The Learning and Teaching Board

Minutes

Wednesday 7 December 2016

Present:

Professor J W Sawkins (Chair)
Ms P J Calabrese
Mr D Cowan
Professor J Hansen
Professor B Jones (by Skype)
Ms D McCaig
Dr S McLaughlin
Mr L J Miles (by Skype)

Professor J M Ritchie
Mr P Travill
Dr G B Thomson
Dr M Sargeant
Professor M L D Wong (by Skype)
Dr M King (Clerk)

In attendance

Mr M Bates (Minutes 142 + 143)
Professor S J Dewar
Mr R W McGookin (Minutes 142-144)
Ms D Russell (Minute 145)

Matters Arising Not Otherwise on the Agenda

138 Welcome and Apologies

138.1 The Chair welcomed as a new member of the Board: Professor M L D Wong, Deputy Vice-Provost, Malaysia Campus. The Chair also welcomed: Professor S J Dewar, Director of Academic Quality, as Deputy for the School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society; Mr M Bates, Director of Student Recruitment, and Mr R W McGookin, Director of Planning, in connection with the items on Student Recruitment, SFC-HWU Outcome Agreement and Service Teaching (see Minutes 142-144); Ms D Russell, Student Conduct Officer, in connection with the item on Contract Cheating (see Minute 145).

138.2 Apologies for absence were as recorded above.

139 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Board approved the Minutes of the meeting of 2 November 2016.

140 Matters Arising Not Otherwise on the Agenda

140.1 The Board noted the report on matters arising from the meeting on 2 November 2016.

140.2 Student Union – Review of Academic Representation (126.6)

The Board noted that the Student Union still required School representatives for its working group to review and revise academic representation. It was agreed that Directors of Learning and Teaching should notify the Student Union of their representatives as soon as possible.

140.3 Personal Tutoring (Minute 127.5)

The Deputy Vice-Principal (Dubai) reported that Personal Tutor training materials had been provided and a Skype meeting would be arranged with the Student Induction and Transition Manager to go through the materials with a view to both the Deputy Vice-Principal (Dubai) and the Deputy Vice-Provost (Malaysia) delivering training sessions in collaboration with colleagues. It was noted that the campus-specific case studies required further revision to ensure their contextual appropriateness.

140.4 University Committee for Learning and Teaching (Minute 132)

The Board noted that a proposal had been made by the Quality and Standards Committee that all Deans should be in attendance at each of the three main Senate Committees. It was agreed to enquire of the Senate Effectiveness Review Project Officer as to whether the
recommendation for the inclusion of five (rather than three) Senate members on the
University Committee for Learning and Teaching had been taken forward.

141 Learning and Teaching Strategy: Update

The Board noted that the following updates related to the implementation of the Learning
and Teaching Strategy and its Operational Plan for 2016/17:

Graduate Attributes
• A further series of promotional/awareness-raising events had taken place in Dubai and
  Malaysia. A student-focused promotions campaign on Graduate Attributes would be
  held in Semester 2;
• Two optional questions on Graduate Attributes had been added to HWU’s option
  question bank for NSS 2017; questions on Graduate Attributes would continue to feature
  in the next Annual Survey.

Retention Strategy Operational Plan
• The staff version of the Learning and Teaching Matters would focus on Retention in
  Semester 2 2017, particularly around the key strategic theme of “Retention is
  Everyone’s Responsibility”. A Retention Communication Plan had been developed in
  collaboration with Internal Communications.
• Registry Services Directorate had established a Retention Group
  to support the
  implementation of the University Retention Strategy and the Operational Plan; the first
  monthly meeting had focused on Personal Tutoring;
• Universities UK would be holding a one-day conference (29 March 2017) in central
  London on Improving Student Retention in the Changing Higher Education Landscape.
  http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/events/Pages/student-retention.aspx

142 Student Recruitment

142.1 The Board noted that, as part of its Standing Agenda Items, there were two reports per
  annum related to student recruitment:

• In May/June: to update on projected intakes for September entry and key issues arising;
• In October/November: to review the September intake and identify relevant actions to
  inform the Student Recruitment Strategy.

142.2 Mr M Bates, Director of Student Recruitment, provided a review of the student recruitment
  intake of September 2016. The key points were as follows:

• Recruitment targets were met and exceeded for Scottish campuses in the categories of
  Scottish, Wider Access, RUK and EU categories at both UG and PGT levels;
• International (non-EU) recruitment was below target at both UG and PGT levels,
  confirming the trend seen through the year of a downturn in demand from many key
  markets (a summary of the PGT decliner survey for UK campuses had been included
  with the report);
• Dubai recruitment was below target, with concerning drops notably in the Degree Entry
  Programme and UG Business and Management programmes;
• Malaysian recruitment was also below target at around 80% for both UG and PGT
  categories.

142.3 The Director of Student Recruitment also provided an update on issues relating to the
  Commission on Widening Access:

• The Scottish Government intended to pursue in full all recommendations made in the
  final report from the Commission on Widening Access and a senior level Commissioner
  appointment was due to be made;
• There were a number of recommendations which were particularly pertinent to Heriot-
  Watt University (as had been highlighted in the Director of Student Recruitment’s report),
  including: admissions, articulation and bridging programmes;
• Heriot-Watt was collaborating with the other Edinburgh-based HEI’s to try to co-ordinate
  provision in several areas, including care leavers.
The Director of Student Recruitment also highlighted to the Board the current, sector-wide drop of 10% in UCAS applications in comparison with the same period in 2015. It was noted that UCAS was conducting an extensive review of the situation and contributing factors, some of which included: a continuing trend in later submission dates; the impact of the demographic decline in the Scottish (and UK) school-leaver population; greater use of clearing.

**Discussion**

The Board raised or noted the following points in its discussion of Student Recruitment:

- Student Recruitment had engaged, and would continue to do so, in a significant range of events to promote HWU and to encourage applications, including in Scotland, RUK and internationally;
- There had been major development of the websites (a key recruitment tool, as revealed in the PGT 2016 Decliner Survey);
- A new Marketing and Communications Committee, as chaired by the Secretary of the University, had been established to review and re-focus recruitment initiatives, and significant emphasis was being placed by the Principal on the importance of all staff contributions during Open/Visit Days;
- Since scholarships had been a major contributing factor in PGT declines, the University Executive had approved a new, clearer and more coherent scholarship framework;
- Ways of engaging with the University’s top agents had recently been revised.

**Widening Access**

The Board raised or noted the following points in its discussion of Widening Access:

- In the west of Scotland, there had been a collaborative initiative of engaging retired academics in outreach activity, providing a consistent and regular presence in key schools and building longer-term relationships, including mentoring and encouraging pupils to apply for university; this was a model which could be taken forward by the aforementioned Edinburgh-based group or via LEAPS;
- Care leavers were being targeted through the new Care Experienced and Carers East Forum, which HWU was chairing;
- The University need to develop a Widening Access Strategy, which would reflect recent collaborative activities;
- Current SIMD students could act as a “buddy”, visiting local schools and communicating their experiences;
- An increasing range of students from diverse backgrounds would require a re-development of the University’s learning and teaching support and approaches to teaching.

**SFC-HWU Outcome Agreement 2017-2020**

The Board noted that, as part of its *Standing Agenda Items*, Mr R W McGookin, Director of Planning, provided an annual report on University’s Outcome Agreement with the Scottish Funding Council; in addition to the annual updates, the Board also had the opportunity to contribute to the development of a new Outcome Agreement every three years.

The Board noted that the paper produced by the Director of Planning had set out trend (2011-14), baseline (2014/15), and recent performance (2015-17) by HWU on each of the “measures” of SFC’s priority Outcomes (colour-coding had been used to differentiate recent performance compared with the new “baseline” year). It was noted that the Board had been invited to consider the level which the University should set as targets for these measures (at least those flagged as “priority measures”) in the Outcome Agreement 2017-20, and to reflect on the significance of the targeted Outcomes and the means to achieve them.

**Target Areas for 2017-20**

The Director of Planning provided a presentation on proposed targets for HWU in each of SFC’s “priority measures”:
Some of the key points from the presentation included:

- The Scottish HE sector had proposed that the withdrawal of EU funding by the Scottish Government should be allocated to HEI's to enable them to increase SDUE's;
- The Scottish Government's policy on social inclusion was coinciding with a demographic decline in the Scottish school leaver population; therefore, it was imperative to focus further on under-represented groups: HWU needed to make more significant progress in recruiting from the most difficult to reach groups, ie SIMD20;
- HWU had doubled its numbers of HN Articulating Entrants, with further incremental growth set as the target;
- Although the University had undertaken significant efforts to improve the gender imbalance, females were still significantly under-represented (the lowest of all Scottish HEI's, even with the predominance of females in Textiles);
- HWU was still widely recognised for its STEM provision; this was an area which the University should continue to promote;
- The University's Retention target for 2018 was 93%; the same target should be set for widening access and other protected characteristics groups.

Discussion

The Board raised or noted the following points in its discussion of SFC-HWU Outcome Agreement (note: discussion on Widening Access is recorded in Minute 142.6):

- The data presented above related only to Scottish UG students; there could be, for example, a more favourable representation of females amongst other student population groups, although the general under-representation was acknowledged and a need for a different approach was agreed;
- Female students and academics could be used as ambassadors, visiting schools to highlight the benefits of STEM subjects and careers;
- At the Dubai Campus, the largest student numbers were in social sciences and there was a target of increasing student numbers across all subject areas; there was a concern about promoting STEM in particular, which could be seen as lack of value for social science subjects;
- In Malaysia, increasing STEM was a Government priority, but for HWUM, there was an opportunity for, and focus on, increasing student numbers across all subject areas;
- The School of Textiles and Design had a number of initiatives in place to increase the number of male students on Interior Design and, while STEM was not so relevant, there was a move to incorporate more technology into both the curriculum and teaching.

Outcome Agreement 2017-20

The Board endorsed the proposed targets, as outlined by the Director of Planning, for the key areas highlighted above. It was agreed that the Board should be given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Outcome Agreement 2017-20 prior to its submission to the Scottish Funding Council.

Service Teaching: Academic Context

The Board noted that, at its meeting on 7 September 2016, the issue of service-teaching was raised again, where the Board had agreed to invite the Director of Planning to a further discussion of service teaching, particularly since the key academic issues had not been resolved. The following issues had been highlighted by the Board:

- focus on the academic context of service teaching (and not simply the more restricted perspectives of the mechanics of funding/Planning Round);
• take account of the other discussions around electives, choice and ability of students to select different subjects in different Schools as part of broadening their educational experience;
• consider a collegiate, institutional approach to the curriculum and to teaching, of which service teaching was a core part;
• outline how service teaching would be accommodated in the current review of the Planning Round.

144.2 The Board noted that the Director of Planning had provided some background information on the “Service Teaching economy” in HWU Scotland – numbers and loci of students involved in inter-department and inter-School teaching, the resultant modelled inter-School charges, and the trend of these flows and charges.

144.3 The Board raised or noted the following points in its discussion of service teaching:

• there was uniform agreement that service teaching was academically beneficial to students, and there should be more service teaching, as it provided breadth and choice;
• the service-teaching model was designed to ensure that, financially, no School would gain or lose;
• there was a major concern about the impact of service-teaching in terms of quality of experience and resources: the model prohibited MACS from recruiting individuals to deliver Maths service teaching and so key academic staff were being taken from other duties to provide service teaching, and had to double-teach classes for c.2,600 students in other Schools per year;
• other HEI’s provided Maths Clinics and while MACS had been asked to provide such drop-in sessions, there was insufficient staff resource/time to do so;
• provision of a Maths Clinic and other such support should be a central resource; this should not be wrapped up into discussions about service teaching.

144.4 The Board endorsed the continuation of service teaching as academically beneficial, but recognised the necessity of addressing the issues outlined above. It was noted that the Board would have an opportunity to make the case for cross-institutional provision through the revised Planning Round process (see Minute 152.1). It was further agreed that the Financial Performance Review, which had been produced by the Vice-Principal, should be circulated to the Board, as it was particularly relevant in the context of service teaching.

145 Discussion Item: Contract Cheating

145.1 The Board noted that, at its meeting on 2 November 2016, it had been agreed that the Discussion Item at the December meeting should focus on “Contract Cheating”, given the scale of this issue as a global problem in higher education. It had been agreed that the focus of the discussion would be on establishing an institutional position. The Board welcomed Ms D Russell, Student Conduct Officer, who had joined the meeting for this item.

145.2 Presentation

145.2.1 The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) gave a presentation “Addressing contract cheating: local and global responses”, which had originally been provided by Dr Rowena Harper and Associate Professor Tracey Bretag, University of South Australia, at the Quality Beyond Boundaries Forum, Melbourne, October 2016. The following points were highlighted in the presentation:

• contract cheating (“when a student arranges for a third party to complete their work for them: may be a relative, acquaintance or stranger; may be for money or favour or exchange”) had become a global and national issue for higher education;
• contributing factors included: commercialisation and marketisation of HE; government policy changes; a “profit mindset” (large class sizes, cost-efficient teaching); focus on employability (getting a “good job”); explosion of global networks and social media;
• it was difficult to gauge how extensive contract cheating was, but studies had shown a change in mindset, with students being less concerned about being penalised for academic dishonesty;
• a number of countries had made cheat sites/essay mills illegal, with organisations advocating for similar legislation in other countries;
• assessment re-design was not necessarily the solution and different types of assessment could still be subverted through contract cheating;
• a multi-pronged approach was necessary: legislation; technology; course and assessment design; consequences, both academic and legal; relationship building (between staff and students);
• a systematic approach should underpin every aspect of a university's operations, which might include institutional missions and marketing; policies and procedures; student-led campaigns.

145.2.2 The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) concluded that although the extent of contract cheating was not known, Heriot-Watt University should be proactive in terms of its approach and its message, particularly since the scale of the University's multi-mode, multi-location activity presented a potentially large risk.

145.3 Discussion
145.3.1 The Board raised or noted the following points in its discussion of contract cheating:

• some essay mills were highly sophisticated and professional, eg the ability to contract the same author to allow for consistency across assignments; discounts for multiple use; scale of payment according to required grade and timescales;
• contract cheating was a major step up from plagiarism, although it was recognised that there had been very serious plagiarism cases at HWU, including entire Masters dissertations;
• the University should consider the resources required to deal effectively with all forms of academic dishonesty, which had increased significantly in recent years, including the more common discipline case of plagiarism;
• the scale of contract cheating was not known at HWU, but there still needed to be widespread awareness-raising, discussion and recognition of it (particularly given the scale of the University's multi-mode, multi-location activity);
• the validity and effectiveness of current processes and penalties were acknowledged and thanks was expressed to the Student Conduct Officer for her work in this area; however, contract cheating was a matter which required wider discussion;
• there was a need to provide more support to students in key academic practices such as essay-writing, referencing; there could be a role for the Academic English unit and SITO to collaborate in this area;
• key messages to students were important, eg academic honesty was a fundamental part of the Professional aspect of the HWU Graduate Attributes;
• academic honesty and the University's approach should be part of student and staff induction;
• HWU's approach should developed wholly in collaboration with students.

145.4 Next Steps
145.4.1 The Board agreed that a similar presentation should be provided to the Senate, the University Executive and Quality and Standards Committee as part of awareness-raising and generating wider discussion around the issue of contract cheating and the institution's position on such. The presentation should also be used to stimulate discussion at the Dubai and Malaysia Campuses.

145.4.2 The Board agreed that the presentation should be circulated to all members, but should be retained for their own use until permission was sought from the original presenters for wider circulation.
The Board noted that as per Matters Arising Report, the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Head of Academic Quality would be meeting to discuss proposals for taking forward the common issues emerging from NSS Action Plans; a paper would be provided to the Board in due course. It was noted that, at their meeting on 7 December 2016, the Directors of Learning and Teaching had discussed a range of issues related to Feedback on Assessment, and had been provided with a Feedback on Assessment Dialogue Sheet to use in discussions with colleagues in Schools.

NSS 2017

The Board noted that, since the choice of optional questions for NSS 2017 had been substantially revised, a meeting had been held on 24 November 2016 to discuss and agree the University’s selection of optional questions; the six optional banks would be as follows:

- Personal Development
- Careers
- Course Content and Structure
- Course Delivery
- Assessment
- Learning Community

It was noted that, as HWU’s own two additional optional questions, two questions related to the University’s Graduate Attributes had been chosen.

The Board noted that, in preference to launching the survey in January, HWU would go live with the survey on Monday 6 February 2017 (end date of 30 April) to provide a more concentrated survey period. It was also noted that consideration was currently being given to a Survey Promotions Campaign in semester 2.

Teaching Excellence Framework: Update; Report from TEF Working Group

The Board noted the update on recent developments related to the Teaching Excellence Framework (both UK-wide and within HWU). In terms of national developments, the Board noted the following:

- All UK HEI’s had to indicate to HEFCE their intentions as regards participation in TEF Year 2 (HWU had confirmed participation);
- TEF Year 2 Briefing Session had been held in Glasgow on 30 November 2016, which had been attended by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), the Student President and the Head of Academic Quality;
- The first meeting of HWU’s own TEF Working Group had been held on 5 December 2016; the focus of the group, which would meet for a second time on 19 January 2016, would be on producing the University’s Provider Submission document (due for submission to HEFCE on 26 January 2017).

The Board noted that a draft of the University’s Provider Submission document would be presented for consideration at the next meeting on 11 January 2017.

Thematic Review on Assessment

The Board noted that, at its meeting on 5 October 2016, it had approved a proposal for combining the Thematic Review of Assessment with the Academic-Related Review of Student Support and Academic Registry on processes in support of assessment into a single (adapted) review. It was further noted that, due to a focus on assessment within the Global Learning and Teaching Transformational Initiative, there was a risk of duplication and of divergence between the two activities as regards the academic aspects of assessment.

The Board approved the proposal that the Thematic Review of Assessment should be incorporated within the Global Learning and Teaching project (as was currently happening), and that the Academic-Related Review of Student Support and Academic Registry should revert to its original focus, namely processes in support of assessment and student support related to assessment.
The Board noted that, at its meeting on 22 November 2016, it had approved the draft Learning and Teaching Partnership Agreement 2016/17, which aimed to address both the Union’s academic plans for 2016/17 and also the key areas where the Learning and Teaching Board would wish to collaborate with the Student Union in 2016/17.

The noted that the three areas of collaboration for 2016/17 would be: review of academic representation; Graduate Attributes; feedback on assessment (the latter topic had been modified from the original “assessment” in order to support Schools in addressing issues related to feedback as specified in NSS Action Plans).

The Deputy Vice-Principal (Dubai) highlighted that the Agreement was applicable to Scottish Campus students only and that there should be a mechanism for direct engagement of the Dubai and Malaysia Student Presidents in key projects related to learning and teaching other than consultation as part of the wider student body. The Board endorsed this approach, while recognising the limitations of the Student Union’s jurisdiction as regards the Dubai and Malaysia Campuses. It was agreed, therefore, consideration should be given to the most effective means of engaging the Dubai and Malaysia Student Presidents in key learning and teaching developments, and that a proposal should be presented to the Board in due course.

The Board approved the completed version of Learning and Teaching Partnership Agreement 2016/17, subject to the modification of badging the Agreement as “Scottish Campuses”. It was noted that a progress report would be submitted as part of the Student Union’s Annual Report on Learning and Teaching, which would be considered by the Board at its meeting on 10 May 2017.

The Board noted that, as part of its Standing Agenda Items, the Minutes of the meeting of the Student Learning Experience Committee on 2 November 2016 had been provided.

The Board noted that, as part of its Standing Agenda Items, the annual update report on the International Strategy had been produced by Ms R J Moir, Assistant Principal (International). It was noted that the report described the place of internationalisation within the institutional strategic context and provided an update on progress against plan, based on the recently published Key Performance Indicators for the year; the report also highlighted some particular aspects of progress in the strategy.

The Board agreed the following with regard to the report:

- Given the coverage of research activity, the report should also be presented to the Research and Knowledge Exchange Board;
- In future versions of the Report, there should be an opportunity for the Deputy Vice-Principal (Dubai) and the Deputy Vice-Provost (Malaysia) to highlight campus-specific developments and issues related to learning and teaching and also practices which had been, or could be, transferred to all campus locations.

The Board noted the following paper, which had been approved by the University Executive and was being presented to the Board for information: Financial Planning Process 2016/17. It was noted that the revised process would enable the Board to contribute to the Planning Round by highlighting institution-wide developments in learning and teaching for consideration. It was noted that this revision was a significant development, and aligned with the proposals contained in the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2013-18 related to the “Development of an Academic Planning Process” Organisational Enabler.

The Board noted the following papers, which had been provided for information on the Board’s SharePoint site:
Dean of the University (Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences)

The Board noted that Professor L Galloway would demit office as Dean of the University (Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences) on 31 December 2016. The Board noted that Professor Galloway, who was one of the Board’s longest-standing members, had been a member of the Board as both a Director of Learning and Teaching in the former School of Management and Languages and then as a Dean of the University. The Board thanked Professor Galloway for her contribution to the work of the Board and to the learning and teaching enhancement agenda.

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Learning and Teaching Board will be held on Wednesday 11 January 2017, **9.15 am**, Anderson Room, Library. There will be a meeting of the Student Learning Experience Committee at **12.15 pm**.