UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

ACADEMIC POLICY COMMITTEE

STUDENT EXPERIENCE ENHANCEMENT GROUP

Minutes of a meeting held on
Thursday 8 March 2012

Present:

Ms C Fyfe (Chair)
Dr A Armellini
Professor Cashmore
Ms L Jones
Dr J Scott

Mr B Athwal
Mr D Cox
Dr M Rawlinson
Professor Thomas

In attendance: Ms C Taylor (for the business recorded in minute 12/M3[a]), Mr B Fawcett (for the business recorded in minutes 12/M3 and M4), Mr B Dodgson (for the business recorded in minute 12/M5) and Miss K Pountney (Secretary)

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs L Bailey, Ms J Dunne, Mr S Johnson and Mr A Nutt

UNRESERVED (ONLY) BUSINESS

12/M1  MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Group considered the minutes of a meeting held on 10 November 2011.

The Group approved the minutes as a correct record.

Arising from minute 11/M28, the Group noted that the latest draft of the Code of Practice on Support for Students had been considered by the Academic Policy Committee in December 2011 and was with College Academic Committees for comment. The Code would be updated following this consultation process before returning to the Academic Policy Committee in April for final approval.

Arising from minute 11/M30, the Group welcomed the news that a full report about the review of the seven piloted departments in the Sustainability of Learning and Teaching Project would be available for consideration at its next meeting.

12/M2  CHAIR’S REPORT

The Chair reported that the Students’ Union had streamed some of its recent events online to allow participation from distance learners. The Students’ Union was keen for this arrangement to be extended to other events including Student Staff Committee meetings.

The Group noted the practice could significantly impact upon the nature of Student Staff Committees. It agreed to consider the proposal in greater depth should a formal request be submitted.

12/M3  INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE

a) International Buddy Network

The Group received a presentation from the Head of the Student Welfare Service about the International Buddy Network. This new scheme, currently piloting with January 2012 intakes, linked new international students with student ‘buddies’ who were already studying at Leicester. Its aim was to provide greater opportunities for
international students to establish social connections. The Group noted that the International Buddy Network had been introduced to help address issues with the satisfaction of international students about their study experience as documented through the International Student Barometer surveys. The Group heard that work was underway to extend the initial pilot of the scheme to include Media and Management students, introduce further opportunities for international students to integrate with the student body as well as the local community, and link the scheme with the Leicester Award.

The Group welcomed the initiative and the news that the International Student Intern was investigating activities at other 1994 and the Russell Group institutions designed to improve the integration of international students into University life. The Group requested it receive a copy of the evaluation of the pilot scheme when the report was available.

b) Responses to satisfaction issues raised by international students about their studies

The Group noted that the English Language Teaching Unit would be working with the Academic Practice Unit to offer support to lecturers whose first language was not English. In addition to supporting their English language development, these lecturers would be given assistance with adapting their teaching style to be less reliant on the spoken word. The Chair reported that allowance for individuals to undergo English Language development if deemed appropriate would also be introduced to the recruitment process. The Group welcomed these measures and noted that they were likely to positively impact on the satisfaction of the student population as a whole.

The Group noted that the International Operational Group was available to undertake tasks towards improving the international student experience. Its membership comprised staff from a range of Corporate Services departments interacting with international students.

The Group resolved that a formal reporting line should be established from the International Operational Group to the Student Experience Enhancement Group.

12/M4 SURVEYS OF STUDENT VIEWS

The Group discussed the increasing prevalence of student surveys across the institution and noted that there was no mechanism in place currently to coordinate their timing to minimise overlap between surveys and to ensure that findings were shared and used to inform actions and planning. It was aware that there were two national surveys open at the time of its meeting, as well as one University survey of staff and students.

The Group agreed that central guidance should be produced to enable members of the University to make suitable decisions about the timing of surveys, their design and reliability, as well as the hosting and dissemination of results. The Group noted that qualitative data, for example that obtained from focus groups, could often be more useful than quantitative data collected through questionnaires.

The Group resolved that the Chair and Head of Planning Office would convene a group to formulate detailed proposals for achieving the above.
POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT EXPERIENCE SURVEY AND POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH EXPERIENCE SURVEY

The Group received a presentation from Mr Brett Dodgson about the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), which were run by the HEA on an annual (PTES) and biennial (PRES) basis. The surveys were intended as quality enhancement tools and the results were therefore confidential and were not for league comparison purposes. The University’s scores were typically comparable or slightly better than its competitors. The Group noted that the University was especially keen to improve its response rate for PTES as this would be good preparation should a public, national survey of postgraduate students be introduced.

The Group heard that the response rate for this year’s PTES was already higher than the equivalent time in 2011. The survey had opened in mid-February and would close on 14 June 2012. The Group discussed ways in which a higher response rate could be achieved.

The Group requested Mr Dodgson produce information that could be presented at the start of postgraduate lectures to promote PTES, based upon that already used for the NSS. It asked him to circulate this material to departments for dissemination to taught postgraduate teaching staff.

CAREERS SERVICE DEVELOPMENTS

The Director of the Careers Service reported that the Service would in the future have a deliberately more visible presence and would be smarter about how it engaged with students.

The Group noted in particular that a week long Careers Festival would replace the usual Autumn Fair. Each day would have a specific theme and students would attend whichever was most relevant to their career aspirations. In order to focus their approach to the event and ensure that they made the most of the experience and their interactions with the employers present, students would be required to undertake preparatory work before attending the festival as well as follow up work after it.

The Group welcomed the reported initiatives and the proactive and targeted approach that had been described.

TEACHING AWARD SCHEMES

a) National Teaching Fellowship Scheme 2012

The Chair reported that the University would be nominating three individuals, the maximum permitted by the HEA, for the award of National Teaching Fellowships. The three selected candidates were in the process of finalising their claims for an award.

b) University Teaching Fellowship (UTF) Scheme 2012

The Group noted that the 2012 Scheme had launched in November 2011 and had been followed by reminder in March 2012. As part of the increased publicity, details of the Scheme had been circulated to chairs of departmental learning and teaching committees (minute 11/M32[a] refers).

c) Teaching Partnership Awards for Students (TPA) 2012

The Group received a schedule for the 2012 Scheme. It agreed that the Secretary would update the guidelines to applicants to permit group applications.
12/M8 STUDENT HANDBOOKS 2012/13

The Group noted that departments would be encouraged to produce electronic handbooks in PDF format for 2012/13 in preference to issuing print copies. A complete move to online handbooks had been postponed since suitable technology would not be in place in time for 2012/13. Centrally supplied text about regulations and university services would be reduced in size but make greater use of hyperlinks that directed students to the definitive information source.

12/M9 ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK WORKING GROUP

The Group received minutes of a meeting of the Assessment and Feedback Working Group held on 27 February 2012. It noted that the winter 2011 workshop about online and electronic assessment and feedback had revealed there was considerable variation in practice across the University in relation to electronic marking and return of feedback. These ranged from no provision to the use of sophisticated, bespoke systems. The individual systems already in operation represented a significant investment of time and resource as well as some duplication of effort.

The Group agreed that the Chair would meet with Dr Scott and Mr Cox to discuss in detail the issues with current practice that had been identified by the Group and consider ways for these to be resolved.

12/M10 WORKING GROUP ON STUDENT EMPLOYABILITY

The Working Group received minutes of a meeting of the Working Group on Student Employability held on 20 December 2011.

12/M11 STUDENT MENTOR SCHEME WORKING GROUP

The Working Group received minutes of meetings of the Student Mentor Scheme Working Group and its planning sub-group held on 6 and 27 February 2012 respectively.

12/M12 TEACHING FUNDS APPROVALS GROUP

The Group received minutes of a meeting of the Teaching Funds Approvals Group (Fund for Teaching Enhancement Projects) held on 8 February 2012.

Duration of meeting: Two hours

CHAIR