QUALITY ASSURANCE STANDING GROUP
Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 20th September 2011

Present: J Taylor (Chair), M Barnard, R Chater, J Edwards, K Jones, A Main, C Symonds, N Silvennoinen (Secretary), G Willcocks

Apologies: A Diaz, B Dyer, A Young

1 Confirmation of membership and Terms of Reference

1.1 The Chair reported that Andrew Ireland is no longer able to continue as the Media Representative due to other commitments. A new Media School representative would be appointed shortly. Andrea Young was leaving BU and would be replaced by Kirsty Randall in November. Kate Jones was welcomed to the meeting as the new Students' Union representative.

1.2 The Chair summarised the Group's remit for the coming year. The Terms of Reference would remain unchanged.

2 Minutes of last meeting

2.1 Members discussed the late introduction of revisions to various centrally prepared procedural documents. The revised assessment regulations and Senate committee structure were cited as examples. In some cases, it was argued, these had impacted adversely on the Schools' preparations for the new academic year. The Group agreed that there was a need to react promptly to external and internal factors which sometimes meant that not all documentation could be published within optimal timescales. However, revisions should be measured and last minute changes should be avoided unless these are necessary to ensure that the student experience or the University's quality assurance framework, are not compromised. Further efforts would be made next year to establish a single and earlier publication date.

2.2 The minutes were confirmed as an accurate record. The Academic Standards Committee (ASC) had accepted the Group's recommendations on enhanced assessment feedback and Members confirmed that most Schools had implemented these for the 2011 start. The Students' Union representative queried whether students would routinely receive typed feedback on all assignments, but it was noted that currently this would not be possible for practical reasons. The Academic Partnerships representative queried whether partners had been informed of the recommendations and whether they would use the relevant host Schools' templates. It was agreed that she would circulate generic assignment brief and feedback forms to partners which could be used where no templates had been circulated by the host School.

Action: The Academic Partnerships representative to circulate Academic Procedure D1 and generic assignment brief and feedback templates to partners.

2.3 Members queried the Senate decision to relax the requirement for three-week assessment turnaround to 4 weeks in exceptional circumstances and members queried when this might be appropriate. The Chair would report back to the Group.

Action: The Chair to circulate further information regarding the above Senate decision.

2.4 Time limits on appeals had been on the Group's agenda in June and the Students' Union representative now reported that the Student Advice Centre's view was that the current limits should not be extended as students are not able to re-enrol until their appeal has been processed. It was noted that students receive a link to the Appeals Procedure on their Transcript. The Students' Union representative welcomed this but suggested that clarification it would be helpful to incorporate the timescales involved in appeals after students results have been published in the appeals procedure flowchart.

Action: Educational Development and Quality (EDQ) to communicate the above feedback on the appeals procedure to the University's Complaints Co-ordinator.

3   Exam feedback and student satisfaction

3.1   The Group had discussed assessment feedback in its July meeting and had made recommendations to ASC for Schools to improve current practice through enhanced generic assignment brief and feedback templates. The Group had agreed to return to the issue of exam feedback in the autumn term after further research into current sector practice had been carried out. 15 institutions responded to EDQ's request for information to help establish whether other universities provide assessment feedback on exams and whether exam scripts are returned or made available to students. The Chair noted that most institutions which replied allowed students supervised access to exam scripts but did not return scripts to students. Members agreed that the University's current practice of allowing students to photocopy scripts appeared to be in line with the sector and was more generous than some practices, although it was agreed that the current administrative charge should be discontinued.

3.2   Sector practice regarding exam feedback was more varied but Members noted that only a relatively small number of students requested exam feedback and those that did were able to receive this on request. This view was supported by the Student Experience Survey (SES) results although the SUBU representative reported that the NUS Charter stated that feedback should not be limited to coursework. This was particularly important where exams underpin further learning and it was suggested that rather than providing individual exam feedback to all students, generic feedback posted on myBU could provide an alternative approach.

3.3   Members discussed the concept of 'feed forward' as a learning tool and the Chair noted that this had been identified as an area for improvement in the SES. She queried whether Schools needed to enhance their pre-exam support for students but members argued that Schools had already various mechanisms in place to help prepare students for exams. These included past exam papers on myBU, and revision sessions although it was agreed that that short fat units were more problematic in this regard. Individual support was also available on request. Even though support was offered, it was noted that not all students accessed the available resources.

3.4   Members agreed that the University had appropriate mechanisms in place for student access to exam scripts and for examination feed forward and feedback. However, it was evident that information about these services should be improved to ensure that students are explicitly made aware of the available support to both encourage more students to access the resources and to help manage student expectations. Similarly, students value consistency so Schools should ensure that the minimum expectations for staff involved in exam preparation and feedback are clearly set out. Members suggested other areas where improvements could be made to help generate more positive student feedback included reducing over-assessment, better staff-student ratios, and further adjustments to the requirement for 3-week assessment turnaround.

        Action: The Chair to raise the issue of administrative charge for exam scripts at an appropriate forum.
        Action: EDQ to prepare staff guidelines which outline the minimum expectations in terms of exam feed forward and feedback and ask Schools to encourage staff to adopt these. The relevant Academic Procedures to be updated for 2012-13.
        Action: EDQ to coordinate enhanced student guidance to assessment processes which should be made available on the portal and on myBU.

4   Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL): credit allowances

4.1   The Chair outlined the background to the paper on APL credit allowances, noting that the University had been asked to revisit the current postgraduate APL limits in light of CPD activity in the Media School. EDQ had carried out sector research based on 19 HEIs and concluded that many had more generous allowances for their postgraduate provision than Bournemouth. Members were invited to discuss whether the current credit allowances continued to be appropriate or whether the Group would support any changes to the present policy.

4.2   The Group considered the paper and discussed the benefits of higher limits, including a potentially more competitive position in the market place through increased ability to respond to applicant demand for flexibility and mobility. The rationale for the current credit limits was also discussed and it was noted that this was linked to the University being able to maintain a degree of control over the taught element thus helping to ascertain authenticity of students' work. All members supported a

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change to bring the current postgraduate credit limits in line with the maximum volume of credit for APL transactions at undergraduate level. EDQ was asked to outline any implications of the proposed increase to ASC [see separate paper].

RECOMMENDATION TO ASC: that the following proposed changes to the current APL limits for postgraduate taught programmes be recommended for Senate approval:

That the current limits as outlined below

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i   credit based on APCL should not exceed 60 credits at Level M. Credit will be given only for taught units.

ii credit based on APEL should not exceed 40 credits at Level M. Credit will be given only for taught units.

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be changed to the following limits in line with the current maximum volume of credit for APL transactions at undergraduate level:

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i   credit based on APCL should not exceed two thirds of the credits for the award for which the student is registered. Credit will be given only for taught units.

ii credit based on APEL should not exceed one third of the credits for the award for which a student is registered. Credit will be given only for taught units.

4.3   The Group did not wish to make any changes to the stated APL limits for undergraduate programmes.

5   Any other business

5.1   The Students' Union representative returned to the earlier discussion regarding typed feedback and queried whether this could be made a mandatory requirement. Members recognised the benefits to students but the Chair reiterated that it was not currently practical to enforce this requirement. However, it was evident that markers were increasingly moving away from handwritten comments so this aspect of feedback was improving.

5.2   The Academic Partnerships Representative reported that partners had been asked to complete a Partner Quality Report which mirrored the School Quality Report template to provide partner institutions with an opportunity once a year to reflect on issues and developments pertaining to standards and quality across the provision at institutional level. To date, partners had only reported directly to the University through ongoing monitoring at framework/programme level.

6   Date of next meeting

6.1   The next meeting would take place on the 15th November.