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Learning and Teaching Committee

Minutes

date: Wednesday, 4 December 2013
time: 2.00 p.m.
location: G5.05, High Wycombe Campus

13.01 Welcome / Apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed members and invited speakers to the inaugural meeting of the newly constituted Learning and Teaching Committee.

Apologies for Absence were noted and recorded separately. It was noted that Doug Cole and Julia Oldham had been invited to attend and speak to items on the agenda.

13.02 Chair's Business

The Chair reiterated that this was the first meeting of the Committee, which had been established as a new Sub-Committee reporting to Senate. Terms of Reference had been drawn up and would be reviewed as part of the Committee's business; these had been articulated to align with the University's Quality & Enhancement Committee while providing a more appropriate forum for considering learning and teaching issues across the University.

13.03 Committee Terms of Reference (Paper LTC13.01)

The Committee viewed the Terms of Reference (ToR) which had been agreed by Senate pending amendments to be considered by the Committee.

- It was noted that the ToR did not reference the Faculty Learning and Teaching Sub-Committee in Society & Health. This was deliberate as there is no parallel sub-committee in Design, Media & Management. It was noted that the sub-committee will continue for the current year but its continuance will be reviewed at the end of the academic year.
- It was agreed to revisit the lines of communication and the flow of information between the Committee and Faculties and to review the individual terms of reference for more evidence of the committee responding to external drivers. Employability would also be referenced more specifically.

The Committee also reviewed the ToR for QEC and felt that the distinction between the two committees was clear.

Membership of the Committee was also reviewed. The Chair noted a strategic objective to maintain a balance between ex-officio and representative members of the Committee with the emphasis being placed on the latter. The following considerations were identified:

- The Enterprise, Security, Resilience and Computing area within DMM is currently not represented within the Committee (as with a number of Committees) as this area is not identified as a School.
- The need for membership of the Committee to include representatives of Flexible & Distributed Learning courses run by the University given the challenge raised by these courses.
- The need for employability to be represented
- Partner Colleges are currently not represented. Consideration of identifying a member of the Committee drawn from a Collaborative Partner to represent the University's Collaborative Partners overall.
- The Chair of the Timetabling Group, which reported to the Committee, would be added to the membership as an ex-officio member
- Equality and diversity representation was considered, but it was noted that the HR representative could cover for this area. Where necessary, the Equality and Diversity Officer could be invited to a particular meeting to speak to a paper.

There was a broader question raised in relation to the advisability of appointing Academic Deans (or nominees) as Ex-officio members of the Committee. This would be considered carefully in terms of the existing committee commitments of Academic Deans and the need for balance between ex-officio and representative members.

It was agreed that the Membership and Terms of Reference would be updated outside the meeting by the Chair and Officer to take into account the Committee's considerations. Revised Terms of Reference would be presented to Senate for approval as part of a wider updating of the Deliberate Committees Formal Document.

Action: Chair / Officer

13.04 UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) HEA Change Academy application

(Paper LTC13.04)

An update was provided by the Director of Learning and Teaching.

Currently, there are 131 members of staff at the University who are members of the HEA. The paper summarised a proposal to the HEA to develop an accredited CPD framework. The proposal was successful and provides the opportunity for the University to work with other HEIs.

A draft CPD framework would be presented to a later meeting of the committee for accreditation during 2014-2015. This would be timed to align with the validation of the University's Postgraduate Certificate Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.

In the meantime, an email invitation would be sent to staff in the New Year for those looking to become a Senior or Principal Fellow of the HEA during the current year. Colleague in leadership roles would be asked to support nominations.

The Committee considered that a framework scheme for staff was overdue but noted the need to embed this in existing PDR processes.

13.05 National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) Activity Update

(Paper LTC13.02)

The update was noted. The Director of Learning and Teaching noted that it was a long-term aim to incorporate the NTFS into the CPD Framework under development and built in to PDR processes.

The Committee noted the two successful nominees to the scheme but asked how the unsuccessful candidates were being supported. It was noted that the Pro Vice Chancellor: Learning and Teaching had written to each candidate referring to the tight timescale for consideration and identifying future staff development events and

opportunities.

It was noted that academic support staff were also eligible for the Fellowship, including learning support staff in the LDU and careers areas.

13.06 Internal Teaching Awards

The Director of Learning and Teaching noted that discussions were at a very early stage for the development of University teaching awards. Advice and guidance was welcomed from the Committee in relation to structures.

The Committee noted a need for clarity on existing structures, including in particular the Inspiring Tutor Awards run in conjunction with the Students' Union. It was noted that there were several areas across the University where student nominations were difficult to capture. The Committee considered that it was time to review these awards with the view to making the process more robust and transparent.

It was noted that the teaching awards being proposed would differ from the Inspiring Tutor awards and would draw upon models developed by the HEA. It was envisaged that awards would be university-wide with clarity on terminology and eligibility.

It was agreed that the Director of Learning and Teaching would prepare a paper for the next meeting of the Committee mapping existing provision and proposing a way forward. The paper would cover the nomination processes involved and would consider both individual and team awards.

Action: Director of Learning and Teaching

13.07 Report on Staff Development Day

(Paper LTC13.07)

The paper was presented by Doug Cole who had been invited to speak to this and the next item.

Highlights were identified as follows:

- 127 staff pre-registered for the event with 140 turning up at some point during the day
- Feedback from participants was very positive on the day and this was reflected in written feedback
- Areas to improve have been identified and these will be taken forward for future events.

Future days would be held on 21 March (focusing on assessment and supporting students) and 21 May. The Committee noted the need to ensure Partner College staff were invited to these events as a matter of course. A broader intention was identified to open days up to other HEI staff which would allow for HEA funding to be bid for.

13.08 Interim report on Activities Week

(Paper LTC13.08)

The paper was presented by Doug Cole. Thanks were directed to the Students' Union for their support in managing this ambitious event which had presented challenges for the University.

Attendance numbers were in the process of being finalised but approximately 2,500 students had engaged with the event at some stage. A number of students still went home for various reasons and it was a quiet week for the University. It was felt, however, that the Week had added value to the degree courses offered by Faculties. Feedback from employers engaged during the week had also been positive but there was a disappointing lack of buy-in from members of academic staff.

A second event would be taking place in March 2014. This would need identification of

activities to be confirmed by mid-January at the latest which could present some issues for the University. It was noted that there would continue to be areas, especially in Society & Health, that could not engage in Activities Week due to professional body requirements for courses.

The Chair thanked Doug for his work putting Activities Week in place for the University. Some of the highlights of the event would be fed in to the forthcoming Learning and Teaching newsletter which would also remind staff of the upcoming deadline for the March event.

13.09 Towards a Bucks Virtual Learning Strategy
(Paper LTC13.06)

The Pro Vice Chancellor: Learning and Teaching presented a paper sketching the content for a draft technology-enhanced learning strategy. This followed a request from SMT as a response to a HEFCE programme on the changing landscape. The paper summarised the input from initial discussions and a short scoping exercise marking the beginning of more formal consultation.

The Committee supported this development especially as it linked in with the development of a University IT strategy. It was noted that the main priority for the University was to ensure that regardless of the IT infrastructure employed, systems should be robust to reduce the numbers of failures of service.

The Committee asked about the “Mobile Desktop” concept, but this was felt to be more appropriately covered through the IT Strategy itself although it might impact on decisions about the software made available for student use.

The Committee also asked about Distance Learning and whether a corporate framework was being developed. The Chair noted that this would likely be covered by the new University Operations Board.

Staff development was highlighted as an issue as it was a challenge for many staff to adapt so quickly to emerging technologies. It was noted the University had already employed Learning Technology Ambassadors who had been tasked with supporting staff in this manner. The University had also invested in training software through Lynda.com which was available to all staff through Blackboard.

The AQD representative asked about the current status of the Student Portal within the University. It was noted that while the University was employing technology more effectively for teaching, delays to the implementation of the student portal meant professional service employees were still reliant on paper-based processes. The Chair agreed to investigate the current state of the portal and provide an update.

Action: Chair

It was noted that further meetings would be held during Jan-Feb 2014 to develop the strategy further. A more detailed proposal would be brought to the final meeting of the Committee in May.

13.10 Update on Assessment and Feedback Projects

[a] Transforming Assessment Pilot Scheme (TAPS)

A verbal update was presented to the Committee.

It was noted that Bucks were one of eight universities running TAPS, which had received HEA funding and was signed up to three of the HEA's tenets. The project was in the preliminary stages of encouraging people to think more deeply about assessment and feedback.

A launch event had been held on 9 July and the project team were now looking at converting this in to specific actions to stimulate change and engage people in debate.

Pilot schemes were being run in modules run by both DMM and S&H. TAPS is also informing revalidations in the areas where pilots are being run.

A report needs to be prepared at the end of the project for the HEA. It was agreed that a draft of the report would be presented to the Committee in May.

Action: Ray Batchelor

[b] 3-week turnaround; online submission and marketing; review of feedback; research project

The Pro Vice Chancellor noted that she was working closely with both Faculties on the topic of feedback in terms of the NSS scores in this area. Research has also been commissioned in to the previous year's NSS scores which would be uploaded to Blackboard for the Committee to view. The research indicated that promptness of feedback was often a proxy for staff engagement in their work.

Further research would be requested to be undertaken where feedback targets have not been met and what the consequences of this might be for stakeholders. It was intended that this should inform a debate on the 3-week turnaround policy and confirm whether the right approach has been adopted and this can be achieved by the University.

13.11 Assessment Handbook for Staff

The Director of Learning and Teaching introduced this item noting confusion by staff over the University's policy on assessment. A need had been identified for an assessment handbook for academic staff to support and embed the assessment policy and to provide a link with course validation. It was intended that a handbook would be developed.

The Committee welcomed this initiative and considered it would be of use to staff offering guidance on assessment nomenclature and best practice. This was most obviously identified through course validations. There was, however, some concern about the notion of a 'handbook' with a feeling that this might better be articulated in another way. It was important that the guide could be readily updated.

13.12 Disability stickers in exams
(Paper LTC13.03)

The paper was introduced by Julia Oldham from the Disability Services unit who had been invited to speak to the item. It was noted that there was confusion from staff over the use of disability stickers in exams. Meanwhile, the percentage of students with a registered disability at Bucks was now 12% which was far above other HEIs.

Accordingly it was intended to relaunch the guidelines for marking the work of students with disabilities following a review of the policy. It was intended still to use stickers in exams although a number of sections were out of date and in need of update. It was further noted that the policy could be rewritten alongside the assessment handbook for consistency.

The Committee agreed that a new policy should be developed and asked for a draft to be considered at its next meeting.

Action: Secretary to ensure item is on February agenda

13.13 Looking at teaching spaces now and future – consultation and pilots

This item was introduced by the Pro Vice Chancellor: Learning and Teaching. It was noted that many of the issues had previously been raised as part of the item on the development of a Virtual Learning strategy (Minute 13.09 above).

In addition, it was noted that while rooms are often booked, actual utilisation of the University estate is low. There was a need for greater visibility of the link between rooms and the timetabling system while making it easier to release rooms no longer required. It

was intended to trial QR codes for this purpose.

There was also a need to look at whether the university still needed small rooms or whether a more flexible arrangement was preferable. Meanwhile it was necessary to think about teaching spaces themselves and how it was considered that the university would engage in teaching activities in the future.

The Committee warned against removing the notion of the 'lecture space' too readily, while in terms of the Key Information Set, it was noted that any intention to adopt a more flexible learning approach needed to be carefully considered in terms of the impact and comparison with the sector.

A consultation would be launched to consider these and related issues. It was agreed that an open meeting would be held at both campuses in the New Year to hear suggestions

13.14 Academic Year Planning Group
(Paper LTC13.05)

The following items were highlighted from the report:

- Move to a single week numbering system
- Publication of A and B Calendars
- Incorporation of Activities Week and Development Days

The Committee asked about arrangements for exam week in 2015-2016 as many universities were putting arrangements in place due to the timing of Ramadan. The AQD representative reported that the Group were aware of this and had factored it into discussions.

13.15 Timetabling Group
(Paper LTC13.09)

The paper was noted.

13.16 Faculty reports against NSS targets
(Paper LTC13.10)

The Paper from DMM was noted.

A verbal update was given from S&H as follows:

- All programmes have included actions in PRE reports especially where these relate to NSS
- Key areas of Social Work, Criminal Justice & Social Studies, Psychology and Nursing are all reviewing data and feedback
- A key NSS target area relates to organisation and management – Course and module leadership roles have been identified or clarified for students
- Noted that feedback is key for reports and data will be available at the end of the Semester
- Other areas for consideration are how placements enhance partnerships and how placement supervision can be improved. A Placement Officer for Social Work is currently being interviewed for which will enhance this area.

The Chair thanked both Faculties for their reports. It was agreed that this item would remain a standing item for the Committee.

Action: Secretary

13.17 Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee would take place at 2pm, 5 February 2014 in G5.05, High Wycombe.