

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

ACADEMIC POLICY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting held on
Tuesday 20 January 2015

Present:

Professor M Peel (Chair)
Professor A Cashmore Dr S Gabbott
Professor S Hainsworth Professor S Law
Professor T Lawson Mr Y Nikolov
Dr T Oliviera Dr R Parry
Mr M Rubin Professor J Scott
Ms C Taylor Dr D Watkins
Professor T Yeoman

In attendance: Mr R Dickinson, Dr C Hewitt (*vice* Dr R Norman), Mrs L Masterman (Secretary) and Mrs K Pollard

Apologies for absence were received from Dr D Luckett and Dr R Norman

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

15/M1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

15/M2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2014.

The Committee **approved** the minutes as a correct record

15/M3 MATTERS ARISING

Arising from M98 (ii), the Chair reported that he would be meeting with the Head of the Department of Economics to follow up on the issues raised in the Department's Periodic Developmental Review.

15/M4 CHAIR'S REPORT

- (i) Learning and Teaching Strategy away morning

The Chair thanked those members of the Committee who had attended the Learning and Teaching Strategy away morning for their input into discussions regarding the development of a new strategy for teaching, learning and student experience. It had been a very productive event and the Chair reported that a similar session would be run with Professional Services colleagues. A draft of the new Learning and Teaching Strategy would then be circulated for comment.

(ii) Task and Finish groups

The Chair reported that the President and Vice-Chancellor had established a number of Task and Finish Groups which would be undertaking reviews of various areas and activities of the University to explore the choices available to the University in the future and to inform the strategic conversation. These included:

- (a) The University Structure
- (b) Leicester's Academic Offer and the Teaching, Learning and Student Experience Strategy
- (c) The future of Distance Learning provision
- (d) Internationalisation strategy
- (e) Digital campus
- (f) Developing a new Business School
- (g) Corporate Social Responsibility
- (h) Research and Enterprise
- (i) Career Enhancement
- (j) Financial Models
- (k) Accountability and Transparency

(iii) Postgraduate Support Scheme

The Chair reported that the government would be introducing a loan scheme for postgraduate taught students to commence in 2016/17, noting that loans would be repaid alongside undergraduate loans once students were in employment earning above the required threshold.

In the interim, HEFCE had provided some funding to enable institutions to support students who wish to undertake a Masters programme in 2015-6 (or part-time in 2015-6 and 2016-7) and who are evidentially underrepresented within the postgraduate taught student body.

Pending further discussion at the University Leadership Team, the University is likely to offer a number of awards of £10 000 on a matched-funded basis to students from under-represented groups. Such groups would be identified by research conducted by the Recruitment team and through an interview process to be managed by the Careers and Employability Service. The outcome of this process would be reported back to the Committee.

15/M5 EUROPEAN JOINT MASTER'S PROGRAMME

The Committee considered a request to amend Senate Regulations to accommodate the proposed European Joint Masters Programme in Infection and Immunity. It had previously given approval in principle for the development of the joint degree programme but there were now specific requirements which needed to be considered before the proposal progressed to programme approval to ensure that it met the requirements of the various partner institutions.

The Committee agreed that, given the different nature of this degree programme and the fact that in all cases the requested amendments to regulations either met or exceeded the

current Regulations, rather than amending Regulations a preferred approach would be to approve derogations from Regulations as 'reasonable exceptions'. This would be on the basis that they met or exceeded the University's existing standards.

The committee **agreed** that the proposed amendments constituted 'reasonable exceptions' so no amendments were required to Regulations and the programme could proceed to programme approval once College procedures had been concluded.

15/M6 PATHWAYS PROJECT

The Committee received a report on the workshops organised by the Pathways Project implementation group.

Dr Parry, Academic Director for the College of Arts, Humanities and Law, presented a report on the discussions which had taken place at pathways workshops in the Autumn term and also reported on discussions which had taken place with students and prospective students. A number of preferences held by students with regards to pathways had emerged, in particular the demand for Languages and Business as minors. Indications were that students would value the flexibility that pathways would offer as well as the vocational/professional facet which could be added to their educational experience. It was clear that students would like reassurance that they would be fully supported in the minor subject and that their degree would be recognised and valued by employers. The Committee noted that the findings of the focus groups and workshops would be used to inform the on-going development of the project.

The Chair further reported that a Project Manager would be appointed to manage the wider implementation of the project and that workshops would be run in all of the Colleges to assist them in mapping out their plans for pathways. The project would continue to be publicised widely via the University's Open days, in the prospectus and at the UCAS Convention, to communicate the new opportunities that pathways will present to prospective students in addition to the existing offering of single and joint honours programmes.

15/M7 SENATE REGULATION 6

The Committee considered the responses to the consultation on Senate Regulation 6. It noted that the majority of responses were supportive of the proposed amendments, but that three key issues needed to be addressed.

The Committee acknowledged the issues arising out of the scheme of assessment being based on 15 credit modules, noting that for departments operating on 20 credits students would be required to pass all modules to gain an award where there is a threshold of 15 failed credits. The Committee was satisfied that this anomaly would be addressed through the forthcoming standardisation of module weightings across the University, which further supported the move to a common framework.

The Committee considered the issues presented by the progression requirements for students who had received penalties for categories 2 or 3 plagiarism, where the resulting mark of zero would otherwise prevent their progression. The Committee agreed that the inclusion of the word 'normally' in the regulation would allow departments to use discretion

to allow the progression of a student in appropriate cases, noting that this would only affect a very low number of students.

The Committee noted that the Department of Engineering had expressed concerns about the impact that the requirement for a minimum mark of 40% in any module to be achieved in order for an award to be made. It felt that this might discourage students from taking a risk with a particular module, as sometimes students who did well overall failed a module because the subject matter was completely new to them. The Committee noted the view but considered that it was problematic that a student could achieve a zero mark in a module at master's level but still be eligible for a degree.

The Committee **agreed** that it would be preferable if the Department's concerns could be addressed by reconsidering the curriculum design of programmes or considering how students should be supported. The Chair confirmed that he would take this forward with the Department of Engineering.

15/M8 STRATEGIC CONVERSATION: CONTACT TIME, MODULE SIZE AND ASSESSMENT CHANGES

The Chair reported that the programme of change over the next two years would be supported through the appointment of a Project Manager to oversee the changes, as well as the work of dedicated steering groups. The Committee noted that the change to credit size would be managed in a coordinated way with implementation planned for the 2017/18 academic year.

The Committee considered how a number of issues relating to contact time, module size and assessment should be managed in the context of forthcoming change to these areas:

(i) Contact time

The Committee noted that there was variation in the understanding of what constitutes 'contact time', from face to face lectures and seminars only, to activities provided by the Library and Careers Service and on-line opportunities for interactive discussion and workshops. The Committee noted that for KIS purposes the University needs to clearly document what it designates as 'contact time' but that there would appear to be some scope for including more than is currently recorded for some programmes, providing these activities are integrated into programmes of study. The Committee agreed that it would be beneficial to consider what constitutes 'directed learning time', as this would include all learning which requires the input of staff, such as online seminars, as opposed to purely self-directed learning time. The Committee also noted the importance of working with students on definitions, expectations and experiences of 'contact time'.

The Committee **agreed** that Academic Directors would compile a list of what they considered to be directed learning time within their Colleges, as the basis for an agreed guide to creating and capturing contact time.

(ii) Standardisation of assessment loads

The Committee considered how the standardisation of overall assessment loads and a minimum variation in assessment modes within modules could be established across the University, noting that comparison would be needed across departments, and that a College level exercise would be most effective in achieving this.

The Committee **agreed** that College Academic Committees should map out and compare practices across departments, and undertake some benchmarking of direct competitors, in order to agree a set of College level standards.

(iii) Management of the change programme

The Committee agreed that consideration of this would be deferred for discussion at the next meeting of the committee.

15/M9 RISK ASSESSMENTS

(i) Highfields Community Association

The Committee considered a risk assessment for the Highfields Community Association.

It was proposed that the University would validate a Certificate in Higher Education in Social Welfare, Advice and Guidance to be offered by Highfields from the 2015/16 academic year. The University had previously validated a Certificate of Higher Education at Highfields but recruitment to this programme had been suspended to allow the development of the proposed new programme. The relationship would be managed by the Vaughan Centre for Lifelong Learning and would build on the strong links established previously.

The Committee approved Highfields Community Association as a partner for the proposed programme and agreed that it should now progress to the programme approval process.

(ii) Xidian University

The Committee considered a risk assessment for Xidian University.

It was proposed that the Department of Engineering would work with Xidian University to offer a B Eng programme which would be taught at Xidian University in China. The programme offered would be based on the one offered at the University but would be taught jointly by the two universities, with each teaching half of it. Students would remain at Xidian University and staff from Leicester would undertake teaching visits.

The Committee **approved** Xidian as a suitable partner for the proposed programme and agreed that it could proceed to the next stage of the approval process, noting that a number of areas would require careful consideration at the programme approval stage.

15/M10 CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL PEER OBSERVATION OF TEACHING

The Committee considered how cross-departmental peer observation of teaching should be implemented. Issues raised by the College of Social Science regarding its value and the associated resource requirements were noted.

However, the Committee **agreed** that cross-departmental peer observation presented valuable opportunities for sharing good practice in teaching that did not rely on subject specific knowledge, and did not necessitate a significant increase in the amount of work required. Indeed, some of the most important insights about approaches and methods were likely to come from observers who were not themselves from the discipline and those observers also stood to gain valuable insight into their own disciplines by experiencing teaching in another subject area. It therefore agreed that the practice should be adopted across the University.

15/M11 EXTERNAL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

The Committee considered and **approved** a proposal that, in addition to the central publication of external examiners' reports, departments should ensure that reports are considered at the appropriate Student Staff Committee on an annual basis.

15/M12 PROGRAMME APPROVAL REPORTS

The committee considered and **approved** the reports of programme approval panels for the following:

- (i) BSc in Operating Department Practice
- (ii) BSc Integrated Medical Degree
- (iii) College of Science and Engineering Foundation Year

With respect to the Foundation Year programme the Committee noted that an exit award had not been proposed for the course as there was no nationally recognised award at this level. The Committee agreed that a University level certificate may be desirable to recognise the achievement of students at this level, but noted that this would be considered as part of a wider study of exit awards.

15/M13 CREDIT RATING FOR DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

The committee **approved** a proposal to adjust the credit rating for the Doctor of Education Programme.

15/M14 STUDENT RECRUITMENT ADMISSIONS AND WIDENING PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2014.

15/M15 QAA Consultations

The Committee noted the following QAA consultations:

- (i) The consultation on Foundation Degree Characteristics, Master's Degree Characteristics, Doctoral Degree Characteristics and Qualifications awarded by two or more Degree-Awarding Bodies

- (ii) International Students Studying in the UK – Guidance for UK Higher Education Providers.

Duration of meeting: Two hours