University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 26 January 2018

EdPSC Communication on Annual Monitoring 2016-17

Jane McAllister, Clerk to EdPSC

Extracts of EdPSC minute from meeting held on 12 December 2017

1. Brief updates on work in progress in relation to the themes identified [EC/2017/19]

ASC highlighted to EdPSC the Undergraduate College Annual Monitoring Summaries for 2016-17 and the number of repeat issues being raised. The main themes raised in the College Annual Monitoring Summaries are listed below with each followed by comments and brief updates on work in progress provided by the Convener and/or other members of EdPSC:

- **Suitability and quality of teaching spaces**

  Major work on timetabling process was underway with expertise in optimisation being bought in.

  Staff should be encouraged to use existing reporting mechanisms for issues in rooms.

- **Student mental health**: while it was encouraging that some action had been taken, it was clear that more support was needed as demand continued to grow.

  Mental Health comments should be forwarded to SSDC – however, Professor Morrison strongly emphasised that many of the factors creating problems, such as capacity, were the responsibility of EdPSC rather than SSDC and should be addressed directly rather than transferring the focus onto Mental Health. Dr Williamson supported this position, stating that it was not a remediation issue. He reported that CAPS had appointed a peer support co-ordinator, who was to work on communicating what is normal in terms of anxiety and what needed to be dealt with.

- **Staffing**

  Staffing issues should be discussed at College and School level.

- **EvaSys**: low return rates and whether alternative methods might be used to elicit the required feedback

  EvaSys - the Convener stated that his understanding of the Course Evaluation Policy was that it had a great deal of flexibility built in. Members agreed and suggested that staff were still getting used to what they could do. Professor Fischbacher-Smith suggested some work in this area could be incorporated in the new enhancement theme projects. The Convener noted that best practice on obtaining good response rates was available and should be re-circulated.

  Action: Professor Fischbacher-Smith, Senate Office

- **MyCampus**: the Director of SLSD invited members of staff to contact her directly with specific details of the problems in order that they could be investigated. It was suggested that, rather than logging problems, hard-pushed staff would often find a work-around solution.

- **Moodle**

  Virtual Learning Environment - The Convener reported that it had been agreed to review the University's Virtual Learning Environment to identify the best solution going forward. All options, including the status quo, would be explored and how each would be supported across the University would be an important factor of that discussion. It was noted that ASC had flagged that the Digital Learning Strategy would be approved by EdPSC in December 2017. The Convener clarified that it had since been agreed that the Digital Learning Strategy would be incorporated into the main Learning and Teaching Strategy, which was undergoing a refreshment process at its mid-term point. Members of EdPSC supported ASC's position that timelines were important to ensure action was taken forward. The Convener reported that issues that could be progressed immediately would be taken forward through the Information Policy and Strategy Committee (IPSC).

  Action: Convener

- **Urkund**: it was noted that the Turnitin/Urkund Working Group had had its first meeting

- Access to portfolio work for recent graduates: this would be addressed to the VLE Development Board with a request for an anticipated timescale for achieving a resolution

2. Discussion of the Annual Monitoring Process in general [EC/2017/19]

The Committee discussed the Annual Monitoring (AM) process in more general terms.

There was agreement that the process posed several challenges for the University. As a vehicle for assuring and enhancing academic quality, it was essential the University's AM process operated effectively. Historically, maintaining staff engagement had required continuing effort. The process had been the subject of several significant revamps also, in the attempt to maximise its usefulness to course teams, Schools and Colleges and to maintain academic staff buy-in. A concern in the past had been that AM had not always been seen as an intrinsic element of course quality management but, instead, as an additional task that needed to be carried out, with consequent impact on engagement and enthusiasm. In recent years, changes had been introduced to help address this, and to minimise staff effort in participating in the process, to ensure it picked up enhancements that might be applicable elsewhere and to gather feedback from staff on topical issues.

A key consideration was the nature of the matters that staff frequently raised in completing AM documentation. It was common for there to be complaints regarding teaching facilities of a minor (though, for the staff member concerned, frustrating) nature. But staffing levels, major teaching space issues and matters relating to corporate infrastructure were also raised. It was essential that the AM process included the facility to report such concerns – both from the viewpoint of good governance and to keep faith with staff who were recording genuine concerns that impacted on academic quality. AM fulfilled an important function in capturing an overview of, and informing the University of, the issues being experienced by staff, as well as in confirming that their concerns were being listened to. However, in different ways, these were difficult to address in a self-contained AM process. For minor problems with facilities, the AM process necessarily took too long to address matters that might otherwise be fixed quickly. Staff could also find eventual responses on very major corporate questions disenchanting, because issues frequently required long-term solutions and it could be difficult for staff operating in local contexts to relate to responses that were necessarily written in broad terms.

More specifically, in discussion, it was commented that AM did not appear to be picking up enhancements or good practice. Reassurance was given that good practice was being reported in the College Summaries but that the overview paper, which focused on the

issues, drew the majority of the discussion at ASC. It was agreed that, in future, a good practice themes summary would be provided to ASC to highlight the positives and to encourage a more holistic view.

Professor Davies raised concerns about the difficulties of getting schools to engage with the process in a positive way and suggested that some work that to demonstrate that the process resulted in effective action would help. Dr Doherty expressed the view that accountability was needed at School level where most enhancement work was initiated. It was noted that ASC had also discussed routes for providing feedback to the Colleges on the issues raised, and the long timescales the process entailed.

There was recognition of the importance of ensuring that concerns being voiced were channelled in the most appropriate way and that they effectively fed into resource management and planning processes at School/RI, College, or corporate levels. There was agreement that the AM documentation could usefully include advice for staff on matters such as how to report minor facilities problems.

Professor Fischbacher-Smith reported that the new enhancement theme, *Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience*, would provide some resource that would be used, in part, to support Annual Monitoring. The work associated with the new enhancement theme was welcomed and thought timely and it was noted that Senate Office was reviewing the process in advance of ELIR4.

It was agreed to feed this discussion back to ASC along with the discussion of refurbishment group.

Action: Clerk, Senate Office

3. Working Group on Teaching Space Refurbishment [EC/2017/16]

EdPSC received a proposal for a new EdPSC sub-group that would provide oversight of, and give direction to, the refurbishment of teaching spaces. The Group would develop a plan for refurbishment that acknowledged evolving pedagogies, consistent design principles, and the development of spaces across campus. If approved, the Group would be established from Jan 2018 and would report to EdPSC. It would involve LEADS and Audio Visual throughout the refurbishment processes and would aim to produce a refurbishment plan by April/May 2018 with the first spaces due for refurbishment in summer 2018.

As background, Professor Coton reported that a condition survey had been conducted some time ago to identify below standard spaces. All spaces identified had now been refurbished and brought up to a good level (Category A). The University had then embarked on pilot programmes with increased budgets and a more critical focus on design standards.

The proposal indicated that support for the Group would be provided by a short term Project Management post, funded by consolidation of resources currently used for adhoc PM consultancy. This post would provide continuity and bring a co-ordinated approach to allow consistent design principles to be applied in a planned way. It was agreed that the appointment of a Project Manager was the single most important aspect of the proposal and that the role should explicitly include listening to all potential users and helping to communicate the practicalities of teaching in each space to architects and other contractors.

Members suggested that the phrase "active learning" should be changed to "interactive" to be more inclusive. It was agreed that "interactive and active learning" would be used to ensure active learning continued to be promoted. It was also noted that room booking systems would need to be upgraded to allow staff to specify the facilities/configuration required for their intended teaching methods to ensure that they would be allocated suitable space. The Convener agreed that the University needed to work towards more sophisticated timetabling/room allocation.

EdPSC agreed to **approve** the proposal and to establish a Teaching Space Refurbishment Sub-Group. The Convener of EdPSC, with the Assistant Vice Principal (Learning & Teaching) would identify a Convener of the Group and arrange for work to begin from January 2018.

Action: Convener, Professor Fischbacher-Smith

4. A summary of progress on review of Annual Monitoring from Senate Office

As noted by ASC, Senate Office is reviewing the University's Annual Monitoring Process.

In recent years, work has been undertaken to simplify the reporting forms and to improve engagement with the process by introducing a discussion/meeting based approach as an alternative to a paper-based exercise. The School Quality Officers have reported that the impact of these changes has been positive but there are still concerns with onward reporting and feedback. The Senate Office is focussing on these aspects of the process.

- Research has been undertaken to explore practices in other institutions that might inform development here. This is being written up.

- Information on current practices for dealing with Annual Monitoring Summaries at school level across the University will be sought over the next weeks. Some initial feedback from the College Quality Officers regarding College practice has been received and a meeting is being scheduled to discuss further.

The next steps will be to:

- Review Annual Monitoring timescales to examine fit with budgeting and planning processes. It will be necessary to ensure the processes link well if annual monitoring is to influence change.

- Explore opportunities to develop the role of Quality Officers.

- Propose and consult widely on a range of options.

- Present recommendations to ASC in May 2018 with a view to implementing for the 2017-18 reporting cycle. NB: this timescale is possible as the recommendations will relate to reporting activity (October/February) and will not affect the reflection and monitoring activity itself, which takes place at the end of the session.

5. New Enhancement Theme - *Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the student experience*

Professor Fischbacher-Smith, Assistant Vice-Principal (Learning & Teaching) will lead the institutional team working on this enhancement theme. One of the priorities identified in the institutional plan is to improve the Annual Monitoring process and its role as a key process underpinning the enhancement of the student experience and engagement with feedback from students. This will be complementary to the Senate Office work described above. It will focus on enhancing the evidence used in the annual monitoring process. The intended outcome is a process that allows greater insight into course and programme level enhancements and areas for improvement that can be drawn upon and shared across the institution to encourage reflection and action on improvements and to share good practice. It will involve students and staff across the University in dialogue about evidence and how it might be meaningfully gathered and used in support of course, programme and subject/discipline level changes as well as how we might integrate evidence across the University.

Enhancement Theme funding for research assistants/interns will be used to support this activity.