

Science Studies Committee
15 May 2013
12.15 The Boardroom, 58 Prince's Gate
South Kensington Campus

Minutes

Present: Professor R Leatherbarrow (Chair), Professor D Humphris, Professor D Wright, Professor R Thompson, Professor S Curry, Mr C Love, Professor A MacKinnon, Professor J Mestel, Dr E Price-Davies, Professor A Spivey, Dr B Duncombe, Dr S Archer, Mr N Wheatley, Mr D Hunt and Ms C Borkhataria

In Attendance: Dr C Aceijas, Miss H Kopecka (Secretary)

1 Apologies for Absence

1.1 Received: There were no apologies for absence.

2 Minutes

2.1 Approved: Minutes of the previous meeting held on the 13 February 2013 (**Paper 1**).

3 Matters Arising

3.1 Received and Noted: A list of actions from previous meetings of the Committee and progress made so far to address these (**Paper 2**) - superseded by **Paper 7**.

4 Senate Summary Report

4.1 Received and Noted: The summary report of the meeting of the Senate held on the 27th February 2013 (**Paper 3**).

5 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee Summary Report

5.1 Received and Noted: A Summary report covering the meetings of QAEK held on 5th March and 10th April. (**Paper 4**).

6 Engineering Studies Committee Summary Report

6.1 Received and Noted: The summary report of the meeting of the Engineering Studies Committee held on the 13th March 2013 (**Paper 5**).

7 Medical Studies Committee Summary Report

7.1 Received and Noted: The summary report of the meeting of the Medical Studies Committee held on the 12th February 2013 (**Paper 6**).

8 Department of Life Sciences

8.1 Procedures for Dealing with Borderline Candidates – a review of the algorithm used by the

Department of Life Sciences: Biochemistry, for dealing with borderline candidates studying the “with management” courses (**Paper 7**).

The Committee was due to review the algorithm agreed between ICBS and Department of Life Sciences. Mr C Love reported that this was not applied at the preliminary Board of Examiners meeting due to misunderstanding on his part. This will now be done through Chair’s action and reported back.

The agreed algorithm will also be considered by Department of Chemistry, adoption (if appropriate) would ensure consistency across the board.

9 Department of Chemistry

9.1 A new Degree: ‘Chemistry with Science Communication’ following a successful trial (Paper 8**).**

The Committee considered the above proposal. Dr E Price-Davies stated that the suggested title does not reflect accurately the degree the student who took part in the trial will receive. The ‘with Science Communication’ term should not be used if no formal Science Communication teaching took place. It was agreed that that the proposed degree should be titled ‘Chemistry with a Year of Science Communication’ instead.

Dr B Duncombe will be liaising with Dr E Price-Davies to agree Science Communication electives to form part of a future degree: ‘Chemistry with Science Communication’ which will be put forward to this Committee in due course.

10 Integrated Master’s and Associated Bachelor’s Degree

10.1 The Committee further considered paper from the Academic Registrar detailing options for an integrated Master’s degree and associated Bachelor’s degree (Paper 10 from the meeting held on 13th February 2013).

The Committee discussed whether to replace the existing descriptor on MSci and MEng degree diplomas and transcripts which was introduced to address the problems of recognition of integrated Master’s degrees.

The Committee noted that there remained an issue on how to classify an ‘integrated’ Bachelor’s degree. The term ‘unclassified’ was not considered appropriate and, if the above proposal was to be approved, different terminology would need to be agreed.

Concerns were also been raised with regards to the potential double-counting of Bachelor’s degree.

The Committee could not come to a consensus on the proposals and suggested the matter should be further considered by the next QAEC Committee.

11 Report from the Royal College of Science Students’ Union

11.1 Ms C Borkhataria (Academic Affairs Officer) presented her report and highlighted key issues that have arisen over the 2012/2013 academic year (Paper 9**).**

11.1.1 The main issue discussed by the Committee was exam feedback. Ms C Borkhataria’s report suggested that there is a serious and worrying lack of standardisation of exam script feedback across the departments. Feedback provided varied greatly across departments from individual feedback given to students through their personal tutor to general information given to the class as a whole.

It became clear that there is confusion over what is ‘allowed’ following the withdrawal of the facility whereby students could apply under data protection legislation to see their marked exam scripts. The Academic Registrar reminded the Committee that in the absence of

students being able to use the data protection route to view their scripts, FTCs were asked to confirm the mechanisms Departments had in place to provide feedback to students.

The report suggested that the ultimate aim should be to achieve a universal standard across departments where each and every student can view their exam script in order to fully understand what mistakes they have made so that these can be rectified.

Bearing in mind the number of exam scripts, the need to make these available to the external examiners in good time and the Examination script retention policy, it became clear that it is not practical to implement such approach. Logistical difficulties clearly outweigh the potential usefulness to the students where detailed comments on scripts are rare.

Feedback given to 1st year students was highlighted as particularly important. A potential solution could be to hand out exams scripts to 1st year students without the need to retain them (where Year 1 does not count towards the degree classification).

The need to establish consistent approach across departments was acknowledged. A core minimum standards should be defined, and departments given the flexibility to exceed these where practical.

Ms C Borkhataria was asked to provide the Committee with the initial suggestion in order to establish the principal.

- 11.1.2** NSS participation was also discussed. The Committee noted that participation has gone up across all departments. The biggest increase in participation numbers in FoNS was in Biology where students have been offered an incentive. Similar approach should be considered by other departments.

12 Distribution of Honours Data 2011-12

- 12.1** The Committee discussed the distribution of Honours Degree Classifications in the 2011-12 session and noted the significant number of 3rd class degrees awarded in the Department of Mathematics in comparison to other Departments (50% of all 3rd class degrees awarded across the College (**Paper 10**).

Professor J Mestel stated that mathematics A-level does not reflect the standard expected. To resolve this, an entrance test has been introduced.

13 Conduct of Boards of Examiners

- 13.1** The Committee received the Faculty of Natural Science Proposed Modifications (**Paper 11**). It was noted that QAA does not explicitly say that anonymity at Board of Examiners meetings is necessary, and therefore cannot be forced. It is left to the individual departments to decide whether this is practical.

14 The EU Commission's Erasmus for All programme

- 14.1** Received and Noted: A message from the European Commission regarding the new Erasmus for All programme (**Paper 12**).

15 Department of Mathematics

- 15.1** Approved: Four new optional fourth year courses: *Modular Forms*; *Partial Differential Equations II*; *Inference, Control and Driving in Natural Systems* and *Computational Stochastic Processes*. (**Paper 13**).

16 Department of Physics

- 16.1** Approved: Modifications to Programmes of Study within the Department of Physics (**Paper**

14).

Some material has been moved between years 2 & 3 in order to make all programmes accreditable by the Institute of Physics by the end of year 2, with the exception of a final year project. This is to enable the Department to introduce more flexibility into years 3 & 4 and to offer a wider range of programs.

17 Dates of Next Meetings

17.1 Approved: The dates of the next meetings of the Science Studies Committee:

- 6th November 2013 12.15pm – 3pm
- 12th February 2014 12.15pm – 3pm
- 20th May 2014 12.15pm – 3pm