

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

Paper No ASQEC/20/5

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

10 March 2020

Agenda Item 8

REPORT FROM THE MEETING OF THE COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS  
FORUM (22 January 2020)

*Presenter: Ms C Reid*

COVER SHEET

No action is required of the Committee.

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

REPORT FROM THE MEETING OF THE COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS FORUM (22 January 2020)

## 1. ESSENTIAL SKILLS

The Chair informed that the University accepts Level 2 Essential Skills in English for entry onto all Foundation degree programmes. Level 2 Essential Skills in Maths is accepted on some programmes depending on the level of Maths necessary to be able to successfully complete the programme. For example, in the UUBS Level 2 Essential Skills is accepted on all programmes except for the Fd in Accounting.

The Faculty of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment does not accept Level 2 Essential Skills in Maths for admission onto any of its Foundation degree programmes.

HE Co-ordinators confirmed that they have no issues within their institution regarding the application of Level 2 Essential Skills in English and Maths for admission onto a Foundation degree.

## 2. RE-VALIDATION TRAINING

The Chair informed that the Centre for Higher Education Research and Practice (CHERP) will provide training on re-validation which will be tailored to the specific needs of partner institutions. It is hoped to make this an annual event which will be held in October each year.

## 3. ATTRITION ON ACCESS PROGRAMMES

Members considered a paper on the deliberations of the Working Group looking at high levels of attrition and poor success on Access programmes.

In the 2018/19 academic year over 50% of Access programmes had attrition rates of between 26% and 49% with 16% of programmes having attrition of greater than 50%.

The Working Group considered a number of factors which may have a bearing on poor retention and success on Access programmes. They include:

- i) Cohort characteristics. The high number of students with complex needs in relation to stage of study, socio/cultural context, and physical and mental health issues.

- ii) The strength of staff delivering these programmes. Additional training and support may be required.
- iii) Demographic change within the student cohorts. A significant increase in younger students with more recent experience in the education system. Is there a lack of commitment among this group of students to complete the course?
- iv) Accuracy of metrics. Are the metrics set at an appropriate level?
- v) Recruitment policy. The consensus among the Working Group is that recruitment processes are robust.
- vi) Curriculum in terms of mode, time and delivery. The upcoming revalidations will provide an opportunity to refresh the course content and assessment structure e.g. consider the use of 20 point modules.
- vii) Ulster University identity. There is a lack of understanding among students about the Associate Student status.
- viii) The lack of follow-up on leavers. The University will draft and circulate a short survey to gather information on why students leave the programme early.

The Chair suggested that Course Directors may wish to forward the names of early leavers from one Access programme which could be checked against the names held on the University's system. This may explain discrepancies in the data.

There is a need to differentiate between those students who leave within the 2 week cooling off period and those students who engage with the programme but leave later in the semester. A number of students apply for a programme through OLA, but never turn up at the College. The reasons for the no shows also needs to be analysed.

The Access programme offered at NWRC over 2 half days has better retention and success rates than programmes delivered over a full-day. This is something which also needs to be considered.

It was agreed that a further meeting of the Working Group be held to progress the discussions.

#### 4. FITNESS TO PRACTISE

Members considered a paper on a collaborative approach to public information availability and application practices for Access NI within partner institutions and Ulster University.

Course Directors of programmes in partner institutions where Access NI clearance is required were asked to:

- i) Confirm that the publicly available information on their website was accurate;
- ii) Outline the process within their College for students who require Access NI clearance.

Twelve Course Directors replied to the request for this information. With regard to the availability and accuracy of published information a range of responses were received. Where information is available then, for some colleges, it represents a shortened version of what is available in their prospectus and / or the entry requirements for programmes found at various places on the college website. For others the brief information is all that is available anywhere on the college website. Some colleges have information in printed literature but not on the website and some other colleges make no reference to the issue at all.

Some colleagues note that they speak with prospective students about the matter should they attend for interview or are provided with a conditional offer. Colleagues have responded to say that where an absence of Access NI information is noted on the website then this is unintentional and steps are being taken to rectify the situation. Some colleagues note that for them there is no stipulation requiring students to complete an Access NI check when applying or upon accepting a place. However, for this college they must be in receipt of the results of the check prior to students being permitted to undertake work placement.

Again, with regard to the process in place for applying for Access NI clearance there are a range of varying procedures in place.

Some colleges commence the process during the induction week after enrolment, whereas others wait until different points in the programme to get the ball rolling. Some colleagues complete the process at the end of Year 1 in preparation for work-based modules in Year 2 whereas some others leave it until Year 2 has commenced. In all cases the student is required to have successfully completed the process prior to commencing work-based learning elements where it is deemed necessary to have the check completed at all. It was noted by some that Access NI checks are only required if the placement provider requests it to be completed. Therefore, across a student cohort some would be required to have the checks and some not, depending upon the placement area. Some colleges report that a Safeguarding Officer oversees the process and for others it is HR who fulfil the role. Lastly, one college reports that whilst they currently have students complete the check having started the course, they are considering changing this to having it done prior to commencement.

Members considered it may be too late to wait until the end of Year 1 before applying for Access NI as an adverse outcome from the application may mean that the student could not complete the course and would have wasted a year. This arrangement could put the college at odds with the protection provided to consumers under Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) legislation.

It was agreed that a draft set of principles relating to Access NI be developed and forwarded to Colleges for consideration.

## 5. APPLICATION OF A NEW DEGREE CLASSIFICATION ALGORITHM

At the last meeting members agreed to survey students regarding the proposal for 30% of level 4 assessment to count towards the calculation of the final award. Members were also to provide the results of the modelling exercise based on student marks after the 2018/19 Supplementary Boards.

The Chair informed that an analysis of the outcomes from the modelling exercise showed very little, if any, change to the final Degree award classification. In fact in a small number of cases the outcome would have resulted in a lower award.

Members accepted that the modelling exercise looked at historical data and did not take account of the fact that students may have performed better had they known that level 4 assessment contributed to the final degree award.

The responses to the survey showed an overwhelming support from students for a percentage of level 4 marks to count towards the final degree award. They felt this would motivate them to work harder in Year 1 as currently the first year of the Foundation degree is seen by many as simply a means to allow them to progress to the final year.

It was agreed:           that a paper be presented to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee recommending the introduction of the new Degree algorithm to Foundation degrees with a two year transitional period where no student would be disadvantaged.

## 6. REVIEW OF THE NEW CONTINUOUS ASSURANCE OF QUALITY ENHANCEMENT (CAQE) PROCESS

The Chair asked for feedback on the new CAQE process which the University introduced last year to replace the former annual course review. Feedback from Colleges will be considered by the University when reviewing the process.

All the HE Co-ordinators said they supported the new CAQE process as it allowed them to focus on their internal quality assurance monitoring and review processes which in turn gave them greater control over both the quality of the programme and the quality of the student learning experience.

Members said they appreciated the way the data was presented to them, but asked if the data could be provided sooner to allow them more time to analyse and drill down into the data at module level. The University agreed to look into this as part of its review of the process.

## 7. FEEDBACK FROM THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Chair informed that 102 people registered to attend the annual conference with 89 actual attendees on the day with representatives from the 6 Regional Colleges, CAFRE, Ulster University and DfE.

Feedback was, on the whole, very positive, with 32 respondents completing the survey, all recognising the value of such an event and praising the excellence of the venue. All the presentations were deemed as interesting and useful, but the one chosen, by more respondents, as the most useful was Professor Bartholomew's presentation on "Making best use of data", closely followed by Caroline Turnbull's session and workshop on the QAA Quality Code.

Suggestions re: future sessions/themes included:

- Pedagogic approaches to improving teaching
- Challenges in delivering HLA's
- Sharing good practice with TEF
- Industry linkages, new areas of development
- Health Checks for programmes using metrics
- WBL – standardising assessments
- Session for FE staff delivering Collaborative provision

Ms Paris suggested a session on calibration v moderation.

## 8. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The Chair informed of two staff development events planned for later in this semester. They are:

- i) Annual Cycle and Examination Boards – 7 May 2020 (morning)
- ii) Online Admissions – 7 May 2020 (afternoon)

H Deighan