

## UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

### LEARNING AND TEACHING COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting held on 10 December 2013 at the Jordanstown campus

#### PRESENT

Professor D A McAlister (Chair), Professor A Adair, Professor R R Barnett, Professor P Carmichael, Professor C Curran, Dr D Hazlett, Ms A Honan, Mr D McGivern, Professor M McHugh, Mr M McKinney, Dr T McLernon, Dr R Monaghan, Professor I Montgomery, Professor A Moran, Dr B Murphy, Dr J A C Webb

#### APOLOGIES

Mr R Banham, Dr M Boyd, Miss C Cochrane, Mr J Cunningham, Dr K De Ornellas, Professor D Heenan, Professor J Jędrzejewski, Professor N McClenaghan, Mr L McCurry, Professor H McKenna, Professor A McKillop, Professor R J Millar, Professor P Ó Dochartaigh, Mrs U Quinn

#### IN ATTENDANCE

Mrs C G Avery, Mr A G Faulkner

#### UNRESERVED

#### 13.101 WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Dr D Hazlett, incoming Director of Centre for Higher Education Research and Practice, as a new member of the Committee.

It was noted that Professor Jan Jędrzejewski and Dr Mary Boyd had been appointed the new Senate representatives on the Committee replacing Professor McColgan and Dr Taylor. Dr Kevin De Ornellas was the new Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator for the Faculty of Arts replacing Dr Fitzpatrick.

The Chair thanked the outgoing members for their contributions to the work of the Committee.

#### 13.102 MINUTES

The confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2013 were signed by the Chair.

#### MATTERS ARISING

#### 13.103 Terms of Reference and Membership (Min 13.62)

The Chair reported that Senate at its November meeting had approved the change in the name of the Committee to Learning and Teaching Committee together with the associated revision to its terms of reference. Faculties might wish to revisit the

names of their own committees. It might also be appropriate to restyle the 'Teaching and Learning Co-ordinator' title.

13.104 Responses from Coleraine and Jordanstown Campus Co-ordinating Groups  
(Min 13.90)

The Committee received the responses from the Coleraine and Jordanstown Campus Co-ordinating Groups to the 2012/13 reports from the Chief External Examiners for the combined undergraduate provision on the Coleraine and Jordanstown campuses (Paper No TLC/13/31).

The Committee noted that no substantive issues had been raised and that no further action was required.

13.105 BSc Hons Accounting (Min 13.92)

The Teaching and Learning Committee at its October meeting had agreed to discontinue the exceptional Level 5 contribution in the classification of BSc Hons Accounting from the 2014 intake. Professor McAlister reported that the Ulster Business School had asked Senate at its November meeting to delay the discontinuation to the 2015 intake. Senate had approved the request which would give the School more time to review the structure of the course and its professional exemptions and align this review with the revalidation of the course in 2014/15.

#### CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

13.106 UK Quality Code for HE

The Chair reported that the final versions of the following sections of the UK Quality Code for HE had been published on 31 October 2013:

Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards  
Chapter B1: Programme Design and Approval  
Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education  
Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and Recognition of Prior Learning  
Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

It was noted that systematic analyses of the University's compliance position would be prepared. Reports on chapters B1, B6 and B8 would be prepared by the Academic Office for consideration by the Committee at its March 2014 meeting. Section B2 was the responsibility of the Admissions Policy Sub-Committee (min 13.67 refers).

AGREED: that Professor Carmichael, Chair of the Admissions Policy Sub-Committee, be asked to ensure consideration of section B2 by the Sub-Committee with a detailed analysis referencing University policy, procedure and practice together with any recommendations, for subsequent report to the Library, Information and Student Administrative Services Committee.

The Committee also noted the QAA's consultation on the draft guidance on education for sustainable development. The final guidance would be received in

due course. It was noted this area featured strongly in the new Learning and Teaching Strategy and that evidence of actions had assisted the University in terms of its ranking in the 'green' league tables.

#### 13.107 Module Survey Implementation Report

The Chair reported that the Academic Development and Enhancement Committee, at its meeting on 9 December, had discussed the Report on the Implementation of the Student Survey on the quality of teaching in modules and at a subsequent meeting of the associated Working Group the work of two placement students in improving the response rate (currently 8 – 10%) had been presented. They had been developing both communication and technical aspects and response rates of 80 - 90% had been achieved in a pilot exercise involving the use of students' mobile devices and the instant provision of results.

In considering the promotion campaign the Working Group had asked that the views of the forthcoming Learning and Teaching Committee meeting be sought on the suggested strapline of 'Spill the Beans', which would be accompanied by positive messaging. Although the proposed use of mobile technology and the branding exercise were welcomed, the majority of members did not support the proposed slogan on account of the negative connotations of the phrase.

The Committee discussed other matters related to response rates, including anonymity of responses, the timing of the survey and the role of class representatives in its promotion.

It was noted that a demonstration of the proposed new technology would be given to Academic Development and Enhancement Committee at its next meeting.

AGREED: that Dr Murphy report back to the Working Group the Committee's views on the proposed branding.

#### 13.108 SUB-COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYABILITY

Mr McGivern presented the report from the meeting held on 13 November 2013 (Paper No TLC/13/32).

#### 13.109 Monitoring of Placement

The Sub-Committee's Placement Preparation Audit in June 2013 had indicated that similar preparation was provided in schools offering both compulsory and optional placements, but there was less certainty around support where only optional placement was available. Consequently, the Sub-Committee had been asked to consider the identification of courses where the placement year was currently not adequately supported (min 13.40 refers). The Committee noted that Faculties had reported that there was consistency in placement preparation for both optional and mandatory placement. Appropriate benchmark(s) for the monitoring and reporting of placement activity against the Learning and Teaching Strategy would be considered by the Sub-Committee at its next meeting.

13.110 Student Placement Management System

The Committee noted that the *MyPlacement* system was intended to be an end-to-end solution for placement management and could accommodate practice across all faculties. As part of future developments the Working Group would review vacancy handling and the requirements for on-placement functions.

It was noted that Faculties could use the system to record where students had been placed, which would be useful for reporting in HEARs.

13.111 Ulster EDGE Award

The Committee noted that 3,840 students were registered for the EDGE award which was an increase of 1,110 since September 2013. Sixty-three activities were now available and seven new activities had recently been received.

Two Nursing students would be receiving an EDGE award at December 2013 graduation. The Sub-Committee would give consideration to the practicalities around future award presentations as the number of eligible students grew.

13.112 Placement Employer of the Year Awards

Mr McGivern advised that the 2014 competition would provide an additional opportunity for staff nominations, in the New Partner (within the last two years) category as well as Placement Employer of the Year Award.

The Committee noted that, although self-employed placements were currently small in number and would not warrant a specific award, they were the type of placement activity whose profile would benefit from some form of recognition.

13.113 Employability Conference 2014

The Committee noted that the Employability Conference was scheduled for Thursday 8 May 2014, culminating in the evening Awards Ceremony for the Placement Employer of the Year.

13.114 EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS 2012/13

Professor McAlister presented the annual overview report identifying general issues arising from the reports received from external examiners for the 2012/13 academic year (Paper No TLC/13/33). The paper highlighted specific comments which pointed to issues of more general import.

As in previous years, the vast majority of the 364 external examiners who had reported to date confirmed that standards were appropriate. They commended many aspects of provision and only a small number of critical comments were made. These required immediate action by course/subject committees, with a timely response to the external examiners.

### 13.115 Participation in the Moderation Process

Nearly all external examiners expressed satisfaction with their involvement in the moderation process and many praised course/subject directors and faculty administrative staff on the prompt and efficient manner in which they had been supplied with relevant course documentation, examination papers and coursework schema, assignments and examination scripts.

A small number commented on delays in the advance provision of examination papers and coursework schema for approval and one examiner had mentioned that examination papers had been sent in small batches over several weeks. It was noted that it was important for Faculty staff to clarify with external examiners the material they expected to receive and how and when it would be provided, to ensure their full involvement in the moderation process.

One external examiner expressed concern that she had been asked to co-assess students on teaching practice. Professor McAlister reminded members that the external examiner's role was one of moderation of the assessment process.

It was noted that a few externals did not appear to have a clear understanding of the relationship between the preliminary board and the formal Board of Examiners when results were confirmed and recommendations for award were made with due process, and that it would be useful to explore this as part of University and Faculty induction.

### 13.116 Assessment

The majority of externals were satisfied with assessment standards and the reports provided evidence of good use of assessment criteria and a wide range of appropriate assessment methods. External examiners generally commented favourably on the quality of feedback provided to students. However, there was a small number of negative comments regarding consistency, timeliness and lack of focus on 'feed forward'. A number of examiners had also raised concerns about over-assessment and inconsistency in the amount of assessment in modules.

Several examiners commented that it was evident that students still required clarity and reassurance around the identification and marking of individual contributions in group work as well as advice and support in the management of unequal contributions on the part of group members. The Chair proposed that, in view of the recurrence of this topic over a number of years, the assessment of group work should be referred to the Quality Management and Audit Unit for a themed audit to ensure that University policy, guidance and practice were appropriate.

A number of examiners cautioned against the over-use of assessment by coursework since students very often performed well in assignments but poorly in formal examination, which might suggest superficial knowledge and understanding.

### 13.117 Marking Standards

Marking standards were generally considered to be appropriate although there were a few exceptions where, *inter alia*, minor inconsistencies in marking, variable standards, absence of evidence of second marking, and occasionally a tendency to

generous marking were noted. Reluctance to use the full range (particularly the upper range) of marks had again been cited by a number of external examiners. One examiner commented on a School's practice of double-marking all coursework, examinations and dissertations which, whilst admirable, was above and beyond University requirements and current practice in the sector and he had recommended sample moderation of coursework.

For some courses, external examiners encouraged a more consistent use of language in feedback to ensure that the comments reflected the descriptors in the bands of the University's generic assessment criteria.

In a small number of cases it was noted that examiners had expressed concern that the teaching, learning and assessment strategies did not reflect the level of the award and they had questioned whether the level of challenge was adequate, particularly at Master's level. In one course an issue of marking against professional competences rather than level 7 academic assessment criteria was identified.

#### 13.118 Quality, Learning and Comparability

A number of externals noted that the courses were amongst the best they were aware of and they commended the standard of teaching and assessment and the quality of student work. Many praised the course teams and individual module coordinators for innovation, pastoral support, and their high levels of dedication and professionalism.

The Committee noted that the external examiners for a course at QA Business School were critical of the achievements of students and considered that there were serious challenges to achieving consistency in assessment between the QA Business School and the 'home' campuses.

In a small number of cases examiners drew attention to perceived inadequacy of both physical and staff resources.

#### 13.119 Administration

The majority of examiners praised the administrative arrangements and it was noted that the support and hospitality provided was in some instances described as exemplary.

AGREED that:

- i) in line with University expectations, substantive issues raised by examiners must be promptly addressed by the relevant course/subject teams and reported through the course/subject management process, and that external examiners be informed of actions taken;
- ii) Faculties be mindful of the general points highlighted in the report and ensure that best practice be followed;
- iii) the Quality Management and Audit Unit be asked to undertake a themed audit on the assessment of group work.

### 13.120 PRIZES AND AWARDS

The Committee received Paper No TLC/13/34 which set out a proposal for one new prize in the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences. It was noted that Chair's action had been taken on behalf of the Committee and Council to approve two new prizes in the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences.

The Committee noted that the proposed Bridget Murray Occupational Therapy Friendship Award was not based on academic performance but would be made through a written application process for financial support for an extracurricular activity, overseas placement by the course committee. Also, it had been styled as an 'Award' and the Committee discussed whether such awards fell within its remit.

AGREED that:

- i) the Bridget Murray Occupational Therapy Friendship Award be endorsed for approval on behalf of Council by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning);
- ii) clarification of the Committee's remit in approving 'awards' be provided.

Duration 1 hour 15 minutes

18 December 2013

AGF/CA/lh