

**LTC09D031**

**Title:** Taught Programmes Policy Group : 24 June 2009  
**Circulation:** Learning and Teaching Committee – 28 October 2009  
**Agenda:** LTC09A002  
**Status:** Open  
**Version:** Final

---

## **1. Code of Conduct (Creative Writing)**

The Policy Group considered a draft Code of Conduct prepared by the School of Literature and Creative Writing in response to a case where a student had breached acceptable standards of behaviour in the content of a piece of written work submitted for assessment. The Policy Group considered the draft in the context of its applicability to other courses or subjects and also in the context of the LTC Review of Discipline. The Policy Group noted that it would be helpful to Schools to have a clear disciplinary route to follow where such issues arose and was pleased to hear that this was one of the aims of the Review. The Policy Group concluded that some of the issues raised by the LIT document, such as a need for verbal feedback on seminars, presentations or workshop activities, to be respectful, were directly applicable to other subjects, whilst the principles underpinning the document had relevance to all. The issues raised by the Code would be fed into the Review of Discipline by the Chair and Dean of Students.

## **2. Taught Postgraduate Student Issues**

The Policy Group received a report from the Academic Officer on issues raised through a discussion forum involving taught postgraduates. The forum was attended by students from all four Faculties and represented a mix of home and international students. The main themes emerging from the forum were a discussion of the reasons why students registered for taught postgraduate courses (e.g. employability or preparation for research degrees), dedicated study space and other resources, support during the dissertation period, teaching and assessment strategies (including the relevance of examinations), study skills training and other induction activities, particularly for international students entering UK HE for the first time, usefulness of marking criteria, and plagiarism training.

The Policy Group welcomed the report and the proposal that such a forum become an annual event, feeding into the Policy Group and Union agenda. It also noted that information on the taught postgraduate experience remained patchy, although the University did now have a number of sources of information available to it, including annual evaluation of the Advising System, and the substantial use made of the Learning Enhancement Service by taught postgraduates, to which the new Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) would hopefully add. There was some concern, however, that many surveys (including PTES) were conducted before students undertook their

dissertations over the summer and therefore could not capture this aspect of their experience.

The Policy Group envisaged that taught postgraduate issues would increasingly populate its agenda, and noted that the inclusion within the membership of the Policy Group of a taught postgraduate representative nominated by Union Council was beneficial and had assisted the Academic Officer in bringing taught postgraduate perspective and issues to the table.

### **3. Marking Criteria and Feedback**

The Policy Group received feedback from its consultation with Staff Student Liaison Committees in respect of the usefulness of published marking criteria in providing students with information on what markers were looking for and on the potential usefulness of basic assessment data as part of feedback. Whilst the responses to the consultation did not provide the Policy Group with a strong steer, they did indicate that feedback based on marking criteria was seen as helpful by students, which accorded with the experience of the Learning Enhancement Co-ordinator.

The Policy Group and Academic Officer felt that direct consultation with student members of Staff Student Liaison Committees could be a useful mechanism for accessing a broad-based student view, but suggested that any future discussions would benefit from a more thorough briefing around the issues to ensure that there was informed discussion or perhaps a discussion facilitated by a member of the Policy Group. It was suggested that it might be helpful to identify any issues for discussion at the start of the academic year to ensure that all SSLCs could participate. Care would be needed to ensure that SSLCs were not overburdened with business referred to them from central committees, so as to allow them to function as a local forum for discussion of local issues.

The Policy Group noted that the issue of providing good feedback to students had been on its agenda for some time and that a priority for 2009/10 would be to convert the helpful and fulsome discussions it had had on this issue into actions. It was felt that the discussion of the adoption of electronic submission of coursework and potentially electronic feedback would be a useful additional prompt.

### **4. Postgraduate Diploma and MSc in Midwifery**

The Policy Group heard that the School of Nursing and Midwifery planned to develop an MSc in Midwifery to build upon the Postgraduate Diploma in Midwifery being validated. In order for students to be able to practice as midwives they would require the award of the Postgraduate Diploma before completing the dissertation component of the MSc. This scenario paralleled that of the Postgraduate Certificate in Education and the MA in Education with Qualified Teacher Status.

It is not currently University policy to make two awards to a student for one course, but an exception was made for the PGCE on the basis that we would disadvantage students in the employment market not to do so and would potentially lose students from the MA (decision by LTC at its meeting on 6 February 2008). It was noted that a student from another university who had already been awarded a PGCE could seek Accreditation of Prior Learning within the MA QTS and would have two awards. Whilst the position was similar for the

Postgraduate Diploma in Midwifery, the latter would also involve exceeding the principles within the current Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy, which only permitted half the credits for an award to be imported.

The Policy Group was content with this position and **recommends** to LTC that students on the MSc in Midwifery (pending approval) be permitted to be awarded the Postgraduate Diploma in Midwifery following successful completion of 120 credits worth of study (and successful achievement of the required professional competencies).

## 5. On-Line Evaluation of Teaching

A report on the pilots of the on-line evaluation of teaching was considered, together with recommendations from Faculty Managers on next steps. The report noted that those Schools who had participated in the pilots were enthusiastic about the on-line tool and that in most cases response rates had been good, although there were some cases where responses had been poor. The creation of the questionnaires had been straightforward and there was flexibility within the tool for one questionnaire to be used for all modules, for there to be a different template for different types of module or for the questionnaire to be tailored to an individual module. A major benefit of the tool was that data could be processed quickly and without drawing heavily on staff time, which meant that information could be shared with students and staff very rapidly. There remained some courses where the tool could not be used because as currently configured it did not meet the School's needs or where the use of an on-line tool was not appropriate. It was hoped that further development of the tool during 2009/10 would allow more Schools to participate.

The Policy Group welcomed the development of the tool. It seemed to the Policy Group that provided that the tool met the particular needs of a Module Organiser, it should be adopted. The tool was commended to Schools for use in module evaluation during 2009/10, with the expectation that unless there were grounds for not doing so the tool would be used. The Policy Group **recommends** that where an on-line survey tool was used, the tool developed by the University should be adopted.

The pilots had identified some general issues about module evaluation questionnaires that required consideration:

- Purpose of the data

The assumption underpinning the revised approach to module monitoring approved in March 2003 was that Module Organisers gathered feedback from students on the student experience of the module in order to inform the future development and enhancement of the module. Its primary focus was therefore on the professional development of the Module Organiser (and teachers on the module).

It was also assumed that issues emerging from module evaluations would be reviewed by someone outside the module, to determine whether there were themes emerging across modules. This could be achieved by the Module Organiser summarising issues for inclusion in the Module Monitoring report (MM1) or by the School Director of Learning, Teaching and Quality reviewing the outcomes of module evaluations (noting that this would be much easier to do with the on-line tool preparing an analysis of the outcomes, which could be sent

automatically). The Policy Group noted that if a Module Organiser opted for a different method of gathering evaluation there would not be data to share and the School would be reliant upon the summary provided by the Module Organiser.

It is also practice in some Schools for the outcomes of module evaluations to be used as general management information or for the outcomes to be used by Heads of School for staff management, including promotions.

When revisions to Programme Monitoring and Review were approved in summer 2008, LTC considered that a review of the procedure (with specific focus on management information and the purposes of the process) would be beneficial, but could not be scheduled into the LTC programme of work until 2010/11. It would seem sensible for the review of the procedure to additionally take into consideration the ways in which evaluation data could and should be used, not least in the light of the potential offered by the new tool for swift and easy reporting of outcomes.

- Frequency of surveys

The Policy Group considered whether it was helpful or necessary to survey students in every module every year, particularly where the module was well established, where there had been no changes to content, teaching or assessment, and where neither the reflections of the Module Organiser nor comments from the external examiner had raised issues.

It may be appropriate for School Directors of Learning, Teaching and Quality to consider whether surveys should only be used on a bi-annual cycle for established modules, with other evaluation mechanisms being used in alternate years. The views of LTC on this are invited.

## **6. Overview of Stage 2 Academic Appeals**

A summary of Stage 2 Academic Appeals, setting out the grounds for appeal (in general terms), the outcome and any issues for wider consideration was considered. This was the second such report to the Policy Group, with the first having been made following a recommendation contained within the revised section of the QAA Code of Practice dealing with Academic Appeals, that the outcome of appeals be considered by a high level central committee as a mechanism for identifying themes for quality enhancement. Whilst the University had already had in place a mechanism for taking forward lessons learned from appeals through the Directors (who act as Chairs to Appeal Panels and assist the Academic Registrar in deciding on Stage 2 Appeals) and Secretaries to Stage 2 Appeals, it was felt that a summary report to the Policy Group would be helpful.

The report did not duplicate the statistical report made to LTC on an annual basis on the number of appeals or equality monitoring data, but the Policy Group did note that a high proportion of taught postgraduate students whose appeals were rejected at Stage 1 subsequently lodged Stage 2 Appeals.

The report noted that the majority of Stage 2 Appeals were made against decisions on degree classification, decisions to withdraw students following academic failure, or decisions to award an exit award (in the case of taught postgraduates). A number of appeals against classification arose where students had fallen within the 2% discretionary band. There were five Appeals against the penalty applied for plagiarism (including one Appeal against the outcome of a

Faculty Plagiarism and Collusion Committee). The most common grounds for appeal were extenuating circumstances. Students claimed that their circumstances had not been fully or appropriately taken into consideration by the Board or presented information that had not been available to the Board at the time a decision was made. In some instances students did provide further information at Stage 2 either about their circumstances or the impact that these had upon their ability to study. In some cases these were considered to be potentially material to the academic decision reached, in others the additional information was considered not to be material. In the case of appeals against the penalty imposed for plagiarism, students claimed that there had been no intention to plagiarise and / or that they had not fully understood the conventions of academic referencing or appropriate academic practice. In two Appeal cases involving taught postgraduate students there had been procedural irregularity in the application of the University's regulations / procedures.

It should be noted that in a number of cases the information included in a Stage 2 Appeal was referred back to a School or to a Board of Examiners to ensure that their decision was made in the light of the full information and could therefore be demonstrated to be robust, rather than because there were prima facie concerns about the decision that had been reached. There was clear evidence from the Stage 1 documentation reviewed as part of the Stage 2 process that Heads of School were giving detailed and thorough consideration to Academic Appeals.

The Director of Taught Programmes and members of the Learning, Teaching and Quality Office have identified the following themes and action points from the Stage 2 Appeals considered during 2008/9.

- Clarification of the supporting evidence required from students in support of claims of extenuating circumstances;
- Further emphasis required on the Circumstances Affecting Study proforma and process for students to draw extenuating circumstances to the attention of their School at the earliest opportunity and for recording the ways in which the circumstances have impacted upon their ability to study (this is a theme that has also emerged through the consideration of concession requests);
- Amendments to the Academic Appeals Procedure clarifying that Schools should ensure that students have attempted informal resolution prior to submitting a Stage 1 Appeal and that Boards of Examiners are considering the impact upon students of extenuating circumstances referred to them by the Head of School following an Appeal and are not considering the validity of the Appeal or the evidence referred to them;
- Clarity of marking and relationship between marks and the marking criteria;
- Understanding of what constitutes plagiarism and opportunities provided to students to learn through practical examples. It is hoped that the revisions to the Plagiarism and Collusion Policy may address some issues associated with penalties;
- Use of third assessment opportunities where there is evidence that a student's performance in or preparation for assessment has been affected and where the Board are unable to recommend that a failure is condoned;
- Amendment to Regulations and Instructions to Examiners in respect of extenuating circumstances.

## **7. Dissemination**

The attention of the members of the Policy Group was drawn to the report from the Higher Education Research and Innovation Group to the May 2009 meeting of LTC and to a copy of the poster presentation on Assessment Specifications from the Project Officer for the Review of Assessment at the May 2009 Learning and Teaching Day. Members were asked to ensure that colleagues were aware of both and to seek additional volunteers for pilots of assessment specifications.

## **8. Electronic Submission of Coursework**

Whilst not a substantive item at the meeting on 24 June, the attention of the Policy Group was drawn to proposals in respect of the electronic submission of coursework. This item was on the agenda for the meeting on 21 October 2009, but members were invited to consider the issues over the summer.