The Learning and Teaching Board

Minutes Wednesday 11 November 2015

Present:    Professor J W Sawkins (Chair)
            Professor T M Chrisp
            Professor S J Dewar
            Dr I J Glen
            Professor J Hansen
            Ms D McCaig
Professor K J McCullough
Professor J M Ritchie
Dr M A Storey
Mr P Travill
Dr M King (Clerk)

In attendance  Dr M Sargeant
Professor R A Williams (Minute 128)

Apologies:  Professor L Galloway
            Dr W Jackson
            Ms H Frances
            Dr S Thomas

125 Welcome and Apologies

125.1 The Chair welcomed to the meeting: Professor R A Williams, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, in connection with the item on Learning and Teaching at Heriot-Watt (Minute 128); Dr M Sargeant, as deputy for the Director of Learning and Teaching, School Management and Languages.

125.2 Apologies for absence were as recorded above.

126 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Board approved the Minutes of the meeting of 21 October 2015.

127 Matters Arising Not Otherwise on the Agenda

127.1 The Board noted the report on matters arising from the meeting on 21 October 2015.

127.2 Effectiveness Review of the Committees of the Senate (Minute 108.3)

The Board noted that the University Executive had approved the proposal that the Learning and Teaching Board, the Research and Knowledge Exchange Board and the International Strategy Board should be incorporated into the forthcoming effectiveness review of the committees of the Senate.

127.3 Redefining the Heriot-Watt Brand (Minute 115)

The Board noted that a range of information had been passed on to the Director of Marketing and Communications regarding the inclusion of the Heriot-Watt Graduate Attributes in the revised version of the proposed HWU boilerplate statement. The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) reported that the revised statement made reference to the four attributes (Specialist, Creative, Professional and Global), as well as the overall strapline, *professionally educated, globally employable*.

128 Learning and Teaching at Heriot-Watt University

The Board noted that the Principal and Vice-Chancellor had joined the Board for the present item to provide an opportunity for a broader discussion on the current status and future direction of learning and teaching at Heriot-Watt.

128.1 Introduction to the Learning and Teaching Board

As a means of providing an introduction to the Principal and Vice-Chancellor on the Learning and Teaching Board, the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and the Head of Academic Quality provided a presentation, covering:
• Overview of the Learning and Teaching Board: responsibility; reporting structure; membership;
• Achievements of the Board: Learning and Teaching Strategy 2013-2018; Quality Framework (Code of Practice for the Management of Multi-Locational, Multi-Mode Programmes); Communication (learning and teaching/quality assurance briefing papers); Leading Change (Restructuring the Academic Year);
• Current Priorities: retention; HWU Graduate Attributes; curriculum re-development; Thematic Review on Technology-Enhanced Learning and Teaching; student learning skills/academic development for staff; student learning experience; QAA ELIR Action Plan;
• External Environment: government initiatives/requirements (Scotland, rest of UK, Dubai and Malaysia).

128.2 Professor R A Williams, Principal and Vice-Chancellor

128.2.1 The Principal and Vice-Chancellor discussed with the Board different aspects of the current status and future direction of learning and teaching, at Heriot-Watt, including:

• Consideration of the desirability to simplify a number of complexities across the institution;
• The implications of the rapidly changing external environment, including the proposals contained in the UK Government Green Paper, such as the Teaching Excellence Framework and the introduction of a Grade Point Average System (see Minute 136.2);
• Trends in enhancement of the student learning experience across all modes and locations;
• The reasons behind the apparent serious decline in retention rates and need to address this. Academic mentoring was an area for initial review;
• Helpful tools to support student learning and appreciation of feedback often arise from initiatives could provide major benefit to students, eg making banks of marked exam scripts available as paper sets; enabling students try themselves to mark assessments based on marking criteria; systematically surveying students part way through the semester and making immediate changes;
• The importance of faster turnaround times for feedback on assessments, and, related to this, reducing the volume of assessment (particularly examinations) and introducing more electronic forms of assessment.

128.2.2 The Principal and Vice-Chancellor highlighted in particular his ambition for Heriot-Watt to be sector-leading in particular areas, such as use of learning technology to enhance the student learning experience. In connection with this, there was a need to provide development for academic staff, to encourage innovation in teaching, and to improve the value for teaching across the institution. These projects could be progressed simultaneously and as priority areas.

128.3 Discussion

The Board raised or noted the following points in its discussion of the current status and future direction of learning and teaching at Heriot-Watt and in the context of the particular points raised by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor:

128.3.1 Retention/Academic Mentoring:

• All Schools had been putting in place a range of initiatives to improve retention, including enhancements to the mentoring system, such as more regular meetings;
• A number of Schools had invested resource in trying to find out the key contributing factors to declining retention, given that poor academic performance was not a major issue;
• It should be made clear to students, at the pre-arrival stage, the role of the academic mentor; a more consistent approach was needed across Schools;
• There was an opportunity to incorporate academic mentoring in to a number of processes, such as attendance monitoring and discussions of personal/professional development; an enhanced student system could provide the tools to facilitate such an integrated approach.
There was a strong commitment to enhance teaching and to ensure its parity with research; for example, in terms of promotion opportunities; A more proactive approach could be taken to recruit individuals on the basis of their “excellence in teaching”; The development provision for more experienced teachers should be enhanced; such additional provision could be a key factor in encouraging leadership in teaching and innovation in teaching; There were many examples of teaching excellence and innovative teaching across Heriot-Watt; yet, as had been repeatedly highlighted, the institution was not particularly effective at sharing such good practice, nor indeed embedding it.

National Student Survey (NSS) 2015: Action Plans

The Board noted that, at its meeting on 16 September 2015, it had approved a process for Schools, relevant Professional Services, the Student Union and West London College to respond to NSS-related issues. As part of this process, it had been agreed that each area should provide NSS Action Plans for consideration by the Board at its meeting on 21 October 2015.

The Board considered the NSS Action Plans, which were presented in turn, from the following:

Discipline areas within the Schools of: Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society Engineering and Physical Sciences Life Sciences Management and Languages Mathematical and Computer Sciences Textiles and Design Information Services Campus Services: Estates; Hospitality Services Registry Services: Careers Service Student Union: NSS actions were embedded within the new Strategic Plan West London College: monitored by the Management Oversight Committee

Common Issues

The Board received, as a tabled paper, a summary of the key themes at School and University level. The Board endorsed the following as topics which the Board should take forward at future meetings:

School Issues
- Clarity on assessment marking schemes
- Feedback turnaround times (2 weeks in three Schools; University policy: 3 weeks)
- Assessment deadlines
- Quality of feedback (ie terms of improving learning)
- Increased opportunities for skills development in: presentation/communication; employability
- Perceived negative impact of overseas activities (eg staff absence) – also an issue raised in ELIR
- Staff availability (related, in some cases, to above point re: absence overseas)
- Mentoring: accessibility and consistency
- Communication to students

University Issues
- Teaching timetable: smaller cohorts losing out to larger groups in terms of room allocation
- Poor condition of smaller teaching rooms
- Learning resources below student expectations and sector-practices, particularly IT
- Availability of study space, esp. in Library: series of short and medium term improvements in Library (plans for new Library from 2020)
- Lack of central system for e-exams (related to forthcoming EBS project)
- Library – particular concerns in some subjects re: services
• More group study space for increased group projects
• No fixed technology replacement cycle for PC labs
• Lack of choice and quality at food outlets
• Increased advice on further study options and on making career choices

129.3.2 The Board noted that, in response to concerns about timetabling, the Academic Registrar would prioritise timetabling as a key, initial project to be progressed through the Student Systems Revitalisation Project. P.Travill

129.4 Summary of Key Points

129.4.1 The Board noted a range of issues specific to particular disciplines, Schools or Services, which each individual responsible for the area in question agreed to take forward. In addition to the common themes identified in Minute 129.3 above, the other key issues were:

• Schools should not conduct a “mock NSS”: it was revealed that the discipline in question did not in fact conduct a “mock NSS”, but rather discussions with students around “three things you would like to be changed”. It was agreed that the phraseology should be changed to ensure that it reflected actual practice and removed any impression of undue influence on students through a “mock NSS”;

• Communicating effectively to students had emerged as a common theme, not only in terms of methods of communication, but in communicating to students what was expected of them in terms of their contribution to their learning;

• All Schools were using their Action Plans as “live” documents, with Learning and Teaching Committees providing School-level oversight of progress;

• It would be particularly useful if the Information Services’ Action Plan could be shared around Schools, as it provided an effective update on how issues related to IT, learning resources and learning technology were being addressed. It was agreed that a request should be made to the Director of Information Services and other Directors of Professional Services to provide a presentation slide of their key NSS Actions which could be slotted into School presentations and also to ask Directors for permission to circulate their Action Plans to more widely;

• Actions taken in response to NSS should be communicated effectively to students (as per the Student Survey Framework diagram), and in collaboration with the Student Union and School Officers.

129.4.2 Feedback on Assessment

The Board noted that feedback on assessment was consistently an issue across all disciplines, in spite of the wide range of measures which Schools had introduced to improve feedback. It was noted that student understanding of feedback on assessment remained an ongoing problem: examples of how some other HEI’s had addressed this were provided, as were examples of practices within Heriot-Watt. It was agreed that this issue should be incorporated into the action on improving assessment feedback which had been allocated recently to the Curriculum Working Group. It was further agreed that a Student Campaign (including School Officers) and the Learning and Teaching Matters posters could be utilised to promote student understanding of feedback.

129.5 Approval of Action Plans

The Board approved all Action Plans, with the exception of Accountancy, Economics and Finance in the School of Management and Languages, for which a re-submission was requested. B.Jackson

129.6 Next Steps

129.6.1 The Board agreed that revised, more comprehensive Action Plans should be submitted from Accountancy, Economics and Finance by 1 December 2015, for consideration by the Board at its next meeting on 9 December 2015. B.Jackson

129.6.2 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. Directors LearnTeach P.Travill S.Union
Discussion Item: Review of the Academic Management Structures

130.1 The Board noted that the present discussion item – Review of the Academic Management Structures – was intended to provide a preliminary discussion in advance of a more comprehensive review to be conducted during November and December 2015. It was also noted that the Board previously agreed that it would conduct a “one year on” review of the Academic Management Structures, which had been introduced in 2014/15, to facilitate the management of learning and teaching across all global locations and modes of study.

130.2 The Board noted that, at the present meeting, the focus was on identifying key issues for consideration in the review of the Academic Management Structures, with a view to providing a framework for wider discussion.

130.3 The Board endorsed the proposal that, since this was a “one year on” review, there was no need for a major, comprehensive review of the Academic Management Structures: such a review would be more appropriate in the context of evaluating the effectiveness of the structures in delivering transformational change across all campuses. The Board agreed, therefore, that a short online survey of Board members should be conducted, based around the initial key aims of the Academic Management Structures.

130.4 The Board noted that the questions for the online survey would be circulated for consideration by correspondence and a report on the review so far would be provided to the Board at its meeting on 9 December 2015.

Thematic Review: Framework for Technology-Enhanced Learning and Teaching

131.1 The Board noted that, at its meeting on 21 October 2015, a series of five questions had been considered, with a view to developing a framework for the first Thematic Review on Technology-Enhanced Learning and Teaching. Since several Board members had left by time of the discussion of Thematic Review, it had been agreed that the views of all members should be sought after the meeting, together with those of the VLE Management Group.

131.2 The Board noted that detailed responses had been received on five key questions, particularly question one:

- What are the key, current issues for HWU?
- What is the overall purpose of the review?
- What would the intended outcomes of the review be?
- Who should be consulted internally on the topic?
- Who should be consulted externally?

The Board received, as a tabled paper, a summary of the key themes across the five questions.

131.3 The Board noted that the review was now particularly timely, as the Principal would be taking forward a project, with external input, to effect major enhancements in the use of technology in teaching and associated pedagogical developments. It was noted that, through the involvement of the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), the Principal’s project and the Thematic Review could be integrated and progressed simultaneously.

131.4 The Board agreed that while there was a need for transformational change in educational technology and its pedagogical use and while the Board supported the objective of Heriot-Watt being seen as cutting-edge, there was a more pressing need to resolve, in the first instance, some of the long-standing, relatively minor, issues related to the current systems (as per those listed with regard to the first question What are the key, current issues for HWU?). It was noted that, although Heriot-Watt had some of the world-leading systems, these were not being used to their full potential: the University should capitalise on its unique selling points, such as its global educational model (including ALP and IDL) and its capacity for producing “professionally educated, globally employable” graduates. The Board recognised that the diversity across Schools inhibited significantly aims to utilise learning technology in a more transformational, sustained way; the lack of the required levels of support for users of learning technology was a similarly limiting factor.
The Board noted, however, that there were numerous examples of innovative practice in using technology in learning and teaching across the institution; however, these were not widely known or shared, even within Schools. It was agreed that the Chair of the Curriculum Working Group should take forward the task of producing a “map” which captured and illustrated the range of good practice in learning technology.

The Board agreed that the key themes across the five questions, as highlighted in Minute 131.2, should provide the framework for the Thematic Review, together with the additional issues highlighted in Minute 131.4. It was recognised that further issues were likely to emerge as the review got underway; these would be reported to the Board as appropriate.

The Board agreed that the arrangements for the Thematic Review on Technology-Enhanced Learning and Teaching would be taken forward as approved by the Board and in accordance with the Thematic Review Handbook, which was approved by the Board at its meeting on 21 October 2015. In addition, it was noted that there could be some modifications to the process, in view of the Principal's plans for a project on use of technology in teaching.

University Risk Register: Learning and Teaching Sections

The Board noted that, as per its Standing Agenda Items, it conducted a twice-yearly (May and November) review of the Learning and Teaching Risks within the University’s Risk Register. It was noted that the Learning and Teaching extracts had been developed by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) in conjunction with the Head of Risk and Audit Management.

The Board approved the current Learning and Teaching Risks as accurate and agreed that this should be notified to the Head of Risk and Audit Management.

Student Union Item: Report on Visit to the Dubai Campus

The Board noted that, at its meeting on 16 September 2015, it had been agreed that, as an outcome of the small scale effectiveness review, each meeting should feature an item from the Student Union. It was noted that, for the current meeting, the Student Union item was a verbal report on the recent visit to the Dubai Campus.

The Student Engagement Manager, Student Union, highlighted the following with regard to the recent visit to the Dubai Campus: training had been provided to the presidential candidates, School Officers and other student representatives on the Student Council.

Annual Monitoring and Review: Revised Procedures

The Board noted that, at its meeting on 14 October 2015, the Quality and Standards Committee approved a series of changes to the Annual Monitoring and Review process and associated guidance documents and templates, which included:

- The incorporation of the Degree Entry Programme (Dubai) and the Foundation Programme (Malaysia) into the process;
- The replacement of the Enhancement section of the School-Level Review and Enhancement Report (SRER) with the updated School Learning and Teaching Strategy and Enhancement Plan;
- The merging of the Annual Monitoring and Review Meeting and Learning and Teaching Strategy Meeting into a single Annual Discussion Meeting (separate Learning and Teaching Strategy Annual Discussion Meetings would continue to be held with relevant Professional Services).

The Board noted all relevant documentation, including an updated School Learning and Teaching Strategy and School Enhancement Plan, was due for submission on 31 January 2016. The Board agreed that the Head of Academic Quality should ensure that all Schools received the new SRER, as well as the 2014 completed version.
135 Matched Funding for Enhancement Theme Projects

The Board noted that 15 proposals had been received for consideration for funding as part of the Enhancement Theme on “Student Transitions”. It was noted that, in previous years, Schools had agreed to provide funding to match that allocated by QAA Scotland in order to ensure that the projects had more lasting impact. It was agreed that all Directors of Learning and Teaching should consult their School Management Teams to ascertain whether matched funding could be provided for the forthcoming projects.

136 Papers for Information

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

- QAA Scotland/Enhancement Committee: Focus on: Assessment and Feedback
- Summary of press releases and other information related to the UK Government Green Paper for Higher Education: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice;
- Universities Scotland Learning and Teaching Committee: Monthly Update, November 2015

136.2 The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) provided an overview of the Green Paper for Higher Education: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice, highlighting that the Board would discuss the proposals in detail at its next meeting on 9 December 2015, with a view to informing subsequent discussions at the University Executive.

137 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Learning and Teaching Board will be held on Wednesday 9 December 2015, 2.15 pm, Room 102, Postgraduate Centre. The meeting will be preceded by a meeting of the Directors of Learning and Teaching at 1.15 pm (topic: updating School Learning and Teaching Strategy and Enhancement Plans).