MINUTE OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 AUGUST 2017
(copy filed as UG/271017/001)

1.1. The Committee approved the minute of the meeting held on 28 August 2017 as an accurate representation of discussions held.

1.2. It was noted that there has been an amendment to the Schools participating in Internal Teaching Reviews mentioned in section 1.2. The Engineering ITR has been delayed and there are current plans for both the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture and the School of Biological Science to participate in ITRs in 2018.

1.3. The action points from sections 3.2. and 3.7. will be addressed in the next UG Committee meeting, when it is expected that there will be an updated paper on lecture capture for discussion.

DISCIPLINARY POLICY (PLAGIARISM)

2.1. The Committee was asked to highlight any areas for review within the existing Disciplinary Policy, specifically in relation to plagiarism. It was noted that guidelines on how to apply the policy (provided by the relevant members of staff in Registry) were discussed in the previous UG Committee meeting, but that staff had more specific concerns regarding the early stages of a disciplinary case.

2.2. There was concern that many students, particularly those who are not native English speakers, do not understand the difference between poor referencing and plagiarism. It was felt that the current policy goes straight to penalty without giving students a chance to demonstrate that they have learned from their mistakes. Although the guidance note clarified that Schools can apply an informal process initially, it was felt that there are too many discrepancies between Schools in terms of how they apply this process. It was also noted that there is no way of knowing if a student has made similar errors across different disciplines and whether they have plagiarism cases ongoing.

2.3. It was suggested that the policy is amended to include a step for informal action which can be taken by Schools prior to logging the incident as a first offence and following the existing formal steps in the policy. The rationale being that an initial offence can be handled in a less formal way while still clearly being part of a formal policy.

2.4. The Committee also discussed whether it would be useful to include an Investigating Officer in the initial stages dealt with at School level. Some Committee members felt that this would be beneficial and could reduce the need for panel hearings, while others were concerned that it might prolong the process and delay an outcome.
LEARNING ANALYTICS POLICY (DRAFT)

3.1. Professor Hannaford introduced the draft Learning Analytics Policy and invited comments from the Committee. It was clarified that learning analytics means the use of data about students and their activities with a view to improving educational processes and providing better support to students. The aim is to help students maximise their chances of success with their studies. This policy has been drafted in accordance with Data Protection legislation and has received input from a small working group made up of representatives from Schools and Support Services, and it takes into consideration similar policies from other institutions (e.g. Trent Nottingham University, University of West London, University of Sydney).

3.2. The Committee requested clarification on the types of data which could be used in learning analytics. Some examples of engagement data included how often students use their VLE, time they access VLE, what they use VLE for, library access (in person and online), and attendance in lectures and small group teaching sessions. Other examples included demographics and performance (e.g. specific exam or assignment questions answered incorrectly). Examples of data not currently planned for inclusion are protected characteristics and financial records.

3.3. It was noted that examples of data are not currently listed in the policy, however care needs to be taken to avoid limiting the use of learning analytics as the university develops its expertise in this field.

3.4. Considerable concern was expressed in terms of students not being able to opt out of having their data used in learning analytics and not necessarily being aware of how their data are used. It was confirmed that learning analytics will use data which are already routinely collected by the university. Professor Hannaford also clarified that the policy involves broad principles of operating and works within legislation relating to consent and data protection. If more privileged data were sought then informed consent would be required. Separate privacy documents are being prepared to specify which data are collected and what is used, and what can and cannot be opted out of. For example, students cannot opt out of data collected for HESA purposes.

3.5. Questions were also raised regarding the anonymity of data and the importance of ensuring that groups of students or individuals cannot be identified by specific characteristics which are being used in comparisons.

3.6. Representatives from AUSA felt that students may have concerns regarding the use of their data and are perhaps not aware of all the data which are routinely collected.

3.7. It was suggested that the policy could include a clause to reassure students that data will not be used to their detriment.

3.8. To summarise, the Committee appreciated the need for such a policy and acknowledged that the principles are helpful, but many members had reservations about data being used without specific consent from students. It would be helpful to provide some examples within the policy document of the types of data used and how it is applied in learning analytics and to emphasise commitments to using the data in a fair and ethical manner.
STUDENT EXPERIENCE PAPER

4.1. Committee members were asked for comments on the working draft of the Student Experience Paper, which disseminates results from the National Student Survey. Any further feedback can be emailed directly to the Convenors.

4.2. Many Committee members felt that the paper was positive on the whole and highlighted several areas in which the University is performing well. It was noted that a lot of hard work has contributed to the improved statistics, for example effort from Schools and the Retention Taskforce influencing the non-continuation rate.

4.3. The paper is also useful in highlighting areas for improvement, but it was noted that it would be useful to see a comparison with the 2016/17 data. Convenor’s note: The Committee requested historical data to compare to 2016/17 but this will not be possible because the data presented for outcomes is already an amalgamation of 2015/16 and 2016/17.

4.4. In relation to the protected characteristics displayed in Table 4, it would be useful to have more detailed information, for example did the students in the widening participation category have the same entry requirements as other students?

READMISSION TO STUDY POLICY

5.1. Professor Shennan introduced this paper, which seeks to gain support for two minor changes to the existing Readmission to Study Policy. Several students have requested to defer their readmission offers and it was noted that the policy does not currently include information about students delaying their return to study. Therefore, it is proposed that a clause is added to clarify that the readmission offer is only relevant for the date stated in the offer letter. It is also proposed that the policy includes a link to the webpage which publishes the readmission application deadlines.

5.2. One Committee member queried whether students who wanted to defer, but were not permitted to do so, would be likely to receive a further readmission offer if they reapplied. Professor Shennan clarified that if students want to delay their return they are still likely to receive an offer but the level of entry offered may change depending on the amount of time that has passed and taking into consideration whether their degree programme structure has changed. The new clause seeks to ensure that the University is able to offer readmission at the appropriate level of study.

ENHANCEMENT THEME UPDATE

6.1. Professor Shennan introduced the new Enhancement Theme – “Evidence for Enhancement”. The Committee was asked to consider what kind of evidence is gathered in Schools and how this evidence is used to enhance the student experience. It will be important for Schools to evaluate evidence, and to consider the impact across the three years of the theme and whether findings can be used to influence strategies and policies. Committee members were invited to share any ideas from their Schools with Professor Shennan.
ENHANCEMENT LED INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW (ELIR) UPDATE

7.1. Committee members were asked to make sure that staff and students within their disciplines are aware that the ELIR is happening next year and to engage with the Enhancement Themes. The Planning Visit will take place during the week of 8 October 2018, with the main Review Visit taking place on the week beginning 19 November 2018.

7.2. Each School will be asked to put together an ELIR group and to designate an individual as their ELIR point of contact.

QUALITY CODE REVIEW

(copy filed as UG/271017/008)

8.1. The UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment is consulting on a new approach to the expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. Committee members were invited to submit any comments or feedback to the Convenors via email.

AOCB

9.1. Professor Jenkinson informed the Committee that the paper on “Policy and Procedures on Academic Flexibility (High Performance Sports)” was approved at UCTL and Senate. An Academic Flexibility Group will be established to consider applications from students who apply for flexibility in their studies as a consequence of their involvement in high performance sports. One individual from the UG Committee will be identified to join the Group.

FOR INFORMATION

SECTOR UPDATES

10.1. The Committee is asked to note and disseminate as appropriate, the following recent sector updates:

Contracting to Cheat in Higher Education - How to Address Contract Cheating, the Use of Third-Party Services and Essay Mills

This guidance, published by the Quality Assurance Agency, sets out best practice around promoting academic integrity in higher education, through tackling students’ use of third party services in order to cheat. It covers the use of essay mills and other forms of contract cheating, and sets out the steps providers can take to deal with these. http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-andguidance/publication/?PubID=3200#We9P-WhSyM8

DATES OF NEXT COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Friday 12 January 2018 at 2.00 p.m. (Committee Room 2)
Monday 12 March 2018 at 2.00 p.m. (Committee Room 2)