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Learning and Teaching Committee

Minutes

date: Wednesday, 5 February 2014
time: 2.00 p.m.
location: G5.05, High Wycombe Campus

14.01 Welcome / Apologies for absence

The Chair welcomed new members to the Committee. Apologies for Absence were noted and recorded separately.

14.02 Minutes of the previous meeting (4-Dec-2013)

Item 13.04 was amended to read 'accreditation during 2014-15'.

Further to this amendment, the minutes were approved as an accurate record.

14.03 Matters Arising / Review of Action Sheet

[a] Review of Action Sheet
(Action Sheet)

Actions were noted as per the status column. There were no further actions arising.

[b] Update on Learning and Teaching Activities

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

- **Activities Week**- The next Activities Week would be running between 17th and 21st of March and would be led by Doug Cole.
- **CPD Framework** – The project team comprised Matthew Kitching, Julie Irwin, Alison Shreeve, Annette Gimbert, and Barbara Dexter. The project would hopefully lead to HEA accreditation during 2014-15. An initial meeting had been held in January in York with 8 other teams with a further 2-day residential meeting set to take place in March. A team meeting is planned for 6 Feb on roles, responsibilities, timelines and evidence.
- **Senior Fellowships HEA** – 11 expressions of interest had been received to date from staff looking to become Senior Fellows of the HEA. A case would be submitted to SMT for the funding of up to 30 individuals (pending institutional accreditation).
- **NTFS** – Submission made by deadline for 2 Bucks candidates (Ray Batchelor and Allen Stroud). Candidates and the University would be informed 22 May 2014 with an embargo on announcements until 12 June 2014. An event is now being arranged for potential 2015, 2016, 2017 nominees.
- **Excellence Awards** – L&T working with SU. For 2014 the awards would be kept the

same as last year, but this would be reviewed for 2014-15. A full paper would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee. 2014 awards would be announced at the SU Awards Dinner on 13 May.

- **TAPS** – Projects are being undertaken in four subject areas (2 per Faculty).. A number of activities were planned and short articles related to the project were in preparation. A full report would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

14.04

Chair's Business

The Chair noted the following:

- **Apprenticeships & Higher Apprenticeships:** The Chair had attended a recent conference with the Director of Business Planning. The University may need to consider embedding apprenticeships in its programmes as this was an area where provision could grow dramatically. Particular areas of interest included Accountancy, Law and Aviation.
- **24/7 access to the Library:** The trial period had been extended into January at students' request. Normal opening hours will then operate for the remainder of the term. Hours would then be extended for the exam period. The costs involved prohibited the extended opening from being year-round and the University would be reviewing student feedback and student appreciation.

It was noted that the trial applied to High Wycombe library only. Uxbridge library could not be opened for a similar extended period, as access could not be restricted to particular sections of the campus.

The Committee discussed the wider issue of teaching spaces (specialist and otherwise) and studios being opened on an extended basis, and whether these are necessarily linked to the Library 24/7 pilot. The Chair noted that avenues were already being explored at the request of students, taking into account the logistics, and data from pilot scheme was awaited to consider the need against the available budget.

- **SMT and the SU are working together on a package for using the additional fee income.** The package was based around supporting any additional course costs (possible examples being assistance with cost of textbooks, uniforms, field trips, graduation). Data is to be analysed by the Library Service regarding the need for e-books or printed books, the trend in preference from each course, and the comparative pricing.

Funding from additional fees will also support Learning & Teaching activities as a whole, including technology, learning development and potentially a package of PhD research studentships to secure strategic areas of the curriculum. A formal proposal is to be submitted to the next meeting of Council.

14.05

Membership update

(Paper LTC14.01)

The paper was noted. One final nomination to represent Collaborative Partners was outstanding. The Chair would approach a potential nomination and members would be notified in due course.

Action: Chair

14.06

Future Committee Activities – Planning for 2014-2015

The Chair asked members to consider this committee's responsibilities, to ensure the scope does not interfere with parallel committees and to bring items for discussion to the next meeting.

Action: Members

14.07 Towards a Research Strategy focus on Pedagogic Research

The Director of Learning and Teaching identified the need to establish a community for sharing information on research being undertaken (including Doctorates, PhDs, and Academic Research).

A meeting had been arranged for 12 February inviting any staff interested in pedagogic or institutional research to establish a Community of Practice / research group (working title 'Higher Education Research & Development'; HERD). The meeting would seek to ascertain levels of interest, current research activities, current levels, and preferred ways of working. 40 responses had been received to date. A paper would be submitted to the University Research Committee in due course which would promote links to a 2018 application for Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP) and the next Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise in 2020.

It was noted how this 'community' would successfully link with the current project of encouraging and assisting with fellowship applications (for example, as a demonstration of leadership), and for supporting wider pedagogic research activity out of individual disciplines. This would be particularly important for increasing involvement in research activities to meet the 50% requirement for RDAP.

There was a general consensus among members that the knowledge within the University is not successfully shared between specialist areas, and it was suggested that a staff portal or Bucks-Wiki could assist.

14.08 Staff Development Days (2014-2015): key themes for discussion

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

The next two Development Days would take place on 21st March (Ray Batchelor co-ordinating; theme is *Assess for Success!*) and 21st May (Richard Jones leading; title to be decided).

Members discussed the possible themes for 2014-15 including 'creativity'; 'enterprise'; 'leadership development in students'; 'our own CPD and reflective practice'. Ideas for guest speakers were welcomed. It was agreed that rolling days would be identified to allow flexibility and maximise attendance from academic staff.

School representatives were asked to raise the question of who should lead the events (Faculties or the Directorate) and ways of working and report back to the Directorate. Staff could also e-mail the Director of Learning and Teaching directly with suggestions for the focus of individual Development Days, and expressions of interest in organising one or more of the days.

Action: School Representatives

14.09 Observation of Practice

(Paper LTC14.02)

The paper was introduced by Allen Stroud (AS), School Representative for DMM (MP&P).

The paper observed how the strength of Bucks in comparison to other Universities in the Country is often cited as being the quality and focus on teaching. Beyond the requirements of the Certificate of Teaching and Learning, however, there was no institutional approach to teaching observation was being implemented (other than during probation).

Members discussed the paper. It was noted that there is currently a process for peer observation but this was regarded as a largely bureaucratic exercise. The discussion identified a need to change the culture of the university so as not to view observation as a chore or a pressured / bureaucratic activity.

During the discussion the following issues / comments were noted:

Positive comments:

- An important initiative to ensure best practice
- A 'wonderful' opportunity for self-reflection
- A chance for group teaching across the course divide (why limit it to observation only?)
- A way for winners of Student Teaching Awards to share their successful methods
- Mirrors the PSE opportunity to shadow in other departments
- Can be expanded to utilise video, already available but underused
- Expanded to include support staff coming into the classroom (for example from HR or Marketing to lend their experiences in the workplace to the relevant courses)

Cautionary observations:

- The need to avoid excessive amounts of paperwork
- Emphasis on convenience to avoid the 'chore mentality'
- Any initiative must be kept separate from Probation and Performance Management.

The Chair thanked AS for introducing the discussion and summarised the important aspects as: 'culture change'; 'improvement'; 'participation'; and the extrinsic benefits of the proposal. Any proposal should also have room for manoeuvre.

The Chair asked AS to prepare a formal proposal to be presented to the next meeting of the Committee (May) which looked at the issues raised during the discussion and summarised existing and best practices. He was asked to work with stakeholders including the Director of Learning and Teaching (to tie in with the CPD Framework).

Action: Allen Stroud

14.10 Module Evaluation Report – Update on Evasys and Next Steps (Paper LCT14.03)

The paper was introduced by Julie Irwin, School Representative S&H (ACP).

Work to be taken forward included:

- The need for a coherent "calendar" of surveys that can be managed out of one area, to ensure that only one survey is live at any one time.
- Identification of other surveys that could use the Evasys system.
- The development of the "online" version of the questionnaire for offsite and distance learning modules,
- Further clarity for exactly what data is needed, what it could be used for and at what levels the data might be of value, e.g. across themes, across courses, across departments, institutionally.

There was general agreement from members regarding the work identified. The Committee noted that the data is incredibly useful for feedback for modules when viewed at department level, and for preparing students to complete the NSS. It was also noted that the feedback was generally positive and should be celebrated.

The Committee noted that further investigation is needed regarding the level of openness in sharing the findings. In particular, members were aware of the need for sensitivity, especially where individual members of staff were referred to in free text fields. The University can edit comments if required, although it was noted that sensitive issues are still important for discussion by line managers with staff.

It was noted that the questionnaire is not as yet specifically linked with the Programme Review & Evaluation (PRE) process which uses 'triggers' to require the completion of a Module Exception Report, but that this could be considered after the initial pilot. There was also potential to RAG rate Module Feedback Questionnaires similar to External Examiner reports using a Red-Amber-Green traffic light rating.

The Committee queried the lack of ethical approval of the questionnaire and the format of some of the questions. The Chair noted that the wording of questions deliberately replicated NSS questions. Module questionnaires were not new, but the question would be forwarded to the Research Ethics Panel for comment.

Action: Miriam Moir

The Chair strongly endorsed the process and the principle of openness and asked for further feedback to be directed to JI.

14.11 University Assessment Regulations
(Paper LTC14.07)

The paper was introduced by Miriam Moir, AQD Representative. It highlighted the need for revised and simpler institutional regulations for assessment based on sound learning and teaching principles that should be debated by the University.

The Chair noted that these represented profound principles of education but which only appeared in regulations and could have unintended consequences when misinterpreted.

Members raised the following issues during the discussion:

- The need to avoid any assessment principles being overridden during the validation of new programmes
- Assessment should be based on achievement of learning outcomes
- Student achievement can be undermined when others are allowed to achieve the same when the effort has been much less. Effort should be rewarded
- Government changes of agenda and their implications, e.g. final assessment

The Chair proposed a cultural change programme to develop a set of regulations for the whole University to agree and noted that it was not acceptable for programmes to bring their own regulations.

The AQD representative was asked to develop a timeline for progress and to discuss issues sequentially. Importance should be placed on the development of University principles that underpin institutional regulations being married to best practice within the sector and professional body requirements and the QAA. A paper should be produced to update the committee with progress made at its May meeting.

Action: Miriam Moir

14.12 Faculty reports against NSS targets
(Paper LTC14.06)

It was noted that this is a standing item on the Committee's agenda and a template had been produced by Business Planning to facilitate the tracking of actions and subsequently completed by Academic Deans.

The Chair noted that this was work in progress but the report was extremely useful to demonstrate that serious engagement had taken place, and that such clear data assists in comparison with DLHE statistics.

It was agreed that this should continue to be a standing item on the agenda. Academic Deans would be asked to nominate one of the School Representatives to brief the Committee on future updates.

Action: Secretary

14.13 Academic Year Planning Group
The paper was received.

14.14 Timetable Group
The paper was received.

14.15 Any Other Business

Lecture Capture

Steve Hoole (Open4Learning Representative) introduced an item concerning Lecture Capture, and the need for investigation into hardware, software, costs and best practice.

It was agreed that a short paper would be prepared for the next meeting explicitly aligning the discussion with the ICT and TEL strategies. The Chair also asked that a heading in the paper relate to best practices from elsewhere.

Action: Steve Hoole

14.16 Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will be at 2pm, 7th May 2014, G5.05, High Wycombe.