

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

Academic Standards and Quality Committee
Minutes of a meeting held on 21 January 2016

Present: Professor A Chetwynd
Dr A Collins
Dr C Edwards
Mr B Harper
Professor N Hayes
Professor S Huttly (Chair)
Dr R Lauder
Dr P McKean
Mrs A Mullan
Professor C Rogers
Professor M Shackleton
Professor S Skogly
Professor M Wright

In attendance: Ms J Anstee (Secretary)
Ms J Atkinson (*for item 10*)
Mr S Cresswell
Mr C Cottam
Dr J Howard

Apologies: Miss P Ainsworth
Mr I Denny
Mr A Okey

SECTION A INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

ASQC/2016/01 Minutes of the last meeting

Documents: SEC/2016/3/0025; SEC/2015/3/0957

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2015 were confirmed as an accurate record.

Document: SEC/2015/3/0968

The Committee noted the reports on the matters arising from the minutes and outstanding actions, in particularly the following items.

- 02.1 *Guidance on repeat year (item 13):* The Provost and Students' Union reported on work being undertaken with the Colleges' Wellbeing Officers and Student Based Services to ensure students undertaking a repeat year were provided with appropriate guidance and advice. It was important that current first year students were made aware of the repeat year regulation.
- 02.2 *Plagiarism Framework (item 14):* The Students' Union reported that the new procedures were now being followed by all departments.
- 02.3 *Student volunteering (items 26 and 27):* The FHM UG ADT reported that as part of ongoing investigation into this area, Human Resources had produced some draft definitions of volunteering and internships. Volunteering work was a short-term unpaid opportunity with the aim of gaining work experience, typically over a period of about two weeks. Internships comprised work over a longer period of time and were paid. Human Resources recognised the concerns around this area and welcomed comments on the definitions and examples from departments and faculties in order to make progress. It was **agreed** that the definitions should be circulated to the ADTs and the Students' Union for consultation and feedback. The Students' Union reported that from the students' perspective the main factor in both scenarios was the opportunity to enhance employability.

Action: FHM UG ADT and Secretary

- 02.4 *Survey fatigue (item 28):* This issue had been considered by the working group looking at the introduction of a Year Two survey.
- 02.5 *European Masters in Management (item 31):* The PG ADT for LUMS reported on progress made in determining the management and QA arrangements for the new European Masters in Management programme. This included provision for a number of joint programme management boards throughout the year (dates to be fixed for 2016-17). It had been agreed with the partners that there would be a role for Lancaster's external examiner to review the programme as a whole (in addition to those modules delivered at Lancaster) but that the details of this were still being negotiated. Lancaster staff would have oversight of the outcomes from the first

year modules delivered in Lyons in 2015-61 in order to approve the progression of these students into the second year of the programme to be delivered by Lancaster in 2016-17. A written report on the management and QA arrangements for this programme would be provided to the committee for the March meeting.

Action: LUMS PG ADT

- 02.6 *NSS 2015 (item 32)*: The chair had received faculty action plans on the NSS 2015 for LUMS and FASS and requested those for FHM and FST be sent to her so that the item could be discussed at UMAG. It was confirmed these were now ready.

Action: FHM and FST UG ADTs

- 02.7 *NSS 2016*: The Provost reported on preparations for the NSS 2016. The survey would start on 1 February and personalised cards would be sent to students on 25 January.

ASQC/2016/03 Chair's Action

Document: SEC/2016/3/0026

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

- (i) *Amendments to PQR schedule 2013-2017*: to reschedule the PQR for the Department of Entrepreneurship, Strategy and Innovation from 2015-16 to 2016-17.
- (ii) *Procedures to be followed for revisions to modules and programmes, including Minor and Major change definitions*: approval of adjustments to the categories of Major revisions which need to be communicated to applicants (MARF 2015).

ASQC/2016/04 Schedule of Business: 2015-16

Document: SEC/2015/3/0952

The committee received the latest version of the schedule of business for 2015-16.

SECTION B ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

ASQC/2016/05 Higher Education Review

05.1 Students' Written Submission (SWS)

Document: SEC/2016/3/0027

The committee received a draft action plan arising out of the recommendations contained in the SWS. The actions had been jointly agreed by the Director of QAE and the Students' Union Vice-President (Education). Many of the actions identified related to issues which had already been identified for action, or to work which was already in hand.

05.1.1 *Recommendation 2: Continue with the review of Part 1 to make it more challenging, enjoyable, valuable and attractive for students.* The Director of QAE reported that the review was likely to be completed by the end of the academic year.

05.1.2 *Recommendation 3: Review the mechanism for the dissemination of external examiners reports to students to ensure greater consistency of practice.* The committee noted that the matter had been previously discussed and the Students' Union reported this was a low priority for them. It was **agreed** that the current requirement for departments to publish these should be kept for this academic year; the matter could then be reviewed. Some concern was expressed over the need sometimes for external examiner comments to be redacted and uncertainty as to who should be signing off the reports for publication. It was **agreed** that the report template should be checked to review the guidance given to examiners. The Director of QAE noted that departments should check with the external examiner if they had specific worries.

Action: Director of QAE

05.1.3 *Recommendation 4: Identify and embed formal mechanisms for student engagement with the design of new programmes and modules.* It was **agreed** that the most appropriate forum for taking forward this action would be the working group on course design, development and approval.

05.1.4 *Recommendation 7: Provide clearer guidance to students on the application of grading criteria for assessments on taught programmes.* The VP (Education) confirmed that this recommendation referred to a lack of clarity in the language used by departments in translating the University-wide criteria into departmental criteria.

05.1.5 *Recommendation 9: Review the process for the dissemination of information about the revised plagiarism framework to academic departments.* It was clarified that this related to the dissemination of the new framework within departments (and it was noted departments had already been reminded of the new framework via the 2014-15 ATR reporting process).

05.1.6 *Recommendation 12: Increase the provision of in-session English Language support for international students.* It was noted that responsibility for this action lay with the Learning Support Implementation Group and that this should be indicated on the action plan.

05.1.7 The committee **approved** the SWS action plan. Actions which were not already being addressed would be added to the committee's action planning list.

05.2 Draft HER report and action planning

The chair provided an update on the draft HER report which had been received from the QAA. The University's comments on factual inaccuracies had been sent back and the final report was due to be published in February. The Head of Academic Standards and Quality would be meeting with the chair and the Director of QAE to discuss the actions, responsibilities and time-scales arising from the recommendations contained in the report. In relation to the national system of quality assurance which would replace the HER methodology, it was not yet clear what form this would take.

ASQC/2016/06 Annual Teaching Review 2014-15: Undergraduate programmes

Document: SEC/2016/3/0045

06.1 Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

This was a clear and comprehensive report from the Faculty. The following points were highlighted for the committee's attention.

06.1.1 *PSRB activity:* Social Work was subject to frequent and regular monitoring activity by the HCPC. The Law accrediting body (JASB) had decided that a positive outcome from PQR would satisfy its requirements for revalidation of the programme, which was pleasing to note.

- 06.1.2 *UG Assessment Regulations.* The Law department continued to be unhappy with the requirement to use letter grades in marking. Difficulties with inserting letter grades into the sector-wide online job application form had now been resolved; however the department still had concerns about students being disadvantaged in the employment market due to employers not understanding the grading system. The committee noted that the likely introduction nationally of a Grade Point Average system would obviate this problem.
- 06.1.3 *Exam timings for students whose first language is not English.* Two external examiners had commented that the University's policy not to allow extra time to complete examinations for students whose first language was not English could be contributing to a lengthening "tail" of relatively weak students. The Director of QAE noted the degree classification performance of overseas students was significantly below that of home/EU students and work was being undertaken to investigate this, including the situation in the wider sector. This was a matter the Learning Support review should help address.
- 06.1.4 *Exam boards for joint honours programmes.* The logistical difficulties associated with external examiners' contribution to joint honours exam boards was raised again. This issue had been raised previously and would be included in the remit of the working group to review exam board practice.
- 06.1.5 *Development of joint degrees.* The report highlighted the difficulties of developing new joint degree programmes where departments outside the Faculty were not responsive. This was particularly important for DELC whose existence as a department depended in large part on joint honours provision. The chair noted that FASS had recently conducted a review of joint honours programmes and it was agreed the faculty's report on this could be submitted to the committee later in the year.

Action: FASS UG ADT

- 06.1.6 *New plagiarism framework.* The ATR had identified some issues and challenges relating to the implementation of this. The committee **agreed** the framework should be reviewed once it had bedded in more.
- 06.1.7 *Academic Tutor system.* Whilst the report noted that almost all departments had reported relatively low take-up of the academic advisor system, this did not necessarily mean the service was not of value and it would take some time to bed down. There were different sources of support available and it was inevitable students would use those which best suited their individual needs.

Lack of comment on the advisor system in the NSS also did not necessarily indicate that students were unhappy with the system. The committee noted there was also potential for the Academic Tutor role to include supporting a students' academic development at programme level.

06.1.8 *Quality of feedback.* The ATR report highlighted continuing reflection by the faculty and departments on how to improve the quality of feedback on students' assessments.

06.1.9 The following **areas of good practice** were highlighted in the report.

- Preparation for placement module (Sociology).
- Peer assessment of group work (LICA).
- Funded summer programme for Year Two students (Linguistics).
- Closing the feedback loop on module evaluation (English).

06.2 LUMS

This was a good and clear report from the Faculty. The following points were highlighted for the committee's attention.

06.2.1 *Maintaining standards – capacity and resource.* A common theme running throughout the report was the challenge in maintaining standards in the context of increasing student numbers and constrained resource. The ADT reported that currently the situation was just about manageable through judicious planning and resource allocation. The faculty's achievement in sustaining a positive student experience in these circumstances was impressive. The chair noted the importance of the business planning process for the ongoing evaluation of resource, and that this did bear fruit (for example the provision of additional posts in Accounting and Finance).

06.2.2 *External examiners' access to coursework.* This had been noted by the Faculty as a particular issue to be addressed and was often a matter of logistics as well as making sure that departments were aware of the University's requirements. The Director of QAE reminded the committee that variation in practice across the University in this area would be addressed through the planned review of examination boards and associated procedures.

06.2.3 *Assessment methods.* A number of external examiners had commented on the challenges of maintaining standards with the increasing volume of assessment due to increasing student numbers. The ADT reported this may necessitate a review of those assessment methods which were only workable with smaller cohort sizes.

06.2.4 *Student performance on international teaching partner (ITP) programmes.* The relatively high examination failure rate for overseas students registered on programmes delivered by ITPs was noted. This was not unique to LUMS however and was being closely monitored by the Partnership Management Groups in the consideration of student performance alongside admissions data.

06.2.5 *Use of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs).* The faculty's use of GTAs had intensified in line with increasing student numbers and this, together with the appointment of Teaching Fellows, was proving successful in helping departments to meet requirements. The ADT also noted that the PGCert in Academic Practice programme delivered by OED was very beneficial in supporting teaching practice in the Faculty.

06.2.6 The following **areas of good practice** were highlighted in the report, in particular the Maths and Statistics Help (MASH) centre and the systematic way in which the faculty shared effective practice.

- Accounting and Finance's ATR and subject area meetings where effective practice is shared and issues aired and resolved.
- Accounting and Finance's employability module which spans three years of the programme.
- Accounting and Finance's SSCC meetings which use Moodle as a forum to encourage students to feedback on their experience.
- Employability embedded within Marketing's programmes and the mapping of skills development across the programme.
- MASH – the Maths and Stats Help centre.
- Feedback to students post- Year 2 examinations to guide students on the best choice of modules for Year 3 study.
- BBA and Euro BBA Year 3 students who mentor small groups of Year 1 students.

- Analyses of LUMES data to identify trends in module satisfaction.

06.3 Faculty of Science and Technology

This was a useful report which highlighted many of the issues noted in the FASS and LUMS' reports. The committee noted the following issues in addition to these.

- 06.3.1 *Student employability.* The committee noted the commendable variety of employability initiatives undertaken across the faculty, and that whilst there was variation between departments as to what constituted employability, this was not necessarily a problem particularly where this was subject-related. The faculty internship scheme was highly rated and there were plans to extend this. The Provost noted the potential to extend the remit of the Lancaster Award to include departments' employability initiatives – this could be explored through the implementation plan for the Thematic Review on employability.
- 06.3.2 *Staff induction.* The faculty's staff induction checklist had already been circulated for information. This could be added to; for example including a department's E-learning champion as a teaching and learning resource.
- 06.3.3 *NSS action plans.* It was queried whether or not there could be a standard template for reporting on NSS action plans. The chair noted however the importance of dialogue in producing reflective NSS action plans rather than relying on a template.
- 06.3.4 *PSRB contribution to programme design.* Whilst PSRB accreditation could be a constraint on programme design and development accreditation generally was felt to be a strength by the faculty, and workarounds could be found.
- 06.3.5 *Percentage of Firsts.* The high percentage of Firsts in two departments (48% and 38%) had been reported on in the ATR; however external examiner reports had not highlighted any concerns here.
- 06.3.6 *Laboratory space and resource.* The faculty had reported that this may need to be expanded, particularly in Engineering, if UG student numbers were to increase much further. The chair noted that this was already being considered in the planning round discussions.

06.3.7 The following **areas of good practice** were highlighted in the report, in particular the outreach work represented by these examples.

- The Maths schools placement module (MATH362), where students spend time teaching mathematics in local schools.
- Engineering held a full away day devoted to teaching and felt this benefited the whole department in terms of teaching delivery (and may have had some role in the department's marked improvement in NSS scores).
- Industrial partners were highly complimentary about the Physics undergraduate Industrial Group Project module (PHYS355). In this module industrial partners set the project topics, usually in the form of a problem.
- The development by Psychology of a wide range of formally agreed volunteering opportunities with relevant charities.
- Chemistry achieved very good turnaround times on assessments and attributed this not only to timely written reminders to staff but also to visits in person from the director of teaching.
- Engineering led a bid for a limited-term appointment of a Maths learning support advisor to help FST students who may not have A-level Maths. The bid was successful and a person was now in post.
- LEC hold teaching forums twice per term, which all teaching staff can attend. They also issue regular 'Undergraduate Teaching' updates as email circulars to keep staff abreast of developments.
- Psychology developed a newsletter largely written by students and published twice a year to improve student engagement with the department and enhance communication.

06.4 ATR procedure

The chair noted that the FHM ATR had not yet been received and suggested that the next Associate Deans Advisory Group meeting discuss the timing of ATR reporting. In addition there could be discussion on the possibility of incorporating NSS evaluation and action planning into the ATR report.

Action: Secretary ADs-AG

Documents: SEC/2016/3/0047; SEC/2016/3/0046

- 07.1 The committee received the draft report and associated action plan on undergraduate external examiner reports for 2014-15, prepared by the Director of QAE for the committee's approval.
- 07.2 The committee noted the following issues for institutional action.
- *Mitigating circumstances procedures; external examiners' access to coursework; exam board practice:* all to be considered in the forthcoming review of exam boards.
 - *Study Abroad translation grades; 50% examination rule; condonation rules:* all to be considered in the forthcoming review of the UG Assessment Regulations.
 - *Internal moderation/vetting of assessments practice; quality of feedback to students:* to be addressed through the dissemination of good practice.
 - *Goenka attendance policy:* external examiner comment on the impact of this policy on students' results had led to this being discontinued.
 - *Student achievement at LU Ghana:* one examiner had commented on the relatively poor performance in the exam. Student achievement at Ghana was being carefully monitored through the Partnership Management Group and in discussion with LU Ghana in relation to the admissions criteria.
- 07.3 The committee discussed the variety of ways in which good practice was disseminated (OED work; faculty fora for sharing good practice; ATR process; review of committee minutes). The chair also noted that promotion applications reflected the use of good practice across the institution. The Director of QAE and Head of Academic Standards and Quality were tasked with taking forward initiatives in the two areas identified for the dissemination of good practice.

Action: Director of QAE and Head Academic Standards and Quality

- 07.4 LUMS and FST ADTs were asked to check on those instances where there appeared to be a standards issue in relation to Marketing at Sunway (items 2.2.2 and 2.3.2) and Psychology at Ghana (item 2.3.2).

Action: LUMS UG ADT and FST UG ADT

ASQC/2016/08 ASQC Annual Report 2014-15

Documents: SEC/2016/3/0052; SEC/2016/3/0023

The committee received and **approved** the annual report of the committee for 2014-15, for onward transmission to Senate. This focussed on the business of the committee for the year. Preliminary discussion had been had by ASQ with the chair regarding the possible format of a comprehensive and evaluative annual account of quality assurance and enhancement matters. It had been agreed to wait until the outcomes of the TEF and HEFCE consultations on the future quality assessment arrangements were known before deciding on any major changes.

ASQC/2016/09 Study Abroad, Exchange and Erasmus+ programmes: Annual report 2014-15

Document: SEC/2016/3/0049

The committee received the annual report on Study Abroad, Exchange and Erasmus+ programmes for 2014-15 from the Head of Study Abroad. The following action/discussion points were noted by the committee.

- *Moveon/LUSI integration:* The integration of the two systems had not yet happened and the Head of Study Abroad expressed concern over the difficulties of managing the Erasmus+ grant finances as a result. The chair noted that there was a major impetus now within the University to develop a strategy for LUSI development work and address the backlog of work including this item.
- *Study Abroad resource area:* Discussion was being held with the Director of Library Services to identify new dedicated space for a resource area.
- *Staffing:* A request had been made through the planning process to make the fixed term Study Abroad Officer post permanent.

- *Exchange programme targets and numbers:* Numbers were healthy but there was a shortage of places in North America. A review would take place shortly to determine gaps and potential new partners.
- *Emergency planning:* Plans were in hand to develop a clear emergency response plan to be able to deal effectively with emergencies abroad.
- *Grade translations:* The committee noted there were still some concerns about grade translations and the possibility that students were being advantaged or disadvantaged by their performance in their study abroad year. The Director of QAE commented this was a complex area to address but that there was now a reasonable set of data to work from and the issue would be included in the UG Assessment Regulations review.

ASQC/2016/10

Lancaster Medical School: Degree award choices for current University of Liverpool-registered students entering Year 5 in 2016-17

Document: SEC/2016/3/0048

The UG ADT for FHM introduced the recommendation that the University of Liverpool MBChB curriculum be accepted as contributing towards the award of the Lancaster MBChB, in order to provide current Liverpool-registered students entering Year 5 in 2016-17 with a choice of degree award. This group of students was currently intercalating a year and would be joining the Lancaster-registered students in 2016-17 for the new Lancaster Year 5. In order to give this group of students the opportunity of receiving a Lancaster degree award if they wished, the Liverpool curriculum for their first four years would need to be accepted as suitable for counting towards the Lancaster degree award. The paper provided details on the curriculum and assessment of the Liverpool programme which demonstrated only minor differences between the two programmes. Liverpool had already accepted that the Lancaster Year 5 would qualify these students for the Liverpool award should they wish to receive a Liverpool degree. Professional accreditation by the GMC helped to ensure a close match between the two programmes in terms of curriculum and standards. *[Secretary's note: following the meeting it was confirmed that Liverpool had agreed that some students may choose to receive a Lancaster award and graduate at the Lancaster ceremony.]* The committee **approved** the proposal.

Document: SEC/2015/3/0975

- 11.1 The committee received a position statement on the operational approach proposed to deal with students' Wednesday afternoon sporting commitments (BUCs-related activities). The University was committed to holding Wednesday afternoon free from timetabled academic engagement as far as possible in order to support the athletes. Two issues militated against the current approach. One was the pressure on the time-table which had led to a number of academic activities being time-tabled on Wednesday after 1.00pm; the other was that away-games required athletes to travel on a Wednesday morning, ruling out their attendance for the whole of the day. Following discussion between the Students' Union and the Provost, an approach had been agreed involving: provision for changing options; approval of requests by the Students' Union and self-certification; and the provision of teaching materials to enable students to catch up on a missed class.
- 11.2 The committee commended the approach to regularising the situation in a transparent way, and noted that a long-time solution would be investigated (including the possibility of Saturday sport) and that this would also look at incorporating postgraduate students into the procedures. The committee **endorsed** the approach as laid in the paper noting however a number of aspects which should be borne in mind:
- there was an assumption that students who missed time-tabled classes would be able to catch up, but this depended on the type of activity and would be difficult, for example, in the case of group work;
 - where group work was involved, non-attendance by a member could disadvantage the other members of the group;
 - there was a particular difficulty in the time-tabling of postgraduate lab activities, many of which had to take place on Wednesday afternoons due to time-tabling constraints;
 - for seminar activities which had multiple time-tabled slots, students could request a change of seminar group rather than a change of option.

SECTION C ITEMS TO NOTE

ASQC/2016/12 Periodic Quality Review 2014-15

12.1 OED PQR – FASS consideration of PQR report and departmental response

Document: SEC/2016/3/0050

The committee noted the minutes of the FASS UG and PG teaching committee meetings at which the OED PQR report and the department's response were discussed.

12.2 Revised PQR schedule 2013-2017

Documents: SEC/2016/3/0051; SEC/2016/3/0002

The committee noted the revised PQR schedule 2013-2017. This took into account the rescheduling of the PQR for the Department of Entrepreneurship, Strategy and Innovation (M.2016/03 refers) and other changes consequent upon departmental restructuring.

ASQC/2016/13 Education Committee

The first meeting of the new Education Committee would take place on 24 February. Henceforth ASQC would become a sub-committee of the Education Committee and would be chaired by the Director of QAE.

ASQC/2016/14 Any other business

14.1 'Storm Desmond'

The chair expressed her thanks to departments and staff for all the work undertaken to mitigate the impact of 'Storm Desmond' which had resulted in the cancellation of the last week of term and the rearrangement of teaching and assessment activities. She asked that the situation be monitored to ensure a timely response to any issues which might arise.

14.2 Staff teaching awards

The Provost reminded the committee of the deadline for nominations for staff teaching awards (30 January).

ASQC/2016/15

Dates of meetings 2015-16

The remaining dates of the Committee's meetings for the academic year 2015-16 were noted as listed below. All meetings will be held on a Thursday morning and take place in FASS Meeting Room 1.

10 March 2016

5 May 2016

7 July 2016