UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

ACADEMIC POLICY COMMITTEE

STUDENT EXPERIENCE ENHANCEMENT GROUP

Minutes of a meeting held on
Thursday 18 November 2010

Present:

Ms C Fyfe (Chair)
Dr A Armellini
Professor Cashmore
Mr P Jackson
Dr P Lynch

Mrs L Bailey
Mr D Cox
Ms L Jones
Dr J Scott
Professor Thomas

In attendance: Dr P Wood (for the business recorded in 10/M30), Mrs L Masterman (Secretary) and Miss K Pountney (Assistant Secretary)

Apologies for absence were received from Mr A Nutt and Dr M Rawlinson

UNRESERVED (ONLY) BUSINESS

10/M25  TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP

The Committee considered and approved its terms of reference and membership for the 2010-11 academic year.

Post meeting note: the Chair has approved, on behalf of the Group, a correction to the membership as follows: the title 'Director of Staff Development' to be changed to the 'Head of the Academic Practice Unit'.

10/M26  MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Group considered the minutes of a meeting held on 28 May 2010.

The Group approved the minutes as a correct record.

Arising from minute 10/M15 (a), the Chair reported that the proposals for amendment to the University Teaching Fellowship Scheme would be considered by the Academic Policy Committee once they had been finalised.

10/M27  PEER OBSERVATION OF MARKING AND FEEDBACK

The Group received a review of the Peer Observation of Marking exercise prepared by the Chair of the Assessment and Feedback Working Group.

The Chair of the Working Group reported that several departments had initially been sceptical about the exercise but most had engaged conscientiously and had found it of value. The most common advice given by the observers related to:

- identifying and explaining positive features in the work;
- ensuring comments aligned with the mark awarded;
- accompanying criticisms of the work with guidance on how it can be improved.

A flyer publicising a selection of helpful comments made observers would be circulated to all academic staff later in the month.

The Group welcomed the exercise and agreed to recommend that it should alternate with Peer Observation of Teaching. It noted that there was also the potential to introduce other peer observation exercises in the future.
10/M28 STUDENT HANDBOOKS

The Chair reported that the Vice-Chancellor had recently commissioned the Group to conduct a review of student handbooks.

The Group received the University’s current guidelines on the production of student handbooks and a paper from Student and Academic Services that reviewed the 2009-10 publications against the guidelines for that year. It also viewed a selection of handbooks for the 2010-11 academic year. It noted that that the appearance and quality of student handbooks varied significantly between departments.

The Group agreed that student handbooks formed an essential part of the student experience. It was important that handbooks had an aesthetically pleasing design and facilitative layout to reflect the quality of the department’s programmes and encourage students to refer to them. The Group acknowledged that some students favoured handbooks in hardcopy format whilst others found an online version more convenient. The Group determined that each format had merit and the current ideal was for handbooks to be available in both hardcopy and online form. Departments should also invest an equitable amount of care in the production of the online version as the hardcopy. The Group noted that handbook production already accounted for a significant proportion of departments’ expenditure and the University may need to provide assistance to departments to enable them to produce handbooks to a professional and effective set standard without incurring additional expense.

The Group resolved to establish a task and finish working group to consider student handbooks to inform revisions to the guidance about their production and related issues such as the timing of the annual review of handbooks.

10/M29 STUDENT RETENTION AND SUCCESS PROJECT

The Group received papers describing recent research at the University relating to student retention and success and noted aspects of particular interest. The first paper reported the findings of the project that had investigated factors contributing to the University’s success in retaining students and in facilitating student achievement and satisfaction. The second was a report about ongoing work relating to early withdrawal.

10/M30 LEARNING SPACES

The Group received the executive summary\(^1\) of an evaluation of three experimental learning spaces at the University, presented by Dr Phil Wood from the Learning Spaces Working Group. The learning spaces had been refurbished in 2009 but had varied in the cost of their redesign and the extent of the modifications made. However, all three rooms had gained reconfigurable furniture and interactive whiteboards as part of the refurbishment.

Dr Wood reported that the three innovative spaces had received high praise from their users, who felt that the rooms were now more conducive environments for learning. The technology introduced to the rooms had been welcomed, especially the interactive whiteboards, but the new flexibility of the rooms was more widely prized. The conclusion of the study was a proposal for an innovative model for the creation of future learning spaces at the University that would enhance the student experience.

The Group welcomed the report and the refurbishment model that it proposed. The Chair reported that several rooms in the Bennett Link had been recently refurbished taking into account some of the principles of the research.

The Group concluded that the suitability of a room as a learning space could be transformed simply by improving its lighting and decoration and adding an interactive whiteboard and good quality, flexible furniture. It noted that this refurbishment standard could be achieved with relatively modest expenditure per individual space.

The Group wished to minute its thanks to the Registrar for providing the funding for the rooms evaluated but noted that further investment was needed to be able to extend the programme of refurbishment to other seminar rooms in need of improvement.

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\(^1\) The full report will be available from the Academic Practice Unit website.
10/M31  ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK WORKING GROUP

The Group received a report of a meeting of the Working Group held on 12 October 2010. The Chair of the Working Group gave a progress report on the Working Group’s current project to encourage students to reflect upon the feedback they received and its different forms. An awareness campaign, run jointly by the Working Group and Students’ Union, was to take place in the week commencing 22 November 2010. The Working Group was also collecting information from departments on how they encouraged students to engage with feedback. This work would inform a list of good practice. Other activities of the Working Group included an assessment and feedback workshop about peer/self assessment for staff and students that was scheduled for 15 December 2010.

10/M32  WORKING GROUP ON STUDENT EMPLOYABILITY

The Group received minutes of meetings of the Working Group held on 2 September and 18 October 2010. The Chair of the Working Group reported on the Working Group’s recent progress with its project to encourage alumni to engage with student employability issues. The Group noted that a pilot set of practice interviews for students would be held before the end of the calendar year.

The Group noted that the first meeting of the new format Careers Advisory Committee had been held in November 2010. The Chair reported that the remit of the Committee had not changed significantly from its predecessor; it continued to take a strategic overview of employability issues. The potential overlap in business that had been envisaged between the Committee and the Working Group, which considered practical issues of employability, had therefore not occurred (minute 10/M6 refers). The Working Group’s future would be reviewed, however, once its current projects had been completed.

10/M33  PERSONAL TUTORS WORKING GROUP

The Chair of the Working Group gave a verbal report on the Working Group’s recent activities. These included employing course representatives to consider the perceptions held about the personal tutor system.

10/M34  SUSTAINABILITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING WORKING GROUP

The Group noted that there was now a full time researcher in post to assist with the review of departments. The quantitative data had been gathered for several more departments and the Group was now in the process of collecting qualitative data.

10/M35  TEACHING FUNDS APPROVALS GROUP

The Group received minutes of a meeting of the Teaching Funds Approvals Group held on 19 October 2010.

10/M36  HIGHER EDUCATION ACADEMY

The Group noted that the HEA had announced details of its revised focus and new structure from 2011. It received an outline of themes for HEA work. These were separated into six areas for strategic intervention and three areas for work with institutions: teacher excellence, developing academic practice, and institutional strategy.

10/M37  DATES OF 2010-11 MEETINGS

The Group noted the dates of its remaining meetings in 2010-11 as follows:

- Thursday 3 March 2011
- Thursday 9 June 2011

Duration of meeting:  One hour and 30 minutes