The Learning and Teaching Board

Minutes                   Wednesday 21 October 2015

Present:    Professor J W Sawkins (Chair)

Professor S J Dewar    Ms D McCaig
Professor L Galloway    Professor K J McCullough
Dr I J Glen            Professor J M Ritchie
Professor J Hansen    Dr S Thomas
Ms H Frances             Mr P Travill
Dr W Jackson             Dr M King (Clerk)

In attendance
Ms E J Bailey              Dr G F Menzies
Mr R W McGookin            Mr M Spence

Apologies:    Professor T M Chrisp    Dr M A Storey

106 Welcome and Apologies

106.1 The Chair welcomed to the meeting: Dr G F Menzies, as deputy for the Director of Learning and Teaching, School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society; Mr M Spence, Director of Marketing and Communications; Mr R W McGookin, Director of Planning; Ms E J Bailey, Planning Manager.

106.2 Apologies for absence were as recorded above.

107 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Board approved the Minutes of the meeting of 16 September 2015.

108 Matters Arising Not Otherwise on the Agenda

108.1 The Board noted the report on matters arising from the meeting on 16 September 2015.

108.2 Contingency Funding – Edinburgh Campus (Minute 87.2): Student Views

The Board noted the Student Union had canvassed the views of students on three of the refurbished rooms at the Edinburgh Campus: responses indicated less enthusiasm than had been expected. Students were, however, positive about the James Watt Study Hub, making full use of its facilities and had recommended that more tables should be provided in the central area. 

108.3 Survey of Learning and Teaching Board Effectiveness (Minute 96)

The Board noted that a proposal would be going to the University Executive to include three of the Boards of the University Executive (LTB, RKEB and ISB) in the forthcoming effectiveness review of the Senate and its Committees.

109 Learning and Teaching Strategy: Updated Learning and Teaching Strategy Operational Plan and Timeline

The Board noted that the revised Learning and Teaching Strategy Operational Plan and Timeline had been circulated to Board members. It was emphasised that Schools and relevant Professional Services should revise their own Learning and Teaching Strategies and Enhancement Plans to ensure that these were fully aligned with the updated Learning and Teaching Strategy Operational Plan and Timeline, 2015/16.
Learning and Teaching Strategy: Report from the Curriculum Working Group

110.1 The Board noted that the Curriculum Working Group met for the first time on 23 July 2015: discussion focused on the HWU Graduate Attributes, which had been identified by the Learning and Teaching Board as the key, initial priority for the Group (and also highlighted in the ELIR Technical Report). It was noted that a report, and a series of recommendations, had been provided to the Board for consideration:

- Graduate Attributes: Raising Awareness/Recommendations
- Plan for Graduate Attributes

110.2 The Board endorsed the plan for Graduate Attributes and endorsed the six recommendations, specifying the action in each case.

110.3 Recommendation 1: Awareness Campaign for Graduate Attributes

The Board agreed that there should be a raising-awareness campaign for Graduate Attributes; these should be part of the HWU brand, and should be familiar to everyone engaged in recruitment and in learning and teaching.

The Board agreed that this action should be taken forward by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), the Head of Academic Quality and the Quality Enhancement Officer, in collaboration with the Director of Marketing and Communications.

110.4 Recommendation 2: Mapping Exercise

The Board agreed that any mapping exercise should not be burdensome to Schools and should not be template-based, rather it should be useful to Schools and aid them in identifying where and how Graduate Attributes were embedded. It was proposed that this mapping could be at the programme, rather than course, level.

The Board agreed that this action be taken forward by the Chair of the Curriculum Working Group.

110.5 Recommendation 3: Communication Strategy

The Board agreed that there was a need for a communication plan, which would help staff in Schools and Professional Services and the Student Union to communicate the Graduate Attributes to students. It was agreed that the actions related to communication should be combined with those related to awareness-raising in order to ensure a co-ordinated, more efficient approach.

The Board agreed that this action should be taken forward by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching), the Head of Academic Quality and the Quality Enhancement Officer, in collaboration with the Director of Marketing and Communications.

110.6 Recommendation 4: Good Practice Strategy

The Board agreed that a good practice strategy should be progressed, which would incorporate the numerous examples across Schools, Professional Services (particularly the Careers Services) and the Student Union of current activities related to the Graduate Attributes.

The Board agreed that this action should be taken forward by the Academic Registrar.

110.7 Recommendation 5: Quality Assurance Procedures

The Board agreed that Graduate Attributes should become part of the University's approval, monitoring and review procedures, and processes, templates etc should be re-designed to reflect this.

The Board agreed that this should be taken forward by the Academic Registrar, the Head of Academic Quality and the Head of Registry Operations.
Recommendation 6: Reflective Tool for Students

The Board agreed that an online system (eg an “app” or student portal) should be developed to enable students to keep an ongoing record of their acquisition and development of Graduate Attributes; this would also enable students to reflect on their progress and to take ownership for their own learning and development. It was agreed that this Graduate Attributes Development Record could be used as a basis for discussion in mentor meetings. It was noted that the Student Union had a similar system in place for volunteering and that some Schools had developed, or were planning, the same sort of e-PDP for Graduate Attributes. It was further noted that the forthcoming student systems revitalisation project could provide an opportunity to develop an institution-wide solution, linking in with alumni, so that students could continue to use their record post-graduation.

The Board agreed that this should be taken forward by the Academic Registrar and the Head of the Careers Service.

Summary

The Board agreed that all actions should be progressed in accordance with the timescales specified in the Graduate Attributes Plan. The Board expressed its thanks to the Chair of the Curriculum Working Group, the Quality Enhancement Officer and all members of the Curriculum Working Group for developing the recommendations and the plan.

Learning and Teaching Board Committees and Groups

The Board noted that, with Chairs and Clerks now in place, the meeting dates of the Board, Committees and Groups had been finalised; meetings had been arranged to facilitate reporting to “parent” committees.

Learning and Teaching Key Performance Indicators 2015

The Board noted that, as per its Standing Agenda Items, it considered at each October meeting, the updated University Learning and Teaching Key Performance Indicators, which had been produced by the Planning Manager. It was noted that the University Learning and Teaching KPI's formed the basis of the Academic Performance data and the core statistics for the Annual Monitoring and Review process. The core categories continued to be: Entry Scores; Widening Access; Retention/Progression; Student Satisfaction; Graduate Employment.

The Board received, as a tabled paper, Learning and Teaching Key Performance Indicators 2015, noting that these would be considered by the University Executive and the Court in due course.

The Planning Manager, Planning Office, provided a presentation on the Learning and Teaching Key Performance Indicators 2015. The key topics and points related to the presentation were as follows:

- entry scores had risen again, placing HWU above the UK average, the Scottish average and the pre-1992 average;
- HWU had exceeded its strategic target for widening access in numbers of SIMD40 students;
- student satisfaction: there had been an improvement in UK position and HWU was back on target due to NSS2015 results;
- graduate employment: HWU continued to perform significantly above the UK average in graduate-level employment.

Retention/Progression

The Planning Manager provided a focused presentation on retention/progression, highlighting that the data showed an unexpected worsening position (10.9%), with there being a significant decline in the period between end of July and end of September 2015. The following key points were highlighted:
• The University had not maintained its improved retention levels of the last two years: there had been a decline across four of the five Schools, with a significant decline in two Schools in particular;
• There were three key groups of students in which the decline had been particularly marked: SIMD40 (17%); 21 and over (18%); overseas fee (15%);
• The trend data to 31 March had shown that the University was on target to maintain its improved levels;
• There was no obvious explanation as to why there had been a significant dip in the period between end of July and end of September: late enrolments had not been identified as a factor;
• There had been improvements at the Dubai Campus in retention/progression, where late enrolments had been an initial factor in a temporary decline;
• The Red-Amber-Green Summary, which had been produced for Annual Monitoring and Review, showed lagging indicators, as it related to 2013/14 entrants; HESA aimed to provide more timely data, so that in due course the UK comparative information would be more current.

112.5.2 The Board noted that the decline in SIMD40 students would not, at this stage, have negative impact on the University's special funding from the Scottish Funding Council.

112.5.3 The Board noted that the Planning Manager would circulate more detailed retention/progression data to Schools, enabling them to drill down to the level of individual students who had withdrawn. It was further noted that the Planning Manager would provide data from HEI's comparable to Heriot-Watt, which had significantly better retention rates.

112.6 Acknowledgements

The Board expressed its sincere gratitude to the Planning Manager for all her significant efforts in continuing to improve the Learning and Teaching KPI's, particularly in providing such comprehensive, yet easily accessible data. The Board noted especially how useful and invaluable the data was informing action-planning at the School level and policy development at the institutional level. It was further noted how timely the publication of the data was, in that the subject-based data would be circulated simultaneously for Annual Monitoring and Review, thereby enabling Schools to combine their AMR reflections with developing their action plans particular KPI's.

113 SFC-HWU Outcome Agreement

113.1 The Board noted that, as per its Standing Agenda Items, it considered at each October meeting, the updated HWU-SFC Outcome Agreement, which was produced by the Director of Planning. It was noted that the University was currently engaged in producing its Scottish Funding Council Outcome Agreement for 2016/17: since this was the third year of a three-year cycle, it was expected that the final report would contain only minor updates.

113.2 The Director of Planning provided an overview of the HWU-SFC Outcome Agreement, highlighting the following:

• The existing priorities for learning and teaching continued to be: widening access; retention/progression; skills; graduate employment;
• HWU had been regarded as exemplary by the SFC and had secured additional funding; at this stage, there were no concerns regarding the security of this funding in spite of the recent decline in retention/progression; although there could be a future clawback if there was no evidence that the University had improved its position;
• There was a renewed emphasis on gender balance, and this was an area where HWU continued to perform unsatisfactorily in some areas.

113.3 The Board noted that a final draft of the updated HWU-SFC Outcome Agreement would be produced by the end of 2105; Board members should provide any comments to the Director of Planning in the intervening period. It was agreed that the finalised update should be circulated by the Director of Planning to Board members for information.
114.1 The Board noted that at the second, and final, meeting of the Retention Working Group on 8 September 2015, the Group had agreed a series of Four Key Principles of a Retention Strategy for Heriot-Watt University, which had been shaped around the concepts of a “framework for student engagement” and “retention as everyone’s responsibility”. It was also noted that the Group had agreed that, critical to the success of the Retention Strategy, was the need for clarifying, and promoting consistent communications on, the “HWU Brand”/the essence of HWU, and the need for creating an identifiable HWU Identity and HWU Community around this.

114.2 The Board endorsed the Four Key Principles of a Retention Strategy for Heriot-Watt University as follows:

- A strong sense of identity, belonging and community amongst students is a major factor in improving retention at Heriot-Watt University. As such, student retention is a responsibility of the whole University community.

- Retaining students within the University is a higher priority than retaining students within any individual School/discipline area, which carries the implications that there will be no unnecessary impediments to students seeking to change programmes and that all areas of the University will act together in a collaborative and integrated manner to address retention issues.

- Improving student retention must be widely embedded in University processes and functions. There will be on-going identification and development of new opportunities to improve student retention added to the Retention Strategy and its associated Operational Plan as appropriate.

- The Retention Strategy and its associated Operational Plan aim to improving the student experience across the whole HWU community, while also targeting specific areas, groups or variables which are known to impact on retention.

114.3 Removing Barriers to Inter-School Transfers

114.3.1 The Board noted that, subsequent to the meeting of the Retention Working Group, a recommendation had been made that inter-School barriers to transfers should be removed in order to retain students who might otherwise be at risk of leaving the University, namely:

*If a student (specifically Scottish/EU) wishes to transfer between Schools and it is agreed by the receiving School that the student is academically qualified to do so, then the Planning Office should be notified (in addition to other relevant parties) so that the capped quotas of the two Schools can be adjusted such that the limit on numbers is not an issue, nor an impediment to transfer.*

114.3.2 The Board endorsed the above recommendation, agreeing that the statement should be incorporated into a review of the current policy and procedures on inter-School transfers. It was further agreed that the processes involving the Student Induction and Transition Office in advising students on inter-School transfers should likewise be included in the review. It was agreed that this review should be taken forward by the Academic Registrar.

114.4 Future Action on Retention

114.4.1 The Board considered and agreed a series of immediate actions related to retention in order to address the University’s worsening position, primarily related to the establishment of a new Retention Working Group, which would report to the Board:

- Membership would comprise: Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching); Academic Registrar; Directors of Learning and Teaching in the Schools Textiles and Design and in Life Sciences; Director of Administration in the School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences; Planning Manager; Student Induction and Transition Manager;

- The Group would focus on addressing a series of short-term measures, particularly: reviewing academic mentoring and identifying courses with a high failure rates;

- The outcomes were likely to result in a more managed approach, with less opportunity
114.4.2 Development of an institution-wide Retention Strategy and Operational Plan would continue, but would be deferred pending further action on the issues highlighted above.

115 Discussion Item: Redefining the Heriot-Watt Brand

115.1 The Board noted that the present discussion item – *Redefining the Heriot-Watt Brand* - followed on from a similar presentation and discussion at the University Executive’s meeting on 24 September 2015. The Director of Marketing and Communications provided a presentation, inviting the Board to consider the following questions from a learning and teaching perspective:

- Does the boilerplate statement describe our university?
- Does it describe the Heriot-Watt purpose to the world?
- How would you improve it?

115.2 The Board noted that the boilerplate, which was currently being revised in response to feedback, would comprise a series of key messages about Heriot-Watt which would be communicated to all stakeholders.

115.3 The Board raised or noted the following points in its discussion of the proposals for *Redefining the Heriot-Watt Brand*:

- The HWU Brand needed to emphasise clearly the Four HWU Graduate Attributes: Specialist, Creative, Professional, Global;  

M.Spence

- There should be more focus on the University’s heritage;
- The highlighting of discipline areas covered by the University should be more inclusive, although it was recognised that the emphasis was on what was distinctive about Heriot-Watt;
- The statement should include reference to “people”, ie to the staff of the institution;
- There were no references to “excellence” or “research-informed”;
- In the consultation on the Graduate Attributes, “applied” had been seen as too closely associated with vocational types of provision and had been removed as one of the core HWU Graduate Attributes.

115.4 The Board noted that a further, revised version of the boiler statement would be considered at the Leadership Forum meeting on 22 October 2015.

116 Thematic Review Handbook and Proposal for First Theme

116.1 The Board noted that, at its meeting on 16 September 2015, the process for Thematic Review, including the five-year schedule of topics, had been approved. It was noted that the process for Thematic Review had been outlined in detail in a Handbook, which had been submitted for the Board’s consideration and approval. It was further noted that, in order to frame the first review topic, which would be *Technology-Enhanced Learning and Teaching*, a series of questions had been identified for the Board to discuss.

116.2 The Board considered and approved the Thematic Review Handbook.

116.3 Framework for Thematic Review Topic on *Technology-Enhanced Learning and Teaching*

116.3.1 The Board considered five questions which had been identified as key to developing the framework for the first review topic.

- 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?

116.3.2 The Board identified a range of issues to be considered, such as: technology being
The Board agreed that the intended outcomes should be a series of recommendations which would address the above issues, particularly the need for a Learning and Teaching Technology Strategy. The Board also highlighted a range of groups and individuals across the University for inclusion in the consultation, such as Schools, Professional Services and students. It was agreed that nominations for external review members should be forwarded to the Clerk.

116.3.3 The Board noted that the outcomes of the Thematic Review process would be reported to the University Executive, particularly as there could be resourcing issues; although it was noted that a more co-ordinated approach across the institution was likely to result in improved efficiencies and, thereby, cost-savings.

117 Proposed List of Discussion Items 2015/16

117.1 The Board noted that it had previously 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. It was noted that, as a consequence, a proposed list of Discussion Items had been produced from a review of both internal and external learning and teaching priorities and developments.

117.2 The Board agreed to defer consideration of the list of discussion items, pending the presentation by the Principal at the next meeting on 11 November 2015, on the basis that there might be particular areas which the Principal had highlighted and which would become priority areas for the Board to consider.

118 Report from the Student Learning Experience Committee

118.1 The Board noted that, as per its Standing Agenda Items, the Minutes of the Student Learning Experience Committee on 16 September 2015 had been provided for consideration. In addition, three specific items had been highlighted:

- Student Learning Experience Committee Operational Plan 2015/16
- Annual Survey and Student Panel
- Revised Framework for Developing Academic Policy

118.2 The Board noted the arrangements for the learning and teaching aspects of the Annual Survey, and that the Director of Learning and Teaching in the School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences would be the Board’s representative on the working group.

118.3 The Board approved the Committee’s Operational Plan 2015/16.

118.4 The Board approved the revised Framework for Developing Academic Policy, noting that a section on the developing underpinning procedures had been added to the framework to provide a consistent approach. It was noted that the policy focused only on learning and teaching policies, and not research policies; as a consequence, it was agreed that the document should be renamed as the “Framework for Developing Learning and Teaching Policy” and the Academic Policy Bank should likewise be renamed.

119 Learning Environment Committee and Learning Spaces Management Group: Mode of Operation

The Board considered and approved a proposal from the Chairs of the Learning Environment Committee and Learning Spaces Management Group regarding the process by which the LSMG would interact with the developments of learning and spaces which were being planned and progressed by Campus Services.

120 Report from the Centre for Academic Leadership and Development: Learning and Teaching

The Board considered, as part of its Standing Agenda Items, the recent update report from
the Centre for Academic Leadership and Development in relation to learning and teaching developments. It was noted that the report covered the following topics: PG CAP; LEADS; International Learning and Teaching Activities (including Dubai, Malaysia and GlobalPD); Publicity and Promotion; Learning and Teaching Strategy and ELIR.

121 **Student Union: Strategic Plan**

121.1 The Board noted that, at its meeting on 16 September 2015, it had been agreed that, as an outcome of the smallscale 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 the new Student Union Strategic Plan.

121.2 The President of the Student Union highlighted that the new Plan was based around a series of four overarching goals, with very clear targets, and had been developed in consultation with current students. The Board emphasised the importance of partnership working with the Union as a means of helping the Student Union achieve its targets; the Learning and Teaching Matters poster campaign could likewise be utilised.

121.3 The Board commended the Student Union on the new Plan, particularly its clarity of presentation and its ambitious targets. It was noted that members could request a copy of the brochure version of the Plan from the Student Union.

122 **Report from the Learning and Teaching Symposium**

122.1 The Board noted that the Centre for Academic Leadership and Development held the annual Learning and Teaching Symposium on 7 October 2015, which had featured a closing address from the Principal and external speakers from the University of Edinburgh on the theme of “Students as Co-Creators”. It was noted that, as on previous occasions, the Symposium also provided an opportunity to launch a call for new projects to be funded as part of the national Enhancement Theme, “Student Transitions”.

122.2 The Board noted that the Symposium posters were displayed on the Bridge Link at the Edinburgh Campus. It was agreed that, in view of the low attendance, there should be a much more active publicity campaign for future events, and, in particular, publicity targeted at improving School attendance.

122.3 The Board agreed that a request should be made to QAA Scotland to extend the deadline for Enhancement Themes projects, so that these could be continued over the summer period.

123 **Papers for Information**

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

- Universities Scotland Learning and Teaching Committee: Monthly Updates, September 2015 and October 2015

124 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Learning and Teaching Board will be held on Wednesday 11 November 2015, 1.15 pm, Anderson Room, Library. The meeting will be followed by a meeting of the Student Learning Experience Committee at 3.15 pm. The Board noted that the Principal would present his initial views on learning and teaching at the next meeting, and there would be an opportunity to demonstrate to the Principal the achievements of the Board to date.