

Quality Network Meeting 21 March 2011 Summary Notes

Network membership

Ron Hamilton had joined MMU as Quality Enhancement Officer in December 2010 and was present for his first network meeting. Sarah Ives had now transferred to CASQE on secondment until December 2012 (with specific responsibilities relating to the EQAL initiative). Interviews for a replacement for Sarah as Quality Administrator for the Faculty of Humanities, Law and Social Science during the period of her secondment were due to take place during the week commencing 28 March.

Update on Strategic Approval processes

Jonathan Wylie and Katharine Rawle were present to provide an update on processes relating to Strategic Approval. Jonathan was due to leave MMU at the end of March 2011 and he confirmed that an advertisement for a like-for-like replacement had been publicised. In the intervening period, and pending appointment of a replacement, Alan Dove would take over Jonathan's the role of advisor to the DVCs in their decision-making process regarding strategic approval of SAFs. Katharine would continue to act as the administrative support to the process. Faculty Quality Officers should send any new SAFs direct to Katharine (copied to Marian Kelly in CASQE) and, where possible, to alert Jonathan to any new SAF proposals before his departure on 31 March 2011 so that he could scrutinise these, and attempt to facilitate early advice where possible.

The majority of SAFs submitted for approval during the current academic session had now been processed, but there were a small number of SAFs relating to Foundation Degrees with Collaborative Partners where funding issues were still to be resolved prior to a final decision being taken. The University was exploring a model to best manage its student numbers in the light of HEFCE instruction relating to Student Numbers Control and other uncertainty regarding Funding Council announcements. The outcomes of the White Paper, the publication of which had been delayed, were likely to influence any decisions taken regarding Strategic Approval.

Development of the P & MI website was ongoing and it was hoped that this might be launched prior to Jonathan's departure. The website would be the source of all information relating to Strategic Approval, including guidance and advice, and a mechanism whereby programme teams could monitor progress relating to SAFs.

EQAL - update

Peggy advised that the revised Assessment Regulations (which included revisions to the current regulations and those to be implemented through EQAL) had been approved by Academic Board at its meeting of 16 March 2011. These would be operational with effect from the 2011/2012 academic session.

The work to effect the transition to the tiered assessment board structure was ongoing. There were still some issues to be resolved with respect to data and systems for use by the boards. Some work had previously been undertaken regarding the clustering of units and programmes within the new structure, and this would need to be re-visited in the light of the programme structures emerging post EQAL modifications. A sub-group of SLG, led by Professor Karen Moore, would lead on this work, which would now be extended to include re-allocation of external examiners to the revised structures.

The review of the Annual Monitoring Exercise was ongoing. Academic Board had recently approved the broad outline of the proposals for a revision to the process, and the details of the revised methodology would be considered at the first Academic Development Committee meeting of the summer term. The proposed new exercise would focus on live monitoring, and on continuous improvement. This would enable scrutiny of the health of programmes with a RAG (red, amber, green) analysis carried out at course/programme level.

All panel meetings to consider EQAL undergraduate programme modifications had now taken place, and Peggy thanked all Network members for their considerable efforts to enable this. A total of 73 programmes had been considered by the panels, and to date 50% of the programme conditions had been met and signed off. A final deadline of 31 March 2011 had been set to mop up the outstanding conditions of approval and Network members were working with programme teams to ensure compliance.

The timescale for the next phase of EQAL ie modifications to levels 5 and 6 of undergraduate programmes, had recently been advised on an EQAL Programme Board brief via an all staff email. Concern was expressed, by CASQE and by Management Services Group managers in particular regarding the details within this. Peggy reported that she had flagged up with the EQAL Programme Board that the timings advised, which suggested a similar pattern to that followed during 2010/2011, were not acceptable. It was likely that modification panels would meet during the late autumn 2011 and early spring 2012, although precise details were to be finalised. The timescale would be finalised as part of the review of EQAL activity and process to date. This review was due to take place shortly and would take into consideration comments and feedback received from all stakeholders, including EQAL champions and external examiners.

The Network was advised that for the next phase of EQAL the existing unit specification would continue to be used – incorporating some tweaks to address some snags identified during modification of levels 3 and 4. In due course, development of the unit specification would be linked to the development of the programme specification and the University was currently working with external providers - Unit4 – to progress this.

Student representation at PARM events

Peter Leyland had worked with MMUnion to provide training on panel membership, and student representatives had been invited to be part of the panels for both EQAL and PARM activity during the spring term. It was noted that although nominees had been put forward and invited to events, the take up had been variable. Student engagement with the process was an area identified as needing further development, and would be kept on the agenda.

Update on External Examining

Following consultation with HR and the Finance Division, a series of documents and correspondence had been sent from CASQE to all external examiners to effect the transfer to payroll required by HMRC. Faculty Quality Officers had previously been circulated with copies of the documentation and guidance concerning the process. In due course, examiners would be set up on SAP, and HR was currently considering the workflow for the documentation. In the meantime, Faculty Quality Officers were asked to send any contractual or financial documentation which examiners might return to them, through to CASQE.

Any documentation relating to right to work ie copies of passports or birth certificates/NI details should be sent to Anna Kennedy in Operational Services, All Saints until further notice.

Finance Division had instructed that external examiners and Standing Panel external assessors should now use Fin 1A to process their claims as they were now deemed employees of the University. One off PARM external assessors should continue to use Fin 1C. Some Network members had experienced some difficulty in having PARM one-off Fin 1C claims processed as Faculty Finance Officers were treating the group as external examiners, and indicating that it was no longer possible to process these through Faculty budgets. Following the meeting, Nicola followed this up with the Finance Division and guidance was issued to both Network members and to Faculty Finance Officers to enable these claims to be suitably annotated and processed.

Work relating to the re-allocation of examiners to the tiered board structure had been detailed in the EQAL update. It was noted that a number of examiners were due to complete their periods of appointment in December 2011, and advice concerning nomination for replacements as part of the re-allocation of examiners to the tiered board structure would be issued to faculties in the near future.

Nationally, the UUK/Guild HE and the QAA consultations on external examining had been completed, but the final report on outcomes was awaited.

Student surveys – including arrangements for the NSS

Rob Baker and Ron Hamilton (Quality Enhancement Team – CASQE) gave a presentation and update on current activity relating to student surveys, including in particular the NSS and the PTES (Postgraduate Taught Experience survey). The team was working with staff and MMUnion to maximise student engagement in surveys, and the use of social networks such as Facebook and Twitter was being introduced to facilitate this. The results to date were encouraging. Other suggestions that the team might consider included the use of the display screens within SIPS, and interaction with the Faculty Marketing Officers.

There had been some difficulties with eligible students in some faculties being unable to access and take part in the NSS, and Rob was currently liaising with P & MI to attempt to address this. Faculty representatives were asked to let the QE team have notification of any such instances so that action could be taken.

The NSS was currently underway and the PTES would be commencing 05 April, to dovetail with the end of the NSS. More information concerning the PTES would be issued to faculties shortly, and the QE team was currently working with faculties and P & MI to confirm the sample. It was recognised that the response rate last year had been low, and Network members were encouraged to raise awareness of the survey where possible within their faculties/divisions.

The remit of the NSS results working group had been widened to encompass all surveys. The new group - the Student Evaluation Policy Group - was Chaired by the DVC Student Experience (Kevin Bonnett) as was the Student Evaluation Strategy sub-group. Rob was a member of both groups.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for 10 May 2011 on the All Saints Campus.