



ACADEMIC BOARD

Minutes of the meeting held on the 28th January 2009

08/14 Attendance

14.1 Present

Professor D Green (Chair), Mr D Antell, Mr W Bowen-Jones, Mr M Donovan, Dr M Doughty, Professor J Elkin, Dr N Evans, Mr D Flint, Ms M Gamble, Mrs A Hannaford, Mr A Hemming, Dr J Keene, Mr T Maxfield, Ms J Murray, Professor J Newbury, Mr M Newitt, Professor A Payne, Mr K Pickess, Mrs J Quallington, Dr M Stowell, Professor D Upton

14.2. In Attendance

Ms H Johnstone, Mr J Ryan

14.3. Apologies

Professor G Elliott, Ms K Hanson, Mrs L Jones, Mr J Martin, Mr R Prout, Mr M Richardson, Professor C Robertson, Dr I Scott

14.4. Membership

The Chair welcomed Ms Janet Murray who was acting as a nominee for Professor Robertson.

08/15 Minutes

15.1. The minutes of the meeting held on the 22nd October 2008 [AB08/16] were confirmed as a correct record of the meeting.

15.2. Matters Arising not covered elsewhere on the Agenda.

15.2.1. National Student Survey [minute 08/06 refers]

It was noted that the 2009 National Student Survey was about to be launched. Staff were asked to encourage students to respond.

15.2.2. Research Centres [minute 08/12 refers]

The Vice Chancellor advised members that the National Pollen and Aerobiology Research Unit (NPARU) would report through the Head of the Institute of Science and the Environment. Members also noted that the name of the Motion Analysis Research and Rehabilitation Centre was to be changed to better reflect the work of the Centre. Members would be consulted electronically on proposals for a change of name for the Centre.

15.2.3. Change of Institute Name [minute 08/11 refers]

It was noted that whilst the Board had approved the change of title to with the effect from the beginning of the 2009/2010 academic year, the Chair of the Board had subsequently approved a request that the new title should be introduced from the 1st January 2009.

08/16 **Student Retention and Achievement: Strategic Discussion [AB08/17]**

16.1 The Registrar introduced the discussion stating that retention and achievement had been discussed in a number of forums in recent months. A paper compiled by the Retention Working Group had been circulated to members. Kevin Pickess and Ian Scott had been visiting Institutes to discuss retention and achievement and to collate ideas for improving these. Retention is crucial to the success of the Institution.

16.2 The Board had a wide-ranging discussion around the themes identified in the paper. The following main points were made:-

- **Pre-Entry Information**

Research indicates that one of the primary reasons for early withdrawal relates to students arriving ill-prepared, and that this applies especially to students from non-traditional backgrounds. There is evidence that the provision of more course specific pre-entry information which explains expectations and approaches to study at HE level has a positive impact. It was agreed that all course teams should develop web-based and other materials that provided students with this type of pre-entry information.

- **Induction**

There was general agreement that the recent reforms of the induction process, with greater emphasis on course-level induction activities had had a positive impact. There was evidence of good practice and it was agreed that such practice should be disseminated across all subjects. Members agreed that the introduction of activities which allowed cohorts of students to “bond” more effectively and opportunities for students to build effective relationships with their tutors should be further extended. (The Board noted that within the Institute of Sport and Exercise Science a residential course had been introduced at the start of one programme of study and that this had been very well received.)

- **Course Structure**

Members discussed the impact of a modular, credit-based structure on student retention and achievement. There were concerns that such structures encourage over assessment and the clustering of assessments. The balance between formative and summative assessment was discussed, particularly in the context of student feedback where there was evidence that students were not always collecting, or taking sufficient notice of feedback on summative assessment. It was agreed that the balance between formative and summative assessment should be reviewed in all cases. The Board also discussed the current structure of HND, FD and BA/BSc courses, which is based on 8x15 credit modules per academic year. There was support for moving to 6x20 credit modules and this will be the subject of further consultation and discussion.

- **First Year Experience**

The Board noted that research shows that the first year experience is a critical determining factor in levels of student retention and a number of possible measures were identified which will be the subject of further discussion through relevant committees and within institutes. These include: redress the balance between formative and summative assessment in year one; divert contact hours from level 6 (year 3) to level 4 (year 1) when students need more support, ensure that year one has a strong focus on the development of study skills that students need to be successful; review the balance in year one between mandatory and optional modules.

- **Personal Tutoring**

Members agreed that personal tutoring is important in tracking student progress and providing support to students who may be struggling. It was agreed that there was a need for additional mechanisms to support personal tutors in their role: greater use of administrative staff to track student progress and initiate follow up in the case of students who fail or do not submit; increased use of peer mentoring and buddy schemes; extend the role of professional support staff (in Student Services and Information and Learning Services) in providing skills courses for students who require additional support.

- Re-assessment and Non-Submission

The Board noted that they would be considering later in the meeting a proposal to re-locate re-assessment from September to June/July and it was agreed that this measure, together with the introduction of an earlier opportunity to retrieve failure from semester one was desirable. The problem of non-submission was considered a particular issue that must be addressed. A re-balancing between formative and summative assessment could have a positive impact and reviews of the timing and nature of assessment were also suggested.

- 16.10 The Chair thanked members for their participation in the discussion. Members' observations would be used to inform further initiatives, and there would be further reports made to the Board.

08/17 Vice Chancellor's Report [AB08/18]

The Vice Chancellor presented his report to the Board, drawing attention to the following points.

- 17.1 Student Applications for 2009 – applications are up. The University has held another successful open evening and the first Visit Day will be on the 30th January (see 08/18 for a more detailed report).
- 17.2 Secretary of State's letter to HEFCE – there will be no Additional Student Numbers in 2010/2011 across the sector; this is a significant change in government policy and one which the University will need to take into account in its future planning.
- 17.3. Graduate Employment – the University's graduates are facing increased difficulties in the current economic climate in securing employment. The University has decided to change its policy in relation to charging for ELQ and in 2009 students registered for a further equivalent level award will be charged the normal fee, although they will receive no bursary. Proposals for a range of internships, both internally and externally, are being considered.
- 17.4 Research Assessment Exercise 2008 – members received copies of the confidential feedback. It was noted that the funding allocation arising out of the Exercise will be announced in five weeks time. Congratulations were extended to colleagues in English some of whose work was rated 4*. The majority of outputs in all areas submitted had been categorised as of national and, in some cases of international importance. Overall, the University's performance provided a good base on which to build the University's research profile.

The Registrar tabled a paper outlining plans to set up a working group to develop a revised Research, Scholarship and Knowledge Transfer Strategy. The working group will report to Academic Board through the Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee and will present a revised Strategy to the Board in July 2009. The Board approved the setting up of the working group.

- 17.5 Regency High School – the University has exchanged contracts on Regency High School and will have ownership from February 2010. The School, which shares boundaries with the University, will provide good size classrooms and will support the University's expansion.
- 17.6 NHS funded students – the rates for Nursing and Midwifery students for 2009/2010 have been increased by 3.9%.
- 17.7 The Board received the report.

08/18 Student Recruitment [AB08/19]

- 18.1 The Registrar presented a report on the current position for student recruitment for 2009/2010 and 2008/2009. Members noted that they could access information about applications for 2009/2010 via the UCAS tracker system.

- 18.2 It was noted that the number of applicants compared with the same date in 2008 had increased by 8.35%, compared with a national increase of 7.23%. The number of individual applications to the University stood at 7533, compared with 6967 in 2008, an increase of 8.12%. Nationally applications have increased by 6.7%. The Board noted that some areas have achieved significant increases including; Combined Arts (35.50%), Creative Arts and Design (34.56%), History (24.56%) and Subjects Allied to Medicine (23.69%). Applications to Initial Teacher Education and Nursing courses were also showing significant increases. However, some areas had done less well including: Computer Science, Physical and Combined Sciences.
- 18.3 The University was able to return a figure of 3900 in the HESES08 return and has a further year in which to make up the shortfall on Additional Student Numbers.
- 18.4 Nursing and Midwifery February intake is 12 short of target but there are further interviews scheduled so this figure should reduce. 23 International and European students are expected to start in February.
- 18.5 The Board received the report.

08/19 Academic Year, 2009/2010 [AB08/20]

- 19.1 The Head of Registry Services presented the paper detailing the proposal to change the timing of August/September reassessment to July. The paper also included proposals for the introduction of an optional reassessment period around Easter; the principle that University committees/Institute meetings are not held during marking weeks; the establishment of a review of the capping of reassessment by Learning Teaching and Student Experience Committee and that these changes should apply to the majority of courses were feasible.
- 19.2 Members noted that the rationale for the proposals was that staff would be more available to support students with reassessment in July. Students would also know the outcomes of their reassessment earlier and be in a clearer position to progress. It was acknowledged that the proposed changes would involve a number of challenges in order that the tight deadlines were met. The proposals also assume that students will receive their marks more dynamically so they can access reassessment information more quickly r.
- 19.3. Members noted that the proposals were for 2009/2010 but discussed whether it would be possible to introduce some of the changes in 2008/2009.
- 19.4 The Board discussed at some length the desirability of introducing at Easter an opportunity to retrieve failure from semester 1 and whether this could be introduced in the current session. Concern was expressed about introducing such a change in 2008/2009, which might cause confusion. It was also noted that nothing in current regulations prevented students opting to start work on semester one re-assessment in advance of the published deadlines and students could be encouraged to do this in future years without making it mandatory.
- 19.5 A proposal was made that students should be assessed in semester 1 before Christmas, however it was acknowledged that this proposal would require need to be worked through thoroughly before the Board could consider it.
- 19.6 The Board made the following decisions:-
- i) The realignment of the reassessment period from August/September to July from 2009/2010 – unanimously approved.
 - ii) The introduction of an optional reassessment period around Easter – the removal of the word ‘optional’ was broadly approved. The Board was generally supportive of this recommendation but agreed that there was not sufficient time to introduce it for 2008/2009.
 - iii) The principle that University committees/Institute meetings should not be held during marking weeks – approved.

- iv) These changes should apply to the majority of courses were feasible – this was approved although it was felt the term ‘majority’ should be removed.
- v) The establishment of a review of the capping of reassessment by the Learning Teaching and Student Experience Committee – approved.

It was agreed that there would be further discussion between the Registrar, Director of Quality and Educational Development, the Chair of Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee and the Head of Registry Services to consider the details of the changes proposed, and subsequently a report to the relevant Committee.

08/20 Research Degrees Awarding Powers [AB08/21]

- 20.1. The Deputy Vice Chancellor presented a summary of the current position to the Board. The Board noted that ACDAP had agreed that the University had made a prima facie case and it had been agreed that the University’s application would now be scrutinised by a panel comprising:
 - Professor Robert Harris, Assistant Director at the QAA whose role will be to co-ordinate the scrutiny
 - Professor Nick Goddard, Professor of Agrarian & Environmental History at Anglia Ruskin University and an experienced QAA reviewer
 - Mrs Sally Powell, Assistant Registrar, University of Oxford and a QAA reviewer
 - Miss Gillian Hooper of Central School of Speech and Drama, who will act as Panel Secretary
- 20.2 The briefing identified the groups of staff and students the scrutiny panel would be meeting with in March. Subsequent to this the scrutiny panel would be observing a number of University and Institute committee meetings for the remainder of the year.
- 20.3 Members noted that the deadline for submitting updated c.v.s was the 1st March 2009, and Heads of Institute were asked to ensure that all staff complied with this deadline.
- 20.4 The Vice Chancellor thanked all colleagues who had worked on the RDAP application. The outcome of ACDAP’s initial consideration was positive and he remained convinced that the University’s application was a strong one. However, much work remained to be done.

08/21 Professorial Titles

- 21.1. Conferment of the title of Visiting Professor on Professor Paul Gilbert [AB08/22]

Members noted the conferment of the title of Visiting Professor in the Institute of Health and Society on Professor Paul Gilbert.
- 21.2 Conferment of the title of Visiting Professor on Professor Mark Saunders [AB08/23]

Members noted the conferment of the title of Visiting Professor in the Worcester Business School on Professor Mark Saunders
- 21.3. Conferment of the title of Professor of Inclusive Education on Professor Peter Clough [AB08/23a]

Members noted the conferment of the title of Professor of Inclusive Education in the Institute of Education on Professor Peter Clough. It was noted that the conferment had been made by the Appointments Panel.
- 21.4 Conferment of the title of Professor of Dementia Studies on Professor Dawn Brooker [AB08/23b]

Members noted the conferment of the title of Professor of Dementia Studies in the Institute of Health and Society on Professor Dawn Brooker. It was noted that the conferment has been made by the Appointments Panel.

08/22 Reports from Committees

22.1 Academic Portfolio Committee [AB08/24]

22.1.1 The Board received the report from the Committee and approved the closure of the courses identified in the report.

22.2 Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee [AB08/25]

22.2.1 The Director of Quality and Educational Development presented the Committee's report to the Board and drew the Board's attention to the ASQEC Report on Academic Standards and Quality for 2007/2008.

22.2.2 Members noted that overall the External Examiners' opinion provided the Academic Board with confidence in the quality and standards of the University's courses. There were a small number of courses where concerns had been raised. Processes have been put in place to address these concerns. A number of priorities for 2008/2009 had been identified:

- **"Institutions and course teams** – embedding of formal moderation procedures, development of consistent practice in providing assessment feedback, and making better use of statistical data to monitor standards and student performance."
- **"Institutional Level** – investigation of progression and completion rates for the UMS; use of data at module and scheme level that enables monitoring and evaluation of academic standards; development of University policy in dealing with plagiarism"

22.2.3. The Board noted that the Institute of Humanities and Creative Arts and the Institute of Science and the Environment had been late, for the second year, in submitting their Annual Monitoring reports. The Institutes had been asked to review their management of the process.

22.2.4. Members were pleased to note that the proportion of good degrees had increased in four of the six Institutes. The statistics also indicate that all Institutes have successfully reduced the number of withdrawals compared with the previous year.

22.2.5. The Board received the report, which would be transmitted in the Board's report to the Board of Governors.

22.2.6. Members noted that ASQEC recommended to the Board the establishment of a partnership arrangement with Business Development Services (Europe) Ltd. It was noted that this was a non-standard partnership which provided for the award of a diploma accredited by the University. Members were advised that this was a new market for the Worcester Business School with the opportunity to develop new programmes in this area. The Board approved the recommendation.

22.3 Representations Committee [AB08/26]

22.3.1. The Committee reported to the Board that it would be investigating the option of implementing a sliding scale of penalties for late submission as opposed to a fixed penalty for students missing the initial submission date. This will be included in the discussion around capping of reassessment by the Learning Teaching and Student Experience Committee.

22.3.2. The Board received the report.

22.4 Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee [AB08/27]

22.4.1. The Vice Chancellor presented the report from the RKTC and advised the Board that good progress was being made on establishing a Doctorate in Professional Studies.

22.4.2. The Board noted the progress in establishing a number of joint research studentships with Coventry University, and the award of two Leverhulme Visiting Fellowships.

22.4.3. The Vice Chancellor drew the Board's attention to the Committee's receipt and consideration of Institute Annual Research reports, which were available from the Graduate Research School Manager. The Committee's report confirmed to Academic Board that the reports showed evidence of further development of the University's research culture and environment and excellent progress was being made in a number of areas; achievements in Sport, Education and Psychology were particularly noteworthy.

22.4.4 The Board noted the work underway on reviewing the arrangements for the allocation of research studentships.

22.4.5. The Board received the report.

22.5 Institute of Education Institute Board [AB08/28]

22.5.1. The Board noted the Institute Board's recommendation that student representation on Institute Boards should be for two years to provide continuity. There should also be succession planning with the new student representative being appointed before the end of the academic year and shadowing the incumbent student representative. Consideration should also be given to having postgraduate and undergraduate representation on the Institute board where sufficient postgraduate provision in the Institute.

22.5.2. The Board welcomed the recommendation and the Registrar undertook to amend the membership criteria for Institute Boards.

08/23 Date of Next Meeting

23.1. Wednesday 6th May 2009

..... (Chair)

..... (Date)