Welcome and Apologies

138.1 The Chair welcomed to the meeting: Dr G B Thomson, as deputy for the Director of Learning and Teaching, School of Engineering and Physical Sciences.

138.2 Apologies for absence were as recorded above.

Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Board approved the Minutes of the meeting of 11 November 2015.

Matters Arising Not Otherwise on the Agenda

140.1 The Board noted the report on matters arising from the meeting on 11 November 2015.

140.2 Thematic Review (Minute 130)

The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) reported that the Thematic Review on Technology-Enhanced Learning and Teaching would take place in semester 2, 2016, in accordance with the specification previously agreed by the Learning and Teaching Board. The scope and proposed outcomes, particularly an institutional strategy for technology-enhanced learning and teaching, had been fully endorsed by the Director of Information Services and the VLE Manager, both of whom would be actively engaged in the review.

140.3 Report from the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching)

The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) provided a verbal report on his recent visits to the Dubai and Malaysia Campuses, where the Academic Registrar had also visited for the recent graduations. The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) also reported on his presentation at a recent conference, held in Dubai, on quality assurance: it was noted that Heriot-Watt University had been seen as a global leader in its management of quality and academic standards across different worldwide locations through, for example, the Multi Code, the Policy on Timezones and the Chief External Examiner system.

Learning and Teaching Strategy

The Board noted the following updates regarding the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy.

141.1 Report from the Secretary’s Board

The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Head of Academic Quality gave a presentation on 2015/16 Learning and Teaching Strategy Operational Plan and Timeline to the Secretary’s Board on 1 December 2015. In addition, an overview was also provided of
the outcomes of the 2014/15 Learning and Teaching Strategy meetings with Schools and relevant Professional Services. The key outcomes of the discussion included:

- The Directors of the six Professional Services involved in implementing the Learning and Teaching Strategy were encouraged to identify, in their Learning and Teaching Strategy meetings, proposed developments which had resource implications. These resource requirements could then be discussed, in turn, with the Secretary of the University as part of the Planning Round.

- The co-operative, collaborative manner with which the Directorates had continued to engage in the process was highlighted; in particular, their role in helping the University to achieve alignment with the institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy was noted (highlighted as an area of positive practice in the QAA ELIR, March 2015).

14.1.2 Updating Learning and Teaching Strategies and Enhancement Plans (Schools and Services)

The Board noted that all Schools were due to submit updated Learning and Teaching Strategies and Enhancement Plans as part of the Annual Monitoring and Review documentation (due 31 January 2016); updates would likewise be provided by Directors of relevant Professional Services prior to Learning and Teaching Strategy meetings in spring 2016. It was noted that the Head of Academic Quality could meet individually with Directors of Learning and Teaching and Directors of Professional Services to provide support and assistance in updating the documents.

14.1.3 Committees and Groups

The Board noted the updates from the various groups involved in supporting the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, which included:

- The VLE Management Group had established a sub-group: the Technology Enhanced Learning Special Interest Group, which met for the first time on 1 December 2015; the group was chaired by the VLE Manager;

- The first meeting of the Inter-Campus Communications Group was held on 11 November 201; emerging actions included compilation of a needs analysis;

- The Curriculum Working Group would hold its second meeting in January 2016 to focus on the HWU Graduate Attributes Mapping Exercise and to identify good practice.

142 Graduate Attributes: Awareness and Promotions Campaign

142.1 The Board noted that, at its meeting on 11 November 2015, it had been agreed that the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Head of Academic Quality should develop a plan for raising awareness of the HWU Graduate Attributes across the institution. The Board considered the proposal for awareness-raising and promotion of the Graduate Attributes at the institutional level, which included applicant, student and staff audiences.

142.2 The Board noted that funds had not as yet been allocated to the promotions campaign; this request would follow on from the Board’s approval of the proposal. The Learning and Teaching Matters and website would be one existing vehicle which could be used without incurring additional cost. It was noted that the Graduate Attributes could be used effectively to clarify to potential applicants what was expected of them at Heriot-Watt.

142.3 The Board approved the proposed awareness and promotions campaign for the HWU Graduate Attributes, and agreed that the Director of Learning and Teaching, School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences, as Chair of the Curriculum Working Group, should meet with the Student Union and the Head of Academic Quality to progress the student-facing elements of the campaign.

143 Retention Strategy: Draft

143.1 The Board noted that, at its meeting on 21 October 2015, it was agreed, in response to the
recommendations of the Retention Working Group, that a University Retention Strategy should be developed around a series of Four Key Principles, which have been shaped around the concepts of a “framework for student engagement” and “retention as everyone’s responsibility”.

143.2 The Board noted that a draft Retention Strategy had been produced by the Head of Academic Quality, which had incorporated comments from the Student Induction and Transition Office, and had been based on the recommendations of the Retention Working Group.

143.2 The Board approved the draft Retention Strategy, subject to the addition of “learning from the practices of other HEI’s” to the key features list and to the re-naming of the “Priority Areas for Development” as “Priority Areas for Consideration”, thereby recognising that the items listed under each Key Principle were matters for discussion, rather than pre-determined actions.

143.4 Progressing Retention Actions

143.4.1 The Board noted that a series of immediate actions designed to improve retention would be progressed by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Academic Registrar in collaboration with key individuals; three such areas for action had been identified:

- The Academic Registrar, the Director of Student Support and Accommodation and the Student Induction and Transition Manager would be undertaking a review of mentoring arrangements: a revised proposal would be presented to Student Learning Experience Committee on 20 January 2016; it was anticipated that there would be greater standardisation in the revised mentoring scheme, eg timing of mentor meetings in Freshers Week.

- The Academic Registrar would be taking forward an alert system, within the Student Systems Revitalisation Project, as part of the “Thinking of Leaving Service”: students who were thinking of leaving could hit a button, within the student system, which would send a message to relevant individuals to contact the student within 48 hours.

- The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), together with the Director of Planning and the Planning Manager, would report on, and evaluate, SIMD20-40 course failure rates for semester 2, 2014/15 and would share the “Top 5” courses with Directors of Learning and Teaching for action.

143.5 Discussion on Retention

- The process for dealing with Temporary Suspension of Studies of first year students who had either not started or had discontinued very early on was inconsistent across Schools; all TSS proposals should be forwarded to Professor L Galloway, as Chair of the Undergraduate Studies Committee, for approval;

- Heriot-Watt seemed to be losing a higher proportion of particular characteristic groups than other HEI’s. There would be benefit in mentors being aware of the background circumstances of students admitted through widening access and other contextualised admissions routes: such students would not be singled out; rather, this background knowledge could make mentors more alert to signs of potential problems;

- There may be some merit in recruiting widening access students who have successfully progressed as peer mentors for incoming students;

- Support for students admitted through contextualised admissions routes could be enhanced through technological developments, which could make it easier to identify, and counsel, students at risk more quickly;

- The availability of resources was essential for taking effective, sustained action in addressing retention;

- The Court, the University Executive and the Senate had, in recent meetings, focused on retention as a major priority area for action.

143.6 Next Steps

The Board noted that, following its approval of the Retention Strategy, the next stage would
be to produce an Operational Plan based on the strategy; the Plan would be presented to
the Board for approval in due course.

144 Review of the Academic Management Structures

144.1 The Board noted that, as agreed at its meeting on 11 November 2015, a “one year on”
review of the Academic Management Structures was conducted via an online survey over a
two-week period until 27 November 2015: 19 responses were received via the survey, which
were augmented by verbal feedback provided to the Deputy Principal (Learning and
Teaching) during his recent visits to the Dubai and Malaysia Campuses, and by emails
provided to the Head of Academic Quality by the Vice-Principal (Malaysia Campus). The
Board noted that the key outcomes of the survey, verbal feedback and emails had been
summarised; an analysis of the survey responses was also provided, together with the
survey brief and the original Academic Management Structures paperwork (remits and
responsibilities).

144.2 Summary of Results and Analysis

The Board noted the key findings from the results and the analysis as follows:

144.2.1 Effectiveness of Operation

Overall, in contrast to negative ratings for several of the components within the
structure, 11 of the 19 respondents stated that they “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that the Academic
Management Structures were operating effectively (with only 3 ratings of “disagree” or
“strongly disagree”). The verbal feedback and emails revealed a more negative view of the
effectiveness from the perspective of staff at the Dubai and Malaysia Campuses.

144.2.2 Seven Aims

In terms of the seven aims of the Academic Management Structures, most aims achieved
positive ratings (“strongly agree” or “agree”), particularly those concerned with:

- clarifying where intermediate and ultimate responsibilities for academic matters lie;
- integrating the management of academic activities across locations;
- supporting academic alignment;
- supporting quality assurance and enhancement;
- are scalable.

The two aims which attracted the most negative ratings (“disagree” or “strongly disagree”) were:

- efficient to run;
- understood by, and easily communicated to, the academic and professional services
  communities across the University.

144.2.3 Committees

In terms of the committees within the Academic Management Structures, the School
Learning and Teaching Committee and the School Studies Committees were rated most
positively (11 and 8 respectively “strongly agree” or “agree”). The effectiveness of the
Academic Councils attracted the most negative results, with only 1 “agree”, and 9 responses
of “disagree” or “strongly disagree”. The Boards of Studies were seen as the most difficult
to operate due to time differences, co-ordination and technology inhibiting effective
communication. Opportunities for colleagues in Dubai and Malaysia to engage in the School
Learning and Teaching Committee and the School Studies Committees were limited.

144.2.4 Roles/Posts

In terms of the effectiveness of the roles within Academic Management Structures, ratings
for all roles (Director of Learning and Teaching; Director of Academic Quality; Senior Director
of Studies/Programme Director of Studies) were generally positive. Of these, the Senior
Director of Studies attracted three scores of “disagree” or “strongly disagree” in terms of its
effectiveness. Four respondents stated that the role of Director of Learning and Teaching was not manageable.

144.4 Areas for Consideration

The Board noted, based on the above results and analysis, six topics in particular had been identified for consideration:

- Overall, the structures were seen as too complex;
- Different forms of briefings would enable staff to understand the purpose and key features of the structures more easily;
- Dubai and Malaysia Campuses were not fully included, nor were their particular circumstances taken in to consideration;
- The Academic Councils were not particularly effective, in terms of links and interaction;
- Roles and committee remits should be clarified (perhaps remit changes), particularly Director of Learning and Teaching and Director of Academic Quality and related Learning and Teaching Committee and the School Studies Committee;
- The Boards of Studies were difficult to operate due factors such as timing, co-ordination and communication/technology.

144.5 Discussion

The Board raised or noted the following points in its discussion of the future operation of the Academic Management Structures:

- the Academic Councils had no connection with the Schools in terms of operations in Dubai or Malaysia; the function of the Academic Councils was being considered as part of the Senate effectiveness review currently being undertaken by the Secretary of the University;
- Boards of Examiners were beginning to operate more effectively, with teams participating from Dubai and Malaysia;
- Beyond management levels, there was a lack of awareness and engagement amongst many staff across all campus locations regarding the Academic Management Structures;
- Technological limitations were hampering the effective operation of many aspects of the structures;
- There was still too much focus within the various committees on day-to-day operational matters, and not sufficient time for enhancement;
- Irrespective of any modifications to the structures, there should be an opportunity for staff worldwide to be part, in reality, of a programme team and to have an opportunity to engage with their peers on an equal basis in areas such as curriculum development.

144.6 Boards of Studies/Senior Director of Studies

144.6.1 The Board identified the Boards of Studies/Senior Director of Studies as critical areas where the Academic Management Structures were not operating as envisaged. Difficulties such as timezones, co-ordination of meetings and the limitations of technology for multi-site meetings all compromised the effectiveness of the Boards of Studies. However, it was noted positively that, on a day-to-day basis, there was increased collaboration between academic staff in different locations.

144.6.1 The Board noted that in some Schools the Boards of Studies were operating; in others, the multi-campus Programme Directors met more informally in small groups, with the Senior Director of Studies acting as a co-ordination and focal point for reporting to the School Learning and Teaching/Studies Committees and was, in effect, discharging in this way the remit of the Board of Studies. There was no consensus as to whether Boards of Studies should be retained or should be removed, with, in the latter case, their function being fulfilled by smaller programme curriculum teams/groups co-ordinated by the Senior Director of Studies, who would report up to the relevant School committees.

144.7 Summary

144.7.1 The Board agreed that there was no need for a radical re-organisation of the Academic
Management Structures, and it was recognised that the structures had brought much-needed clarity and consistency across Schools to the management of programmes in multi-campus locations. It was agreed, therefore, that the focus should be on addressing those aspects of the structure which had been highlighted as not operating effectively. In addition, it was agreed that there should be some further and different forms of communications and briefings to enable staff to understand better the purposes and key features of the structures.

144.7.2 The Board agreed that the operation/remit of the Boards of Studies and the roles of Senior Director of Studies/Programme Director of Studies should be discussed more fully at the next meeting on 20 January 2016, with a view to determining how the functionality of multi-location, equal collaboration and team-working in matters such as curriculum development, assessment and teaching delivery could be realised in practice. It was further agreed that consideration should be given to a briefing/training session for the Senior Director of Studies.

145 Revised NSS Action Plans

145.1 The Board noted that, subsequent to the meeting on 11 November 2015, the common issues emerging from the analysis of the NSS 2015 Action Plans had been incorporated in to the Proposed List of Discussion Items paper (LTB/15/90).

145.2 The Board noted that, at the meeting on 11 November 2015, it had been agreed that the Action Plans for Accountancy and Finance in the School of Management and Languages should be re-submitted, and an Action Plan for Economics, which was not included, should be provided. The Board considered and approved the integrated Action Plan for Accountancy, Economics and Finance.

145.3 The Board noted that Schools, relevant Professional Services, the Student Union and West London College would be invited to submit updates on their NSS Action Plans by 22 February 2016, for consideration by the Board as a whole on 2 March 2016.

146 UK Government Green Paper: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice

146.1 The Board noted that, on 6 November 2015, the UK Government published a Higher Education Green Paper: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice; the consultation period on the proposals contained in the Green Paper would run from 6 November 2015 to 16 January 2016. The Board had been invited by the Principal to contribute to the University’s response, focusing in particular on the proposals related to learning and teaching, namely the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework.

146.2 The Board noted that, with regard to developments in the Scottish HE sector, at present, these had as yet to be published; at this stage, the only information released had been an announcement that there will be a one-year gap between the end of ELIR3 and the start of next cycle of institutional review. The results of the HEFCE consultation on quality assessment had recently been published; these had revealed broad support for: a risk-based approach to institutional review/ending cyclical institutional review; enhanced External Examining system (central register; training programme); degree algorithms; focus on student outcomes and metrics as basis for quality assessment; Teaching Excellence Framework.

146.3 The Board noted that some of the key elements of relevance to the Board within the Green Paper were as follows:

- Teaching Excellence Framework: 4 levels, each linked to approval to raise tuition fees;
- Remove of cyclical institutional review, which would be replaced by metrics and evaluation at institutional and discipline levels; these would be reviewed by panels of experts;
- Degree classification: use of Grade Point Average in parallel.

146.4 The Board agreed that comments on the Teaching Excellence Framework and/or any other aspect of the Green Paper should be forwarded to the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) by 12 noon on 8 January 2016.
Proposed List of Discussion Items 2015/16

147.1 The Board noted that, since 2013/14, each meeting had featured, as an agenda item a Discussion/Enhancement slot; the topics had been relatively ad hoc to date, emerging from issues raised by Board members or issues highlighted as the University prepared for its QAA ELIR3. At its meeting on 21 January 2015, the Board had agreed that a programme of future discussion items should be produced, but that there should remain the flexibility for Board members to discuss topics raised on an ad hoc basis by members (Minute 7.2).

147.2 The Board noted that a proposed list of Discussion Items 2015/16 had been provided for consideration, which had been produced from a review of both internal and external learning and teaching priorities and developments, and also the presentation and discussion of learning and teaching with the Principal at the meeting on 11 November 2015. The Board was invited to consider the topics, as well as identifying alternative themes, with the aim of agreeing a list of three topics for the remainder of 2015/16. The Board noted that the other Discussion Item slots at the remaining Board meetings would be held free for members to raise more immediate issues.

147.3 The Board identified a range of potential topics, such as sharing good practice, teaching excellence and its recognition, and promotion routes for learning and teaching, which had been included in the proposed list. It was agreed that, in preference to highlighting three particular topics, the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Head of Academic Quality should use the list as a basis for selecting pertinent issues for the Board to consider at appropriate times.

148 Strategy Away Day: Agenda

148.1 The Board noted that its annual strategy away day would take place on Tuesday 8 March 2016. As noted by the Board at its meeting on 21 October 2015, one of the main items would be a continuation of the Board’s discussion on an Integrated Approach to Student Learning Skills and Staff Academic Development, which the Board had discussed initially at its meeting on 16 September 2015 and, as part of the Matters Arising at the 21 October meeting, it had been noted that this topic would be an item for the Away Day.

148.2 The Board agreed that, in preference to the proposed sessions for Schools to focus a SWOT analysis of learning and teaching and their key issues for the Board to discuss, there should be sessions on technology-enhanced learning, to which the VLE Manager and the IS Director in EBS should be invited. It was proposed that, as a continuation of this key theme, the Student Union item could be focused on technology-enhanced learning from the student perspective; the Student President indicated that this could be a potential theme, although others might emerge at the start of semester 2.

148.3 The Board agreed that a revised agenda should be presented for consideration at its meeting on 20 January 2015.

149 Report from the Student Learning Experience Committee

149.1 The Board noted, as part of its Standing Agenda Items, the Minutes of the Student Learning Experience Committee on 11 November 2015. In addition, the following items related to the operation of the Committee in 2015/16 had been provided:

- Terms of Reference
- Membership

The Board approved the Terms of Reference and Membership, subject to the School of Life Sciences being represented by the Director of Learning and Teaching.

150 Report from the International Strategy Board

150.1 The Board noted that, as part of its Standing Agenda Items, a report had been provided by the International Strategy Board, which included extracts from the Minutes of the meetings
150.2 The Board noted the following items:

- the Sub-Committee on Brazil and Brazil Strategy 2015-2020;
- the strategic development of Malaysia and Dubai;
- the International Research Strategy; and
- the Heriot-Watt Global Student Programme (now Go Global).

151 QAA Enhancement Theme Funding

The Board noted that as per the processes in previous years, HWU’s funding allocation from the Student Transitions Enhancement Theme had been shared between a number of projects: 16 applications had been received; the results of the Review Panel, as held on 26 November 2015, were provided. It was also noted that all Schools had confirmed that they would continue to provide matched funding for the QAA projects.

152 Director of Learning and Teaching, School of Management and Languages

The Board noted that Dr W Jackson would be demitting office as Director of Learning and Teaching, School of Management and Languages, on 31 December 2015; he would be succeeded in the role by Dr M Sargeant. The Board thanked Dr Jackson for his contribution to the work of the Board and to the learning and teaching enhancement agenda, and wished him well in his new role of Head of Accountancy, Economics and Finance.

153 Learning and Teaching Colloquium

The Board noted that the Learning and Teaching Colloquium, which was designed to support the implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, would be held in March 2016; as yet, no theme had been published. It was agreed that the Director of Learning and Teaching, School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences, should meet with the Academic Programme Leader (Centre for Academic Leadership and Development) and the Head of Academic Quality to discuss potential themes, including sharing good practice in learning and teaching.

154 Papers for Information

The Board noted the following paper, which had been provided for information:

- SCQF Update 24, autumn/winter 2015.

155 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Learning and Teaching Board will be held on Wednesday 20 January 2016, 1.15 pm, Anderson Room, Library. The meeting will be followed by a meeting of the Student Learning Experience Committee at 3.15 pm.