

Centre for Alternative Technology

Academic Council Meeting 14th September 2017, 2 - 4pm, Alder Room

Minutes of the meeting of 14th September 2017 held at 2pm at the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT)

Present: Adrian Ramsay (AR, CEO) (Chair), Alun Thomas (AT, Head of School), John Carter (JC, in attendance from item 5 onwards), Frances Hill (FH)

In Attendance: Martin Skelton (MS, minutes), Jane Fisher (LA, Lead Academic)

Apologies: Alex Apeageyi (UEL Link Tutor), Tim Coleridge (TC), CAT Student Representative

1. Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

1.1. AR welcomed those present to the meeting.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

2.1. These were agreed as an accurate record.

3. Matters Arising

(NB: References are from previous minutes)

(3.8) JC was not present for this item however AT advised validation of the MArch course is now complete.

(6.2) Action complete.

(7.2) Action complete.

(8.3) Action complete.

(9.3) Action complete.

(9.5) AR has asked Mike Sparks to look into this and will report back. **Action: AR to confirm insurance provision for students.**

(10.5) No further progress made towards finalising the draft End of Year survey. AT advised the survey would be issued to students following completion of their final taught module. **Action: TC to forward additional questions to MS for inclusion in the survey, and AT/TC to agree when the survey will be issued.**

(11.1) Action complete.

(11.2) Action complete.

(14.2) Action complete.

(14.3) Action complete.

(15.1) Action complete.

(15.2) See Agenda Item 5.

4. UEL Collaborative Review: Outcome

- 4.1. AT has now received a signed letter from UEL confirming this process has been formally completed, and all of our courses run in partnership with UEL are validated.

5. Possible New Courses

- 5.1. Potential new degree topics were originally suggested to UEL during the original validation of the current MSc SA suit in 2014, and these potential topics formed the basis for a list of potential programme titles which were circulated to staff and students during the summer of 2017.
- 5.2. LA gave an overview of the proposed new programmes, summarised the feedback received during the consultation with students and staff, and outlined the process and timescales for introducing new programmes.
- 5.3. Of the four potential new programmes, “Green Building” appeared to be most popular amongst staff and students. Sustainable Habitats/Sustainable Ecology and Biodiversity were attractive to the students, and Sustainable Leadership/Business Management was attractive to some staff.
- 5.4. LA advised it will be necessary to submit early approval forms to the validating university in early October 2017 if we wish to introduce new programmes for academic year 2018/19. The submission of early approval forms does not commit us to anything further, but failure to submit will prevent us from introducing new programmes next year.
- 5.5. The relative merits of expanding the number of programmes versus consolidating the existing SA and new SEPDM/SFNR programmes were discussed.
- 5.6. AT felt it would be prudent to submit early approval forms if we have any intention to offer new programmes next year, and cautioned that the level of interest in new courses and overall growth in student numbers seen this year might not be repeated next year.
- 5.7. AR expressed his reservations about submitting early approval forms before the market potential and financial /resource implications has been more fully explored. Ideally all proposals for new programmes should be discussed with the Senior Management Team and the Board of Trustees in the first instance.
- 5.8. After further discussion it was **agreed** that LA will prepare more detailed proposals for the Green Building programme, including likely costs and resources needed, in order for this to be considered further. It was also **agreed** to revisit proposals for other programmes at a later date.
Action: LA to provide additional information in relation to potential new courses.

6. Progression of MSc Students

- 6.1. Dissertation module leaders have noted that fewer students than expected are beginning the dissertation process this year, and this appears to be supported by progression data collected at the end of July: of the 41 students who enrolled in 2015, including 15 full-time students, only 8 students (20%) had gained 120 credits by this summer.
- 6.2. LA has identified two possible reasons for this:
 - Students are not progressing through the degree at the usual full time rate (1 year to complete all taught courses) or part time (2 years to complete all taught modules), and/or
 - Students who have completed all taught modules are choosing not to start the dissertation module, even after attending the dissertation workshop.

- 6.3. LA has considered whether the slower than expected rate of progression was due to students requiring more support and improved engagement, or if it reflects the mature student cohort who choose to progress slowly in order to balance other aspects of their lives such as careers and work. LA has also questioned if there are teaching and learning improvements which can be made to increase progression rates.
- 6.4. AT was very concerned about the data and felt urgent action needed to be taken.
- 6.5. FH pointed out that of the 41 students enrolled in 2015, many are part-time and would not be expected to have gained 120 credits by July. Furthermore, a lot of students have completed dissertation projects in June and the number of students with 120 credits should increase significantly within the next month and be recorded at the October UEL Award Board meeting. FH noted that many students balance studying with work and family commitments, and students often choose to intermit for these reasons.
- 6.6. LA advised that a short questionnaire has been sent to all students who are eligible to begin the dissertation progress but haven't, and outlined the actions that have already been put in place to help improve progression:
- Regular pre-timetabled tutorials which will cover a range of key academic skills are being introduced from September 2017.
 - Progression onto the dissertation will be encouraged by:
 - a) embedding 'research methods' learning into each module week, possibly as an evening session. It has also been proposed that module leaders design a research methods workshop for each teaching week to cover a spread of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods, and research approaches, and
 - b) running an additional 'on-site' dissertation workshop in October 2017 for all those students would like to attend.
- 6.7. It was noted that there isn't currently a robust method for recording student engagement with tutorials. **Action: AT to remind tutors of their responsibility to ensure all instances of student interactions are recorded.**
- 6.8. FH said it was difficult to track student progression without access to the student database. **Action: MS to discuss tutor access to the student database and a shared network drive with Mike Sparks.**

7. HERAP Progress

- 7.1. AT reported that everyone is aware of what needs to be done before the submission deadline of 20th September.

8. Minutes of Programme Committee Meetings

- 8.1. Minutes of the SA PC meeting (7th April) and the Prof Dip meeting (12th July) were circulated in advance of this meeting. FH advised that minutes were also available for the SA meeting held in June and agreed to send to AT for circulation.
- 8.2. AR highlighted the low attendance at some Programme Committee meetings and felt that a minimum of two academic staff should attend. JC noted it would be difficult for all three permanent Prof Dip staff to attend every meeting due to time pressures. **Action: AT to ask Programme Leaders to ensure maximum attendance at Programme Committee meetings.**

9. **AOB**

LJMU Representative

- 9.1. It was **agreed** that a representative from LJMU will be invited to the next Council Meeting
Action: AT to invite LJMU representative to next meeting.

Academic Council Meeting Dates 2018

- 9.2. AT proposed Council meeting dates for 2018. The challenge of holding these meetings during module week was acknowledged and further discussed.
- 9.3. It was **agreed** to arrange meetings of the Academic Council during the week prior to module weeks and it was **agreed** members could participate via Skype where onsite attendance wasn't practicable.
- 9.4. The meeting dates for 2018 were confirmed as 11th January, 5th April, 5th July, and 6th September.

10. **Date of Next Meeting**

- 10.1. 2pm, 11th January 2018 (venue to be confirmed)