# **HUMANITIES FACULTY COMMITTEE**

## Thursday 17 October 2024

**Present:** Fiona Devine (Chair), Fiona Smyth, Emma Rose (Secretary), Charles Insley, Mabel Sanchez-Barrioluengo, Ken McPhail, Roz Webster, Jon Shute, Richard Whalley, Katie Jackson, Mario Pezzino (for Claire Alexander), Chloe Nahum-Claudel, Georgina Lewis-Vasco, Juup Stelma, Sofia Micklewright

**Apologies:** Thomas Schmidt, Umit Kemal Yildiz, Rachel Walton, Claire Goulsbra, Dimitris Papadimitriou, Maggie Gale, Martin Evans, Patricia Perlman-Dee, Fiona Keenan, Kate McNamee

**In attendance:** Gemma Keaveney (note-taker), Victoria Roberts (Business Support Manager), Vicky Skinner (Head of Faculty Finance), Amanda Grimshaw (for item 3, student recruitment)

## 1 Welcome, introduction and apologies

Professor Fiona Devine welcomed the group to the first meeting of the academic year.

## 2 Minutes and actions of previous meeting

Confirmed that actions from the previous meeting had been completed or were in process with a verbal update provided by Emma Rose as secretary. The minutes of the meeting held on 29 May 2024 were approved noting that Charles Insley did not attend but was listed as being present.

The Chair confirmed that Terms of Reference (ToR) had been shared with the group as usual for the first meeting of the year and that comments and feedback were always welcome.

**HFC171024-02-01**: Role titles to be reviewed and updated.

## 3 Student recruitment update

An update on progress to date was provided by Amanda Grimshaw, Admissions Manager and presentation will be shared with members. Key elements of the presentation are listed below:

* Humanities had 45,000 UG applications (45% of the University’s UG applications) same number of applications as Warwick and Sheffield universities. A good reminder of the scale of our own operation.
* There was a slow start to UG/PGT recruitment cycle. However, our current registration position indicates the faculty is headed towards achieving financial intake targets.
* There was a significant drop in international application numbers.
* Noted a 10% drop in China applications and although we did want to reduce these numbers, we would prefer to do so in a more controlled way. Colleagues will be meeting agents in China next week to get a better understanding of the market.

To confirm that a 10% alumni bursary will be available to students from 2025, alongside scholarships for international students.

The group discussed the potential in the future for more flexibility of programmes to allow students to remain in work and to study at the same time.

It was noted that flexible programmes to date had a mixed success rate but that options were being discussed as part of the flexible learning project to determine more flexible options for future programmes.

We should continue to recognise the amount of work invested in getting us where we are currently in terms of recruitment of home and international UGT and PGT students, We must understand that market conditions are changing and business as usual is not enough and we should further consider our portfolio and understand areas of demand and shape it in ways not previously considered. That said, through the efforts of academic and PS staff involved in recruitment, admissions and conversion activities, we are not in the same position as other institutions who continue to struggle.

We should note the amazing work undertaken by academics and PS staff, especially during the period of clearing.

## 4 NSS update

Professor Fiona Smyth presented an update on NSS and key points to note are listed below:

* UoM came 146th from a total of 155– we must do better. There is some evidence that our NSS score is damaging our wider reputation, and it may be, for example, that our NSS score explains our challenges in attracting home PGT students, and especially in our ability to convert our own UGT students to PGT programmes.
* We need to focus on working towards improvements and ensure that our students have a fantastic experience at Manchester.
* Student comments: there is roughly a 50/50 split for positive and negative comments.
* SLT has agreed a 15 point action plan addressing the fundamentals of Assessment and Feedback and Student Voice, with updates to be reported back monthly. Priority themes include:
* Timeliness and quality of feedback.
* Clarity and consistency of assessment and feedback.
* Access to/responsiveness of academic staff.
* Valuing the student voice and partnerships and creating positive learning communities.

It has been agreed that Directors of T&L and Programme Directors should have a more ‘open door’ policy to allow students to get quick fixes where possible.

Our priority is to get consistency across all Schools within Faculty.

Discussion ensued around tight marking deadlines, the university’s marking (15 working day) policy, and it was confirmed that discussion is currently underway on this policy.

In terms of timetabling examinations, this is not as straightforward as it may seem and that several factors were in play when making and agreeing dates for exams etc. We can of course consider changes to aspects within our control as a faculty and will do so.

Other issues identified were: Blackboard not notifying when work comes in; the huge impact of GP’s not issuing notes for mitigating circumstances; and the issue of why some students are not looking at their feedback (further discussion revealed that some students are unaware that they need to click a link to get the feedback, and this should be made clearer in student communications).

Fiona Smyth confirmed that the current Action Plan is a 100 day plan with which the University hopes to shift the dial a little and indicate what we need to do more of and less of. It is not intended to be a one fix ticket.

It is understood that Canvas will provide much better student analytics which will help to address some of these issues.

Discussed the impact of reducing the assessment load by reducing the size of assessments and using alternative forms of assessment.

Katie Jackson reported that whilst it was great for UoM to take on more Widening Participation students, we need to think about how they can be fully supported. We aim for good diversity of students, but we do need to properly cater for them all and this should be fed into our strategy.

Focus groups are also being set up to include paid school reps from the student union. The issue of feedback can be discussed at these meetings. Katie Jackson confirmed that there had been student representation at the AMBS school board yesterday which had been valuable.

## 5 Teaching Sustainability project update

Professor Fiona Devine presented an update to the group and the presentation is shared with members of this Committee.

Other Faculties are also involved but their issues are around course units only. It was confirmed that representatives from FBMH and FSE were part of our Teaching Sustainability working group.

Information was shared by Emma Rose on the progress of consolidating our portfolio. A question was raised on the number of students registered to programmes that have now been closed.

**HFC17102024-05-01:** Emma Rose to share the data on the number of students on small programmes that have been closed through the project.

The Chair mentioned that discussion with Duncan Ivison as Vice-Chancellor and President confirmed the need for an attractive portfolio and that careful consideration should be given to the types of programmes on offer in terms of online and face to face. More work is needed to identify where there are programmes with very similar content within Schools and if there is opportunity for further consolidation, as well as modelling proposals for minimum numbers on programmes.

It is noted that whilst there has been much Faculty communication about the project, this has not always fully cascaded through our Schools. Therefore, the project narrative has been enhanced to better articulate the intended benefits. The Chair confirmed that she had also recently met with UCU colleagues about the TS project and another meeting has been arranged early in 2025 to keep colleagues informed of progress.

An offer was made to present on TS to our student representatives if this would provide a useful update and Emma Rose would be happy to attend if required.

**HFC17102024-05-02:** Katie Jackson to confirm if Fiona Devine/Emma Rose were required to present or whether the PowerPoint slides would be sufficient.

## 6 Cultural Institutions

The issue of the Martin Harris Centre not being included as a cultural institution had been raised by a colleague in SALC. It is agreed that there should be more consistency of our assets across the board.

Nalin Thakkar would raise this at the Governance Institution in October and would feed back to us on the outcome.

## 7 Authorised absence within SEAts

There had been a number of issues reported with the SEAtS system and clarity had been sought here. It is confirmed that students can log themselves on the system to add illness, personal issues, medical appointments etc. These absences are then approved by a member of staff. It is **not** the responsibility of a lecturer to log a students’ absence. However, PS staff can log an absence where there is a clash of units for example. Authorised absences do not impact a visa for those students on a Tier 4 visa.

**HFC17102024-07-01:** Sofia Mickelwright agreed to share this issue with Working Group to ensure that planned and future communications to students include clear instruction for logging absences.

Agreed that this issue should also be addressed via FAQs on the University website.

**HFC17102024-07-02:** Katie Jackson confirmed she works closely with Comms & Marketing teams and is happy to share the message via them and Societies within the University more generally.

Other issues included some programmes falling out of scope of Phase 1 of the Engagement Analytics project, and therefore not able to use SEAtS. These programmes will be addressed in later phases and until then existing attendance monitoring and escalation methods will be used. electronic record of attendance, and international students and the effect on visa requirements.

**HFC17102024-07-03:** Fiona Smyth to discuss these issues with Directors of Teaching & Learning in Schools.

## 8 Word limits for assessed coursework

This item was covered under item 4.

## 9 Timetabling permissions

Timetables are issued in August and colleagues are requested to check timetables before this publication. Once a timetable has been published, any changes must be approved by the Vice Dean for Teaching, Learning and Students, as set out in the policy approved by Senate. Changes will not be approved if they cause clashes and disruption elsewhere.

Faculty is following the procedure set by Senate and we have to work within these parameters whilst trying to balance the needs of our students and academic staff.

We should also remember that the scale of our activity is extensive and even small changes have knock on effects. Many of our students are working and/or have caring responsibilities so changes to timetables to suit one person may impact large numbers of students would subsequently be inconvenienced, for example having clashes or changing work patterns.

**HFC17102024-09-01:** Any specific issues within SALC could be discussed outside this meeting by Richard Whalley and Fiona Smyth. Richard to approach Fiona as appropriate.

## 10 AoB

Confirmed that the call for agenda items is normally included the Faculty e-News however it had not been included in the previous issue for reasons of timing. Committee members had received the call for items email with appropriate timing.

**Actions arising from meeting 17 October 2024**

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| **Meeting** | **Action** | **Responsible** | **Context** | **Update** |
| HFC17102024-02-01 | Amendment to be made to Mabel’s job title on ToR and other relevant membership lists by Faculty Office team. | Victoria Roberts / Gemma Keaveney | **Relates to item 2: minutes and actions of previous meeting** | **COMPLETED** |
| HFX17102024-05-01 | Identify the overall number of students across all these small programmes and report back at next meeting. | Emma Rose | **Relates to item 5: Teaching Sustainability project update**  More work is needed to identify where there are programmes with very similar content within Schools, each with minimal number on each programme. The question was raised about student numbers across this area. |  |
| HFC17102024-05-02 | Confirm if Fiona Devine and/or Emma Rose required to present to Student reps or whether PowerPoint slides will be sufficient. | Katie Jackson | **Relates to item 5: Teaching Sustainability project update**  An offer was made to present on TS to our student representatives if this would provide a useful update and Emma Rose would be happy to attend if required. |  |
| HFC17102024-07-01 | Share this issue with Working Group to ensure that planned and future communications to students include clear instruction for logging absences. | Sofia Mickelwright | **Relates to item 7: Authorised absence within SEAtS**  There had been a number of issues reported with the SEAtS system and clarity had been sought here. It is confirmed that students can log themselves on the system to add illness, personal issues, medical appointments etc. These absences are then approved by a member of staff. It is **not** the responsibility of a lecturer to log a students’ absence. However, staff can log an absence where there is a clash of units for example. |  |
| HFC17102024-07-02 | Katie Jackson confirmed she works closely with Comms & Marketing teams and is happy to share the message via them and Societies within the University more generally. | Katie Jackson | **Relates to item 7: Authorised absence within SEAtS** |  |
| HFC17102024-07-03 | Discuss these issues with Directors of Teaching & Learning in Schools. | Fiona Smyth and DoTLs | **Relates to item 7: Authorised absence within SEAtS**  Other issues included some programmes falling out of scope and therefore no electronic record of attendance, and international students and the effect on visa requirements. |  |
| HFC17102024-09-01 | Any specific issues within SALC could be discussed outside this meeting by Richard Whalley and Fiona Smyth. Richard to approach Fiona as appropriate. | Richard Whalley | **Relates to item 9: Timetabling permissions** |  |