LTC10D087

Title:	**Report of the meetings of the Taught Programmes Policy Group on 9 March 2011 and 13 April 2011**
Author:	Assistant Registrar, Dr Joanne Ashman
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The Policy Group discussed a number of items as set out below. There are **no** recommendations arising from the meeting for LTC to consider. However, the attention of the Committee is drawn in particular to the Policy Group's discussion of **quoracy of Assessment Boards**, noting that this was an issue raised by the 2009 Institutional Audit.

Issues considered

- **New Academic Model**

The Chair had updated the Policy Group on progress in respect of the development of the New Academic Model, including a report on the recent visit of Professor Graham Gibbs and his consultations with individual Schools. As the Committee's meeting of 27 April was devoted to the NAM it is not necessary to report the Policy Group's discussion here.

- **Review of Academic Appeals and Academic Complaints**

The Chair provided an update to the Policy Group on the discussions at the first meeting of the sub-group convened to review the academic appeals and complaints procedures and invited the Policy Group to give further consideration to the issues raised.
Further discussion is required before proposals and recommendations can be brought to the Committee. A summary of the discussion follows, but a number of key issues have been agreed:

- There should be a change to arrangements for the reporting of extenuating circumstances, specifically where it is claimed that these have had an impact on assessment and marks;
- This change should apply to reporting circumstances to Boards of Examiners, the appeals process, and concessions processes (repeat years, intercalations and deferred assessments);
- Students should be required to report relevant factors prior to the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners and by a published deadline;
- There should continue to be an appeal route through which students could submit extenuating circumstances where there were good grounds for having not disclosed the circumstances at the appropriate time.

The first meeting of the sub-group had focused on the reporting of extenuating circumstances and specifically whether late reporting should be permitted. It was recognised that the reporting of extenuating circumstances could not be considered in the context of appeals alone – noting in

particular that in some Schools late reporting might result in a concession request rather than an appeal. Any decision on the reporting of extenuating circumstances in respect of appeals would also need to apply to concessions and delayed first sits.

The sub-group had recommended that extenuating circumstances should only be taken in to consideration if reported prior to the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners unless a student could demonstrate good grounds why the circumstances had not been disclosed at the appropriate time. The Policy Group endorsed this position and noted that further discussion would be required to establish what constituted acceptable grounds for late reporting. The Policy Group considered how consistency and equity might be achieved across Schools in respect of what was accepted as a good reason for late reporting and considered whether administrative support for Stage 1 Appeals from the eleven Coordinators in the Learning and Teaching Service would ensure this. The sub-group and Policy Group were attracted by the practice at other institutions whereby a single university level body considered appeals or indeed all extenuating circumstances. Whilst there would be a significant resource commitment in such a model given the likely volume of extenuating circumstances and required frequency of meeting (issues which other institutions had presumably addressed), such an approach would ensure consistency across Schools.

The Policy Group and sub-group discussed whether a change in the Appeals procedure to make late disclosure more difficult would change student behaviour. It was recognised that the issue of encouraging students to disclose extenuating circumstances promptly was a perennial one and that there were a number of different factors at play. There were, however, examples of good practice where a School ethos that encouraged students to have confidence that their circumstances would be addressed sympathetically did encourage prompt reporting, noting that prompt reporting meant that there were more options available to students and that circumstances could be addressed before there was too much impact on marks. It was noted that the appeals process in place prior to 2005 had required students to disclose circumstances prior to the meeting of the Board of Examiners or to provide acceptable grounds why they had not done so.

It was felt that a single deadline for the reporting of extenuating circumstances (possibly one in each semester) would be easier to administer and would provide clarity for students. Further thought would need to be given how such a model would work for courses / students operating a non-standard academic year where assessment took place at different times and where Boards of Examiners met at other times. Administrative systems would need to be developed to record and receipt reported extenuating circumstances and attached evidence (noting that there have been cases where a student believed that a School was aware of circumstances when information was not in fact available to the Board and cases where a student claimed to have submitted information or evidence for which no record could be found). It was unclear whether there were sufficient resources in current Faculty Teaching Offices or the future Learning and Teaching Service to put in place a service to students that provided a receipt / record for the submission of extenuating circumstances and for the evidence provided in support.

The Policy Group considered the implications of imposing a deadline for the reporting of extenuating circumstances. The discussion touched upon the processes that would need to be put in place for situations where a student wished to submit extenuating circumstances to a Board, but needed to gather appropriate supporting evidence which would take them beyond the published deadlines (for example a full dyslexia screening, a complete medical diagnosis or gathering information from their home country). The Policy Group was asked to consider whether students would expect the University to keep more strictly to its timescales and deadlines if students were expected to conform to deadlines and what impact this might have on workloads and the setting of University deadlines. It was noted that the timescale for considering appeals could easily be extended to 30 or 40 working days to ensure that commitments were observed. It was noted that at present the consideration of

appeals had to be fitted around other workloads, whether by the Head of School, Faculty Teaching Office or the Learning, Teaching and Quality Office. The Policy Group was therefore asked to consider whether a dedicated appeals and complaints office / service might offer an efficient commitment of resources for the future.

It was not felt that a change in policy in respect of late reporting would have a significant impact upon retention rates, although further consideration might be required noting the volume of concessions for repeat years or deferred assessments rather than the volume of appeals.

- **Evidence for Absences from Course Tests**

As the Committee may recall, the University's policy and procedures in respect of acceptable absences from examinations / delayed sits, including the requirement for any such claim to be supported by appropriate evidence, was extended to course tests with effect from the 2009/10 academic year. The University Medical Services expressed concern at the resource implications of this policy in the light of the volume of course tests and the absence of NHS funding for this activity (this additional activity is funded by the University). There has also been some variation in the wording of medical certificates issued to cover different situations (absence from examinations, absence from course tests or medical conditions affecting engagement), which has in some circumstances meant that the University has not had the clear information that it requires in order to make a decision on an individual student's circumstances. A sub-group of the Policy Group, including the Dean of Students, has been discussing options with representatives of UMS, noting that some of the issues would diminish as the New Academic Model was implemented and in particular as course tests became formative rather than summative assessments. These discussions are continuing.

- **Feedback to Students on Assessment**

The Policy Group received reports from Faculties on the development of plans to provide feedback to students on assessed work. These included plans within SSF and SCI to provide feedback / feed-forward on examinations. At least one Year 1 module would be selected, ideally one for which the examination was early in the series, and group feedback offered to the cohort as soon as possible (and prior to the end of the academic year).

In addition the Policy Group received information on the development of the assessment strategy for the BA in Professional Studies (EDU) for 2011/2, which harnessed thinking being undertaken as part of the development of the New Academic Model. The assessment strategy sought to define for students the purposes of both assessment (formative and summative) and of feedback in the learning process.

Consideration was also given to the development and implementation of an Assessment Compact, defining the role of assessment within the University's and Schools' learning and teaching strategies and the University's and Schools' commitments to students in respect of assessment. The Policy Group received and considered the Assessment Compact in place at Oxford Brookes University, noting that Oxford Brookes is a sector leader in assessment and feedback matters and were advised that permission had been given to adopt this format. The Policy Group endorsed the notion of a UEA assessment compact but decided, however, that a version of the Assessment Compact should be specifically designed for use at UEA as part of our wider strategy of disseminating good practice, reflecting what we ourselves do well and being flexible enough to be adapted to particular disciplines and course structures. Such a tool would be extremely helpful in the development and implementation of a revised approach to assessment and learning within the New Academic Model.

The Policy Group established a sub-group to move forward with the development of an Assessment Compact for UEA. Proposals will be brought back to the Policy Group and thence to the Committee in due course.

The Policy Group also considered an example of best practice from the sector in the use of technology to support the provision of feedback to students, receiving the University of Strathclyde's Re-Engineering Assessment Practices (REAP) Project. It was concluded that it was desirable for an on-line resource to be created which could provide a forum for the dissemination and discussion of good practice in teaching, learning and assessment, sharing practice at UEA and linking to external sources.

- **Marking of Offensive Material**

The Policy Group considered an updated draft of a policy document which had been prepared in response to a small number of cases in recent years and which articulated with General Regulation 10 and existing disciplinary procedures, whilst drawing a distinction between academic merit and discipline. The policy document was recommended to the Committee at its meeting on 27 April in advance of this report to ensure that it was in place for the main assessment period.

- **NSS 2010 and PTES 2010**

The Policy Group received reports from Schools on action taken in response to issues at School level identified via these two surveys. There were no matters arising that required attention by the Policy Group or the Committee, but the Policy Group again urged Schools to adopt a "You Said …, We Did …" format for advising current students of actions taken in response to these surveys (and other evaluations of the student experience). The Policy Group also noted that there was variation in the evidence of discussion of the NSS and PTES outcomes with current students and of the active discussion of issues emerging from the surveys by student representatives. This is perhaps a matter of concern given that the same issues appear to be present in the NSS in successive years, but current students (and particularly finalists who are about to complete the next survey) do not appear to have a particular insight into the issues underpinning the results, to endorse the School or University's response to the issues raised in previous surveys or offer suggestions as to how their experience might be improved. As we have noted in the past, Schools and the University often struggle to understand the reasons for the NSS outcomes in a particular year or across years, and discussion with current students would appear to offer the best way of identifying what the key issues are, yet the evidence from these reports implies that SSLCs are not providing any additional insight.
It was noted that PTES 2011 had been launched.

- **Quoracy of Assessment Boards**

As the Committee will recall, this was an issue raised by the 2009 QAA Institutional Audit. The University did not fully understand why the issue of the quoracy of Assessment Boards had been singled out in the Audit Report as the report had not provided any contextual information as to why this was a particular issue for concern for the Audit Team. Nonetheless, Associate Deans had been asked to consult Faculties as to whether the current provisions of the Instructions to Examiners for the three regulatory frameworks for taught awards were sufficiently robust in respect of the composition of Module Assessment Boards, Stage / Intermediate Assessment Boards, Reassessment Boards and Final Assessment Boards. The Policy Group were reminded that absences from Final Assessment Boards (whether internal or external members) had to be approved by the Director of Taught Programmes on behalf of the Committee. In general internal members were normally replaced by another member of the teaching team and where an external examiner was unable to attend a meeting due to unforeseen circumstances provision was normally made to discuss results via other means. The Policy Group was also mindful that Schools / subject teams varied substantially in size and that it would therefore be extremely difficult to specify a minimum membership of an Assessment Board that went beyond the current requirement (the Chair and an internal examiner for a Module or

Stage / Intermediate Board). It was the view of all four Faculties that current arrangements were robust and remained appropriate.

The Policy Group noted the suggestion that further information on the role of internal examiners might be helpful. This issue might appropriately form part of the Instructions to Examiners for taught awards under the New Academic Model or form part of the Code of Practice on Assessment.

- **Marking Scales**

The Policy Group considered a request from a School in SSF that in addition to the numerical marking scale / Senate classification scale and the fail/pass/distinction scales currently in place, the University adopt a third scale of either A, B, C, D, E or Excellent, Very Good, Acceptable, Narrow Pass, Narrow Fail, Fail, in order to provide more information to students.

The Policy Group concluded that given the impending need to commit resources to reconfiguring SITS for the New Academic Model there was no resource to support the implementation of such a marking scheme. It was also felt that the existing marking schemes provided sufficient flexibility and that further variation was undesirable.

- **Networking Problems and Future Planning**

Following the discussion by the Committee of the network problems that occurred just before Christmas, the Committee had asked the Policy Group to consider plans for the University's response to any such future incident, including the appropriate locus for decision making and communications strategies. The incident had highlighted some easily remediable issues, such as the need to have at least one non-networked printer available and to have key mobile phone numbers in hard copy. The incident also highlighted the limits of the University's disaster planning and specifically that the contingency plans had not appeared to extend to significant disruption of this nature to assessment or to a decision making team that covered learning and teaching. (The Policy Group acknowledged, as the Committee had done, that one of the issues in December had been that the likely duration of the incident had not been apparent from the start.) The incident therefore provided an opportunity to consider a range of potential situations that could have a severe impact on learning, teaching or assessment and to build a disaster plan around these, building on the University's existing Disaster Plan.

The Policy Group noted that a special set of Regulations and Instructions to Examiners for CCS had been prepared and approved to take account of the potential impact on assessment of either swine flu / other pandemic or industrial action.

The Policy Group **recommended**
- o that the core decision making team, coordinating the University's response, should be
  - PVC (Academic)
  - Director of Taught Programmes[1]
  - Dean of Students
- o that the existing Disaster Plan should be extended and form the basis of a disaster plan covering learning, teaching and assessment
- o that a set of regulations for the New Academic Model should be written covering contingencies such as industrial action or pandemic (mirroring the current set of CCS regulations and instructions).

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[1] Further consideration should be given as to whether the Director of Research Degree Programmes should also be included.