Action plan relating to the recommendations resulting from the HER in March 2016

Introduction

This action plan responds to the recommendations made by the QAA in the report of the University's Higher Education Review which took place in March 2016[1]. The action plan was drafted in consultation with OUSU and the Conference of Colleges. A draft of this plan was considered by Education Committee in Trinity term 2016. This version was signed off by the PVC (Education) in July 2016 and published on the University's website in August 2016. Education Committee will receive updates on progress during 2016-17. A report on progress will be published in October 2017.

Recommendation 1: Work with the Conference of Colleges to establish an appropriate mechanism by which the University can, on a regular basis, be informed of the nature and extent of complaints and appeals within the Colleges (Expectation B9).

Commentary

Education Committee noted in Michaelmas term 2015 that it would be helpful to receive information about college-related OIA cases, alongside the annual summary report on OIA decisions of University cases.

The Conference of Colleges agreed in June 2016 that it will provide a copy of the annual report it receives on cases considered by CCAT and by the OIA to the University's Education Committee.

Actions still to be taken

Action	Date for completion	Action by	Success indicator
1A: Provision by Conference of Colleges of the report on cases considered by CCAT and by the OIA to the University's Education Committee	Michaelmas term 2016 (and each year thereafter)	Conference of colleges	Education Committee receives the report.

---

[1] The report can be found at: http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/provider?UKPRN=10007774

Recommendation 2: Ensure that there are appropriate procedures in place for the development, monitoring and review of all collaborative partnerships (Expectation B10).

Commentary

A revised *Policy and Guidance on providing education with others (P&G EWO)* was approved in Hilary term 2015. The *P&G* sets out the policy framework within which any new collaborative proposal would be developed.

A report on current collaborative arrangements, including an updated University *Register*, was provided to the Quality Assurance Subcommittee (QASC) in Michaelmas term 2015. A range of actions arising out of the report for relevant departments and divisions were identified, including the establishment of written agreements with relevant partners. QASC received updates in Hilary term and Trinity term 2016.

QASC agreed (in Michaelmas term 2015) that EPS officers should undertake an annual process of collecting updates for the *Register of collaborative arrangements involving students* (the *Register*) and that it should receive an updated *Register* annually, alongside a report on the schedule of reviews of collaborative courses.

Actions still to be taken

Action	Date for completion	Action by	Success indicator
2A: Continued pursuit of outstanding written agreements with collaborative partners	September 2016	Departments and divisions	All relevant collaborative arrangements have a current written agreement in place.
2B: Updates for the Register to be sought	Long Vacation 2016 (and each year after that)	EPS officers	QASC receives its annual report on collaborative arrangements (including updated *Register).*
2C: Annual report, including updated *Register* and schedule of reviews, to QASC	Michaelmas term 2016 (and each year after that)	QASC	

Recommendation 3: Provide explicit guidance to enable a consistent approach to student workload across the University (Expectations B1, A3.1, B3, B4, B6).

Commentary

The HER Report suggests that the most effective way for the University to address this recommendation would be 'to provide clear guidance and expectations through its programme approval process and the definitive record of its awards.' (paragraph 2.9) Given the relative stability of the University's course offering, tackling this through the course approval process alone would not be sufficiently effective. The information for colleges, academic staff and students needs to be enhanced through a systematic and comprehensive approach.

Departmental recommended patterns of teaching are a key source of information relating to workload. Their format and content varies between subjects and there is currently no systematic process in place for updating them or incorporating their content into course handbooks.

The *Policy and Guidance on course information* (which includes a template for course handbooks) already requires that course handbooks include information about teaching patterns. However, the implementation checks of UG and PGT handbooks undertaken by QASC in Hilary and Trinity terms 2016 identified that information on teaching patterns varies significantly in content and level of detail.

Discussion with student representatives has highlighted the fact that consistent amounts of tuition (as represented by recommended patterns of teaching), does not always equal a consistent amount of work for students, as different tutors will set different amounts of work for tutorials. Furthermore, the bunching of tutorials can cause peaks of workload. This variation can be a positive aspect of the collegiate system, which allows UG tuition to be individualised according to student needs and academic interest. However, there is an important role played by organising tutors in monitoring the suitability of the overall workload (primarily in terms of number of tutorials) planned for their students each term. Senior Tutors' Committee (STC) has agreed a revision to one of the recommendations made in the 'Guidance and questionnaire relating to College UG academic provision' to clarify organising tutors' responsibilities. The new wording will apply to the recommendation in place for 2016-17. Colleges report on their compliance with the recommendations each year.

Specific work with OUSU is planned to identify and follow up on courses where students have raised particular concerns about workload. Further research and policy work is planned in relation to joint courses and defining the outer limits of expectations of workload for UG students.

Actions still to be taken

Action	Date for completion	Action by	Success indicator
Information in course handbooks			
3A: Divisions have been tasked (by QASC) with working with academic departments to improve the content	October 2016	Divisions and academic departments	All course handbooks contain appropriate information about patterns

of course handbooks for 2016-17, to ensure they move towards meeting the requirements of the *P&G course information*.			of teaching.
Recommended patterns of teaching			
3B: During the summer of 2016 and the 2016-17 academic year, EPS officers, in collaboration with Senior Tutors' Committee (STC), departments and divisions, will work to specify the format in which recommended patterns of teaching for UG courses should be presented, to ensure they are meaningful for departments, colleges and students.	June 2017	EPS Officers, STC, QASC, QAWG	Format for recommended patterns of teaching to be agreed to inform content of course handbooks and the proposal template for new courses and course changes for 2017-18.
3C: Establish a structure for ensuring the recommended patterns of teaching are kept up-to-date by departments and are communicated effectively to students and colleges.	June 2017	EPS Officers, STC, QASC, QAWG	Clear process in place for the maintenance and annual updating of information on recommended patterns of teaching, and for how they are made easily accessible to, and utilised by, colleges.
3D: EPS officers will work with the Quality Assurance Working Group and STC to consider how the revised recommended patterns of teaching might be used by the colleges.	June 2017	EPS Officers, STC, QASC, QAWG	
Oversight of workload by organising tutors in colleges			
3E: Revised recommendation in the STC 'Guidance and questionnaire relating to College UG academic provision' to clarify that organising tutors should be aware of the workload planned for their students each term.	Michaelmas term 2016	Conference Secretariat, all colleges, QAWG	Revised recommendation in place and reports from colleges confirm practice in line.
Identifying particular areas of concern			
3F: The University will work with OUSU to identify UG courses where students have raised particular concerns about the total amount of workload, or the distribution of the workload across the terms and years of the course.	January 2017	OUSU, UG Panel / QASC	Set of courses with particular student concerns identified.
3G: For those courses identified, engagement with the students (perhaps via focus groups), and with the relevant academic departments via the division, and with colleges via STC,will take place to map the current workload and consider its	September 2017	OUSU, EPS officers, departments and divisions, colleges and STC	Student workload mapped and considered by relevant academic departments, in consultation with their students and with colleges.

appropriateness.			
3H: Scope and map the landscape of joint courses across the University (those which involve significant contributions from more than one academic department).	June 2017	UG Panel	Taxonomy of joint courses developed, and areas for further attention agreed.
Striving towards a consistent approach			
3I: Consideration of amendments or extensions to the *P&G UG learning and teaching* to define the typical and/or maximum amounts of workload expected for students on UG courses.	June 2017	UG Panel (in consultation with STC as appropriate)	Revisions to the *P&G UGLT* agreed.
3J: Provide information to students about the typical and/or maximum amounts of workload expected of them (in course and/or college handbooks) alongside information about how to seek support in relation to unusually heavy workloads.	October 2017	Divisions and academic departments, colleges	All UG course handbooks and/or college handbooks contain appropriate information about typical and/or maximum workloads.

Affirmation: The University's progress in implementing the Policy and Guidance on Course Information and the Policy and Guidance for Examiners (C).

Commentary

This affirmation relates to the steps that have been taken to improve information for students about their courses through the implementation of the *Policy and Guidance on course information* (which includes a template for course handbooks) and the provision of a template for examination conventions in the Policy and Guidance for examiners and others involved in University examinations.

As noted above in relation to recommendation 3, QASC has undertaken implementation checks of UG and PGT handbooks which have identified areas where further development is required.

Actions still to be taken

Action	Date for completion	Action by	Success indicator
Divisions have been tasked (by QASC) with working with academic departments to improve the content of course handbooks for 2016-17, to ensure they move towards meeting the requirements of the *P&G course information*.	October 2016	Divisions and academic departments	Improvement in the content of course handbooks, particularly those identified as having the furthest distance to travel to meet the *P&G* requirements.