

**MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**

**ACADEMIC BOARD**

**REPORT SUMMARY**

<b>Meeting date:</b>	17 June 2009
<b>Report title:</b>	Annual Monitoring Exercise 2008/09
<b>Author/to be presented by:</b>	Chair of Academic Development Committee
<b>The Board's responsibilities/ terms of reference which apply are:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsibility for general issues relating to the research, scholarship, learning and teaching and courses at the institution , including criteria for the admission of students; the appointment and removal of internal and external examiners; policies and procedures for assessment and examination of the academic performance of students; the content of the curriculum; academic standards and the validation and review of courses; the procedures for the award of qualifications and honorary academic titles; and the procedures for the expulsion of students for academic reasons, such responsibilities shall be subject where appropriate to the requirements of validating and accrediting bodies;</li> <li>• Responsibility for considering the development of the academic and related activities of the University and the resources needed to support them and for advising the Vice-Chancellor and the Board of Governors thereon;</li> <li>• Responsibility for advising on such matters as the Board of Governors or the Vice-Chancellor may refer to the Academic Board.</li> </ul>	
<b>Summary of what is being presented or proposed</b>	
<p>The Chair of the Academic Development Committee's Annual Monitoring Exercise report 2008/2009 has been prepared following the Academic Standards and Quality Sub-committee AME plenary meeting held on the 29 April 2009. The report has been prepared in accordance with the agreed AME schedule.</p> <p>The report summarises the outcomes of the Annual Monitoring Exercise, identifies key issues and trends, highlights examples of good practice and makes recommendations for enhancement to be considered by Academic Board and Directorate as appropriate.</p> <p>The report was approved for submission to Academic Board by ADC at its meeting on 3 June 2009, subject to some minor alterations to the text which have now been incorporated.</p>	

<b>Other key issues/points</b>	
<i>i</i>	<p><i>Background</i></p> <p>The report summarises the outcomes from the Annual Monitoring Exercise, following the Academic Quality and Standards Sub-committee plenary meeting held on the 29 April 2009.</p>
<i>ii</i>	<p><i>Stakeholders/who is affected /summary of any consultation undertaken</i></p> <p>Whole University and collaborative partners.</p>
<i>iii</i>	<p><i>How does the report relate to the University's Strategic Plan?</i></p> <p>The Annual Monitoring Exercise supports and enables the progression of the core aims of the Strategic Plan.</p>
<i>iv</i>	<p><i>What are the resource implications (including administrative support) of any proposals within the report?</i></p> <p>No additional resource implications at this stage.</p>
<i>v</i>	<p><i>Indicate any consequences relating to equality, accessibility or diversity. Have any proposals in the report been subject to an equality impact assessment?</i></p> <p>No.</p>
<i>vi</i>	<p><i>How will any proposals be implemented, monitored and evaluated (indicate timescale)?</i></p> <p>Any proposals, actions and responses will be monitored through the Academic Development Committee and its Sub-committees.</p>
<b>Action required</b>	
The Board is asked to <b>approve</b> the report and refer to CASQE for action.	

# **MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY**

## **THE ACADEMIC BOARD**

### **ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE 3 JUNE 2009**

#### **Chair of Academic Development Committee's Report to the Academic Board on the findings of the 2008/2009 Annual Monitoring Exercise:**

##### **1. Summary of the outcomes of the Annual Monitoring Exercise**

The Annual Monitoring Exercise (AME) had been undertaken thoroughly and the academic standard and quality of University's provision was confirmed.

Faculties had submitted complete and informative documentation using proformas which had been revised from the previous year's exercise, in response to comments arising from the report on the process. Minor revisions had been made to the proformas with the intention of drawing out good practice and addressing specific themes in response to comments made last year. Faculties had been requested to pay particular attention to the areas of student retention, employability, the student voice and issues arising from the National Student Survey. Overall, the prominence of institutional objectives and centrally-led projects is reflected in Faculty submissions to AME. Process issues drawn from both Faculty and central service provider reports were discussed and will be used to inform planning for future Annual Monitoring Exercises. Suggestions for enhancement included:

- a recommendation that Faculty Executive Groups (and FADCs in addition if required) monitor the achievements in both AME action plans and Faculty strategic plans as part of one process on a regular (minimum of termly) basis;
- to recommend inclusion of an update on previous year's action plan in Faculty Overview and Action Plans, as provided this year by the Institute of Education;
- consider the addition of a section for good practice in Quality Improvement Plans to gather and disseminate good practice;
- a recommendation to require additional central service providers to submit reports, in particular PMI, bearing in mind the provision of AME statistics and introduction of Uniview referred to in several of this year's reports, implementation of central timetabling and the need to consider the alignment of planning cycles.

In response to recommendations from last year's exercise, an extended range of central service providers were invited to submit reports.

Comment on process issues would continue to be located in the annual report of ADC to the Academic Board.

##### **2. Issues highlighted in the Students' Union and central service provider reports.**

There was discussion about the appropriateness of the current format of central service provider reports. The plenary meeting agreed that the format of the template should be redesigned to encourage more evaluative submissions. A small working group would be established to revise the proforma for reports and reconsider the number and scope of reports required from central service providers. There was also a need to clarify and source the underpinning data required to inform these reports. The plenary meeting noted that the

statistics available to Faculties could not be utilised in the same way by central service providers and measures that were available did not align with those used by Faculties. Central units were also aware of the need not to 'over-survey' students and would need clarification on the type of evidence base needed for more evaluative reports. The meeting suggested that for next year, an overarching Student and Academic Services report, together with a separate Services report would prevent a fragmented approach and provide a better overview of the impact of centrally-led enhancement projects. In addition, it was important to build in a process for exchanging information so that issues to be raised in either faculty or central service provider reports could be picked up and responded to before the final submission of reports.

## 2.1 Students' Union Report

This was welcomed as an extensive and extremely valuable report assessing the quality of student learning from the Students' Union perspective. MMUnion's report addressed a number of significant issues and through it, students recommended that ADC should commit to the following actions:

- i. maintain a commitment to the University Student Agreement and roll out systems to improve teaching in the fastest and most systematic way possible, such as team-teaching, peer-review or peer-support;
- ii. support the ten principles of good feedback practice identified in the SU's report and work with MMUnion to implement 'quick wins' and longer-term policies across the whole university;
- iii. conduct a thorough and critical review into closeness or even overlap between coursework deadlines and examination timetables and any possible impact of this on student success, in order to prevent this situation from re-occurring by rationalising the academic calendar;
- iv. work with MMUnion in Cheshire to evaluate and improve current library and specialised facilities to meet students' high expectations;
- v. develop a policy with MMUnion on lecture notes which balances environmental sustainability and budget concerns from the university with the learning needs and budget concerns for students;
- vi. effectively communicate, measure and manage changes to the teaching timetable so that disruption is minimised and learning re-arranged, as stated in the University Student Agreement;
- vii. ensure that Careers support evolves to provide the expert assistance that students need to engage with the employment market in a recession;
- viii. implement fast and sensitive emergency student financial support systems that fully considers the impact of the economic recession;
- ix. establish a policy with the Advice Centre that guides MMU staff that work with student debt sensitively and appropriately;
- x. communicate the important and independent role of MMUnion to all staff, with particular emphasis on how our work together contributes to an excellent learning experience

It was agreed that these recommendations would be taken into account and progressed where appropriate.

## 2.2 Central Service Reports

A range of reports from central service providers were received and these contributed towards annual monitoring through critical reflection on current services and needs. Key issues extracted from the reports are provided below.

### 2.2.1 Student Services

- Full launch of Careers Online Vacancy and Events Service (COVES);
- Introduction of framework of support for disabled students;
- Dissemination of guidelines for staff on supporting student disclosure of disability;
- Development of online enrolment;
- Counselling service staff involvement in CPD programme and MA Academic Practice to provide more training to staff.

### 2.2.2 Faculty and Campus Student and Academic Services

- Clearly located accountability and responsibility with consistent structures.

### 2.3.3 Facilities

- Refurbishments;
- Facilitated extending library opening hours at All Saints;
- Completed review of security provision;
- Achieved Fairtrade status.

### 2.2.4 Learning and Research Information Services

- Students' Union/Services Forum (LRIS with Facilities);
- Welcome Campaign;
- Extension of All Saints Library opening hours;
- Implementation of standard zones across all libraries;
- Extension of drop-in opening hours at All Saints;
- Simplified Wi-fi roaming;
- Follow up work on previous year's AME on issues relevant to LRIS.

### 2.2.5 Centre for Learning and Teaching

- Good engagement from staff: well-attended short courses and workshops; 263 attended conference on 'Ensuring Student Success by Quality Enhancement';
- Shift in development work on new LTA Strategy towards a succinct Strategic Framework document for wide distribution [now approved by Academic Board];
- Priority work on assessment for learning, progressed through the 'Challenging Assessment' initiative [April 08-Sep09].

### 2.2.6 Recruitment and Admissions

- Major shift to centrally co-ordinated provision, structured into four teams: Course Enquiries; Recruitment Information; Education Liaison; Recruitment [events and campaigns];

- Following centralisation, next step is to improve processes with stronger system solutions;
- Need to develop an effective CRM solution.

### 2.2.7 MMU International

- PMI data reported at different points to previous year, making forecasting and planning difficult;
- Provision of training for staff on international student support issues;
- Introduction of staff intranet site for use by academic staff.

### 2.2.8 Collaborative Partnerships Office

- Re-establishment of link tutor forum;
- WP newsletter;
- Use of Student Ambassadors in delivery of WP activity.

## 3. **Matters of institutional significance**

A number of themes emerged from the reports and discussion at the plenary meeting. These are identified below.

### 3.1 Assessment

- The work of the Challenging Assessment enhancement project was acknowledged, but its impact so far on assessment strategies and practice appeared to be rather limited;
- As noted above, the Students' Union report drew attention to a range of issues causing student concern:
  - coursework feedback and timeliness of feedback;
  - course work and examination clashes
  - need for more consistent policy on the provision of lecture notes to students;
- External Examiners and employers commented upon poor standard of written English within some academic assignments;
- Some External Examiners commented that the raising of the postgraduate pass mark to 50% had resulted in a concentration of marks in bands above the pass mark;
- A need was identified for revisiting means of designing out plagiarism and supporting students in good academic practice.

### 3.2 Curriculum and Employability

- The use of periodic review was noted as an opportunity for emphasising and identifying employability skills more strongly in programmes.

### 3.3 Learning Resources and Facilities

- A number of reports highlighted concerns relating to accommodation, in particular the quality of the learning environment for postgraduate students and the need for additional lecture space for larger groups;

- The consequence of changes to the policy and programme for computer renewal was commented on in relation to student and staff facilities;
- A need to enhance postgraduate students' access to electronic databases was noted;
- The objective of achieving consistent processes for submission and receipting of student course work may be being constrained by the resources this demands;
- Part-time students need improved access to electronic resources for off-site use as well as improve provision of evening and weekend facilities on campus;
- Need to ensure WebCT is accessible promptly to all students regardless of the start date of their programme;
- Concern about demands placed upon, and consequent reliability of the managed learning environment (WebCT); some concern expressed about the availability of technical support for lecturers developing MLE materials;
- Difficulties in maintaining the link between central student systems and WebCT (where it has been used locally used as a database) has caused problems in accessing up to date and accurate student records.

#### 3.4 Uniview/ PPI Data

- Late access to Uniview data for programme leaders and other key staff and perceived inaccuracy in enrolment figures due to implementation of Uniview;
- Need for precise guidance on use and significance of PPI data;
- Staff training in the use of relevant parts of Uniview should be a priority;
- Uniview PPIs need to address postgraduate and part-time student performance.

#### 3.5 Language support

- It was reported that international students do not always take up opportunities for English language support despite their need.

#### 3.6 Admissions

- The move towards a centralised admissions system was viewed with some trepidation, anticipating possible problems in the coming year's recruitment cycle;
- Faculties and programmes would need to monitor new admission arrangements and work with SAS to ensure the necessary level of service is maintained.

It was noted in the meeting that some of the anticipated problems had indeed materialised in the new academic year, but very active intervention and process review was being applied to the difficulties.

### 3.7 Programme management

- Ensure that effective Faculty support processes are implemented through the new administrative structures and that these mesh with effective academic management of programmes;
- Benefits anticipated for the student learning experience from the project to develop co-ordinated timetabling;
- Monitor interim quality assurance arrangements for cross-faculty subject provision in management and business;
- Ensure more consistent implementation of scheme for peer support of teaching;
- Enterprise activity to be incorporated flexibly in monitoring processes;
- CASQE, FADCs and ADC should promote speedier processes for approving programme modifications;
- Ensure that QAP processes do not wastefully duplicate Ofsted requirements for initial teacher education;
- Annual training in procedures and processes, including AME processes would be useful.

### 3.8 Communication

- Consistent strategy needed for communicating with students regarding postponed classes due to absence of tutors, etc., as recently highlighted by the MMUnion 'Late' campaign.

### 3.9 University-wide Programmes

- It was acknowledged that the report provided by the University-wide Programmes Board was 'transitional' in nature;
- It was noted that the identity and 'ownership' of students whose programmes were within the Board's remit needed careful consideration, while recognising that the quality management of these students' learning experience was most effectively achieved at unit level and through particular Programme Committees;
- There were a significant number of issues identified in the action plan, and the plenary meeting questioned whether these should be prioritised for practical actions;
- The student experience on Combined Honours was adversely affected by various subjects maintaining 'reading weeks' which do not coincide with each other in timing, despite university policy being clearly opposed to such untaught periods.

## 4. **Trends and/or generic themes**

- A general need to ensure the maximum sustainable impact and practical benefit from the wide variety of institutional enhancement projects, such as:

- Retention and Student Success and ‘Shock Absorber’
  - Student Voice
  - Challenging Assessment
  - Employability
- Continuing need to enhance flexible access to facilities and appropriate learning resources for part-time, postgraduate and CPD students;
  - Need to closely monitor the impact of re-organisation and centralisation of administrative and professional support, both at faculty/campus level and in services such as Recruitment and Admissions.

## **5. Institutional-level commentary on the findings of external examiners’ reports**

- Overwhelmingly positive affirmation of academic standards of awards and external examining process recorded in Overview reports for all faculties, with systems in place to address specific issues raised in individual reports and monitored effectively at Faculty level;
- Confidence in the operation of the revised Assessment Regulations;
- External examiners commented that, where Faculties had strong links with employers, programmes met the needs of students and industry;
- Several external examiners commented on poor standard of written English.

## **6. Collaborative Provision**

- Need to address reliability of ICT access and provision for students and collaborative partners, along with the timeliness of available support;
- Need to address practical difficulties in the enrolment of external students resulting in late delivery of student cards and late access to MMU facilities, particularly WebCT.

## **7. Effectiveness of student voice in quality management**

- This is being actively addressed in partnership with MMUnion through the Student Voice Project; its recommendations should result in more systematic practice in how the University gathers student feedback, acts on it, and reports back to the students;
- The Students’ Union/ Services Group Forum continues to operate effectively.

## **8. Key examples of good practice**

8.1 Active focus on improving student retention and success through specific actions and initiatives:

- Active engagement with the Student Transition and Induction and Shock Absorber projects;
- Fuller analysis of retention in QAPs;
- Increased support for students in some faculties from Faculty Student Support Officers and from personal tutors;

- Establishment of Retention Strategy Groups and other working groups to focus on retention and wider learning and teaching issues;
- Specific actions included the use of “gatekeeper” units, extended induction projects, pre-entry portals, attendance monitoring and Christmas progress reports.

#### 8.2 Continuing improvements to the process of sustaining and monitoring quality:

- More effective access to information from Uniview for programme teams;
- Electronic storage of programme logs – accessible on shared drive;
- Strong relationship with link tutors on collaborative programmes;

#### 8.3 Continuing development of course provision and delivery in line with university mission:

- External Examiners commend evidence of programmes meeting the needs of students and industry through their vocational relevance;
- Embedding of PDP and employability in programmes, e.g. through the core Learning and Employability Unit in Combined Honours;

### **9. Recommendations for enhancement**

- 9.1 Continuing attention and action required on student retention and success to improve overall performance;
- 9.2 Continuing innovation on employability in an increasingly adverse climate for graduate employment prospects;
- 9.3 Continuing efforts to enhance opportunities for student voice and feedback, ensuring active responses and feedback on actions taken;
- 9.4 Continuing review of the effectiveness and impact of more centralised processes and information;
- 9.5 Continuing efforts to enhance flexible access to facilities and appropriate learning resources for part-time, postgraduate and CPD students, linking to planned capital improvements and associated facility management;
- 9.6 Consider ways in which to capture the views of collaborative partners more explicitly.