

The University of Manchester

School of Chemistry

Teaching Committee

Minutes of Thursday 10 September 2009

Present: Garry Procter (Chair), Steve Yeates, David Collison, Eric McInnes, Joe McDouall, Andrew Horn, Tim Wallace, Frank Mair, Karen Charters (Secretary)

1) Apologies for absence

Apologies had been received from Andrew Regan, Peter Gorry and Jim Thomas

2) Minutes of the meeting of 8 July 2009

The minutes were approved.

3) Matters Arising

- a) The Head of School was not able to attend the meeting so the Chair explained the importance of the University's Undergraduate Review and the increased emphasis being placed on the results of the National Student Survey.
- b) The two working groups had not yet met and the item would be carried forward to the next meeting.
- c) Assessment points would be discussed under items 6a and 6d.

4) E-learning

It was noted that content on blackboard for all years of study was compulsory during the 2009/10 academic year. TW reminded colleagues that content which was not to be viewed immediately by students should be hidden in blackboard.

5) Laboratories

The Chair informed colleagues that budget cuts would affect labs this year, with a 12k decrease in consumables and 20k decrease in demonstrating costs to be found. It was noted that the second year S-lab would be running trials using online submission and feedback for lab scripts this year.

6) Examinations

- a) BSc projects – new guidelines and feedback sheets for projects were circulated. Comments included the addition of clear information regarding penalties for late submission (awaiting information from working group), the addition of a space for comments and/or signature of moderator on the marksheet. EJM asked for clear information regarding staff roles in supervision and marking.

Action: Garry Procter/Karen Charters/Jonathan Agger

b) MChem group projects - in response to comments from our external examiners the following alterations had been made:

- Feedback sheets redesigned so that marks are now defined within a 2 mark bracket and the marking criteria is more precise
- Marking of projects will be circulated within sections so that the supervisor does not mark the projects of his/her own students, meaning that at least 50% of the final mark is assigned by someone other than the supervisor
- Students will not be awarded marks for the poster presentation unless they are present during the whole session

c) Marking criteria and feedback sheets had been redesigned as above.

d) Operation of the algorithm – all three external examiners had requested that the criteria for promotion of borderline candidates be altered so that 80 credits be in the higher class for promotion, but with an extra requirement that at least 40 credits must come from non-project work. This was due to concerns that the 60 credit projects, with a high class average, were distorting classifications.

DC reported that Kevin Flower had canvassed colleagues in Chemistry departments in other Universities and had found that at least 12 institutions had final year projects worth 50% of the final year and that average marks for these projects were in the region of 70%. It was noted that within EPS Earth, Atmospheric and Environmental Sciences had a 60 credit project but used method B to deal with borderline candidates.

It was proposed that the project be broken up into 3 different sections, one 30 credit mark for the report, a 20 credit mark for project execution and a 10 credit mark combining the viva and presentation.

The committee felt that the measures proposed, along with the more narrow marking bands introduced for project marking, would have some effect in slightly lowering project averages. It was noted that the change in weighting would mean that 2/3 of the final year project marks would now come from markers who did not supervise the project. There was no desire shown at this stage to make alterations to programme regulations in relation to promotion under the algorithm. It was noted that any such change would have to be first cleared by Faculty and then put into the handbooks for the cohort entering in 2010/11 and so would not affect a graduating MChem class until 2015.

e) DC asked if questions setters could be encouraged to consider whether there was enough in papers for weaker students to be able to gain marks sufficient to achieve a third class mark. This issue to be discussed by sections in exam paper meetings.

Action: HoTS

f) Simplification of exam paper formats – in response to comments from external examiners sections would be asked to ensure that instructions to students on exam

papers were scrutinised. Again, this item could be discussed during sectional paper scrutiny meetings.

Action: HoTS

7) Outreach

FM reported that it had been another very busy year for Outreach activities with approximately 7,500 contacts made. Positive feedback had been received following the Salters festival and camps. A small operational profit would be reinvested in equipment and developments for the forthcoming year included an online booking system and some help from other teaching sections. It was noted that the recruitment of a new RSC regional co-ordinator was in train, as was the appointment of new RSC Teacher-Fellows; moves to get these positions resident in the University are underway.

8) Admissions and Recruitment

No business discussed under this item.

9) Quality Assurance and Student Feedback

No business discussed under this item.

10) Attendance

No business discussed under this item.

11) Sectional Issues

Inorganic – the section would be looking to introduce the 'lecture notes allowed' format for examinations to CHEM10312 and CHEM30311 in 2009/10. It was noted that the format could not be extended to CHEM30312 as students on placement also took this option.

It was agreed that DC would take this proposal to the external examiners and was also noted that the examinations office would be informed of a requirement for larger desk spaces for students.

Action: David Collison/Karen Charters

12) Any Other Business

a) A request for staffing for Communicating Chemistry was noted, with Heads of Teaching Sections to contact Martin Attfield with names.

Action: HoTS

b) Provisional meeting dates were circulated and would be confirmed at the next meeting, taking place on Friday 16 October 2009 at 2.00 pm.