

**Board of Studies
19th Meeting**

14 September 2006, University of Manchester

Minutes

Present

Dr Ann Morton (in the Chair)
Mrs Terry Bransbury, Mr Simon Eades, Ms Janet Flexney, Mr Matthew McClelland (Secretary),
Mr Mike Miller, Mr William Mortimer, Mrs Joyce Tate, Mr Bob Westaway,

Apologies

Mrs Amanda Ashley, Dr Nigel Beasley, Mrs Sue Beech, Mr Hugh Jones, Ms Helen Thomas, Mrs
Alison Robinson

01.19 Minutes

Confirmed: minutes of the previous meeting, with minor amendments.

Matters arising:

- (1) (03.18.iv) A letter regarding articulation arrangements had been sent to Professor Sir David Watson, Director of the Institute of Education's MBA (HEM) and a response was awaited.
- (2) (03.18.v) From 2006-07, graduate destination data would be collected.
- (3) (04.18.vi) The analysis of assessment feedback had been completed and was being prepared for publication.
- (4) (08.18.iv) As soon as the programme handbook was finalised, a copy would be sent to Chair, Equality Advisory Group for comment.
- (5) (08.18vi) The Review Group would report on the revalidation process in due course.
- (6) (10.18.2.iv) Academic Transcripts had been implemented.
- (7) (10.18.3.xvii) All participants had been notified of the change to the assessment regulations.
- (8) (10.18.3.xxii) The Professional Development Committee had rejected the proposal to introduce an intermediary award.

02.19 Terms of reference and membership

Received:

- the terms of reference of the Board
- the current membership of the Board

Noted:

- (1) Mr Simon Eades, the new participant representative, was welcomed to the meeting.
- (2) Mr William Mortimer had agreed to become Vice-Chair.
- (3) Mr Martin Hodkinson had resigned from the Board. Members thanked him for his input.
- (4) Ms Helen Thomas had been nominated to the Board as a representative of the Higher Education Academy.

03.19 Assessment

Received:

- the minutes of the last meeting of the Assessment Board
- reports from the assessor representatives

Reported:

- (1) The following recommendations had been made to the Open University:
 - (a) Submissions in the first instance (13):
 - Awards: 8
 - Referrals (major assignment): 3
 - Referrals (portfolio): 1
 - Referrals (both): 1
 - (b) Resubmissions (2)
 - Awards: 2
- (2) One candidate had successfully appealed on the grounds of mitigating circumstances and would be allowed to resubmit a major assignment for a second time.
- (3) The standard of work submitted had not improved significantly and the following general criticisms had been made:
 - (a) insufficient evidence of analysis, evaluation, and reflection, particularly in minor assignments;
 - (b) insufficient range and quantity of reading, and reliance on non-academic sources;
 - (c) insufficient personal reflection on the Code of Professional Standards.

Noted:

- (1) Achieving M level standard in 1000 words was a challenging task which some candidates had achieved through a narrow interpretation of the assignment titles. This was an ingenious strategy, although assessors stressed in their feedback that a broader coverage was required in the major assignment.
- (2) With the approval of the Open University, it would be possible to further amend the word limit and balance of summative assessment for cohorts which had started the programme during or before 2005-06. At present, it was not necessary to do so, although the situation would be kept under review.

04.19 External Examiner's Report

Received:

- the External Examiner's report for 2005-06
- the draft formal response

Reported:

- (1) The External Examiner had confirmed that the standards operated by the Assessment Board were appropriate, as were the quality of marking and the administration of the assessment process.
- (2) Having reviewed the draft programme handbook, the External Examiner supported the general structure of the curriculum from 2006-07 and was impressed by the coverage and succinctness of the handbook.
- (3) The External Examiner commented on the fact that many candidates produced work at or around the pass / fail threshold, and attributed the variety in performance to: pressure of work; entry characteristics; mentors' limited role in supporting academic development.

Noted:

- (1) Personal and professional pressures were a significant issue for participants and a number of support mechanisms existed to mitigate their impact. However, this area remained largely outwith AUA's control.
- (2) AUA and the Board were committed to an open access policy. The proportion of participants admitted in accordance with the non-standard entry criteria was nonetheless relatively low, and efforts were made to ensure that those participants accessed additional support and training through their own institutions.
- (3) Extensive guidance had been issued to clarify the mentor's role. Whilst this was seen as supporting primarily the professional aspects of the programme and providing critical friendship, there was nonetheless a number of constructive ways of engaging in developmental dialogue about standards and assessment.

Resolved:

- (1) From 2006-07, summative assessment of the knowledge component should consist of three assignments of 3000 words.
- (2) Mentors should be sent details of key issues raised through the assessment process with suggested topics for discussion with participants.
- (3) The formal response to the External Examiner was approved with minor amendments.

Action: Secretary

05.19 Mentor, Participant, and Graduate Surveys**Received:**

- the summary report of the annual participant and mentor questionnaire
- the preliminary report of a survey of graduates

(1) Participant and Mentor Surveys**Noted:**

- (a) Generally, the survey results were positive and satisfaction targets had been met in most instances.
- (b) High proportions of mentors and participants declared themselves 'unable to say' in relation to the mentor coordinator and jiscmail

discussion lists. As the former existed to resolve problems, this was seen as a positive outcome. The latter remained underused but were nonetheless a useful resource for those who did make use of them.

- (c) A surprisingly high proportion of participants and mentors declared themselves 'unable to say' in relation to guidance notes. This was surprising because all guidance notes had been circulated by email, posted on the website, and distributed at training events.
- (d) Participants rated the mentoring relationship very highly, although access to mentors was an issue for some. This was reflected in feedback from mentors who found mentoring very rewarding, were clear about the role, and confident of providing good advice, but, in some instances, had insufficient time to devote to mentoring.

(2) **Graduate Survey**

Noted:

- (a) The survey had been carried out by Celia Whitchurch to inform her research and provide data on the programme. A full report would be available soon.
- (b) The programme is valued by new entrants because it allows them to contextualise current roles in the HE policy environment. It was sometimes used to build confidence in relation to particular skills and the opportunity to reflect on practice in a structured way was appreciated.
- (c) Further links to other programme of study and professional development would be appreciated.

06.19 Training

Received:

- the summary evaluation of training in 2005-06
- a report from the trainer representative

Noted:

- (1) The new training programme which had been introduced in 2005-06 had exceeded all its delivery targets.
- (2) It was not intended to amend the content of the training programme for 2006-07, except to reflect changes to the structure of the programme.
- (3) Cohort analysis would determine whether the new training had a positive effect on participant attainment.
- (4) The annual survey of participant experience could be used to gauge the perceived efficacy of training at a later point in their registration.

07.19 Statistical Summary

Received: a statistical summary of recruitment, progression, and retention for 2005-06.

Noted:

- (1) A full set of statistics had been prepared to comply with the new OUVS guidelines and provide additional information about the programme.

- (2) A total of seven participants had been admitted without meeting the standard entry criteria. Two of these were only qualified to GCSE / O level.
- (3) The majority of participants withdrawing from the programme were recorded as 'lapsed'. This reflected the high degree of flexibility, particularly amongst early cohorts, and the difficulty in identifying participants who were not making sufficient progress early on. These issues would be resolved by the more prescriptive structure of assessment from 2006-07.
- (4) A number of participants from the earliest cohorts were still continuing by exceptional agreement.
- (5) The pass rate for formative assignments had improved significantly on 2004-05, although this would need to be monitored over the longer term.

Resolved:

The admissions policy for non-standard entry should be reviewed.

Action: Secretary

08.19 Regulations

Received: a summary of proposed revisions to the regulations.

Resolved:

- (1) The proposed revisions to the requirements, regulations, policies, and procedures were endorsed with some amendments.
- (2) A proposal to limit to two the number of formal stages of the complaints process was endorsed.
- (3) The new policy on mitigating circumstances was endorsed with some amendments including the constitution of a mitigating circumstances panel comprising: Programme Leader (Chair), an External Examiner, and one assessor who has not been involved in assessing the candidate in question.
- (4) The final draft of the regulations etc would be circulated electronically to the Board for approval.

Action: Mike Miller

09.19 Appointment of Academic Advisor**Reported:**

- (1) The position had been widely advertised through www.jobs.ac.uk and four applications had been submitted.
- (2) The Chair and Secretary had reviewed the applications on the Board's behalf and had recommended the appointment of Mr William Locke, Principal Policy Analyst, Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI), Open University. This appointment had been approved by OUVS in fulfilment of one of the conditions of revalidation.

10.19 Academic Reviewer

Received: the OUVS Guidance Notes for Academic Reviewers and Associated and Accredited Institutions.

Reported:

The Open University had appointed Marion Cartwright Academic Reviewer for the programme with a time allocation of two days *per annum*.

Agreed:

During the first year of this new arrangement, the priorities for engagement would be: the annual monitoring process; student support and guidance mechanisms and resources.

11.19 Academic Infrastructure

Received: the QAA mapping exercise action plan.

Reported:

- (1) The Professional Development Committee had approved the action plan.
- (2) The following items had been completed:
 - (a) (Item 2) OUVS oversight of promotional material;
 - (b) (Item 3) implementation of EO monitoring system;
 - (c) (Item 7) review of complaints and appeals procedures;
 - (d) (Item 8) review of policy for extenuating circumstances.
- (3) The following recurring items had been completed:
 - (a) (Item 1) monitoring of benchmark statements;
 - (b) (Item 11) review of promotional material.
- (4) The following items would be progressed in accordance with the plan:
 - (a) (Item 4) inclusion of disability awareness training in the mentor induction programme;
 - (b) (Items 5 & 6) advice to be sought from Chair, Equality Advisory Group on EO and disability issues.

12.19 Incentives for Mentors

Received: a report on the introduction of a subsidised ILM accredited qualification for mentors registered on the Pg Cert.

Noted:

- (1) The paper had been circulated amongst mentors and a considerable number of responses had been received. Many of these were positive, although some concerns had been expressed about: the level of the qualification; the potential duplication of training; the possible creation of a two tier system; an additional burden for mentors.
- (2) The qualification was designed to enable mentors to enhance further their skills and, through reflection, to apply these at work as well as in the mentoring relationship. It would be introduced on a purely voluntary basis and would not duplicate existing training.
- (3) The qualification could act as an incentive for new mentors and for some existing mentors who wished to gain formal recognition for their mentoring skills.

Resolved:

The Board endorsed in principle the introduction of a voluntary qualification for mentors, and resolved that a detailed proposal be brought forward to the next meeting.

Action: Chair / Secretary

13.19 Reports from Representatives

Received: reports from –

(1) **Branch / Regional Coordinator representative**

Reported:

- (a) At some institutions the qualification had not proved attractive whilst at others it had become popular.
- (b) Participants seemed to be finding the programme progressively harder.

Resolved:

On the grounds of privacy, it was not deemed appropriate to notify Branch or Regional Coordinators of participants joining or leaving the programme.

(2) **Participant representatives**

Reported:

- (a) Participants had raised the following issues:
 - (i) The lack of tuition gave rise to a perception that the programme did not provide good value for money and free lectures for participants should be provided by AUA.
 - (ii) Feedback on resubmissions of summative assessment could, in some circumstances, take a long time.
 - (iii) It was difficult to achieve M level in 1000 words.
 - (iv) The quality and quantity of feedback was, in some instances, perceived to be insufficient.
 - (v) Accessing key texts was, for some, problematic.
 - (vi) The nature and structure of the programme demanded a considerable commitment from participants.
- (b) Participants had commended:
 - (i) the content and structure of the programme which was interesting and stimulating;
 - (ii) the quality of support from the programme team.

Resolved:

- (a) It was apparent that some participants entered the programme without fully understanding the nature of the programme. Much work had been done to clarify expectations in advance, but this would be kept under review to ensure that the message was clearly delivered and understood.
- (b) The structure of feedback from assessors had recently been changed, and this would be reviewed to ensure consistency of quality.

Action: Secretary

(3) **Mentor representatives**

Agreed:

- (a) A development event would be scheduled in Scotland in 2006-07.
- (b) The programme is designed to break even, and any substantial increase in costs would be reflected in participants' registration fee. For that reason, it was not desirable to pay mentors' expenses, subsidise their membership fees beyond the current level, or provide discounted places on professional development events.

14.19 Other Business

Appointment of Programme Manager

Noted:

Mrs Catherine Lillie would take up the post of Programme Manager from October 2006, and would be secretary to the Board. She would take over responsibility for the day to day administration and management of the programme, whilst Matthew McClelland would retain responsibility for its leadership. A briefing note would clarify the points of contact for mentors, participants, and all involved in the delivery and management of the programme.

15.19 Dates of next meetings

20th meeting: noon, 31 January 2007, London

21st meeting: noon, 31 May 2007, Manchester