

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

Paper No ASQEC/19/8

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

13 March 2019

Agenda Item 12

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS FORUM

COVER SHEET

To consider the report from the meeting of the Forum held on 23 January 2019.

REPORT FROM THE MEETING OF THE COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS
FORUM (23 January 2019)

1. MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM COHORT SIZES

The Chair provided clarity on the decision by ASQEC approving a minimum student intake of 15 (F/T and P/T combined).

This policy was introduced to address concerns regarding the quality of the student learning experience in small class sizes and also the ongoing financial viability of offering such programmes.

Colleges must demonstrate a determined and strategic effort to meet the minimum intake requirements. They must clearly articulate why they have not met the target and what they are doing to increase admissions.

Student intake will be subject to annual monitoring and where it is evident that the minimum cohort size cannot realistically be met the course will be withdrawn.

Colleges were encouraged to be innovative when addressing the problem of small class sizes and to look at all options both within their institution and in partnership with University. They were also reminded that the letter of offer to applicants should clearly state that the course will only run if there are sufficient student numbers.

2. ONLINE ADMISSIONS

The Chair informed members that the University is planning to extend online admissions (OLA) to all Colleges from September 2019. All new students from this date will be able to apply online.

Students will also be able to upload evidence of their GCSE English (and Maths where applicable) online at the same time. This should help to eliminate the problems which arose this year regarding lack of adherence to the University's Admissions Regulations.

Training on the use of the OLA process will be provided by the University. It was noted that there will be a significant cost implication for the University in checking the accuracy of the evidence provided and some of this cost may be passed onto partner institutions, particularly in those cases where the information provided by Colleges is incorrect or inadequate.

3. STUDENT RETENTION AND SUCCESS

Members considered a paper on student retention and success after the 2017/18 Supplementary Boards of Examiners.

The Forum, at its meeting on 21 September 2016, agreed a benchmark of 10% attrition for FDs and 20% for Access provision. Only CAFRE met the benchmark for attrition in both years 1 & 2 for full-time programmes and only SWC met the target for year 2. Only CAFRE and NWRC met the benchmark for part-time Access provision.

With regard to Success 2 the Forum agreed a benchmark of 75% for Year 1 and 80% for Year 2. For Access provision a benchmark of 70% was agreed.

In the majority of cases the Success 2 benchmark for full-time provision was met after the supplementary boards. However, the large increase in success between the June Boards and the Resit Boards needs to be addressed, as too many students are still failing at the first attempt.

No College met the Success 2 benchmark for Access provision for either full-time or part-time mode of study. It was noted that full-time Access students do not pay a course fee, whereas part-time Access students pay the full College fee. This may have an impact on attrition and success.

Members agreed that there were many factors, both academic and personal, which impact on high levels of attrition on Access programmes. Colleges were asked to drill down into the data to ascertain how many students left the course for academic reasons and how many were early leavers because of their personal circumstances.

- It was agreed that:
- i) a small Working Group be established, chaired by Mrs McCall, with representatives from those Colleges offering Access programmes to look at the causes of attrition and to come up with recommendations to address problems identified;
 - ii) Colleges provide QE with their analysis of attrition within their own institution to assist the deliberations of the Working Group.

4. ATTRITION, PROGRESSION AND SUCCESS DATA 2Y3S 2017/18

Members considered a paper on attrition, progression and success data for the 2Y3S mode of study for 2017/18.

No College met the agreed benchmark of 85%.

Members noted that this mode of study is no longer approved by Ulster University and the existing programmes are being run out. It was also noted

that there is no supplementary examination period for students on 2Y3S programmes.

5. ANNUAL COURSE REVIEW 2017/18

Members considered a paper summarizing the outcomes from the outcomes from the 2017/18 annual course review. The report from the Sub-Group reviewing the annual course review submissions from partner institutions was approved by ASQEC at its meeting on 30 November 2018.

The Sub-Group will meet again on 30 January 2019 to review the adequacy of the responses to issues identified.

The Sub-Group reviewed and approved the actions taken or proposed by partner institutions to address the issues raised as part of the 2016/17 annual course review. They were concerned that while training had been provided to College staff on how the University calculates success and retention data, there were still variances between University-generated data and that provided by partner institutions. They asked that senior management within Colleges provide training to relevant staff on the data which must be provided in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER).

A recurrent theme throughout the provision, and indeed the most significant problem for HE provision in Colleges, is that of low student numbers, and in consequence of the viability of the programmes on offer. Most of the courses struggle to recruit students at the levels originally agreed at evaluation/revalidation time, and the levels of attrition (particularly in terms of early leavers and non-returners) are often disappointingly high.

The Sub-Group noted that in the SER course teams were asked to reflect on data over a four-year period. This allows for trends to be identified and action taken where appropriate. There was little evidence of course teams critically reflecting on data over the four years. The Sub-Group asked that this be included in the training which will be provided to course teams by HE Co-ordinators on the data required in the SER.

A number of External Examiners commented that the marks on the WBL module were over-generous, in particular where industrial partners engage in the students' assessment. While employer input can lead to effective course design and good employability, it should not result in over-generous marking.

As per Ulster University's requirements, Course Committee (CC) and Staff Student Consultative Committee (SSCC) meetings were taking place once per semester. In some partner institutions CC meetings are held once a month. Minutes of these meetings were being taken, with copies normally being sent to the FPM. In most cases course teams were using the University's agendas and minutes templates provided through the CPF. It was noted that in a small number of programmes, there was good practice whereby students were taking

the minutes of the SSCC meeting. However, it was evident that minutes of meetings were still not being routinely forwarded to FPMs.

The following actions were agreed to address the matters referred to the Forum:

	Recommendation	Agreed for Action
1.	That partner institutions provide a named contact who will be responsible for forwarding all Course Committee (CC) and Staff/Student Consultative Committee (SSCC) minutes within their institutions to Faculty Partnership Managers on an ongoing basis at agreed junctures.	A named contact will be provided. NRC expressed concern that under their present structure for managing collaboration activity this would be difficult to achieve.
2.	That the FPM Annual Report be amended to take account of College specific issues within a subject network.	The Chair will amend the FPM annual report.
3.	That HE Co-ordinators ensure that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course Directors notify the University immediately of early leavers; • Staff development be provided by HE Co-ordinators for all Course Directors and key staff on the completion of statistical data on the Self-Evaluation Report (SER); • Course Teams be encouraged to use the University template for CC and SSCC meetings; <p>Course Teams track and record non-returners and implement strategies to encourage the return of these students.</p>	HE Co-ordinators were reminded of these requirements.
4.	That Boards of Examiners should only be chaired by appropriate staff who have been trained by the University.	HE Co-ordinators were reminded of the need for Chairs of BoE to have received training.

Members were also advised of a number of areas of good practice including the running of the 'Book Club' the presentation of materials on Moodle to the provision of a Student Conference, industry-sponsored awards and the use of verbal quizzes to reinforce the various stages of academic appeals and student complaint processes.

6. APPLICATION OF THE NEW DEGREE ALGORITHM TO FOUNDATION DEGREES

Members considered a paper investigating the potential to apply the new degree algorithm to FDs.

The recent focus on benchmarks for attrition and progression served to highlight the very large numbers of students on validated courses who are not successful at the first attempt in May. On many FD courses in 17/18, over half of the students had resits in August. No institution met the Success 2 benchmarks following the June Boards of Examiners.

One potential way to address poor student progression at the first attempt is for level 4 modules to contribute to the final award. Students might be less content to accept a capped mark at the August resits, and might strive to succeed at the first attempt, thereby reducing the volume of resits.

At the last meeting of the Forum members identified final year students on 4 courses in partner colleges for investigation, covering different subject areas and modes of delivery. A total of 193 sets of student marks were modelled using the degree algorithm of 30% level 4 modules, 70% level 5 modules, to assess the impact of any change to current arrangements.

82 students, or 42%, saw their mark go down, while 111 students, or 58%, saw their marks stay the same or go up.

In terms of moving across bands for classification, 27 students (14%) dropped one classification while 12 students (6%) rose by one classification.

Members considered whether the potentially negative impact it would have on the 42% of students would be one factor in motivating students to attempt to succeed first-time round. It was accepted that this was a small sample and the analysis looked at historical data and did not take account of the fact that students might have performed better had they known that level 4 assessments contributed to the final award.

It was also noted that for many students the first year of an FD is seen as a transition year from FE into HE and it may be unfair for this transition year to count towards their degree classification. The first year of an Honours degree at Ulster University does not count towards the final award.

It was agreed that HE Co-ordinators discuss the proposed FD algorithm with their colleagues and report back to the next meeting of the Forum.

7. WORK-BASED LEARNING TEMPLATE

Members received the University's new WBL module template for Foundation Degree provision.

The Chair informed members that this template would help to address an issue raised at ASQEC in relation to high marks, particularly where the employer-assessed element of the WBL module was marked too generously. There was also a concern that the content and assessment of WBL was more in keeping with placement than actual work-based learning, and that the requirement to engage in an authentic project was not assessed

Course Teams are to be encouraged to use this template, and adapt it to their specific subject area, particularly where there is evidence of consistently high marks. This is an attempt to standardise WBL across all partner institutions and should be approved by the University through a CA3.

8. MARKETING ACTIVITY

Members received a paper detailing the University's current marketing and communications activity.

The University, and in particular the Marketing Engagement Team, are currently working on revamping Open Days with a change of date and format. The Jordanstown date is being moved to before the summer holidays, possibly around the end of May/start of June and Magee and Coleraine will be held during the week in early September. The University is also proposing to pay for buses to transport students from their schools to Magee and Coleraine.

In the past Magee and Coleraine have had approximately 500 students and their parents attending with Jordanstown having approximately 10000 students. With these change of dates the University is hoping to spread out the attendance of the students so more will come along to Magee and Coleraine and learn what goes on at each campus and subsequently hopefully increase applications and enrolments at each of these.

The University is changing the format of our Applicant information events. Instead of being held as previously on a course basis they will now be held on each campus.

H Deighan