out at the appropriate time. He reported that FASS was looking at ways of systemising records of ongoing actions to ensure the timely tracking of actions.

3.2 Provision of alumni data and use of professional social media (M.51)

The Committee received a full and helpful report from the Director of Alumni, Development and Events on alumni work and in particular on the University's engagement with professional social media. The importance of Linked-In was noted. A number of members also reported positively on alumni initiatives being undertaken elsewhere in the University.

3.3 Annual summaries of External Examiner reports (M.56)

The Director of QAE reported on amendments to the annual summaries of External Examiner reports, following discussion of these at the last meeting. The template for these summaries had been amended so that they would include a report on actions being taken in response to the issues raised. The Committee noted the extract from the revised report on Lancaster-delivered provision which detailed actions being taken.

ASQC/2015/04 Report on Chair's Action

The Committee **noted** Chair's Action taken since the last meeting to approve the following matters.

4.1 Amendments to the regulations for the Degree of Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBChB).

4.2 Amendment to the schedule for PQR reviews 2013-17 in respect of the Lancaster Leadership Centre review.

ASQC/2015/05 Schedule of business: 2014/15

Document: SEC/2015/3/0024

The Committee received the updated schedule of business for the year. Faculty ATRs for postgraduate provision were due to be considered at the March meeting.

SECTION B

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

ASQC/2015/06

Faculty undergraduate Annual Teaching Review reports 2013/14

The Chair thanked the Undergraduate 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.

6.1 Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

6.1.1 This was a well-written and reflective report which highlighted issues and actions, faculty initiatives and examples of effective practice.

6.1.2 ***Enhancement initiatives.*** The Committee noted enhancement activities being undertaken within the Faculty, including:

- work to make degree programmes more attractive to applicants, including increasing the module offering (module choice had been the major source of negative comment in the NSS over the last three years);
- innovation in placement provision;
- schools liaison work;
- obtaining student feedback on an ongoing basis in order to be able to address student concerns in a more timely way;
- improvement to the faculty's learning support through the provision of workshops.

6.1.3 ***Faculty-level issues.*** The Committee noted issues directly related to questions of resource would be addressed through the planning process (see M.6.5.3 below). In relation to issues concerning the size and viability of the Faculty's degree programmes (for example joint honours programmes) the Chair noted that the University's strategy for growth was a topic for discussion in this year's VC's meetings with Departments. The Faculty intended to develop guidance on group work and group assessments and the assistance of LUMS and FHM in sharing effective practice in this area would be useful. The enhancement of learning support provision at Faculty level was noted. On this subject the Chair reported the Thematic Review on Learning Support would end shortly and would draw on existing good practice to build consensus on the most effective way forward here. The Faculty commented on issues attendant upon the increased offering of modules carrying smaller amounts of credit, but was cautiously optimistic about this initiative.

6.1.4 ***Institutional-level issues.*** The following institutional issues were identified by the Faculty.

Develop a policy on the provision of examination feedback. A review of current practice was already underway, with a view to developing institutional guidance on this (to be considered by the Committee at a future meeting).

Consider issues of space allocation and availability raised by the Faculty. This concerned the control and allocation of specialist space and the space allocation process within the timetabling of teaching. The Committee noted the area was complicated and there was no quick fix here. Initiatives to improve the module offering would also have a direct impact on space and timetabling. The Head of Student Registry noted that despite the issues raised, the area of timetabling was an area which students had reported on positively in the NSS (the University had come 7th on this aspect nationally).

Consider resourcing an expansion in staffing of undergraduate teaching. The Chair noted that staffing resources were part of the planning round discussions.

6.2 Faculty of Health and Medicine

6.2.1 The Committee noted much that was positive in the report, including the 100% overall student satisfaction score in the 2014 NSS for the Lancaster Medical School (LMS). LMS appeared to be coping well with the close scrutiny from the General Medical Council and the ADT reported the GMC had no real concerns over the University's ability to deliver a quality medical degree (it was noted that issues relating to the GMC's concerns over the outcomes of inspections of the local hospital trust were not within the Faculty or University's control and would not impact on students' clinical practice).

6.2.3 ***Enhancement initiatives.*** The Committee noted enhancement activities being undertaken within the Faculty, including:

- the novel use of scenarios in the assessment strategy adopted by LMS (the Faculty would be happy to share practice with other faculties via its Teaching and Learning Forum which other staff were welcome to attend);
- work to improve overseas recruitment which included close liaison with the International Office over targets and visit itineraries.

6.2.4 **Faculty-level issues.** The poor coursework turnaround times for Biological and Life Sciences (BLS) were reported by the Faculty as disappointing and had been identified for action in 2014-15. In relation to the institutional-level recommendation arising out of BLS's PQR, it was noted that the recommendation related to the University's promotion criteria rather than the actual contribution of professorial staff to the Department's teaching. The Committee noted the teaching space and timetabling issues identified for BLS and that this concerned research labs as well as teaching labs. The ADT reported that the matter was being addressed as part of the planning process and the Faculty was not yet at a point where students could not be accommodated. The Chair noted that the Estates Committee was actively looking at the development of new space but there would be no quick solutions.

6.2.5 **Institutional-level issues.** The Faculty had highlighted the inaccessibility of the Clinical Anatomy Teaching Centre learning and teaching space as an institutional issue. Planned changes to allow full disabled access had not yet been implemented. The Faculty confirmed the matter had been raised with the Estates Committee.

6.3 Management School (LUMS)

6.3.1 The report was a very positive one for the Faculty; however the Committee noted the collaborative provision for the Faculty had not been included in the report. This had been an unintentional error (the Faculty had assumed the report on ITPs being produced by the centre would incorporate this (see M. 6.5.2).

6.3.2 **Enhancement initiatives.** The Committee noted enhancement activities being undertaken within the Faculty, including:

- the Faculty Maths and Stats Help (MASH) Centre which provided support for undergraduate students;
- the creation of separate Admissions Tutor roles for recruitment (outreach) and conversion activities, which was proving to be a successful model;
- the work recently completed by the Faculty on identifying existing and innovative methods of providing assessment feedback to students in response to NSS results.

6.3.3 **Faculty-level issues.** The Committee noted the Faculty's monitoring of future developments and growth in provision in order to ensure that expansion is sustainable and the quality of the student experience is protected. The setting of caps on module numbers was a matter for discussion by the Faculty.

6.3.4 *Institutional-level issues*

Teaching space: The Faculty had highlighted a lack of teaching space for large cohorts and the appropriateness of teaching space allocations as continuing issues. The Chair noted that the provision of large teaching space was currently under discussion within the University and that timetabling was being kept under regular review in relation to the allocation of teaching space.

Examination timetable: The Head of Student Registry reported the biggest constraint on this was the scarcity of large flat space in which to hold examinations (together with the bunching of examinations at the start of the examination period). The Committee noted that space constraints were not immediately solvable; however a possible move to a January examination period could help to alleviate the problem (see below).

Student communication: The matter of student communications was a separate agenda item for the Committee (M.10 refers).

Consultation on January examination period: This matter was currently under discussion by USAG and PSAG and a report would be made to ASQC in due course.

Assessment regulations – letter grading system: This would be included in the UG Assessment Regulations review to be undertaken later in the year.

Online enrolment system and LUSI and CAIT developments: The Committee noted that progress had been made with making the online enrolment system for Part II students more effective and that this work was ongoing. The Head of Student Registry reported on work being undertaken in liaison with the Director of QAE, ASQ, and ISS on improvements to programme and module processes, and the technical developments within LUSI which would support this work.

6.4 Faculty of Science and Technology

- 6.4.1 Overall this was a very positive and reflective report. Progress had been made on a number of fronts, including the appointment of a Deputy Director for Natural Sciences and the appointment of a significant number of new academic staff across the Faculty. The Committee noted that there had been some slippage with a number of actions from the previous year's report and that these were being rolled over into the current action plan.

6.4.2 **Enhancement initiatives.** The Committee noted enhancement activities being undertaken within the Faculty including:

- the success of the Faculty internship programme and the provision of other employment-related opportunities for students;
- the introduction by some departments of seeking feedback on student experience in order to anticipate and address problems at an earlier stage.

6.4.3 **Faculty-level issues.** A number of departments were conducting discussions on professional body accreditation. In relation to the development of new Integrated Master's programmes, it was noted it would be worth the Faculty bearing in mind the balance between MSci and MSc programmes particularly in the context of the forthcoming new PG loan system for students wishing to progress to Master's level courses. The Committee noted that the PVC Education and the Director of QAE would be reporting to a future meeting of the Committee on the University's strategy in relation to the further development of this type of programme.

6.4.4 **Institutional-level issues**

Provision of laboratory space (capacity and refurbishment issues). Delays in estates projects across the Faculty were highlighted as likely to impact negatively upon NSS results. Increasing student numbers, planned expansion of the new Chemistry department and professional body accreditation requirements all contributed to pressures on the provision of suitable teaching facilities. (See M.6.5.3.)

Staff induction and support. The Faculty reported on the need to share effective practice in this area across the institution and amongst all staff, not just those new to the University. The Committee noted that OED will continue to support and develop opportunities and resources to enable the sharing of practice.

6.5 **General**

The Committee noted the following general matters arising out of its consideration of the reports.

6.5.1 **Use of acronyms:** It would be helpful to spell out any Faculty-specific acronyms in the first instance to assist readers.

- 6.5.2 **Collaborative provision:** This must be reviewed by departments and faculties alongside the Lancaster-delivered provision; an institutional summary of ITP provision, reviewing institutional-wide issues, would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.
- 6.5.3 **Space and facilities issues:** It was important to note where space and facilities issues impacted on the quality of the student experience; however the mechanisms for addressing these matters lay primarily with other University bodies and thus would normally need to be referred on for action.
- 6.5.4 **Sharing of effective practice:** The discussion of faculty ATR reports in committee (at both faculty and institutional level) was demonstrably a good way of sharing effective practice. Notwithstanding this, the PVC Education and Director QAE would bring to a future meeting some ideas on how effective practice could be disseminated more widely across the University.

ASQC/2015/07

Student academic representation project

Document: SEC/2015/3/0025

- 7.1 The Education Manager for the Students' Union presented the report and provided a summary of the proposal. Whilst there was much good practice within the University, the Students' Union felt it was an opportune time to review the University's guidance on student representation and to consider enhancement of practice, particularly in the context of the new QAA *Quality Code*. A questionnaire was proposed, to be circulated to departments and faculties, to gather views which it was hoped would inform the development of a revised set of core principles and guidelines.
- 7.2 Members discussed a number of aspects of student representation including
- what the most meaningful level for student representatives to engage with was (module/programme/department);
 - the challenges involved in engaging students who were in employment and/or studying on distance learning programmes;
 - how best to utilise Moodle;
 - how the system could provide better support to postgraduate research students and students studying with international teaching partners.

- 7.3 The Provost suggested that it would be useful if some staff became involved in the project alongside the Students' Union, and the Education Manager reported that he would be happy to attend faculty Teaching Committee meetings for further discussions.
- 7.4 The Committee **agreed** to support the consultation process and to endorse the questionnaire provided as Appendix 1 to the paper. ADTs were asked to circulate this to departments. It was also agreed it would be helpful if faculties included this item on their Teaching Committee agendas for discussion.

Action: ADTs/Students' Union

ASQC/2015/08

External Examiner procedures: Areas for enhancement

Document: SEC/2015/3/038

- 8.1 The Director of QAE presented the paper, which was a summary of areas for enhancement of External Examiner procedures in line with the QAA *Quality Code*.
- 8.2 **Availability of External Examiner reports and names of External Examiners to students.** Currently reports are made available to student representatives but not to the whole student body and External Examiner details are not published to students. The following was proposed and **agreed**.

- (i) the latest External Examiner reports and the names of External Examiners should be made available to all students, with effect from the start of the 2015/16 academic year; this should be done by departments, for example by posting the reports and information on Moodle and including a link to them in student handbooks. The Head of Department's response should also be made available alongside the report.

Action: Heads of Department

- (ii) Information on the role of the External Examiner and the location of reports for students' viewing should be included in student handbooks, with effect from 2015/16.

Action: Director of QAE/Provost

It was noted that External Examiners are already informed via the appointment letter that students are able to view their reports.

- 8.3 **Mentoring.** There is a need to build in clearer formal procedures around the mentoring of new External Examiners in order to standardise arrangements. Whilst there was some guidance available, this was not sufficient and it was **agreed** that revised guidance should be drafted and brought to a future meeting of the Committee for discussion. It was noted in the summary paper that from 2015/16 the role of Mentor would attract an additional fee of £100.

Action: Director of QAE/Assistant Registrar

- 8.4 **Induction.** The Committee noted that induction procedures for External Examiners were limited and that more needed to be done. A number of suggestions for improvement were outlined in the summary paper and it was **agreed** that OED should become more involved in working out the detail of some of these.

Action: Director of QAE/OED/Assistant Registrar

- 8.5 **Recognition of External Examiner work undertaken by Lancaster staff.** ASQC had already agreed that a central record should be kept by the Secretariat of those staff who were active External Examiners but that the mechanism for collecting this information had still to be determined. Whilst it was acknowledged that there could not be a requirement on staff to disclose this information, a central record did need to be kept (partly to check for reciprocal arrangements on making new appointments). The institutional benefits of sharing practice were also noted (sharing at departmental level was already likely to be happening). One potential way of doing this would be via an annual dissemination event facilitated by OED.

Action: Director of QAE/OED/Assistant Registrar

- 8.6 An update on progress with these matters would be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

Action: Director of QAE/Assistant Registrar

ASQC/2015/09 Future approaches to quality assessment: HEFCE consultation

Document: SEC/2015/3/027

- 9.1 Members received for information the letter sent by HEFCE to heads of HEIs giving notice of their plans to review the approach to quality assessment and a link to the recently published discussion document. The Provost was a member of the HEFCE Steering Group for the review and she provided a report on the background

to this. The review was considered to be necessary because of the number of new types of providers who had entered the sector recently, the volume of work generated by the current methodology and the need to ensure the UK's good reputation for its HE was maintained and secured for the future.

- 9.2 The first discussion document focused on matters of principle and HEFCE had requested feedback from institutions by late February. The Chair reported that she would be attending the regional consultation event and would co-ordinate feedback from within the University.

Action: PVC Education

ASQC/2015/10 Internal communications

- 10.1 The Chair explained the item was an action from the last meeting when the matter of internal communications had arisen in the context of discussing the policy on the marking and return of coursework and the broader issue of dissemination of teaching-related matters. Luke Davis, Communications Manager in Student Based Services (SBS), and Sarah Airey, Head of Internal Communications, were in attendance to report on work in progress from both the student and staff perspective.
- 10.2 SBS had just completed a research project on how students like to be communicated with. The outcomes from this research would feed into the University's wider communications strategy. A key result from the survey was that email was the top choice for students in terms of communication tools, although they felt they received too many emails (a lot of these were Moodle notifications). Other issues around email concerned the timing and presentation of information. Additional findings from the research were that postgraduate students have some different needs from undergraduates and that distance learners were less engaged generally with University communications.
- 10.3 The Committee **agreed** it would be useful for members to receive the research report. Mr Davis reported he would be happy to attend faculty Teaching Committee meetings to talk about the work being done in SBS and requested that members send him any ideas they might have.

Action: SBS Communications Manager/Committee members

- 10.4 The Head of Internal Communications reported on work being done on the development of the new intranet for staff which would provide a comprehensive and time-sensitive platform for the dissemination of information, news and links relevant to staff. “LU Text” and the VC’s messages would be subsumed within this. The work followed on from the staff survey on communications undertaken in the summer and was an important priority for the University. A group of sample staff were informing the project. The first phase would be rolled out in April, with further developmental and enhancement work after this.
- 10.5 It was confirmed that a content management system would be used so that resources feeding into the channel could be easily managed. Information would be navigable by categories and there would be department-specific areas. Members **agreed** it would be useful at this stage to be sent the link to view the demonstration area.

Action: Head of Internal Communications

SECTION C: ITEMS TO NOTE

ASQC/2015/11 QAA HER update: HER Steering Group notes and other matters of report

Documents: SEC/2015/3/021; SEC/2014/3/0765; SEC/2014/3/0862; SEC/2015/3/0020

The Committee received for information the notes of the HER Steering Group meetings held on 29 October, 20 November and 17 December 2014.

ASQC/2015/12 QAA consultation on qualifications characteristics

The Committee noted the current QAA consultations on Qualification Characteristics Statements for the following types of degrees:

- Foundation Degrees
- Master’s Degrees
- Doctoral Degrees
- Qualifications awarded by Two or More Degree-Awarding Bodies (new)

ASQC/2015/13

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held at 2.00 p.m. on 11 March 2015 in the John Welch Room, University House.