

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

ACADEMIC POLICY COMMITTEE

**Minutes of a meeting held on
18 October 2013**

Present:

Ms C Fyfe (Chair)
Professor A Cashmore Ms J Dunne
Professor S Law Dr T Lawson
Dr R Parry Mr M Rubin
Professor J Scott Dr D Watkins
Professor T Yeoman

In attendance: Professor S Law, Ms Heather Willcocks and Mr A Petersen (Acting Secretary)

Apologies for absence were received from Mr D Flatt, , Professor S Hainsworth, Dr D Lockett, Mrs L Masterman and Dr T Oliviera

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

13/M86 MINUTES THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on 18th September 2013.

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

13/M87 MATTERS ARISING

Arising from M76 point d) the Committee noted that the Colleges had developed summaries and action plans arising from the recently released results of the National Student Survey for 2012/13. It was agreed that it would be helpful for these summaries to be considered this Committee, and the Chair agreed to raise this with the Head of each College [ACTION: CHAIR].

13/M88 CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair reported:

- a) That the Higher Education Academy (HEA) had brought forwards the process for the nomination and award of National Teaching Fellowships. The internal deadline for draft applications was 18 November 2013, and successful applicants at this stage would be assigned a mentor to develop their applications before submission to the HEA on 14 January 2014. The Chair requested that members further publicise the scheme to academic colleagues within the colleges.
- b) That a meeting had been scheduled for 25 October to discuss promotion on the basis of teaching excellence, following the formal establishment of a teaching led career path for academic staff. The meeting would focus on the types of evidence that could be compiled to support applications for promotion on the basis of teaching. The Committee welcomed the development, however noted that it would be helpful for

the meeting to be documented and links to supporting resources be publicised to staff who were unable to attend.

- c) That VCAC had sought clarification regarding the rationale for the deadline for late registration at the start of the academic year, which was currently set at two weeks. The Committee noted that the two week deadline was intended to reflect the maximum amount of material and assessment that a student could miss at the start of term but still be able to catch up without negatively affecting their studies. The Committee agreed that this deadline remained appropriate from an academic perspective, although noted that it would be helpful to confirm whether the same deadline applied to programmes by distance learning or in postgraduate research. The Chair agreed to feed these comments back to VCAC [ACTION: CHAIR].

13/M89 **QUALITY CONTROL FOR DISTANCE LEARNING MODULES**

The Committee considered a draft procedure and supporting documentation for the quality control of the materials delivered as part of distance learning modules at the University.

Under the new process Heads of Departments would be responsible for ensuring that all new distance learning modules to be delivered after 1 May 2014 underwent review by both an internal member of academic staff and an appropriate external reviewer. This process would take place after the completion of the Programme Approval process. Existing distance learning modules and new modules to be delivered before 30 April 2014 would be subject to internal review only. A timescale for completion of the review process for existing modules would be agreed with each department, however the process should be completed by 31 August 2014. Support for the process would be provided by the Academic Practice Service (APS), the Library and the Quality Office in the format of FAQ documents, workshops and a supporting website.

The Committee noted that the quality of the student experience for distance learning students was more heavily dependent on written learning resources than campus-based modes of study. Furthermore, as distance learning materials were more public in nature the level of University risk associated with the quality of such materials was higher. The Committee agreed that the implementation of the process should result in a consistently higher standard of learning experience for distance learning students and, subject to very minor amendments, **approved** the policy.

The Committee agreed that it was essential that the formal announcement of the policy should be accompanied by communication of the range of support and guidance that would be available for staff. [ACTION: SECRETARY AND APS]

13/M90 **CODE OF PRACTICE ON MANAGING HIGHER EDUCATION PROVISION WITH OTHERS**

The Committee considered a revised draft of the University Code of Practice on Managing Higher Education Provision with Others, along with a range of documents designed to support the process of development and consideration of collaborative proposals. The Code had been developed to meet the requirements of Chapter B10 of the Quality Code, and had been amended in light of previous feedback from the Committee. It was noted that the final appendix, the template for a Student Exchange Contract, was under development in consultation with the International Office.

The Committee welcomed the revised document and considered it in detail. The Committee agreed that it represented a well designed and integrated approach to the development, approval and management of proposals for collaborative provision. The Committee agreed that the role of the Collaborative Partnerships Management Group would be vital, and that draft Terms of Reference for the Group should be considered at the next meeting of the Committee [ACTION: SECRETARY]. The Committee also agreed that several aspects of the policy such as the selection and support of industrial placements and the expectations upon placement providers would require additional guidance to be drafted to support staff. Finally, the Group agreed that the criteria for the appointment of staff to teach on collaborative programmes should be revised to place the emphasis less on standardised qualifications and more on a robust evaluation process at University level in each individual case.

Subject to the above and additional minor amendments agreed in the meeting, the Committee **approved** the Code of Practice to be sent to Heads of academic departments for consultation, with feedback to be directed through the College Academic Committees. The Committee expressed its thanks to Louise Masterman and Heather Willcocks for the work that had gone into developing the Code.

The Committee considered the principles which should underpin the development of a University strategy towards developing provision with others, in order to inform the drafting of a paper for consideration by the Vice Chancellor's Advisory Committee.

The Committee agreed that it would be helpful to develop a clear University position towards engagement with the higher risk categories of collaboration as defined in the Code. Furthermore, the Committee agreed that a strategy should take account of all aspects of a potential partnership including commercial, academic, moral and reputational. The Committee noted that several departments within the University were currently engaged in collaborative activity and it would be useful to gather feedback on the various strategies at Departmental level in order to inform the development of a University strategy. The Committee agreed that alongside the circulation of the Code of Practice for consultation, departments should be invited to provide feedback on their existing strategies towards the development of collaborative provision. Additionally, the Directors of External Relations and of the International Office should be invited to comment, as development of a strategy relating to collaborative provision would be directly linked with the University's international strategy [ACTION: SECRETARY].

13/M91 **FASTING DURING ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATION PERIODS**

The Committee considered a report from Professor Cashmore on the work of the task and finish group that had been considering fasting during assessment and examination periods.

A wide consultation process had taken place with feedback sought from the Students' Union, academic staff, the University Chaplain and a local Imam regarding the development of a University policy on fasting during assessment periods, in light of the fact that Ramadan would soon coincide with the midsummer examination period. The conclusion of this consultation had been that fasting during these periods was both voluntary and not intended to impact upon daily life. As a result, it was not appropriate to consider fasting as a reason to alter the examination schedule or to take it into account as mitigation in the event of failure in assessments.

The Committee **approved** this recommendation and **agreed** that a formal statement to this effect should be drafted in consultation with the Equalities Unit and the Students' Union for publication to students. The statement should include links to appropriate external resources regarding health and wellbeing whilst fasting.

The Committee thanked Professor Cashmore and the Group for developing the University's formal position on this issue.

13/M92 OIA ANNUAL LETTER

The Committee considered the second annual letter from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

The Committee noted that the OIA banding system was based on the size of the student population, however it did not account for overseas distance learning students with this total. This had the result of artificially inflating the number of completion of procedures letters issued by the University in relation to the student population recognised by the OIA. The Committee also noted significant variation in the number of completion of procedures letters reported to have been issued by a range of institutions in the same band as Leicester. The Committee noted that a letter from the Vice-Chancellor highlighting these apparent disparities had been sent to the OIA, and the University was awaiting a response.

The Committee was however pleased to note that the proportion of the cases handled at University level which then proceeded to be raised with the OIA was lower than the band median, and further noted that the number of complaints which had been deemed either partly or fully justified was extremely low, and had reduced from the previous year, clearly illustrating the robustness of the University's internal procedures.

13/M93 WORK SCHEDULE 2013/14

The Committee received a draft schedule of work for the 2013/14 academic year.

Duration of meeting: One hour and 40 minutes