

LTC09D079

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The CCS Review group has had another meeting on the 27 January 2010.

The following issues were reported and discussed:

1) Further consultation meetings on the basic proposed principles of the new CCS regulations as endorsed by LTC in December 2009

- a) The Chair reported that he and colleagues from the Learning, Teaching and Quality Office were in the process of meeting members of all the four Faculty, Learning, Teaching and Quality Committees to brief them on the proposed principles of the new CCS degree regulations and to seek their views on these. He had so far met with two of the Faculty, Learning, Teaching and Quality Committees from the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Faculty of Science. Members of both Committees were broadly in favour of the agreed principles of the new CCS degree regulations. Members especially welcomed the principles that students had to pass every module in order to progress to the next Stage and that reassessment would not be an automatic right. Some members also welcomed the principle of condoned progression for students who had narrowly failed to meet the progression requirement to progress to the next Stage. They were however concerned that the principle of condoned progression is developed properly whilst not defining it too narrowly as this may result in inconsistent decisions by the Board of Examiners. Members on the whole thought that the principles of the new CCS regulations would lead to an improvement in student engagement which could lead to a culture shift in students' behaviour at UEA.

The Chair also mentioned the current debate concerning whether the first year at UEA should count towards the degree classification, which some Faculties favour in order to improve student engagement and recognise achievement. The decision regarding this issue does lie with UEA's Executive Team which is going to make a decision shortly. Some members seem to be convinced that changes to the CCS regulations as proposed would already lead to an improvement in student engagement and thought that making the first year count to achieve the same goal may not be necessary. The Chair explained that once he had finished consulting with the four Faculty, Learning, Teaching and Quality Committees, which is expected to be by the end of February 2010, a new set of CCS draft regulations would be written. The Chair explained that he and colleagues from the Learning, Teaching and Quality Office would also be happy to meet with members of faculty in individual Schools of Study should this be what Schools would wish him to do.

Once draft regulations had been written, these would again be sent out to Faculties for further consultation, piloting and testing. It is hoped that Senate will approve the new CCS regulations in December 2010 for implementation in September 2012; this timeframe would allow the SITS team to make the

relevant changes to the student information system before actual implementation of the revised CCS regulations.

- b) The Chair had also met with the Admissions Faculty Managers and members of central admissions office to brief them on the approved principles of CCS and the debate about the first year counting towards the degree classification. Admissions Faculty Managers were concerned about whether the undergraduate prospectus for 2012 entry would contain the correct information regarding the revised CCS regulations. The prospectus for 2012 would be finalised in October/November 2010 and by then the revised CCS regulations would be nearly finalised and therefore it should be possible to ensure that the information in the prospectus reflects the spirit of the new CCS regulations. However, it is recognised that it would be preferable to have a final Senate decision on the new regulations before the prospectus is finalised. Admissions Faculty Managers expressed some concerns about the first year counting towards the degree classification as they thought that this would have implications for international student recruitment and might require an increase in the IELTS English language entry requirement for undergraduates, which could lead to a decrease in numbers of international students at UEA. [Note the IELTS score for admission of taught postgraduate students is higher than that for undergraduate students because taught postgraduate students start with counting soon after they arrive at UEA. It has been felt that because the first year of the undergraduate programmes are treated as transition years international students with lower IELTS scores would have time for their language abilities to improve]. They also thought in case the first year at UEA should count towards the degree classification, that further thought needs to be given to any students who were accepted as a direct entry into a second year of study or any student who wishes to transfer degree programmes. Further points raised by some of the Faculty Managers were: we would need a longer induction period which included information on study skills, assessment methods and probably introducing more 'practice' in assessed bits of work; if the second semester only was to count then exams would need to take place at the end of first semester to prepare those students who do not come from a formal examination background (and indeed others who are not used to the university system).
- c) The Chair has also met with the SITS team to brief them on the proposed changes to CCS and to get their views. The SITS team were hopeful that they would be able to implement the changes necessitated by the new CCS degree regulations as long as they were given 12 months notice. However, they reserved their judgement on the timeline for implementation as at this stage without knowing the complexity of the changes required to be made to SITS to accommodate the revised CCS regulations, more time may be needed for the development of the Student Information System and the timeline may slip.

2) Grade Point Average (GPA)

Members of the CCS Review Group were asked if UEA should adopt a Grade Point Average (GPA) alongside the current degree classification system. A Grade Point Average is a scale to measure academic achievement at higher education institutions for all modules taken in a semester or academic year or whole degree programme.

The Grade Point Average is widely used in the USA, Australia and Canada and is therefore considered to be international currency to assess a student's academic achievement and might provide students with an advantage in a global education and employment market.

A few years ago, the Burgess Review had proposed the GPA as an alternative to the current degree classification scheme in a consultation paper. The Vice Chancellor at

UEA at the time, consulted Heads of Schools at UEA about introducing the GPA and Heads of Schools were mainly in favour of introducing a GPA. However, the final report of the Burgess Review rejected the GPA with little explanation and proposed to introduce the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) in place of the degree classification system.

Members of the CCS Review Group decided that the introduction of a GPA should be explored further as it would seem a very easy and transparent way of displaying student achievement which would help UEA graduates to compete in the international employment market. It was proposed that the Dickenson Visiting Professors ought to make a presentation to a Heads of Schools' meeting to gather views of Heads of Schools. If the introduction of the GPA gets endorsed by Heads of Schools, it needs to be explored what software was needed to administer the GPA. Members of the Review Group also proposed if the go ahead for the GPA was given, that it should be tested out on taught postgraduate students in the academic year 10/11.

The Review Group considered that of the possible GPA schemes available that a transparent one converting UEA marks directly into GPA scores should be explored, notwithstanding the differences in marking cultures across UEA. In this scheme a mark of 100% would give a GPA of 4; 75%, 3; 50%, 2; and 25%, 1 with intermediate marks converted pro rata.

3) Management of Assessment within the new CCS degree regulations

The Chair explained that it would be sensible as new CCS regulations were going to be introduced to establish if any savings could be made in administering the assessment process. One of the areas which could be simplified is the confirmation of marks by the module assessment board meeting. Currently, CCS regulations stipulate that module marks need to be confirmed at the module assessment board meeting by the Board of Examiners. Boards may scale module marks to take account of factors such as standard deviation and the overall average mark for the module relative to other modules. Members of the CCS Review Group agreed that the module assessment board meeting could be abolished leading to considerable savings in resources if the Instruction to Examiners to allow them to scale marks was removed. However, an alternative method to confirm marks would need to be put into place. Marks could be confirmed after a thorough internal and external moderation process and signed off by the Chairman of Examiners, a process which is perceived as much more flexible. It is hoped that anomalies regarding module marks which had previously been dealt with by scaling marks would now be dealt with by a robust moderation process. Further savings in the administration of Boards of Examiners would need to be identified, e.g, should Stage Boards be combined with Final Boards and Mrs Caroline Sauverin and Mrs Claudia Gray were asked to think about further savings which could be made in the assessment process.

4) Use of level descriptors as used in the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (FHEQ)

The CCS Review Group considered whether UEA should adopt the nomenclature of the Higher Education Framework (FHEQ) for modules although there was no external pressure to do so. However, within the context of the CCS Review consideration of such a change is timely; once the SITS work commences on the new regulations we would not want to make a subsequent change to module descriptors. Currently, UEA modules are described as level 0 (all modules taken in the first year by Foundation year students), level 1 (all modules taken by first year students – with exception of LAW), level 2 (modules taken by second and third year students), level 3 modules (modules taken by third year students) and M-level modules (modules taken by masters students and final year integrated masters students). The level descriptors used in the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (FHEQ) would be level 3 for UEA level 0 modules, level 4 for UEA level 1 modules, level 5 for UEA level 2 modules, level 6 for UEA level 3 modules and level 7 for UEA M-level modules.

These level descriptors are used by National organisations (e.g. HESA, HEFCE, UUK) and also by UEA's partner institutions such as University College Suffolk and City College Norwich.

Members of the CCS Review Group thought that adopting the nomenclature of the FHEQ might help sort out the confusion regarding the level of the module and the year of study. Also, level 2 modules are currently being taken by second and third year students which does not imply an element of progression.

Members of the CCS Review Group agreed that provided the conversion of the existing level descriptors of modules would sort out the confusion around progression and if the conversion to the FHEQ framework did not prove to be too expensive, it may be a good idea for UEA to adopt the FHEQ level descriptors. It was agreed that this issue would be referred to the SITS team with a request to comment on the resource implications of the proposed changes before any decision to adopt the FHEQ level descriptors was made.