

16 June 2010

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Title: Annual Monitoring Exercise 2009/10**

**Author: Chair of Academic Development Committee**

**Purpose of Report:**

The Chair of the Academic Development Committee's Annual Monitoring Exercise report 2009/ 2010 has been prepared following the Academic Standards Sub-committee AME plenary meeting held on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 2010. The report has been prepared in accordance with the agreed AME schedule.

**Key Issues:**

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.

The stakeholders are the University and its collaborative partners.

The Annual Monitoring Exercise supports and enables the progression of the core aims of the Strategic Plan.

Any proposals, actions and responses will be monitored through the Academic Development Committee and its Sub-committees.

An updated Action Plan relating to the previous AME is attached to the report.

The report was approved for submission to the Board by ADC at its meeting on 2 June 2010.

**Action required by the Board:**

The Board is asked to **approve** the report and refer to CASQE for action.

# MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

## THE ACADEMIC BOARD

ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE 02 JUNE 2010

### **Chair of Academic Development Committee's Report to the Academic Board on the findings of the 2009/2010 Annual Monitoring Exercise**

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

Confirmation was given that the Annual Monitoring Exercise (AME) had been undertaken thoroughly, ensuring the academic standard and quality of University's taught provision.

Following consideration of programme and departmental monitoring documentation, faculties/divisions had submitted their Faculty/UPB Overviews and Action Plans, using a standard proforma which had, in response to a suggestion arising from the previous exercise, been updated to include a new section requiring update on the previous year's Action Plan. Specific questions relating to external engagements (including PSRBs and collaborative provision) and relating to non-credit bearing provision had also been added to the proforma, in response to recommendations from the previous AME plenary. Faculties/divisions had been requested to pay particular attention to the areas of monitoring how the student transition and induction framework was being addressed; retention; employability; and issues arising from the NSS and the International Student Barometer.

The plenary also considered reports from the Central Service providers, and the MMUnion. Additionally, and to meet the requirements of the Institutional Code of Practice for PSRBs reviewed and updated by CASQE in December 2008, an institutional overview of PSRB engagement had been submitted for consideration.

The 2008/2009 AME plenary had identified some difficulties in the format of the template for Central Service providers and it had been agreed to consider re-designing the format of the template so that issues raised in Faculty/UPB reports were picked up and responded to, and to encourage more evaluative submissions. A meeting of key central staff and CASQE officers had taken place and it had been determined that two composite reports should be submitted. One to represent Services (to include Facilities and Learning & Research Information Services) and a second to represent Student and Academic Services (to include Student Services; Faculty/Campus SAS; Centre for Learning & Teaching; Collaborative Partnerships Office; Recruitment and Admissions; MMU International; Planning and Management Information). These two reports had been drafted cognisant of the Faculty/UPB Overviews and Action Plans in the light of discussions which had taken place at the previous plenary.

Procedures for the operation of the Annual Monitoring Exercise are in the process of review as part of the EQAL strand 4 – looking at Quality Assurance and Enhancement of Provision. As much of the process of monitoring provision during the 2009/2010 exercise had taken place at the point of re-vitalisation of the AME review project, it was agreed that for this year it was only possible to make minor adjustments to the way in which the plenary would operate. An update on the previous year's ADC Report and Action plan to ensure all the key issues had been addressed formed the initial section of the plenary. This was followed by consideration of major issues from the Central Service provider reports, the MMUnion report and the Institutional Overview report on PSRBs.

Prior to the plenary, CASQE officers had carried out a scrutiny of the Faculty/UPB Overviews and Action plans and had identified three emerging themes of institutional relevance which were considered in detail at the plenary. These were: The student experience for postgraduate, part-time and international students; e-Learning and the use of the VLE to support student learning; and good practice. With respect to the latter, faculties/divisions had been asked to identify and share with the meeting one example of good practice that was embedded, enhanced the student experience and was transferable.

## **2. Issues highlighted in the MMUnion and central service provider reports and the Institutional report on PSRBs**

As outlined in section one above, the Central Service provider reports had been rationalised to two submissions for the current exercise. It was acknowledged that this still presented some challenges to the authors and further work would be carried out to re-structure the report templates for the 2010/2011 exercise. Notwithstanding this, the reports before the plenary for discussion were able to provide a better overview of the impact of centrally-led enhancement projects.

### **2.1 MMUnion Report**

The report from MMUnion advised that having only recently produced an extensive written submission for QAA Institutional Audit – the details of which were currently being processed via an Action Plan linked to that submission – the report submitted for the current AME commented rather on previous recommendations and where and how they had progressed. In addition to the ten steps proposed during the previous AME to further improve the student experience which were currently being tracked via the Action Plan from the 2008/2009 AME, a further six areas were highlighted relating specifically to student representation and tracking of actions taken in response to feedback from students on their learning experience.

MMUnion would welcome greater student involvement in measures to enhance the student experience and greater demonstration of actions (and results of actions) in response to issues raised by students, so these could be more easily tracked. They suggested that a tracking issues document would be useful so that long-term issues could be monitored, and also suggested that electronic tracking would ensure involvement in the process where physical representation at meetings was not possible. This was seen as a useful method of maximising transparency, but acknowledged as being challenging to implement.

The MMUnion representatives noted that some measures were being implemented to demonstrate actions taken in response to student issues, but would like to see greater consistency across MMU. They welcomed in particular developments such as the Threshold Standards Statements but emphasised the importance of measuring the impact of such initiatives. Enhanced use of the student representation system could act as a change-making tool in this respect.

The report raised concerns relating to non-traditional students during campus re-organisations. This issue was also discussed as an emerging key theme as part of discussions during the plenary and any further input from the MMUnion to contribute towards a solution to the issues raised would be welcomed.

### **2.2 Central Service Reports**

Two composite reports were submitted as part of the AME as follows:

### 2.2.1 Services

The Services report, covering the areas of Facilities, and Learning & Research Information Services, had proved a challenge to pull together given the wide range of Services covered by the group and given the background of financial constraints. It noted that the Services/MMUnion forum had proved a useful mechanism for discussing broader issues, although it was recognised that recording the conclusion of issues could be improved and this might be mitigated by a move to a tracking issues mechanism as suggested by the MMUnion representatives.

A considerable quantity of work had been undertaken through the Learning & Research Technologies Review to plan for the future direction of the VLE. In presenting the report, the Services representative noted that there was a requirement for more support for academic staff in moving to Moodle. Further discussion on this at the plenary recommended that access to support should be a priority and should be addressed in the interim before the move to Moodle.

Some areas of provision, such as SIPs, fell within the responsibility of SAS, but it was hoped that some central buildings, Hubs and Libraries, could be open 24/7 in the future. Financial constraints and the number of University sites prevented speedier progress towards this aim.

### 2.2.2 Student and Academic Services

The representative from Student and Academic Services reported that the new report format, which now covered all areas within SAS, had been a useful development, but she welcomed feedback from plenary members on whether they felt that this had been a correct and helpful approach. The report provided detail on the implementation of new structures; introduction of new administrative processes and systems, including the extension of the online enrolment system, the implementation of campus-based SIPs, the first phase of the implementation of the QLS/Agrosso student records system assessment module, and the further development of Uniview; response to external challenges, including the QAA Institutional Audit and the HEFCE student data audit; and support for new areas of work, including the new corporate planning processes, the development of centralised timetabling and a unified coursework receipting and monitoring system.

Two specific areas were highlighted for future work:

- Availability of timetables  
(PMI had focussed on improved delivery during 2010)
- Academic Calendar and timing of core business.

### 2.2.3 Institutional report on PSRBs

The first institutional overview of PSRB engagement for AME purposes was presented by the Head of CASQE, to meet the requirements of the Institutional Code of Practice on PSRBs. Very little feedback on PSRB engagement had been received from External Examiners. Local input to the PSRB database provided the information contained within the annexes to the report.

It was noted that some PSRB activity had been omitted, despite a request from ASSc previously for this data to be checked and updated by faculties. FADC representatives members were asked to ensure that local action be taken to augment the information held in the database to provide a full set of data. Data should also include details of any reporting from and to the PSRB.

In future, a more qualitative report would be submitted to the plenary meeting. PARM and AME processes currently under review would consider the appropriate mechanism for capturing relevant information without duplication of effort.

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

Two emerging institutional themes had been identified from scrutiny of the reports submitted for the plenary. These formed the basis of detailed discussion at the meeting and resulted in recommendations as follows:

#### **Theme 1: Student experience for postgraduate, part-time and international students**

Key points from the discussion were as follows:

- Members commented on the strategic drive to increase student numbers from these groups;
- Postgraduate and part-time programmes were traditionally viewed as 'non-standard' across the University with processes, systems and regulations geared to meet the needs of 'standard' full-time undergraduate students. A shift in culture towards flexibility and responsiveness to employer demands would help to address this.

##### Specific issues relating to AME

- AME processes (including availability of PPI data) did not currently align with the timings of postgraduate programme structures;
- With respect to PPI data, PgCert and PgDip students completing their studies at that level should be considered as completing students and not recorded otherwise.

##### Specific issues relating to the non-standard timing of some programmes

- Admissions cycles for some programmes with these student groups did not fit the traditional pattern and current processes did not support non-traditional cycles;
- Student experience for these students was not improved by lack of access to services out of core term times and hours – suggested focus on induction period for part-time students to help them feel more prepared (arising from evidence in the MMUnion induction survey);
- It was important to maintain current registration for postgraduate students in the autumn term during dissertation completion;
- Suggestion that a Christmas or January graduation ceremony should be introduced - this would demonstrate that the University was responsive to the needs of postgraduate and other students whose awards could not be ratified during summer examination boards;

### Issues identified with respect to process, systems and services

- Initial difficulties relating to the re-organisation of Recruitment and Admissions was likely to have affected postgraduate programmes more than undergraduate programmes – this former group also had a higher ratio of international students;
- Monitoring of online enrolment for international and external students would allow the University to take steps to ensure that it operated effectively;

The plenary noted that the current review of AME (EQAL strand 4) to work towards procedures for implementation 2011/2012 was likely to include live monitoring, which should address many issues relating to the timing of non-standard programmes.

Although some measures were being taken to address issues relating to opening hours and access to central services these were currently operating on a piecemeal basis and it was acknowledged that the University could be clearer about its long-term plans to address issues related to opening hours and access consistently.

Greater access to services online was currently under consideration. Longer term, a systems-based approach would be preferred to ensure that where it was not possible to provide staff at particular locations/times in areas of less demand, alternative forms of help could be put in place.

Issues raised as being of concern would be captured within the Action Plan arising from the 2009/2010 AME.

### **Theme 2: e-learning and use of the VLE to support student learning**

Key points from the discussion were as follows:

- The Learning and Technologies Review had set out some basic standards and every single unit would be expected to have a presence in the new the VLE;
- The likely impact of financial cuts would increase reliance on e-learning and the VLE;
- Access through the VLE was variable across the University currently – particularly obvious through the experience of Combined Honours students;
- VLE training should be a staff development priority, particularly given that staff were experiencing difficulties in obtaining technical support. This was a resource issue which could have a significant impact on the migration to the new VLE which is to be piloted in 2010/11;
- Staff development would be crucial, to make sure there was widespread engagement. This was not just a technical issue, but also one of academic practice. There is a need to foster enthusiasm for working within the VLE and for this reason staff development would need to be carefully managed and be ‘fit for purpose’;
- Importance of the role of mentoring by staff with technical expertise;
- Some nervousness given the timescales – when could staff transfer over to the new VLE?
- Experience suggested that students would not return to using the VLE if they experienced problems early on, so it was important to make sure the new system was robust before rolling out;
- There was a need to link and integrate Moodle within the student portal.

Following discussions, it was agreed that the DVC (Student Experience) would take forward a stronger case for early development, with work on plans for transferring from WebCT and staff training to be considered a priority. There was a recommendation that the University should access others with expertise in this area, for example the Open University.

As a point of information, CeLT has a small podcasting suite which can be booked, with some technical staff available to provide some support.

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

##### Art and Design

A process had been introduced on the first year of the BA (Hons) Acting Programme, to guide students through evaluation and committee representation processes. A programme leader's annual report at the end of the academic year will include a summary of the year's work, identifying particular strengths and weakness in relation to the overall quality of the provision. The report will act as a tracking document so that students can trace actions taken in response to the issues they have raised.

##### Hollings

Hollings faculty presented as good practice their Open Professional Programme (OPP), which had been in operation for a year. The programme is industry-facing, with students' course work based on issues at their place of work.

A review of OPP is currently being undertaken at which six faculties are represented. HLSS and MMU Cheshire are interested in implementing an OPP and there has been some discussion around developing an Institutional OPP.

##### Health, Psychology and Social Care

Specific induction arrangements were discussed, in particular a 'nursing buddies' scheme and the 'Easy Start' initiative in Physiotherapy. Both of these had developed separately. The nursing buddies scheme operated with two intakes per year. There had been good feedback on this scheme, which has an induction manager, focuses on peer support and links up through chat rooms. Induction is continued through the first year. They also hold an informal meeting between staff and students and this social integration is evaluated very positively by students. HPSC feel that retention in nursing programmes has been improved with students identifying with each other as part of a cohort.

##### Humanities, Law and Social Science

The Faculty has taken measures to improve feedback to students on general issues by including a paragraph in student handbook to show where actions have been taken in response to queries; a portal has been developed as forum for students to engage with before they start University (access is given to this portal at Open Days). The Faculty has also developed via the coursework receipting database a system to easily identify students who have not submitted course work and contact students in this category with a request to make contact with their tutor. This is currently being piloted in the School of Law with good effect.

### Institute of Education

Induction arrangements for new staff have been developed. These have included mentor support, ideally from a peer, with events/activities arranged relating to the student experience, and including training/advice on quality assurance arrangements and coursework arrangements. This has formalised a network of new staff. A small project is identified annually and reported to the network. Members of the network have supported each other and have developed research and enterprise activity as a result of their work.

### MMU Business School

Use of podcasting has been developed in areas of the Business School resulting in positive feedback from students, especially for those studying off-campus, on exchange, placements or those for whom English is not their first language. It has been very useful at induction, as a revision aid, and for providing detail to inform option choice. The environmental benefits of using podcasting as opposed to producing much printed material must be emphasised.

Notwithstanding its success this has been a challenging development with the current level of support that is available.

### MMU Cheshire

MMU Cheshire presented as an example of good practice a monitoring and tracking system for a group of Interdisciplinary Studies students on their journey through their programme. Monitoring and tracking of the student experience was operating particularly at key points through the year including induction and transition points. The Faculty hopes that monitoring and tracking evolving issues, and taking appropriate action will be reflected in NSS results; the outcome of the first year of this project has been fed through to the NSS Results Working Group.

The Chair of the AME plenary has suggested that this project be considered by the Quality Enhancement Sub-committee.

### Science and Engineering

Transition through Year 1 has been monitored in specific areas of the Faculty. This has focused on (i) maintaining contact after visit days; (ii) an applicants' meeting in early July (which has been very positively received); (iii) development of a pre-entry portal; (iv) student mentors to engage with potential applicants to help to inform the induction process; and (v) extended induction.

A Christmas report system operates within the Faculty, and there is a post-Christmas review which operates/feeds into the tutorial system.

### University Programmes Board

The staff/student liaison committee was commented on, particularly with respect to the online provision in this area for a dispersed group of students and the success it has had in closing the loop on student issues. The pre-induction portal developed by and operating successfully in the Faculty of Science and Engineering was also used by student applicants to the Combined Honours programme. This has been vital and particularly useful for mature students, who have started working as a group. It will be extended to Foundation Year.

The good practice examples cited above demonstrated constructive and pro-active approaches to enhancing the student experience and details of these will be made available through the good practice database held in CeLT. FADC Chairs were asked to ensure that their good practice was input to the database and were also encouraged to explore further the areas of good practice presented by other areas across the University where these might be disseminated across their faculties.

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

Reports submitted for the 2008/2009 period had been scrutinised widely at programme and faculty level as part of the Annual Monitoring Exercise for 2009/2010. During the latter part of the autumn term 2009, CASQE officers carried out a systematic scrutiny of the reports looking at matters of Institutional and general import, including collating instances of good practice shown to be operating within programmes. Theme-based templates were introduced for this purpose and the templates then forwarded to the relevant University-wide project groups, such as the annual review of Regulations group, for action.

Overwhelmingly, the reports evidenced positive affirmation of academic standards of awards and this had been recorded in Overview Reports for all faculties/divisions, with systems in place to address specific issues raised in individual reports and monitored effectively at faculty level. Examiners had also demonstrated continued confidence in the operation of the University's Assessment Regulations.

## **6. Recommendations for enhancement**

- Review the purpose and operation of the AME to ensure an enhancement-led process which will enable effective and timely monitoring of programmes in all modes and levels of delivery;
- Continue efforts to enhance opportunities for student voice and feedback, ensuring active responses and feedback on actions taken, including consideration of the implementation of an electronic-based tracking mechanism to maximise student involvement in monitoring and evaluation processes;
- Continue 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;
- Early development of plans to transfer from WebCT to Moodle, with staff training to be considered a priority.
- Continuing attention and action required on student retention and success to improve overall performance;
- Continuing innovation on employability in an increasingly adverse climate for graduate employment prospects;
- Continuing review of the effectiveness and impact of more centralised processes and information.