UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

ACADEMIC POLICY COMMITTEE

STUDENT EXPERIENCE ENHANCEMENT GROUP

Minutes of a meeting held on
Tuesday 13 January 2015

Present:  Professor Mark Peel (Chair)
Mr B Athwal  Ms L Bailey
Ms T Dodman  Mr J Gillott
Mr R Greenhill  Professor S Law
Mr Y Nikolov  Dr R Norman
Mr M Rubin  Professor J Scott
Ms F Stone  Dr D Watkins
Mr B Wynne  Professor T Yeoman

In attendance: Mr T Humphreys (for the business recorded in 15/M3) and Mrs K Galloway (Secretary)

Apologies for absence were received from Professor A Cashmore

15/M1  MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Group considered the minutes of a meeting held on 6 November 2014.
The Group approved the minutes as a correct record,

15/M2  CHAIR’S REPORT

Developing our offer, provision and services for students: thoughts on the future of SEEG

The Chair reported that he was leading two of the Vice Chancellors’ strategy development task and finish groups; one considering the University’s academic offer and the other developing a teaching, learning and student experience strategy. He would produce from the learning strategy group’s discussions and consultations a brief statement encompassing the Institution’s vision for education to which academic departments and professional services would then be asked to add their own statements about their particular visions for education. The academic offer task and finish group would be taking a bottom up approach; discussing with departments how they wish to present their discipline and aiming to synchronise the University’s academic offer with its planning of student experience.

In connection with the above, the Chair presented a paper with proposals for bringing a more coherent and coordinated approach to the development, management, review and enhancement of the University’s overall portfolio and the experience that we offer our students. This proposed the establishment of an offer development group (ODG) and an offer and experience planning group (OEPG). The first would be a task and finish group and the second would be positioned to take over some of the work of the Student Experience Enhancement Group, freeing SEEG to focus all its attention on discussion and development of improvements in learning and teaching.

The Group noted that one aspect of the offer was about marketing and product but another part was about experience. It agreed that communication loops would needed to be strengthened to be successful in achieving bringing these together. The Group considered it important that the student voice was heard and it discussed the degree to which it was appropriate for students to contribute or to drive the development of the academic offer. The Group agreed that there was an opportunity to broaden the membership of the ODG and OEPG groups beyond the usual pool of candidates. This would avoid increasing their meeting
workload and allow colleagues with increased day-to-day contact with students to contribute more directly.

The Group welcomed the proposals in principle. The Chair agreed that he would revisit them to reflect the Group’s discussions.

[ACTION: M PEEL]

15/M3  STRATEGIC DISCUSSION: TEACHING AND LEARNING SPACES

The Chair reported that the University’s current Learning and Teaching Strategy was due for renewal in 2015 and recent discussions had concluded that a University Learning Strategy should be created in its place. The University’s estate has a significant part to play in delivering strategic objectives involving the student learning experience.

The Director of Estates reported that towards the end of the calendar year a small group of people had brought up to date a feasibility study on improvement works to learning and teaching spaces, with a particular focus on the Charles Wilson Building. This project had initially been led by PVC and SEEG’s former Chair, Ms Christine Fyfe. The group had concluded that a generic solution was needed for this part of the University’s estate. The programme of refurbishment for the Charles Wilson Building will provide renovated teaching space and introduce some areas for social learning. It is likely the Building will also continue to house catering outlets. The Group noted that the optimum proportion of each provision was still to be determined but the intention was that the renovation and refurbishment works would be completed in two to three years’ time.

The Director of Estates reported that the Charles Wilson catering outlets would need to be relocated in some form during the refurbishment works. The Group noted that the loss of the sports hall, whether on a temporary or permanent basis, would have a substantial impact upon sports and fitness activities and the ability for main campus to accommodate large numbers of students in a single examination sitting. The Group noted that the refurbishment arrangements would need to adequately plan for these and all other relocation issues as well as for design matters.

The Group discussed the kinds of spaces and facilities that the Charles Wilson Building might incorporate. The Group agreed that it would like the Charles Wilson Building to include spaces for social learning, areas for research students to engage with collaborative learning and teaching, and some ‘a-social’ learning provision. The Group suggested that consideration should be given to the feasibility of transforming a proportion of the building into a student services hub. It acknowledged, however, that a hub facility may prove not to be viable because it would significantly reduce the space available for other purposes.

The Group accepted that the building would not have the capacity to accommodate all proposals and therefore some element of compromise was inevitable. The Group noted that it was important for proposals for the Charles Wilson Building to be agreed in conjunction with development plans for the rest of the University estate in order to make the smartest use of space overall. The Group was additionally mindful that the arrangements for the building will need to anticipate and satisfy future learning and teaching needs or directions and not just focus on current areas of actual or perceived shortfalls, which may be very different.

The Group concluded that it was essential that the development incorporated generous spaces that were flexible enough to be easily reconfigured to suit different learning and teaching needs, for instance by making smart use of partitions and adaptable furniture options. The Group noted that lecture theatres were by their nature one of the most inflexible classroom settings and although use of retractable seating was one possibility to enabling it to be temporarily re-purposed for other activities the seating would be less sturdy and durable than fixed alternatives.

The Chair reported that staff and students would be asked to comment upon and prioritise the various redevelopment opportunities to be identified for the Charles Wilson Building,
Brookfield site and non-lending areas of the Library. The Group noted it was conceivable that student visions of the future of the University’s campus may not match staff expectations of their view. The Group agreed that it would be pertinent to seek the opinions of school age children as part of student consultations because the intention was for the refurbishments to shape the University’s estate for the next 20 years.

The Group agreed that the Chair and Director of Estates would consider the way forward in light of the Group’s discussion and bring their proposals to forthcoming meetings of SEEG and APC; the proposals would likely involve the establishment of a small working group.

[ACTION: M PEEL & T HUMPHREYS]

15/M4 REFERENCING STYLES: PROGRESS TOWARDS ADOPTING A MORE CONSISTENT APPROACH

The Group received a paper from the Deputy University Librarian reporting on progress in introducing greater consistency to referencing styles adopted across the University. The Group agreed that it was reasonable for every department to decide on a particular style and that each style should have a designated version. The Group noted that the Library would maintain the footnote and author/date (Harvard) styles once the work to define the definitive versions of these main styles had been completed.

The Group welcomed the progress the project group had made to date. It noted that the Department of Economics had not yet selected its departmental referencing style. The Chair agreed to raise this with the Head of Department on behalf of the Group.

[ACTION: M PEEL]

15/M5 ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK WORKING GROUP

The Group considered a report of a meeting of the Assessment and Feedback Working Group held on 5 November 2014.

The Group noted the Working Group’s progress with its themes of work. It considered it important that the examples of good practice, such as Law’s student engagement with feedback project, were disseminated widely across the institution. It agreed that the creation of a learning and teaching online ‘tool kit’, positioned in an easily accessible location of the University’s website, would be an efficient way of sharing models of good practice.

The Group noted the Working Group’s consideration of departmental reports on the operation of peer observation of marking and feedback. The Group discussed double marking practices, noting that the Working Group had requested further clarification from the MBChB programme team about its double marking and moderation policy. The Group agreed departments may benefit from guidance about maintaining robust marking practices without being unduly reliant upon time-consuming double marking. It requested that the Working Group develop this discussion and report back to the Group at a forthcoming meeting.

[ACTION: J SCOTT & K GALLOWAY]

15/M6 TEACHING FUNDS APPROVALS GROUP

The Group received the minutes of a meeting of the Teaching Funds Approvals Group: Funds for Teaching Enhancement Projects held on 3 December 2014.

The Group noted that an interesting set of proposals had been presented. It noted that the Approvals Group would be revising the bid guidelines to make them more explicit about what an application for funds needed to address. It would also be considering ways to encourage a greater number of bids. The Group noted that consideration of how the window for spending approved funds could be made less restrictive would also be welcome.