# **HUMANITIES FACULTY COMMITTEE**

## Wednesday 29 May 2024

**Present:** Fiona Smyth (Chair), Emma Rose (Secretary), Claire Alexander, Martin Evans, Claire Goulsbra, Dimitris Papadimitriou, Constance Smith, Maggie Gale, Charles Insley, Patricia Perlman-Dee, Mabel Sanchez-Barrioluengo

**Apologies:** Fiona Devine, Ken McPhail, Roz Webster, Jon Shute, Richard Whalley, Katie Jackson, Thomas Schmidt, Umit Kemal Yildiz, Rachel Walton

**In attendance:** Gemma Keaveney (note-taker), Victoria Roberts (Business Support Manager), Vicky Skinner (Head of Faculty Finance), Richard Allmendinger (AD for Business Engagement, Civic & Cultural Partnerships)

## 1 Welcome, introductions and apologies

Professor Fiona Smyth welcomed the group to the meeting.

## 2 Minutes and actions of previous meeting

Confirmed that actions from the previous meeting had been completed or were in process. The minutes of the meeting held on 11 April 2024 were approved.

## 3 Business Engagement update

Presentation and update provided by Richard Allmendinger who outlined the achievements to date and upcoming opportunities within business engagement and knowledge exchange. To note that this is now referred to as BEKE.

A copy of the slides is available to members following this meeting.

It was confirmed that there had been tangible outputs, particularly in comparison to FSE and FBMH, and that Humanities overall is doing well. Interdisciplinarity is working well however we do need to encourage staff to consider commercialisation.

A question was raised about the difference between policy and business engagement: how these areas overlapped and how these areas might be more aligned. It was suggested that colleagues from the Policy@Manchester team be involved in the work of the BEKE team.

**HFC290524-03-01:** Richard Allmendinger to discuss P@M involvement on BEKE projects with Cecilia Wong.

BEKEs initial project centres on fashion and retail and Richard confirmed that this area was chosen as a starting point as research was already being undertaken. It is also noted that whilst there are issues with sustainable fashion etc., working with this industry would hopefully provide an opportunity to address issues on sustainability, modern slavery and provide buy-in and interest from external partners. Confirmed that the focus of the work is on retail rather than the fashion element.

## 4 Finance update

As we approach year-end, Vicky Skinner gave an update on year to date performance and where we are positioned against budget and the five-year planning cycle.

Noted that Humanities has had a solid performance and though tuition fees are slightly adrift, there have been some mitigating factors with strong performance in some areas. Overall, we are tracking ahead of budget in YTD performance.

The three key messages from the full year Q3 update are:

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A question was raised about how UoM compares financially to other similar institutions. It is noted that although we are in a strong position, we are not complacent and are looking to the future and how we might strengthen our position.

There are of course external impacts on us such as the cost of living and lower Chinese student numbers than we thought. Both these things and other issues making it difficult to predict this year.

Issues were raised relating to the closure of some part-time programmes and these are being considered within the teaching sustainability project. It is confirmed that we will continue to offer part-time programmes that have been **designed** to be part-time rather than using programmes in a piecemeal way. It was acknowledged that some part-time programmes *cost* rather than *make* money and it is these types of programmes that are being considered within teaching sustainability recognising that programmes are about quality rather than finance.

## 5 Hallsworth conference funding

Issues raised by members about conference funding processes and delays caused by internal virement of funding. Overall, colleagues are happy to receive the grant money which can reduce fees and therefore increase the number of applicants for programmes. However, the internal processes of paying internal departments have proved difficult and caused delays to a number of payments. The main question is how this process can be improved to create efficiencies.

**HFC290524-05-01:** Vicky Skinner to liaise with School Finance Teams to understand the issues causing delay and report back to this Committee.

It was confirmed that although different University departments transferring money and in effect paying themselves seems counter-productive, there is value to the University in the process and it is unlikely that this system will change.

Noted that Hannah Rundle had previously been involved in discussions on this issue.

**HFC290524-05-02:** Emma Rose to liaise with Hannah Rundle and Vicky Skinner to progress and offer suggestions for improvement to process.

A suggestion was made that funding could be allocated to one Faculty cost centre which would use different task codes for each area to draw upon. The task code would be closed once all funding released/end of project.

**HFC290524-05-03:** Vicky Skinner to work with teams to set this system up.

## 6 Unit survey: closure date and results access

Two key issues were brought to Faculty Committee on unit surveys, and these are listed below along with responses to each provided by colleagues in the TLS Delivery Team.

***Closing date*** Staff are unclear on why the end of semester unit surveys closed on 5th May, one week before the end of teaching.

The survey was moved a week earlier to allow for the new redaction process to take place. This was intended to provide colleagues with the final week before exams began to review the comments and request redaction. Given the technical issue that occurred this was delayed by a week and therefore unfortunately did not make use of this intended ‘buffer week’.   
  
For 2024-2025 the timeline for surveys will be agreed at the next SSWG (Student Surveys Working Group) meeting on 3rd June. At present the intention for Semester 1 is that surveys will run until the final day of teaching. For Semester 2 we have a very late easter break, meaning only weeks 11 and 12 of teaching remain once students return. The group will be identifying the best solution as part of the June meeting.

***Access*** Some colleagues have asked why Unit Survey results are no longer shared with CUDs / PDs / DoTLs / HoDs. It is useful to be able to see overall results for the area(s) you are responsible for in order to be able to make improvements going forward.

For Blue to release aggregate reporting electronically to CUD, PDs, HoDs etc the schools would need to provide the T&L Delivery team with a detailed list of every colleague who holds these roles. PD and CUD information should be provided, in advance, so this can be added as a data source. For the current academic cycle, it has been established that this would not have been a practical request due in part to the ongoing issues in collecting necessary data to run the surveys from schools.

For Semester 1, all reporting was shared via SharePoint both the HoE/DOTL and HoTLSE in each school across the University. It was then at the school’s discretion to disseminate this as they deemed most appropriate to HODs, PDs and CUDs given they should hold this data. Although not the optimal solution, it was workable for 23/24. This was shared with the HoE/DOTLs and HoTLSEs at the time of the Semester 1 reporting release.

The same process will occur for Semester 2 and will be shared with the HoE/DOTLs and HoTLSEs next week now that comment redaction has been completed. Aggregate reporting is currently being prepared.

As part of SSWG, the question will be raised as to whether the schools have capacity to provide the required lists to move to electronic release. The intention is to migrate data collection processes to the software’s inbuilt functionality for 24/25, which will finally move this data process away from a 7-week back-and-forth via Excel files. Given the support school colleagues may need in adapting to this, it may be that the team are not in the position to introduce electronic release of aggregate reporting for 24/25.   
  
Vice-Deans for TLS and Faculty HoTLSE have access to the whole data set for all faculties. The four schools in HUMs have then had the relevant DOTL and HOTLSE added. We have had individual requests since the release for specific members of staff to be provided with access in schools.

A further related item was raised at the meeting:

***Redacted comments*** – as AI is now used for redaction process, it is likely that if inappropriate comments are made, only that comment would be redacted. The Chair confirmed that the whole response is not removed from the response.

**HFC290524-06-01**: Fiona Smyth to raise with the Student Voice Strategy Group.

It is noted that with c. 30,000 comments, it is difficult to pick everything up even with additional filters which proved selective. The panel who work through the comments confirm that there were no significant flags raised and that information was circulated to colleagues for them to redact as appropriate.

It is noted that we reserve the right to de-anonymise and report where inappropriate comments are made for example that may contradict our Dignity at Work policy or where there is racial hate, etc. Such comments are permanently removed from all records, but no further action is taken. We do however recognise that this is by no means a perfect process.

One example of such commentary was highlighted in the meeting and this issue will be addressed directly between the Head of School of SoSS and Fiona Smyth.

Other issues were raised on Course Unit scoring and the impact low scores may have on colleagues’ careers. It is confirmed that scores are looked at as part of probation and promotion procedures however they are not considered in isolation and never used to rank colleagues. Scores are evaluated against the overall number of students, the response rate and other factors and form only a small element of these processes. It is noted that if colleagues receive high scores, they include them in promotion applications whereas those perceived to have low scores do not include as they may think this would be detrimental to their application.

**HFC290524-06-02:** Fiona Smyth and Fiona Keenan to discuss how best to clarify how this information is used within processes and feedback to this group and others as appropriate.

It was agreed that making Course Unit surveys compulsory would not be a viable option, but it is recognised that there could be some improvement with a view to enhancing benefit to the student. There may also be opportunities to make the survey shorter with better quality of questions which may also consider inclusivity.

It was also agreed that some bias remains in the process and that questions should be based around learning outcomes rather than individuals, this would lead to less bias overall.

**HFC290524-06-03:** Fiona Smyth to pick this up with the Student Voice Strategy Group outside of this meeting and report back.

The Chair confirmed that reports are only generated with a minimum number of five to retain anonymity whilst recognising that some courses may have lower numbers of students and therefore lower response rates which fall below the reporting criteria. These cases are looked at individually to protect the students so that they can answer honestly without being identified by members of staff. This data can be released on request so that staff can view comments made.

One example given was a colleague with 8 students and a 50% response rate which falls below the reporting criteria.

**HCF290524-06-04:** Colleagues with requests for information on these cases should contact Daniel Bayes or the T&L Service Delivery Team.

It was agreed that it was helpful and motivational to receive a letter from the Head of School when scoring had been improved and that we should ensure this is best practice across Faculty.

**HCF290524-06-05:** Fiona Smyth to raise this issue with Directors of T&L to ensure this is adopted throughout Humanities.

## 7 Any Other Business

The Chair thanked Constance Smith for her Committee service now that her term was coming to an end.

Faculty Committee elections have taken place and SoSS representative had been confirmed as Chloe Nahum-Claudel. There were three nominations for two available PS memberships and voting is currently underway to fill the vacancies on the Committee.

No further business was reported.

**Actions arising from meeting 29 May 2024**

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| **Meeting** | **Action** | **Responsible** | **Context** | **update** |
| HFC290524-03-01 | Discuss P@M involvement on BEKE projects with Cecilia Wong | Richard Allmendinger | **Item 3: Business Engagement update**  The difference between policy and business engagement: how these areas overlapped and how these areas might be more aligned. It was suggested that colleagues from the Policy@Manchester team be involved in the work of the BEKE team. |  |
| HFC290524-05-01 | Liaise with School Finance Teams re. issues causing delay and report back to this Committee | Vicky Skinner | **Item 5: Hallsworth conference funding**  Issues raised by members about conference funding processes and delays caused by internal virement of funds and how these processes might be improved to create efficiencies. |  |
| HFC290524-05-02 | Liaise with Hannah Rundle and Vicky Skinner to progress and offer suggestions for improvement to process | Emma Rose | **Item 5: Hallsworth conference funding**  It was confirmed that although different University departments transferring money and in effect paying themselves seems counter-productive, there is value to the University in the process and it is unlikely that this system will change. Noted that Hannah Rundle had previously been involved in discussions on this issue. |  |
| HFC290524-05-03 | Work with teams to set this system up | Vicky Skinner | **Item 5: Hallsworth conference funding**  A suggestion was made that funding could be allocated to one Faculty cost centre which would use different task codes for each area to draw upon. The task code would be closed once all funding released/end of project. |  |

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| HFC290524-06-01  HFC290524-06-03 | Raise issues with the Student Voice Strategy Group | Fiona Smyth | **Item 6: Course Unit closure date/results access**  ***Redacted comments*** – as AI is now used for redaction process, it is likely that if inappropriate comments are made, only that comment would be redacted. The Chair confirmed that the whole response is not removed from the response.  It was also agreed that some bias remains in the process and that questions should be based around learning outcomes rather than individuals, this would lead to less bias overall. |  |
| HFC290524-06-02 | Discuss with Fiona Keenan how best to clarify how this information is used within processes and feedback to this group and others as appropriate | Fiona Smyth | **Item 6: Course Unit closure date/results access**  Impact low scores may have on colleagues’ careers. Scores are looked at as part of probation/promotion but are not considered in isolation/never used to rank colleagues. Scores are evaluated against the overall number of students, response rate and other factors & form only a small element of these processes. It is noted that if colleagues receive high scores, they include them in promotion applications whereas those perceived to have low scores do not include as they may think this would be detrimental to their application. |  |
| HCF290524-06-04 | Colleagues with requests for information on these cases should contact Daniel Bayes or the T&L Service Delivery Team. | All members | **Item 6: Course Unit closure date/results access**  Confirmed that reports are generated with a minimum number of five to retain anonymity whilst recognising that some courses may have lower numbers of students and therefore lower response rates which fall below the reporting criteria. These cases are looked at individually to protect the students so that they can answer honestly without being identified by members of staff. This data can be released on request so that staff can view comments made. |  |
| HCF290524-06-05 | Raise this issue with Directors of T&L to ensure this is adopted throughout Humanities. | Fiona Smyth | It was agreed that it was helpful and motivational to receive a letter from the Head of School when scoring had been improved and that we should ensure this is best practice across Faculty. |  |