

**Board of Studies
24th Meeting**

29th May 2008, Woburn House, Tavistock Square, London

Minutes

Present

Amanda Ashley, Nigel Beasley, Louise Cole (minutes), Adam Cresswell, Janet Flexney, Catherine Lillie, William Mortimer, Ann Morton (Chair), Alison Robinson, Joyce Tate, Helen Thomas, Bob Westaway

Apologies

Nick Allen, Terry Bransbury, Marion Cartwright, Mike Miller, Mariken Schipper

01.24 Minutes

Confirmed: minutes of the previous meeting

Matters Arising:

- (1) (02.23) The changes to the Terms of Reference will need to be reviewed in the light of the new AUA governance structure.
- (2) (04.23) The wording on guidance relating to feedback has been changed and will feature in the Programme Handbook for the next academic year.
- (3) (05.23) The amendments to the Assessment Extension Guidelines had been made and approved by Chair's Action.
- (4) (06.23) Felix Mussell in the AUA National Office was currently putting together a proposal relating to incentives for mentors which will report to the Board of Trustees.
- (5) (07.23) The recommended changes were made to the wording in the Study Skills Guidance and will be incorporated in the prospectus. The prospectus will be circulated by email to the members of the Board for comment.
- (6) (09.23) The AUA office are currently implementing a new membership database system. Once this is fully in place, the office will be able to ascertain which VLE will be most suitable.
- (7) (11.23-1) The Programme Manager had spoken to the Conference Co-ordinator to ensure that conference sessions relating to the Pg Cert do not clash at the 2009 conference.
- (8) (11.23-2) The recommended wordcount had been added to assessment guidelines.
- (9) (11.23-3) The AUA Administrator had contacted mentors who had either never been allocated a mentee, or had not had a mentee for some time. The majority of them wanted to continue to be a mentor but would like some refresher training. It was recognised that in most cases, the mentor did not require training on the mentor role, but only a short session on the changes to the programme. A few mentors (in Scotland) would like refresher training, but only

if they were guaranteed a mentee. The Board agreed that it would only be possible to ask them to attend a mentor refresher course as soon as possible after being allocated a mentee, as we cannot guarantee mentee allocation. There were also some mentors who had not responded to the communication and the Board requested for them to be contacted one last time. If there continued to be no response, they should be removed from the mentor list.

Action: Programme Manager/National Office

02.24 Terms of Reference and Membership

Received:

- the Terms of Reference of the Board
- the current membership of the Board

Noted:

- (1) A term relating to receiving recommendations/updates from the Programme Management Team should be added.
- (2) There is no clear reporting structure for BoS under the new AUA Governance structure, and consequently it was proposed that the BoS Chair become an ex-officio member of the Board of Trustees. Similarly, it was judged important to have an Academic Registrar role on the Board .
- (3) Nick Allen commenced as a new Mentor representative and Mariken Schipper as Participant representative on 1 May 2008.
- (4) There was a vacancy for the Director of Postgraduate Study on the Board.
- (5) There was a vacancy for the trainer representative on the Board, however, there were already members of the training team on the Board in other roles.

Resolved:

- (1) It would be recommended to Board of Trustees that the Chair of BoS become an ex-officio member of the Board of Trustees so that there is a clear reporting structure.
- (2) It would be recommended to the Board of Trustees that an Academic Registrar position be added to the BoS membership.
- (3) The National Office would identify a number of potential candidates from the membership to approach about the vacancy for the Director of Postgraduate Study.

Action: Programme Manager/National Office

03.24 Statistical Summary

- (1) **Received:** a Statistical Summary of recruitment, progression, and retention

Noted:

- (1) Analysis by age on withdrawal showed no obvious trends. However, it would be interesting to see what the average age of participants was.
- (2) Overall, the statistical summary did not throw up any peculiarities which was reassuring. The fact that there were few "course not as envisaged" responses was also encouraging.
- (3) Further analysis on when a participant withdraws from the programme would be useful e.g. after PDP, etc.
- (4) The Board agreed that the Statistical Summary should be reported to BoS on an annual basis only.

Resolved:

- (1) Further statistical analysis on the average age of participants and also the point at which participants withdraw should be incorporated in the report to BoS.

Action: Programme Manager/National Office

04.24 Assessment

Received: an oral report from the Chair of the Assessment Board

Reported:

- (1) In summary, the following recommendations to the Open University were made:

- a) 2007/08 Round 2

11 submissions in the first instance:

- 5 passed
- 1 passed major assignment only
- 1 passed portfolio only
- 2 referred on portfolio
- 1 referred on major assignment
- 1 referred on both elements

No resubmissions

- b) PGC37

12 knowledge assignments, 8 Code of Professional Standards assignments and 1 portfolio from 11 participants submitted in the first instance:

- 9 knowledge assignments passed; 3 were referred
- 7 Code of Professional Standards assignments passed; 1 was referred
- 1 portfolio passed

2 knowledge assignments were resubmitted and failed.

Therefore 1 participant passed overall, 1 participant failed overall and 9 participants continue to next elements.

- c) PGC38

40 knowledge assignments from 21 participants submitted in the first instance:

- 27 assignments passed
- 13 assignments referred

All participants continue to next elements.

- (2) There had been a high volume of papers to assess on this round. The Programme Manager confirmed that an advertisement for new assessors had recently been circulated which should help ease the workload in future.
- (3) In general, the standard of passes for those on the new regulations had improved. However, many are still being too descriptive, not answering the question, not providing adequate evidence and/or relying too much on internal documentation and websites.
- (4) It had been noted that participants from smaller or newer institutions did not seem to perform so well and the office should monitor this.
- (5) The External Assessors felt that the assessments needed to have more structure to them, and recommended that the guidelines emphasise the use of subheadings. They considered internal assessor feedback to be constructive and

appropriate to the first stage of a M level programme.

- (6) The External Assessors recommended that one referencing system (e.g. the Harvard system) be used.
- (7) The issue of compensation/condonement had been discussed at the Assessment Board in relation to the first four marking criteria (e.g. word length, spelling, referencing). The Board felt that it was important to look at similar programmes to see what they do, and to what extent assessors are permitted to exercise their discretion in this area.

Resolved:

- (1) The office should monitor the number of fails across the different marking criteria to enable the Board to make an informed decision on whether further action is required.

Action: Programme Manager/National Office

05.24 Report from the Equality Advisory Group

Received: a report from the Equality Advisory Group

Noted:

- (1) The suggested wording provided by EAG for Section 4 "Disability Policy" statement 4.1 was approved by the Board.
- (2) The suggestion that AUA consider extending equality monitoring was a matter for AUA and the Board of Trustees. The Executive Director confirmed that the membership database currently being implemented would incorporate these suggestions.
- (3) With reference to the point on policy on disclosure of information, the Programme Manager confirmed that OU documentation is currently sent to participants.

Resolved:

- (1) The Board agreed that the current E0 form should be altered to include the HESA categories suggested (in the long term the new AUA membership database would also incorporate these categories).

Action: Programme Manager

06.24 Refund Procedure

Received: a refund procedure outline

Resolved:

- (1) It was agreed that this policy should be considered by the Board of Trustees. Therefore amendments to the refund procedure should be made before it goes to Board of Trustees for a decision.

Action: Programme Manager

07.24 Revalidation

Received: an oral report from the Programme Manager

Noted:

- (1) The revalidation event will take place 29-30 April 2009. There will be a planning day in July in order to critically appraise the programme which will report to BoS in September.
- (2) All the documentation should be ready for December for the preliminary revalidation panel and any changes recommended can be incorporated for the

January BoS.

- (3) The revalidation team will include the PMT (Ann Morton, Nigel Beasley, Catherine Lillie, William Locke and Jo Kan). William Mortimer, Bob Westaway and Amanda Ashley also volunteered to participate in the group.

Resolved:

- (1) The Programme Manager would check with the OU who needs to attend the revalidation meeting so that those involved can note in their diaries. A date should be identified for the preliminary meeting as soon as possible.

Action: Programme Manager

08.24 Reports

(1) **BCs representative**

Noted:

- The BC/RC representative was unable to attend, however, had communicated via email that the agenda appeared to deal with their concerns.

Reports from -

(2) **Participants representative**

Reported:

- (a) The following feedback was reported:
- (i) The participants' response to a proposed third Study Day had not been enthusiastic, however they considered the Development Days to be important and should be continued.
 - (ii) Participants had noted difficulties in accessing relevant texts.
 - (iii) The participants wanted to know if there was any rationale behind having to submit two pieces of work at the same time.
 - (iv) Participants had asked about the possibility of developing an online forum for those on the programme. In addition, they would like to have access to benchmark essays online.
 - (v) One participant had reported experiencing difficulties with the programme because they did not work in an HEI.
- (b) In response to the participant concerns:
- (i) It was acknowledged that access to appropriate texts would be addressed in the long term through the new IT system currently being implemented. In addition, the suggested online forum would be possible with the new web portal. However, both these issues could only be addressed after the new system had been fully implemented.
 - (ii) The Programme Management Team were unaware of any academic reason for having to submit two pieces of work at the same time, other than the time requirement for assessors to mark and report back to the Assessment Board. It was agreed that the Programme Manager should look into the timing of assessments with relation to Assessment Board to ensure that they are relevant to the new programme.
 - (iii) The Programme Manager confirmed that benchmarking essays would shortly be made available online.
 - (iv) As participants are not required to write about their organisation, those who work outside of HEIs (e.g. funding bodies) should not experience any particular difficulties on the programme. Moreover, the

Board pointed out that such participants would benefit from looking beyond their own organisation to gain a broader view of the sector and this should be part of the motivation for doing the course. It was agreed that this issue should be treated on a case by case basis, such that when candidates from outside HEIs apply to the course, the possibility of tailoring their assessments to suit their needs more closely should be raised.

Action: Programme Manager/National Office

(3) **Mentor Representative**

Reported:

- (a) The following feedback was reported:
- (i) Mentors were concerned that the turnaround time between submitting assessments and receiving feedback was too long. The handbook states a turnaround time of 8 weeks, but many participants had waited 10-11 weeks.
 - (ii) Some mentors disagreed with the decision to not provide a mark on formative assignment.
 - (iii) There had been considerable activity on the mentor forum regarding what was felt to be unhelpful feedback on participant assignments. It was felt that some comments were harsh and actually demoralised participants, as opposed to providing constructive comment.
 - (iv) Mentors had expressed some concern about the availability of feedback on the common problem areas that assessors encountered.
 - (v) There had been a request for an update on obtaining access to an example of an assessment relating to the AUA CoPS.
- (b) In response to the concerns raised:
- (i) The Programme Manager explained that in the majority of cases the turnaround time was within 8 weeks. The few cases where it took longer were due to markers resolving discrepancies in marking and also the larger volume of assignments they had recently experienced. The Board recognised that the situation needed to be resolved. In an effort to rectify this problem, an advertisement for more assessors was currently out and assessors had been asked to inform the office if they were likely to be unable to meet the turnaround time so that the Programme Manager can inform the participants involved. It was agreed that in the meantime, the Programme Manager should circulate an email to participants stating that the BoS recognised that there had been some problems and were endeavouring to rectify them.
 - (ii) The Board accepted that there was an issue with the feedback provided by some assessors. However, the External Examiners had consistently reported that they found the feedback to be positive and helpful. It was considered that the problem was likely to be one of style. The current marking criteria consist of 'Excellent/Good/Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory' which the Board agreed were highly emotive words which could potentially demoralise participants. It was suggested that these marking criteria be altered to 'Pass' and 'Refer'. It was also suggested that the box size for feedback on the proforma may promote the use of somewhat "clipped" language. The addition of a free text box would permit narrative with

advice on how to improve.

- (iii) It was agreed that an assessment review group should be set up to address these issues, which should include mentor representatives and an academic advisor. Any actions taken from this should be in place for Spring 2009 when the next cohort would be submitting their first assignment. William Mortimer and Catherine Lillie would liaise to prepare an email communication informing participants and mentors that this issue was being reviewed as part of ongoing process enhancement. The office would identify candidates for the review group and contact them.
- (iv) The Programme Manager confirmed that examiners' common areas of feedback was available online and had been sent to participants.
- (v) The Programme Manager was preparing guidance for mentors in relation to the reflective statement.

Action: Programme Management Team/William Mortimer

09.24 Programme Management Team

Received: an update from the Programme Management Team

Reported:

- (1) There was no business to report.

10.24 Other Business

Noted:

- (1) The Training Team had discussed changes to Study Day Two in order to strengthen writing skills, including amending the Assignment Writing exercise and looking at participants writing skills.

Resolved: The proposals for changes to the training were approved by the Board.

11.24 Dates of next meetings

- 25th meeting: 18th September 2008, Manchester
- 26th meeting: 29th January 2009, London