

Centre for Alternative Technology

Academic Council Meeting 11th April 2019

Minutes of the meeting held on 11th April at 10am at the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT)

Present: Kim Polgreen (KP, CEO)*; Adrian Watson (AW, Head of School) (Chair); John Carter (JC); Tim Coleridge (TC); Jane Fisher (JF); Julia Munro (JM, MArch Student Rep); William Webb (WW, MArch Student Rep); Aran Yardley (AY, SEPDM Student Rep); Anna Crowder (AC, SFNR Student Rep)

* attended via Skype

In Attendance: Martin Skelton (MS, minutes)

Apologies: Ian Lemon (IL, UEL Link Tutor); Colm Bowe (CB, LJMU Representative)

1. Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

1.1. AW welcomed those present to the meeting and apologies were noted.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

2.1. The draft minutes of the January 2019 meeting were **agreed** as an accurate record. **Action: MS to publish minutes of the January 2019 Academic Council meeting on the GSE website.**

3. Matters Arising

(NB: References are from the minutes of the January 2019 meeting)

(2.1) Action complete.

(2.2) Action complete (draft minutes circulated in mid-March).

(6.8) AW provided an update on the work that has been undertaken since the start of the current academic year to support students with additional needs and concluded that the approach has, in general terms, proved to be successful. **Action: AW to draft a policy for consideration at the next meeting.**

(8.1) JC advised that we are still awaiting a decision. **Action: JC to update Council when ARB prescription of the MArch programme has been recognised by the European Commission.**

(9.4) Action complete. TC advised that a procedure for managing student research risk assessments has been agreed with John Challen. Use of the existing T100 system was considered but not felt to be appropriate. The Student Support team will be responsible for filing completed risk assessments.

(9.4) Ongoing: MS said that it has not been possible to progress the development of a student feedback database due to the more pressing development of a database for managing applications from prospective students. However it remains an aspiration to create a database for collating student feedback later in the year. **Action: MS to develop a database for recording student feedback later this year.**

- (4.1) See Agenda item 4.
 - (4.2) See Agenda item 4.
 - (4.4) Actions complete.
 - (6.3) Action complete. MS advised that application forms have been updated however they have not been uploaded to the website due to the anticipated introduction of online application forms (see Agenda item 6).
 - (6.4) See Agenda item 6.
 - (7.2) Action complete.
 - (9.2) Action complete.
 - (10.1) Action complete.
 - (10.2) See Agenda item 7.
 - (10.4) AW said that it had been decided not to proceed with the external market analysis discussed at the last meeting and an internal review of CAT's marketing strategy is currently underway. **Action: AW to report findings of the CAT / GSE marketing review.**
 - (11.2) Action complete
- [JF joined the meeting; KP left the meeting]

4. New Courses: Development & Validation Update

- 4.1. AW confirmed that all required documentation has been submitted to LJMU in respect of the planned introduction of the new degrees (Sustainability and Behaviour Change and Sustainability in Ecology) following the validation event held in January. AW said that LJMU's suggestion for a Research Methods module has been considered. The Memorandum of Cooperation document is awaiting final sign off however LJMU have allowed us to accept applications for both courses in the interim.
- 4.2. AW reported on progress towards introducing the proposed Green Building programme in partnership with UEL. Following a meeting with UEL representatives in mid-February revised documentation has been submitted in advance of the planned validation event on 8th May, to be held at UEL. AW advised that UEL are undertaking a review of their Academic Regulations and this could impact on our ability to continue offering 15-credit modules in future. Additionally, UEL are considering the introduction of a mandatory 30-credit Research Methods module which we would have to adopt unless we could demonstrate that our current delivery achieves the required learning outcomes. **Action: AW to provide a further update at the next meeting.**

5. Course Designation Update

- 5.1. AW reported on progress towards achieving course designation with HEFCW and OfS, following the submission of documentation for all of our courses in December.
- 5.2. HEFCW have requested some additional information prior to review by the Welsh government and we anticipate a favourable outcome. Despite responding to their initial feedback our courses are not yet listed by OfS and to date only courses that are provided in England have been designated. AW reported that all other alternative providers in Wales have been similarly affected and we are now actively pursuing course designation via the Dept. of Education (DoE). AW advised that our courses might not be designated until June and whilst this won't affect our

returning students it is likely to impact on new students who wish to apply for a student loan before then. **Action: AW to provide an update regarding course designation at the next meeting.**

6. Online Forms for Students

- 6.1. MS introduced a proposal to offer students an opportunity to complete a number of our application forms online, as an alternative to completing them offline and emailing or posting copies to the Student Support office. GSE works collaboratively with two degree awarding universities, LJMU and UEL, and there are a number of known differences in their respective academic regulations and administrative processes. This has, on a number of occasions, caused confusion for GSE staff and students. The introduction of an online form option would simplify our application processes and reduce the risk of errors by offering students an online form submission option.
- 6.2. Prior to the meeting MS circulated a link to an online form ‘hub’ that directs students to the forms that are appropriate to the programme they are studying, thereby eliminating or reducing potential confusion. It is possible for students to upload supporting evidence however it is acknowledged that not all students will be comfortable about uploading sensitive and confidential documents via an online platform, and the option to submit these by email or post will remain available.
- 6.3. MS highlighted some other potential benefits of the proposal such as the ability to vastly reduce the number of different hyperlinks used in GSE documentation, and the ability to include links to other documents e.g. online student feedback and booking forms, which would enable our students to access multiple resources via a single web link.
- 6.4. TC welcomed the initiative and said that current arrangements were onerous and somewhat confusing to students, often at times when dealing with stressful events in their lives.
- 6.5. It was **agreed** that the introduction of online forms would be a useful development and Council **approved** this. **Action: MS to finalise form content in conjunction with the Student Support Team and make available to students.**

7. Ethics Committee Terms of Reference

- 7.1. AW explained the purpose and remit of GSE Ethics Committee, which is Chaired by Dr Ruth Stevenson, and introduced draft Terms of Reference (ToR).
- 7.2. A discussion was held during which the outcome of some recent research proposals was reported. TC was concerned that some recent research proposals had contained personal information that could constitute a breach of GDPR requirements, and said that our risk assessment template has been updated accordingly. JF said GDPR compliance would be covered in additional detail in forthcoming Dissertation Workshops.
- 7.3. TC asked if the ToR should also contain a reference to LJMU Research Ethics policy and AW agreed to include this.
- 7.4. Council **approved** the GSE Ethics Committee Terms of Reference subject to the above inclusion being made. **Action AW to amend the GSE Ethics Committee Terms of Reference prior to publication.**

8. LJMU: Exceptional Second Referral / Final Module Attempt Rules

- 8.1. JF explained that there is a significant difference in the assessment of UEL and LJMU students in that LJMU students get a single referral opportunity, and if they fail this they may get an Exceptional Second Referral (ESR).
- 8.2. LJMU Regulations state that students who have failed the single referral opportunity will be allowed an Exceptional Second Referral on the same module(s), up to 20 credits at any Level, provided that 100 credits at that level have been achieved. The maximum mark that may be gained from an Exceptional Second Referral is 50% or the minimum pass mark for the module(s), whichever is the higher. Any previous successful elements (marks or submitted materials) of a module(s) will be carried forward upon an Exceptional Second Referral.
- 8.3. Furthermore JF advised that any LJMU student who has exhausted the referral opportunities may be withdrawn from that programme of study. If a student attains between 60 and 99 credits within a level, they will be offered the opportunity to re-register for a Final Module Attempt (FMA) upon the failed module(s) provided that they have not completed a previous level via this mechanism. If a student attains fewer than 60 credits within a level, they may be offered the opportunity to re-register for a Final Module Attempt upon the failed modules provided that they have not completed a previous level via this mechanism, that the Board of Examiners has reason to be confident in the student's engagement and that there is evidence of this. An FMA will be a single attempt (therefore there can be no subsequent referral). The FMA will be a new attempt with attendance and no marks will be carried forward from previous attempts. The maximum mark obtainable from an FMA is the module pass mark.
- 8.4. JF advised that LJMU do not allow students to buy a replacement module if they exhaust all opportunities to pass a module. Therefore any students in this position and who wish to continue with a CAT programme will be advised to transfer to one of UELs programmes and APEL any common modules over.
- 8.5. Reporting on the current situation for CAT students JF advised that there are some students who have failed a referral and will need to wait until the Board of Examiners in June to assess their profile for ESR eligibility (i.e. accumulation of 100 credits). One student who will need to apply for FMA at the June Board as they have failed two modules (30 credits) and thus will be unable to acquire 100 credits. JF noted that if students fail one module they will be able to accumulate 105 credits of taught modules and thus apply for ESR at that point, but if they fail two 15 credit modules, or the 30 credit Sept/Nov core module, they will finish their taught modules at 90 credits. TC highlighted that students in these situations will be expected to keep studying thereby exposing them to additional financial risk, before a decision will be taken regarding their eligibility for ESR. JF agreed and said that students in this situation have been advised they should only continue studying if they are committed to gaining sufficient credits to be eligible for ESR.
- 8.6. Council **noted** these regulations and thanked JF for explaining them and how they are currently affecting our students. It was **agreed** that these Regulations will be communicated to new students during their induction in September, and included in programme documents where appropriate.

9. Withdrawal of Non-Engaging Students

- 9.1. MS outlined the procedure that is currently followed when students do not sufficiently engage with their course and do to respond to attempts by GSE staff to contact them, and asked Council to consider this further with a view to agreeing a ‘best practice’ approach that can be used to inform the introduction of a formal GSE policy.
- 9.2. A formal policy will assist the Student Support team in managing non-engaging students in a consistent and supportive way, and help ensure that related expectations of students described within our Student Charter are adhered to. TC agreed that we should be consistent in our approach to granting leave of absences / intermissions for students and recording this formally.
- 9.3. It was noted that UEL and LJMU have existing policies and definitions that would be useful in the development of our policy. MS suggested that an effective policy would be likely to include an escalation pathway and, ultimately, the option to withdraw students who repeatedly fail to engage.
- 9.4. It was **agreed** that a draft policy should be presented at the next Council meeting. **Action: MS to draft a Student Engagement / Withdrawal Policy.**

10. University Partner Updates

- 10.1. IL was unable to attend the meeting and had asked for two items to be raised on his behalf. UEL would like to know if GSE staff would like any training to be provided, and secondly IL asked to know which GSE staff intend to attend the June Board. AW agreed to respond directly to IL after further discussion with academic staff. **Action: AW to discuss training requirements with IL and confirm who will be attending the UEL June Board.**

11. Programme Quality and Enhancement Reports

- 11.1. JF introduced this item and advised that LJMU’s Annual Monitoring Review process, which was conducted at the end of each academic year, has been replaced by an online Continuous Monitoring and Enhancement (CME) process that aims to continuously monitor the performance of a programme.
- 11.2. JF confirmed that outstanding actions from the last AMR have been copied to CME and highlighted some of the key issues and objectives that will be addressed in an action plan. JF advised that due to the nature of CME it is appropriate for this to become a standing agenda item at Academic Council meetings hereafter and this was **agreed**.
- 11.3. TC noted some similarities and differences between LJMU’s CME process and UEL’s Review and Enhancement Process (REP) and said that some of the items on the CME action plan could be discussed at future Programme Committee meetings. TC said that the LJMU system appeared to be more useful than UEL’s REP process as a tool for delivering continuous improvement.
- 11.4. AW invited Council members to feed back any further comments to JF.

12. Minutes of Programme Committee Meetings

- 12.1. TC reported that the last Programme Committee meeting for MSc programmes was held in February and minutes have been circulated previously. Following the meeting the new student representatives wrote an email to introduce themselves and this has been circulated to all current students and GSE staff. TC said that some of the previous student representatives have

- created a WordPress blog site where they are regularly posting some of their ideas and research findings.
- 12.2. TC also reported on some feedback from the February Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) meeting and highlighted some areas where improvements could be made such as the use of a discussion forum that can be accessed by all students, and the introduction of live streaming of lectures and seminars for distance learners. AW said the possibility of hosting our own Virtual Learning Environment is being explored, however it was noted that this would present its own risks in terms of associated IT support requirements, and AW added that existing Moodle and Canvas systems would need to remain available for some assessment related tasks. It was acknowledged that an IT assistant would be needed to facilitate the introduction of live streaming technology and manage interactions with distance learning students. Following a short discussion it was **agreed** that plans to create an Alumni network should be taken forward after a replacement Graduate School Marketing Officer has been appointed.
- 12.3. JC confirmed that the last MArch Programme Committee meeting was held in December and the next will be held later this month. JC said that library facilities and the availability of teaching spaces at CAT remain of concern and also reported on the difficulties in accessing a number of mainstream Architectural journals. On a more positive note JC advised that the 'Kindred Spirit' initiative is developing nicely and some good relationships are becoming established.

13. Any Other Business

- 13.1. TC expressed his sincere thanks and best wishes to Janet Drummond who retires from the Student Support team this week.

14. Date of Next Meeting

- 14.1. The next meeting will be held on **Thursday 4th July 2019, 10am – 12 noon** (venue to be confirmed)