

The University of Manchester

School of Chemistry

Teaching Committee

Minutes of Tuesday December 16th 2008

Present: Garry Procter (Chair), Andrew Regan, Christopher Whitehead, David Collison, Eric McInnes, Frank Mair, Jim Thomas, Joe McDouall, Mark Whiteley, Tim Wallace, Karen Charters (Secretary)

1) Apologies for absence

Apologies had been received from Peter Gorry and Paul O'Brien

2) Future meetings

- a. Standard agenda

Received: a draft standard agenda for Teaching Committee Meetings

Agreed Add standing items for Outreach, Admissions and Recruitment, Quality Assurance and Feedback, Attendance Reports and SSLC minutes.

Action: Karen Charters

- b. Frequency and time of subsequent meetings

Agreed The committee will meet on a monthly basis during teaching, plus once in July for annual review purposes. Draft dates for 2009 would be presented to the next meeting.

Action: Karen Charters

- c. Membership and Terms of Reference

Agreed Add "monitor student attendance and performance" to the terms of reference.

Action: Karen Charters

3) MChem group projects

Noted An increase in student numbers (currently over 200 students in level 2) means there will be a need for more MChem group projects and BSc mini-projects in the next few years. MWW also stated that there would be fewer placements available in 2009/10 and so more students on the Industrial Placement and Forensic and Analytical programmes would be likely to remain studying in Manchester in their third year. This would have implications for academic staff teaching time.

It was noted that the group project performs an important role in preparing the MChem students for aspects of the larger research project in level 4, such as literature research and project planning.

There is much student discontent with the current allocation model, whereby students do not get a choice of project area. One suggestion discussed was that next year's students could be asked to rank their preference for Computational, Inorganic, Organic, and Physical MChem group projects. It was noted that such a scheme would be likely to place a greater burden on specific teaching sections, which would be more popular than others. It was suggested that the 'ideal' project would be one which contained elements from each discipline, so that students could negotiate within the group to undertake roles which best suited their skills or interests. It was suggested that projects run in this way would need joint supervisors and a discussion took place as to the practicalities of such a scheme.

Agreed

At the next meeting the following information would be presented:

- analysis of potential BSc/MChem numbers
- a list of current MChem project titles
- survey of time spent on project supervision

Action: Karen Charters/Garry Procter

In advance of the next meeting, HOTS were asked to discuss MChem group projects with their colleagues and report any preliminary comments to KC.

Action: Heads of Teaching Sections

4) National Student Satisfaction Survey

Noted

The main area in which we could improve significantly is in 'feedback'. It was felt that the problem may lie in the student perception of what constitutes feedback. There is a need to make this explicit when interacting with students about their performance.

It was noted that the Student Satisfaction Survey is completed by students at the end of their graduating year and that most 4th year students do not have tutorials and may be taking taught course units which are assessed wholly by examination. Various options were discussed, including the use of online testing, but it was felt that this was not an easy tool to use at the higher level. The possibility of a requirement for level 4 course units to have either a voluntary formative assessment element or a compulsory summative assessment element was discussed.

One idea was to ensure that a breakdown of course unit marks was made available to tutors, so that they would be able to discuss examination performance with students in greater detail. Another would be to publish course unit averages to students, so that they could see how their marks for a particular course unit compared with their peers.

It was noted that current University records management policy does not allow us to return marked examination scripts to students, as there is a requirement for us to store these for at least one year.

Agreed

KC to make breakdown of course unit marks available to personal tutors in semester 1.

Action: Karen Charters

Members of the committee were invited to submit further ideas on methods of improving feedback via KC in advance of the next meeting

Action: All

GP to report at next meeting following a meeting with a colleague from Dentistry, which scored very well in the NSSS

Action: Garry Procter

5) Away day

Noted The Head of School had asked for a teaching 'away day'.

Agreed Any ideas about possible topics to be sent via KC in advance of the next meeting.

Action: All

6) Response to External Examiners

Received A draft response to reports from the External Examiners for 2007/8.

Noted JCW stated that it would be difficult for the Physical teaching section to be able to schedule a break in advance of the examination period for second years.

All academic staff should be fully informed of the new examination marking and moderation guidelines.

Agreed The document would be sent to External Examiners with a covering letter from DC.

Action: Karen Charters/David Collison

7) Any other business

a. Teaching Quality Enhancement and Retention Fund 2008/9

Received A call for expression of interest for this fund. A discussion took place about possible areas for which to apply.

Agreed MWW would put forward an expression of interest in applying for funding in the following two areas: collaborative project to improve feedback to undergraduate students (possibly working in conjunction with Physics, who scored well in the NSSS); development of online induction for PGR students.

Action: Mark Whiteley

b. Examination timetable

Noted DC reported that the examination timetable for semester 1 had been published and that many exams were taking place across more than one venue. This could have caused problems, meaning that all question setters may have to make themselves available to be present at the start of the exam.

c. Outreach Activities

Noted EJM informed the committee that there could be a problem with the availability of staff for outreach activities in the next academic year.

Agreed It was acknowledged that at present the outreach load was falling heavily on a small group of staff and it was suggested that this issue be raised at Management Team.

Action: Garry Procter/Eric McInnes

8) Date and time of next meeting

To be arranged

Action: Karen Charters

Proposed 'standard agenda' for future meetings -

The University of Manchester
School of Chemistry – Teaching Committee

There will be a meeting of the Teaching Committee of the School of Chemistry on (insert date); please send apologies to Karen Charters, Secretary to the Teaching Committee (karen.charters@manchester.ac.uk).

- 1) Apologies for Absence
- 2) Minutes of the previous meeting
- 3) Matters arising
- 4) E-Learning
- 5) Laboratories
- 6) Examinations
- 7) Sectional issues
- 8) Any other business (items not covered within the preceding agenda)
- 9) Date of next meeting

Enclosure 2

School of Chemistry – Teaching Committee

Draft Terms of Reference

Membership

The Committee will include the Director of Teaching (Chair), the Senior Education Officer (secretary), the Director of Undergraduate Studies, the Learning Enhancement Officer, the E-Learning Champion, the Director of Undergraduate Laboratories, the Organizer of Undergraduate Research Projects, the Heads of Teaching for Inorganic, Organic, and Physical Chemistry (or their representatives), the Organizer of Outreach activities, the Head of Examinations, and the Admissions Tutor, and Head of School. Other members of staff may be invited to attend as appropriate to the business being discussed.

Reporting

The Teaching Committee will report to the Management Team.

Remit

1. To advise the Head of School and the School Management Team on the teaching, organization and examining of programmes taught with the School.
2. To establish procedures for quality assurance of the teaching within the School including student feedback, examination results, external examiners' reports.
3. To review existing courses and be active in curriculum development and innovation.
4. To consider issues arising from Staff Student Liaison Committee.
5. To advise on aspects of recruitment of undergraduates.
6. To liaise with the Faculty Undergraduate Teaching Committee and equivalent bodies in other Schools.

Enclosure 3

On the detailed comments of the external examiners, from summer 2008.

It appears that Prof Cole-Hamilton received no feedback in response to his comments from 2007, and he highlighted as urgent two procedures, which are the policy of the University, and are in the list of items below. TLSO have now responded very apologetically about this already, stating: a) that the University is conducting a review of the regulations and b) that it is current policy to have anonymised boards, but that practices are always under review.

The examiners were generally pleased with the content of the degree programmes and the calibre of Manchester's students, and they appear to find the semi-formal meeting with a group of students useful. The following points are significant items raised by the examiners and which require action or response.

- 1) All examiners are very concerned that University policy requires that the final Examination Board in the presence of the external examiners must be conducted anonymously. They believe that this is to the disadvantage of the students, in respect of identifying last minute errors and the possibility that students with special circumstances may not be treated fairly. They urge a reconsideration of policy by the University, and for the School to seek a pragmatic solution. In 07-08 a partial solution was attempted wherein following the final Board of Examiners meeting the final graduating lists with names were circulated to academic staff in the afternoon prior to posting. **ACTION:** We should continue this practice and request that for graduating students (years 3 and 4) there is a formal requirement for their tutors (from years 1-3), project supervisors and programme directors to check for anomalies and to report them immediately to the Exams Officer/Undergraduate Office. The timetable for the visit by externals in June 2009 might make this difficult to achieve on the same day as the Board.
- 2) The algorithm for borderlines was of concern to Cole-Hamilton and to Dyke. They argue that the large credit-weighting of the year 4 project dilutes the requirement of performance at the higher level in course units assessed by examination. The examiners suggested some possible changes, but University regulations give no scope for alteration beyond returning to vivas at borderlines. Alternatively the credit rating for the project could be reduced. **ACTION:** This discussion reinforces the importance of the project in year 4 towards the final degree mark, and we are reviewing the written advice given to students about procedures for projects that do not appear to proceed smoothly.
- 3) There was concern from the three examiners about our procedures for checking at all stages within the examination process. **ACTION:** New procedures have been put in place for 08-09 that clarify what is expected of question setters, markers and convenors, and tighten up formal checking procedures throughout.
- 4) There are requests that all marks for projects are made available, including original marks prior to moderation, and that explanations of resolving disparities are provided. At least one examiner has suggested that the markers of the oral examination should each return a separate mark sheet. **ACTION:** The documentation produced for the assessment of projects should be reviewed.
- 5) Examiners were concerned about effects of remarking. **ACTION:** We have instituted a plan for papers that have been remarked to have all original mark lists returned to the Undergraduate Office as well as the revised final list, and an explanation of the changes and a declaration that checking has taken place to ensure that no individual student has been disadvantaged by the remarking/revision process.
- 6) There were comments in common from the examiners as a result of their meeting with the undergraduates that are relevant.
 - (a) Model exam papers/questions should be made available for all new modules/courses. I understand that this is happening. **ACTION:** It would be helpful for this to be confirmed by sections at the TC.

- (b) There is insufficient revision time at the end of semester 2, between the end of lectures and the start of examinations. **ACTION:** Sections are requested to use the final week of second semester for examples classes, workshops etc, and not to introduce new material.
- (c) There is poor quality of some tutorial experiences. Four of the five students taking part in the discussions were in year 4, and so much of this disquiet is historic and might have its roots in the processes of merger. The final year 08-09 students are the first cohort to be entirely from a single entry to the new university and so any similar criticism of tutorial experience in future must be considered very seriously and action taken by line managers if grounded in fact.
- (d) It was thought that some element of choice in assignments of year 3 MChem group projects might be helpful to the students. **ACTION:** this idea should be discussed with TC and project organisers.

Enclosure 4

EPS Teaching Quality Enhancement and Retention Fund 2008/9

Call for Expressions of Interest

Background:

This year we have some funding available for projects to enhance our Retention Agenda (for UG and PGT students) and we are inviting colleagues across Schools to participate in ideas for development.

We are encouraging collaborative bids on a variety of themes relevant to Retention. This will enable larger initiatives to be developed which are: proactive, likely to make a significant difference to student retention and transferable across the Faculty as a whole.

In consultation with the Faculty LEO (Learning Enhancement Officer) network, 3 broad areas for consideration have been identified:

- Feedback (in relation to Assessment)
- Induction
- Aspects of Student Support eg: Advisors in Schools; Peer Support; the particular needs of Overseas Students.

(Other ideas may also be considered as long as they relate to the Retention theme)

Timescales:

NB: The finance associated with these projects will need to be spent by the end of the financial year 2008/9.

There will be several stages to the bidding:

1: By 19th December

Please send an initial brief but informative email to Rosemary Tomkinson (rosemary.tomkinson@manchester.ac.uk) to register interest in one of the above areas.

In this email please include:

School and name of project leader/team (+ email contacts)

What you would like to do: why and how?

2: By 7th January

Rosemary will put you in touch with others who are interested in similar ideas and:

3: By 23rd January

You will need to have communicated with the others and developed a bid (please see suggested template) which should be sent to margaret.dexter-brown@manchester

Bids will be judged by a panel in late January and you will be informed of the outcomes in early February.

Rosemary Tomkinson
1st December 2008

EPS TQEF/ Retention Bids December 2008 - January 2009

Project Title:	
Project Leaders/Team:	
Tel:	
Email:	
School(s):	
Aims:	
Learning Outcomes: (crucially how this will improve the T & L provision and how this will be evaluated)	
Programme: (a summary of the work to be done and timescales involved)	
Deliverables:	
Costs:	
Head of School signature(s):	

NB: Please return 2 copies to Margaret Dexter-Brown in C4 Sackville by 23rd January 2009: one electronic copy (margaret.dexter-brown@manchester.ac.uk) and one paper copy signed by the HoS.