

FLTQC 29 January 2025

Wednesday, 29th January 2025 10:15am

Teams | Faculty of Science Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee

Attendees

Attended

Robbie Altham

Zoe Burke (ZB)

Andrew Burrows (Chair)

Susan Crennell (SC)

James Foadi (JF)

Paula Gabriel

Marguerite Hallett (Secretary) (MH)

Zack Lyons (ZL)

Ioana Mocanu (IM)

Sarah Paine

Charareh Pourzand

Philip Rogers (PR)

Tony Shardlow (TS)

Gan Shermer (GS)

Paul Snow (PS)

Did Not Attend

Florin Bisset

Liz Haynes

Momna Hejmadi

Nikki Hodgson

Plato Ng

1.0 Welcome and Quorum (3362)

The Chair welcomed members, noted apologies and observed that the meeting was quorate.

2.0 Declaration of Interest (3363)

There were no declarations of any potential conflicts of interest.

3.0 Minutes of the Previous Meeting (3364)

The Board approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 November 2024 (Paper 49).

4.0 Matters Arising (3365)

SC reported that Natural Sciences unit flowcharts have still not been published for next year due to delays with Registry deciding on how to balance 6 and 5 credit units.

Action: The Chair agreed to follow this up with Registry.

5.0 Chair's Business (3366)

Chair's actions:

- Approval of withdrawal of SL50182 Molecular Phylogenetics and Epidemiology from 2025/26 as an optional unit on the MSc Molecular Biosciences (Bioinformatics) course (approved 20 December 2024) (Paper 50).
- Approval of withdrawal of Semester 1 unit SL32069 & Semester 2 unit SL32070 Current Topics from the Final Year of BSc (Hons) Biology (& placement version) from 2025/26 (approved 20 December 2024) (Paper 51).
- Approval of a MMath course change for students choosing options in Year 2 (approved 16 January 2025) (Paper 52).
- Approval of assessment pattern changes for units SL32065-8 Current Topics from 2025/26 (approved 28 January 2025) (Paper 53A).

Exam venue issues:

The Chair reported dissatisfaction with a room on Level 5 and the two big lecture theatres (1.10 & 1.11) in The Chancellors' Building. The room on Level 5 was very cold for one of the exams, due to an issue with air intake. The Chair had raised this with the Exams Office who had apologised and resolved the issue early on in the assessment period.

The Exams Office recognises that the big lecture theatres are not ideal for exams, partly because they are steeply tiered, so it is difficult to stop candidates seeing what those in front of them are writing. The Exams Office will try to use these rooms as little as possible. Where it is necessary to use them due to a shortage of venues, it will be for smaller exams so that candidates can be spaced out more. PS highlighted the need for the Exams Office to coordinate with Portering regarding spacing out candidates, e.g. so that formula books/instructions placed on every desk are similarly spaced out.

SC highlighted the need for Exams Office staff to enable examination scripts to be collected on the last day of exams, including for examinations running late on the Friday, so that staff facing a tight marking turnaround can mark scripts over the weekend.

PR highlighted that rooms in The Chancellors' Building can be occupied at the weekends during the assessment period for UCAS offer-holder days or building maintenance which may conflict with preparing the rooms appropriately in advance of examinations in the week ahead.

IM enquired as to whether any examination paper errors had arisen. ZL commented that a few errors had been picked up in the Department of Computer Science which would be reported to the Board of Studies.

2024/25 UGAR flowcharts:

The Committee noted that draft amended flowcharts (to resolve previous ambiguities) had been circulated by Registry last week for comment, so it was expected that they would be published imminently.

Scaling guidance:

The Committee noted that Registry planned to consult the FLTQC on a scaling guidance update for 2025/26 at its meeting on 4 June.

6.0 Faculty generic grade descriptors and group work (3367)

Generic Faculty grade descriptors:

JF reminded the Committee that all faculties and the SoM are required to have generic grade descriptors as part of our conditions of registration from the OfS. Registry has encouraged faculties to tailor the OfS Level 6 sector-recognised standards to their specific disciplines, to serve as a reference point for assessment consistency across departments, ensuring transparent grading and alignment with expectations. The generic Faculty grade descriptors, which are tailored to Science and are more concise than the OfS standards, should be aligned to Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs).

The generic Level 6 Faculty grade descriptors provide a single Faculty-wide framework that supports cross-disciplinary courses (e.g. Natural Sciences) and ensures a consistent basis for External Examiners and OfS reviews. It is designed to be both useful and flexible. Departmental descriptors, e.g. for project marking, should be based on / align with the Faculty grade descriptors, to make assessment and feedback practices more consistent across the Faculty. The current headers reflect the structure inherited from previous Faculty-wide descriptors but can be changed to better align with Curriculum Transformation (CT) categories. JF invited members to consider how to best coordinate implementation across departments to ensure full adoption for 2025/26.

PS reported that the Physics DLTQC had suggested including a high-1st descriptor, given the wide range of the 1st class classification from 70-100%. However, PS recognised that the Faculty grade descriptors were at the classification level, rather than the mark level. AB suggested that the Department could include further breakdown of the classification descriptors within their own aligned marking descriptors. TS commented that the Faculty grade descriptors included deviations from the OfS descriptors that did not relate to tailoring them to Science. The Chair asked members to review the Faculty grade descriptors and to provide JF and him with any further comments noting that the descriptors had been revised from the previous version that had come to FLTQC based on comments received at and after the meeting.

AB reported that the OfS has only published example descriptors for Level 6. In time, the Faculty may wish to develop descriptors for Levels 4 and 5. For now, the Faculty has focused on developing descriptors for Levels 6 and 7 because these correspond to the degrees we award. AB highlighted the need to have Faculty grade descriptors to inform Faculty Board of Studies degree-awarding decisions. JF explained that work has just started on Level 7 Faculty grade descriptors, evident from the very early draft shared. JF asked members to let him know if they would like to join the working discussion on these. The Committee noted that the Level 7 descriptors could be designed to cover both UG Integrated Masters and PGT courses, given the common 50% pass mark.

Group work:

The Chair reminded departments to consider the impact of groupwork/assessment on student outcomes (including the contribution of groupwork to degree classifications) to ensure it does not disadvantage or advantage any student, particularly those with protected characteristics (including how groups are created). The Chair reported that there is a University level group reviewing group work assessment, partly as a result of feedback from the ongoing Equality Act work. MH emailed members with details of CLT support available for colleagues regarding groupwork/assessment.

7.0 List of non-CT units no longer included in courses to be taken out of use (3368)

The Committee considered for approval a list of non-CT units, that are no longer included in any courses, to be taken out of use (Paper 54). The Committee noted that units can be taken out of use even if students are doing re-assessment for them from a previous year & the units will still show on transcripts for students who have not yet graduated. Removing obsolete units will enable the TEL team to delete the Moodle courses associated with these units. Additionally, these units will then no longer appear on any Webi reports, nor will they be displayed in SoTW where administrators use the Role Admin Tool to assign unit convenors, etc.

The Committee noted that the list had been finalised for Chemistry, Computer Science & Maths. Following the meeting it was confirmed that the spreadsheet was correct in listing all CH5 units as no longer required because new unit codes had been created for the revamped Integrated SCT PhD starting 2025/26 (since the credit sizes were all different). PS, ZB and PR confirmed the list was correct for Physics, Life Sciences and Pharmacy respectively.

8.0 Unit and Course Changes (3369)

The Committee approved the following unit and course changes:

Department of Chemistry (for 2026/27):

Reduction of the contribution of the Management component of the BSc (Paper 55A) and MSci (Paper 55B) (Hons) Chemistry with Management courses (and placement & Study Year Abroad variants) to 25%. The Committee noted that the accrediting body, the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC), required the contribution of the Management component to the degree classification to be no more than 25% and the University requirement is that this component be at least 25%, meaning that the actual value has to be exactly 25%. It is proposed that the reduction from the current value to 25% be achieved by:

- replacing the current Chemistry with Management Year 2 laboratory unit CH22015 (10 credits) with the larger CH22010 laboratory unit (15 credits), taken by all other Chemists;
- requiring students to choose 15 credits of Management (MN units) in Year 2, rather than the current 20.

GS commented that this change will make logistics easier since all students will be doing the same laboratory unit. However, it will mean that students have uneven semesters because they have to select 15 credits of MN units, i.e. 5 credits in one semester and 10 in the other. The Committee noted that the change was supported by the School of Management.

9.0 MPharm at Plymouth + Preparatory Year GPhC Step 2 monitoring submission (3370)

The Committee approved the MPharm at Plymouth + Preparatory Year GPhC Step 2 monitoring submission (Paper 56), subject to members providing any feedback on the submission to PR as soon as possible after the meeting, given the submission deadline of 5 February.

PR reminded the Committee that the MPharm at Plymouth was approved by the GPhC during the 2022/23 academic year for launch from 2024/25. The Year 0 programme was approved by the GPhC in November 2024 for launch from 2025/26. The next stage in the accreditation process is a monitoring visit to Plymouth by the GPhC on 26-27 March to review the first year of delivery and plans for delivery of Year 2.

10.0 British Computer Society (BCS) (Re)accreditation report (3371)

The Committee noted the BCS (re)accreditation report for courses in the Department of Computer Science (Paper 57). ZL reported that the accreditation visit had taken place in May 2024, and had run smoothly, with a positive outcome.

11.0 Degree Apprenticeship Quarterly Monitoring Report (3372)

The Committee noted the MSc Computer Science Degree Apprenticeship Quarterly Monitoring Report (August - October 2024) (Paper 58). ZL reported that the Department of Computer Science is awaiting the Government announcement of plans for future Level 7 apprenticeship funding.

12.0 Feedback from Committees (3373)

Academic Programmes Committee (APC):

The Committee noted the minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2024 (Paper 59).

Education Advisory Board (EAB):

The Committee noted the minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2024 (Paper 60).

13.0 Papers from Education Advisory Board (3374)

The Committee noted the papers from Education Advisory Board (Paper 62A-J). GS highlighted that the Departments of Chemistry, Computer Science and Physics, and Faculty of Science as a whole, had been identified as having students with poorer wellbeing, particularly students with disabilities who also had poorer outcomes / continuation. GS welcomed some central support / expertise in identifying the cause of this, e.g. competing deadlines coinciding with completion of the Be Well Survey, signposting to sources of support during exam periods, Covid legacy effects, managing student expectations / transition from A Level and/or course design (e.g. larger, higher stakes CT units, embedding skills in curriculum & assessment). AB reported that this year the Be Well Survey had a response rate of approx. 15% and is probably completed more by students who are concerned about their wellbeing. There is insufficient information in such surveys to identify causes of results. AB suggested that departments seek feedback from their students on this matter in the first instance, e.g. through Open SSLCs. The Committee noted that Paper 62C CT Evaluation Report states that data sources will be collated to evaluate and monitor the extent to which the CT principles have been achieved, e.g. supporting the diverse needs of learners. The Committee agreed that an evaluation of the extent to which CT has reduced assessment burden, including staff marking hours, is long overdue.

14.0 Department Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (DLTQC) minutes (3375)

The Committee noted the minutes of the meetings held on:

Department of Chemistry: 13 January 2025 (Paper 63).

Department of Computer Science: 27 November 2024 (Paper 64A) and 17 January 2025 (Paper 64B).

Department of Mathematical Sciences: 30 October (Paper 65A) and 4 December (Paper 65B) 2024.

Department of Physics: 16 December 2024 (Paper 66).

15.0 Any Other Business (3376)

Mark query policy:

ZL reported that the Department of Computer Science planned to trial a policy for Semester 2 that requires students to raise any queries with coursework marks within 2-3 weeks of receiving their marks, so that any issues can be identified early and resolved in good time before results are ratified by Boards of Examiners for Courses and the Board of Studies. FLTQC were supportive of this initiative so long as it is caveated with a statement to the effect that queries after 3 weeks will be considered on a case-by-case basis. ZL added that the policy, that would be circulated to all students and staff, would include a turnaround time for staff to respond to queries, to enable resolution of issues in a timely manner. The Chair and Secretary agreed to review any draft policy that ZL wished to share.

Errors in exam papers:

IM reminded the Committee of the importance of Unit Convenors acknowledging / reporting errors in examination papers to affected students shortly after an error is identified, and then communicating to these students the action taken by the Board of Examiners for Units to ensure no student is disadvantaged by the error, once results are released.