

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

LEARNING AND TEACHING COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting held on 14 February 2017 by video-conference

PRESENT

Professor P Bartholomew (Chair), Dr L Bradley, Dr D Brown, Ms H Bruce, Dr C Carruthers, Professor H Farley, Professor P Hanna, Professor D Hazlett, Dr M Keenan, Mr D McGivern, Professor A McKillop, Professor U McMahon-Beattie, Ms J McMinn, Mr K McStravock, Professor B Murphy, Mrs J Peden, Mr M Quigg, Professor P Seawright, Professor C Turner

IN ATTENDANCE

Mrs C G Avery, Mr A G Faulkner

17.1 TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP

Professor Bartholomew welcomed members to the first meeting of the newly constituted Learning and Teaching Committee.

The Committee received its draft terms of reference and membership (Paper No LTC/17/1). It was noted that the terms of reference and composition of this Committee and of the new Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee, also within the Education portfolio, were still in draft form and might be revised before final approval by Senate.

Given the expectation that members will have read all papers in advance of each meeting, the Chair advised that items for discussion would be starred.

AGREED: that the draft terms of reference and membership be endorsed and recommended to Senate for approval.

17.2 MINUTES

The confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2016 were signed by the Chair.

MATTERS ARISING

17.3 Teaching Excellence Framework: Year Two Specification (Min 16.84)

The Chair reported that a draft submission for TEF2 had been considered by Senate at its meeting in January 2017. As there was no benefit to be gained in terms of fees uplift in Northern Ireland unlike in other UK regions, it had been agreed not to participate in this round, in common with the other Northern Ireland universities. Future participation would be kept under active review.

17.4 Grade Point Average (Min 16.90)

The Committee noted that the final report of the GPA Working Group would be considered by the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee at its meeting on 21 February, in accordance with its draft terms of reference.

CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

17.5 Inclusive Teaching and Learning as a Route to Excellence

The Committee noted the receipt of a guidance document produced by the Disabled Students Sector Leadership Group, which had been prompted by changes to the Disabled Students' Allowance for students ordinarily resident in England. Although this focussed on English providers, the principles involved had wider interest and application. (See www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-teaching-and-learning-in-higher-education.)

It was noted that the University's guidance on inclusivity, competence standards, and reasonable adjustments under SENDO encouraged the anticipatory and inclusive approach emphasised in this new guidance document. (See www.ulster.ac.uk/about/governance/equality-diversity/equality,-policies-and-guidance.)

The notice of publication had been copied to Student Support and to the Equality section of the Policy Implementation Unit, Secretary's Office. Ms McMinn reported that her Department was undertaking an analysis which would identify matters for attention. She had also met with Professor Hazlett to discuss how the necessary actions might be taken forward strategically.

Professor Bartholomew advised that inclusive learning and teaching would be embedded in the new curriculum design principles which he was developing (minute 17.7 refers). The Centre for Higher Education Research and Practice and Student Support would collaborate to develop appropriate staff development to feature in an expanded Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice as it was developed into an MEd.

17.6 UUSU Learning and Teaching Awards 2017

The Chair reported that nominations for the 2017 UUSU Learning and Teaching Awards were now open. These awards were very valuable in recognising and celebrating outstanding achievements by Ulster staff and student representatives. Information on the eight categories and the nomination process was now available on the Students' Union website: www.uusu.org.

Faculties were asked to encourage students to submit nominations by the closing date of 31 March 2017.

17.7 CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Professor Bartholomew outlined his plans for curriculum development at the University which included new curriculum design principles.

It was noted that curriculum re-design was a key feature of the continuing 2016/17 pilot Programme Review and Development process, but the new principles would steer this reflection and development within clear parameters to help ensure achievement of the strategic goals for excellence in teaching. The Committee noted that two of the three schools participating in the PRD pilot had requested full or partial deferral of their revalidations.

The Chair stated that the process of curriculum design needed to be a key focus in the University's course approval/re-approval processes and consideration would be given to how this activity might be strengthened and supported.

Professor Bartholomew mentioned that he had already signalled his initial thinking around the principles in various formal and informal meetings and discussions, including the induction event for external examiners in January. Reaction had been generally positive. He intended to roll out discussion and understanding of the proposed principles through staff consultation events at each campus, to be held between 5 - 12 April, in order to gauge the general response and to ensure that any possible issues were identified and explored in advance. An all staff email would be sent out in due course and an article would also be published in *Insight*.

Professor Hazlett was asked to organise a similar consultation event with students. It would, however, be important to give careful consideration to the student year groups invited to participate to avoid possible confusion among students who would be completing their studies under current regulations.

Ideas included:

- Rationalisation and reduction in the total number of learning outcomes and removal of distinct 'KIPT' headings in modules.
- Greater standardisation of module credit size – towards a norm of 20 credit points.
- Guidance on assessment load (number of assessments, word lengths), with a view to reducing over-assessment and ensuring consistent student experience.
- Changing the current Honours degree award algorithm to take into account work undertaken in year 2 [level 5] and possibly year 1 [level 4].

The Chair advised that the principles would be somewhat flexible and that course/subject teams would be able to seek permission to depart from them, as at present, but only with a sound rationale that will be subject to peer review/scrutiny.

Other key objectives for student learning in relation to information literacy, employability, digital skills, sustainability and internationalisation would continue to be embedded within the curriculum and evidenced through the course approval and annual monitoring processes. An action arising from annual monitoring could be that course provision which was not meeting performance targets might be required to undergo revalidation in the next academic year.

It was expected that the new principles should be formally applied in individual courses no later than the next approval point in the revalidation cycle, although course teams could adopt them earlier on an elective basis.

Committee members, including the Students' Union representatives, were supportive of the general inclusion of a level 5 contribution in Honours classification. The Chair advised that the timing of the introduction of any changes to the basis of classification would require careful consideration to ensure that students were treated equitably and that no student was disadvantaged. He had requested modelling of existing data and a preferred algorithm was classify on the best outcome from the aggregate of one of the following:

- 100% Level 6;
- 60% Level 6 and 40% Level 5; or
- 60% Level 6, 30% Level 5 and 10% Level 4.

The Chair recognised that, although consultation was ongoing and detailed proposals would require formal approval through the relevant committees, many teams were already preparing for revalidation in the 2017/18 academic year and the new algorithm for classification would have implications for assessment design at levels 5 (and 4). While there was no current regulatory impediment to adoption of the majority of the principles outlined, course teams wishing to develop their assessment practices to reflect the new Honours degree algorithm should discuss their intentions with Professor Bartholomew. The 'variations and departures' process could be used to consider approval for specific courses, pending a change to the general Honours degree regulations.

The Chair reported that he had met with Professor Turner to discuss the implications of the proposed changes for the Curriculum Management System. He was also exploring with Student Administration processes for boards of examiners so that they could readily identify the appropriate summary mark for classification purposes and the impact of final mark adjustments.

The Chair welcomed Mr McGivern's suggestion for a single dashboard for students where they might access learner analytics (predictive) and HEAR (retrospective) data together.

17.8 FACULTY ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

The Committee noted that this was a new standing item on the agenda whereby members would have the opportunity to raise learning and teaching matters for discussion.

17.9 INVIGILATION OF EXAMINATIONS

Dr Keenan identified concerns about the significant academic staff costs involved in the invigilation of examinations. Although the School of the Built Environment had removed many examinations through the PRD re-approval process, allocation of invigilation duties remained very high and presented challenges particularly in January, when staff wished to undertake other activities such as attending conferences, marking and research. Other Faculty representatives had similar

concerns. Dr Bradley reported that, although there had been a substantial reduction in the number of examinations in her Department, the requested number of invigilators had substantially increased, which she attributed to a requirement for the supervision of students assigned to individual rooms under the reasonable adjustments protocol.

While it was noted that Senate had previously approved an Invigilation Policy which applied to all academic staff (2010) and external invigilators were not employed as in some other institutions, it was considered appropriate to instigate a review of the efficiency of current arrangements.

AGREED: that this matter be referred to the Student Administration Department who should prepare a paper in consultation with Student Support for consideration by the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee in accordance with its terms of reference.

17.10 MISSING EXAMINATION SCRIPTS

Professor McKillop reported that there had recently been two instances of examination scripts going missing, although not through any apparent negligence by the students concerned or the invigilators. These cases had now been dealt with and the matter was scheduled for discussion at the next meeting of the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee. The Faculty would welcome a University policy in this regard.

It was noted that while such serious breaches should not occur the University should have a clear policy to deal with any rare instances, and that current procedures for the secure collection, retention, distribution and return of examination scripts should be reviewed to ensure that scripts cannot be lost.

AGREED that:

- i) the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences forward to the Chair its report on the recent incidents;
- ii) Student Administration be asked to review and report on current security arrangements, to introduce changes to reduce possible loss of scripts, and to develop a procedure if one did not exist, including the consequences for affected students;
- iii) a paper on this matter be considered by the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee.

17.11 FITNESS TO STUDY; EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

Dr Keenan reported that an increasing number of students appeared to be experiencing mental health difficulties and considered that a Fitness to Study policy needed to be developed. It would also be timely to review the Extenuating Circumstances policy to ensure that it remained fit for purpose, given that some general practitioners were reportedly unwilling to verify illness which may have affected student performance.

It was noted that other institutions had Fitness to Study policies.

The Head of Student Support advised the Committee that these matters would be addressed through/alongside the proposed Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy which was currently being developed. It was noted that a group had previously been established to consider a Fitness to Study policy.

Ms McMinn reported that, although there was an element of academic judgement and discretion in dealing with extenuating circumstances in accordance with the University's detailed guidelines, there appeared to be less consistency in relation to the evidence accepted than might be expected. It was noted that, while the formal responsibility for accepting and consequently permitting 'first sits' lay with boards of examiners, boards did not receive the details of individual circumstances, only a recommendation from the course director/Faculty Extenuating Circumstances Panel in this regard.

AGREED that:

- i) the draft Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy be considered by the Committee at its June 2017 meeting;
- ii) the draft Fitness to Study policy be considered by the Committee at its October 2017 meeting;
- iii) a review of the Extenuating Circumstances procedures be referred to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee.

17.12 WORD LIMITS

Professor McKillop raised the question of penalties for exceeding word limits, in the absence of a University-wide policy on this matter. The Faculty had developed its own policy, as had a number of other Faculties.

Mr Faulkner confirmed that the University had not adopted a single set of penalties following the last review but had required that each Faculty keep its own arrangements under review to ensure internal consistency and that penalties be made explicit in course and module handbooks. (Teaching and Learning Committee mins 03.43 and 04.109 refer.) Faculty policies and practices were to be kept under review.

Professor Bartholomew considered it timely to instigate such a University-wide review.

AGREED: that a paper on this matter, including a review of current Faculty policies and practices, be considered at the next meeting.

17.13 TEACHING PERIOD

Ms Bruce raised the question of the time available to support students on courses without formal written examinations, which were common in the Belfast School of Art. She suggested that there was a perceived requirement that teaching should

be restricted to the standard 12 week teaching blocks in the Autumn and Spring semesters. It was felt that this could have a detrimental impact on student learning and students might consider that this approach did not provide value for money.

Mr Faulkner confirmed that there was no University requirement that teaching should be confined to weeks 1 - 12 in each semester and that courses with no examinations were able to make use of weeks 13 – 15/16, which were within the dates of attendance, as appropriate. Professor Bartholomew advised that staff should think creatively to use the time available for teaching and particularly at the end of the semester in courses which did not have sessional examinations. It would be important to take account of other activities during the designated examination period and the implications for students whose module choice did involve examinations.

17.14 CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Dr Carruthers stated that matters around the CMS had been raised in her Department. Professor Turner advised that he was endeavouring to arrange meetings of the Users' Forum in the near future, which would provide an opportunity to update staff in relation to recent changes and proposed developments and to identify and discuss issues.

Dr Bradley reported her concerns about system delays associated with saving changes; work being lost even when saved; inconsistency between information held in CMS and the online prospectus; and an inability to view previously approved versions of programmes/modules.

Professor Turner advised that the issue of speed in saving changes was already known and he was working with the Information Services Department and the external developers to resolve this matter. Previously approved versions of programmes and modules could be viewed through the History tab and saved versions should not be lost. Professor Turner emphasised the importance of users communicating specific problems so that they could be identified, prioritised and resolved.

Mr McGivern confirmed that the CMS was the single source of information for the online prospectus and that information could only be brought into the prospectus if it was recorded in CMS.

Dr Bradley questioned if the CMS would be extended to include validated provision in partner institutions. Professor Turner stated that the system could be made available to the University's partners, but in this early phase it had been restricted to internal use. Any roll-out would require careful consideration of costs and benefits to the University and to external institutions and be negotiated with them.

17.15 SUB-COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYABILITY

The Committee received the report of the meeting held on 1 February 2017 and noted that no items required discussion (Paper No LTC/17/2).

17.16 DIGITAL LEARNING SUB-COMMITTEE

Professor Hanna presented the report from the meeting held on 14 November 2016 in which two items had been referred for discussion (Paper No LTC/17/3).

17.17 Electronic Management of Assessment and Feedback Policy (Item 7a) (Min 16.98 refers)

The former Learning and Teaching Committee had agreed at its June 2016 meeting to a staged approach to the transition to online assessment with the online submission of written assessment being prioritised in Semester 2, 2016/17, the online return of marks in 2017/18 and feedback in 2018/19. It was noted that the timetable was phased to allow staff appropriate time to adjust to new methodologies but was not intended to disconnect the links between marking and providing feedback, as embedded in the Principles of Assessment and Feedback for Learning, nor to prevent earlier achievement of all aspects.

Professor Bartholomew considered that it might be more appropriate pedagogically, and practically, for online marking and feedback to be dealt with together in a single target date of 2018/19. This would allow staff more time to make the adjustment to online marking and feedback, and in particular it would assist those staff who did not yet have the appropriate hardware to fulfil these expectations. Heads of School would have more time to review resources.

Variability in practices and lack of consistency among individual staff were raised by the Ulster University Business School representatives. Professor Murphy advised that staff should be encouraged to attend the Assessment and Feedback sessions scheduled by the Office for Digital Learning to support best practice and to seek advice in terms of technical solutions relating to their particular equipment.

The Sub-Committee had noted that staff who did not have the appropriate equipment to support online assessment should raise the matter with their Head of School; a list of actions arising from consideration of such requests had been drawn up. Health and Safety concerns should be considered through the Display Screen Equipment Procedure and the implementation of health and safety interventions, if necessary. It was noted that a paper on this topic was to be presented to the next meeting of the Health and Safety Consultative Forum.

Professor McMahon-Beattie asked whether any normal or minimum equipment requirements were specified. Although there was a view that staff would benefit from double screens, Professor Murphy advised that this would not be set as a minimum standard since it was possible to mark and provide feedback with a single screen, and resources might constrain the availability of such an optimal solution.

AGREED that:

- i) the timetable for the return of marks online be revised to coincide with that for feedback in 2018/19;

- ii) the Office for Digital Learning draw up a flow chart to guide staff on contacts, equipment needs and other matters relating to online assessment and feedback. This should be circulated to members for discussion and agreement before the next Committee meeting.

17.18 Project 10 Technology Review Update Report (Item 8b)

The Committee noted that the report compared the different approaches by two schools to the delivery of their courses remotely in two regional colleges (outcentres).

Professor Hanna drew to the Committee's attention a need to incorporate longer transition time into the timetabling system for rooms classified as active learning spaces on account of the additional time required to set up and restore rooms.

17.19 PROFESSIONAL AND CONTINUING EDUCATION SUB-COMMITTEE

The Committee received the report of the meeting held on 15 November 2016 chaired by Professor McMahon-Beattie (Paper No LTC/17/4). Although no items had been identified for discussion, the Chair noted that the Centre for Flexible and Continuing Education was seeking advice from the Committee on the best way to progress planning for 2017/18 with Faculties and Schools.

The Committee noted that Professor Murphy was currently preparing a strategic planning paper on opportunities for income growth. Professional training and development activities (postgraduate and part-time) were considered to be most feasible. The paper would be informed by discussions with Faculties.

Professor Seawright noted the importance of, and need for, the University to generate income from these activities but advised that other pressures to meet, for example, international recruitment targets might impact on the significant growth expected in relation to flexible learning. The Chair recognised the tension between a range of activities and stressed that Faculties needed to consider the net income and opportunity costs associated with each in determining their priorities.

AGREED: that the Centre for Flexible and Continuing Education hold initial discussions on continuing education plans for 2017/18 with Executive Deans, to ensure that proposals were aligned to the annual planning cycle.

17.20 UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORKS 2015/16

Professor Murphy presented the 2015/16 reviews of the two frameworks (Papers No LTC/17/5a) and LTC/17/5b).

17.21 Certificate of Personal and Professional Development Framework

The Committee endorsed the Centre for Flexible and Continuing Education request to explore the design of an extended flexible framework from levels 4 to 7.

The Committee noted that this development would be discussed with Executive Deans and incorporated into a strategy paper.

17.22 Postgraduate Certificate of Professional Development Framework

The Committee noted that the Postgraduate Certificate framework continued to demonstrate impact in a number of ways, in particular through the generation of new income streams and an increase in the non-MASN student numbers.

17.23 WIDENING ACCESS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

Dr Bradley presented the report from the meetings held on 7 November 2016 and 16 January 2017 (Paper No LTC/17/6). The Committee was asked to consider three items identified for discussion.

17.24 Revised Terms of Reference (Item 3 and Appendix 1)

The Committee noted that terms 1 – 6 had been revised to set the Sub-Committee's business within the context of the University's Strategic Plan. A Student Officer and the Research and Impact Manager within ADDL had been added to the membership.

17.25 Strategic Enablement (Item 8 and Appendix 2)

The Committee noted the strategic alignment proposed for the Centre for Flexible and Continuing Education, through four workstreams (School Partnerships, Community Engagement, Workforce Development and FCE Programme Team (Flexible Framework)). Engagement with the schools' sector would be re-focused strategically through the HE Discovery Framework. Two task groups were to be established to ensure full Faculty consultation in relation to a) the process for recognition and credit for HE transition and b) the Community Fellowship Scheme 'Developing a Community Faculty' (within the Community Partnership Framework).

17.26 Data (Item 9 and Appendix 3)

The Committee noted that the first meeting of the Data Analysis Group had been held and that widening access would be included within the remit of the Group to ensure appropriate sharing of information and ethical considerations. The proposed datasets detailed in Appendix 3 to the report were considered appropriate.

AGREED that:

- i) the revised terms of reference and membership be approved;
- ii) the strategic alignment of the Centre be endorsed;
- iii) the identified widening participation planning and performance data requirements be endorsed.

17.27 COMBINED STUDIES PROGRAMME

Dr Bradley, Director of Combined Studies at Magee, presented the annual report on the operation and management of the combined studies programme in 2015/16 on behalf of the three campus co-ordinating groups (Paper No LTC/17/7).

It was noted that the chief external examiners' reports were all very positive and would be formally received by the Academic Standards and Enhancement Committee at a future meeting. The Committee also noted that the removal of subject areas in Arts and Business at Coleraine would affect the range of combinations available for students.

17.28 STUDENT SUPPORT

Ms McMinn provided an oral report on the updating of the following procedures:

- Procedures in the Event of a Student Death;
- Procedures for a Serious Student Incident;
- Out of Hours Critical Incident Response Protocol.

Duration 2½ hours

1 March 2017

AGF/CA/lh