

REPORT FROM THE MEETING OF THE COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS
FORUM (4 October 2017)

1. ONLINE ADMISSIONS PILOT

Members were provided with an update on the online admissions pilot for all first year students at NWRC, and the initial pilot courses from 16/17.

The online admissions process appears to have worked well with only a small number of minor issues. Online admissions (OLA) opened on 29 August 2017 and closed on 29 September 2017. Enrolment forms were printed on 29 September and sent to the Course Directors. They also received enrolment forms for those who had commenced but who had not completed an OLA for the specific programme.

The process will be reviewed when all the completed enrolment forms have been returned to the University.

The Chair reminded partner institutions that the late enrolment fee applies to those applications submitted after 14 October 2017.

It is hoped to roll out online admissions to all first year students in all partner institutions from the 2018/19 academic year.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP

Members received a paper detailing the revised Terms of Reference and Membership of the Forum.

It was noted that the fifth Term of Reference has been revised to reflect the University's 5&50 Strategic Plan.

It was noted that not all collaborative partners are members of the Forum, and are perhaps out of the loop in terms of having an input into the development and monitoring of policies and procedures.

AGREED that it be recommended to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee:

- a) that the revised terms of reference and membership be approved (Appendix);
- b) and that all partner institutions be invited to have a representative as a member of the Forum.

3. APEL AUDIT

Members considered a paper on the findings from the audit of APEL for admissions for year 1 Foundation degree entry in 2016/17.

The Annual Course Review Sub-Group raised the issue of APEL, and concerns that some students at partner institutions were being registered on a course by APEL, that the SPMs were not informed of this, nor was it disclosed in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER). Course Teams must provide details in the SER of how they select students who do not meet the course entry requirements. They must also consult SPMs where candidates are under consideration for APEL before offers are made.

A three-stage APEL audit was undertaken by SPMs.

Stage 1: Review of APEL policies

Colleges were requested to submit their APEL policies for review. The University's expectation is that these should align with the regional APEL policy, a DEL initiative to which all partners contributed.

In the main, Colleges aligned with the University's and the Regional APEL policy

Stage 2: Audit of APEL admissions for 2016/17

Colleges were asked to provide information on APEL admissions for each Foundation degree for 2016/17.

The SPMs undertook a formal audit of these returns on a course-by-course basis. The information returned did not align with SPMs' experience/ involvement, nor did it tally with experience from previous Annual Course Review submissions, where each SER is required to account for the basis of admission to each course. In some cases, SPMs had been sent larger numbers of APEL candidates, but this was *after* the candidates had already enrolled on the course. In other cases, SPMs had rejected candidates but they were admitted despite this. In quite a few cases, the College had not involved the SPM at all, and the SPM had been unaware that the candidates had been admitted on that basis.

The audit findings included non-submission of portfolios with the APEL form; inadequately constituted APEL panels; incomplete alignment with entry requirements, especially where candidates were claiming APEL for GCSE English and Maths (which is not permitted by all Faculties); inadequate personal statements; no annotation of decisions; no indication of scrutiny or evidence of decisions made. There was inadequate reporting of the extent of APEL at the course level and by extension at the college level.

The SPMs were also concerned that in a few instances there were insufficient grounds to justify awarding APEL on the basis of level 3 equivalence; some offers were not deemed to be valid according to the policy and expectations. In some cases, evidence of the decision-making process and outcomes was poor, and it was unclear who had oversight of the process and the resulting decisions.

The audit also revealed that some candidates did not fulfil the level 2 entry requirements, but no APEL process was in place; instead the students were made to sign a waiver. This practice should never have been adopted and is of grave concern.

As a consequence of inconsistencies in the documentation and misalignment with SPMs' expectations, a full investigation of admissions decisions for 2016/17 was required.

Stage 3: Full audit of level 3 entry requirements 2016/17

All colleges were asked to complete a spreadsheet detailing UCAS tariff/educational attainment for each new Foundation Degree student in 2016/17. These returns were then crosschecked. Each SPM was asked to check the total of APEL admissions identified by the colleges for each course, then the UCAS tariff/entry requirements for each candidate to ensure they aligned with the offer standard. Where a candidate presented with lower than agreed tariff, this was identified as a candidate who should have gone through the APEL process. The SPMs were also asked to identify where details were missing. In such cases, the assumption would be that these were cases which should have gone through the APEL process. Finally, SPMs were asked to note EU and International applicants, which should normally be referred to the University.

The audit found that in general APEL was not implemented appropriately, and that there are concerns over the application of offer standards across the board. Where details were missing, these mainly concerned part-time students on certain courses. It is to be assumed these should have been put through the APEL process.

- It was agreed that:
- i) In the interests of fairness and equity for all applicants across Northern Ireland, Colleges will comply in full with the agreed regional policy and procedure on APEL;
 - ii) No applicant may be admitted through APEL without following the agreed procedure;
 - iii) No offers may be made to any applicant until the SPM has endorsed the offer based on the portfolio and documentation, which must be completed in full;
 - iv) This process must be completed before the published start of semester 1;
 - v) No retrospective endorsement of unapproved APEL admissions will be permitted;
 - vi) All EU/International applicants must be referred to the SPMs to verify against the University's equivalence list;
 - vii) SPMs will create a simple proforma to close the loop on APEL applications.

4. STUDENT RETENTION

Members considered a paper on student retention in the 2016/17 academic year as at 28 July 2017.

At the meeting of the Forum on 21 September 2016 members considered a paper on retention and progression data. This paper was prompted by new reporting arrangements within the University and the potential for monitoring and reporting under the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

At the meeting members agreed that a benchmark of 10% attrition be set for HE programmes, with a 20% attrition benchmark for Access provision. The higher attrition rate for Access provision takes account of the profile and background of students enrolling on these programmes.

The data this year showed that with the exception of CAFRE no College met the agreed benchmarks for either full-time or part-time provision. No College met the benchmark for full-time Access provision with only two Colleges meeting the benchmark for part-time programmes.

It was noted that full-time HE attrition rates were markedly worse in all Colleges than in 2015/16, with only one College showing a small improvement in part-time HE attrition. Likewise, attrition for full-time Access courses was significantly worse than last year, with two Colleges showing an improvement in retention for part-time programmes.

5. STUDENT SUCCESS

Members considered a paper on student success in the 2016/17 academic year as at 28 July 2017, which relates to the paper on student retention.

Members were reminded that the University has two success measurements:

Success 1: $(\text{Proceed} + \text{Award}) / (\text{Total} - (\text{Early Leavers} + \text{LOA} + \text{Non-Returners}))$
Success 2: $(\text{Proceed} + \text{Award}) / (\text{Total})$

What this means is that all students who engage with the course, regardless of how well they get on, are classified as Success 1. Success 2 refers to those students who enrolled onto the course irrespective of whether they engaged with the programme or not. In practice, therefore, it is the Success 1 data which gives a truer reflection of student success.

The data for both success measurements for 2016/17 for HE and Access programmes is generally poor. While it is recognised that the success data will significantly improve after the summer resits it is still a major concern that so many students, across all years of a programme, are failing at the first attempt. On some programmes more than 50% of students are failing first time round.

Of concern to the University is the fact that there appears to be only limited analysis of progression and success data after the June Boards of Examiners. It would seem that this data is only considered after the summer resits. The resit information is used by Colleges for the University's annual course review purposes.

While it is accepted that the College MIS systems are not set up to collect and store data relating to HE programmes course teams should be aware of success information at the June Boards of Examiners. As such they should be in a position to reflect on performance and report on the outcome of their review through the annual course review process.

- It was agreed that:
- i) A benchmark of 75% be set for Success 1 in Year 1 and 80% in Year 2, as at the June Boards;
 - ii) The QMAU provide HE Co-ordinators with course-specific data on retention and success as at 28 July 2017;
 - iii) HE Co-ordinators be provided with an explanation to the codes used by the University;
 - iv) A simple, easy to understand explanation be provided on what the University means by Success 1 and Success 2;
 - v) The SER used in annual course review be revised to include a section on a critical analysis of retention and success data at the June Boards of Examiners;
 - vi) Resit data be considered at the next meeting of the Forum; and,
 - vii) Success measures for 2Y3S courses be considered at the January Forum meeting, since these boards are only held in mid-September.

6. MARKETING ACTIVITY

Members received a paper on current marketing activities.

All colleges were sent, and included in, communications regarding Open Days across campuses. Over 450 students from further education colleges attended Open Days with further communication provided to students who had registered including subject related information. Communication will also be sent regarding subject specific information events.

Students will be invited by text, email and hard copy postcard, where applicable, to a range of applicant information events. This information will be circulated to colleges and included on a dedicated landing page.

Members of the Student Recruitment Team will give presentations to both 1st and 2nd year students at the beginning of semester 1 to promote progression to the University and the key factors these students need to consider.

H Deighan

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS FORUM

(A SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. To keep under review, advise and make recommendations to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee on the development, monitoring and enhancement of National, EU and International collaborative provision in line with the University's strategic objectives and to report to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee on matters relating to:
 - a) admissions and enrolment;
 - b) initial course planning, evaluation and re-validation;
 - c) standards management;
 - d) quality assurance and enhancement;
 - e) resources;
 - f) student support and guidance.
2. To report to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee on the outcomes of each meeting of the Forum.
3. To promote, encourage and facilitate the planning of collaborative provision at home and overseas in the context of the University's corporate objectives.
4. To contribute to the development of Fds linked to the Academic Planning process.
- 5. To contribute to the Civic Contribution pillar of the University's 5&50 Strategic Plan through the objectives for Employment and Widening Access.**
6. To ensure efficiency, promote innovation and disseminate good practice in course provision.
7. To ensure that technical and academic resources for digital outreach and digital learning are apposite and of high quality to support flexible and distributed provision.
8. To consider any other matters relating to collaborative provision which the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee or other relevant University Committees may require.

In reaching decisions the Sub-Committee will have due regard to their impact on, and implications for, the University's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity and good relations as outlined in its Equality Scheme, and associated policies, and where possible and practicable the Committee will ensure that its actions are proactive in this respect.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS FORUM

COMPOSITION

Chair

Partnership Managers:

Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment
Life and Health Sciences

Ulster University Business School

*One representative nominated by each of the following
Partner Institutions:*

Belfast Metropolitan College
College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise
Northern Regional College
North West Regional College
Southern Regional College
South Eastern Regional College
South West College

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)

Head of Quality Management and Audit Unit

Director of Access and Distributed Learning

Representative from Collaborative Courses Unit

Representative from Employability & Marketing

Secretariat

MEMBERSHIP

Ms Maeve Paris

Mr Jim Curran
Ms Susannah McCall
Ms Anne Moorhead
Ms Maeve Paris
Mr Jerome Marley
Mrs Margaret Sowney
Ms Carol Reid

Ms Lorraine Lavery
Mr Derek McDowell
Ms Tara Millar
Mrs Dorothy McElwee
Miss Carolyn Davison
Mrs Heather Miller
Mr Liam Curran

Professor Paul Bartholomew

Mrs Janet Alleyne

Professor Brian Murphy

Ms Norma Cameron

Mr Paul Quinn

Mr Hugh Deighan