

as at 27 September 2007

The University of Manchester
Office of the President and Vice-Chancellor

Reviews of Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience

Pursuing Step Change Improvement for Students

1. The Reviews

The University of Manchester is a leading provider of higher education, offering good, scholarly programmes that are well taught, well managed and effectively supported. But like all large, comprehensive universities with tens of thousands of students and high *student:staff* ratios, Manchester has over recent decades had to make inimical compromises between size and quality, particularly at the level of undergraduate education. Despite the evident motivation, dedication and skill of those engaged in undergraduate education across all our Faculties, the inexorable pressure of having to produce more and more graduates with diminishing *per capita* resources threatens to take an increasingly heavy toll on our capacity to offer students a learning experience of the highest quality.

Taking steps to ensure the quality of our postgraduate research programmes is also timely. Not only is this a vital aspect of our research agenda more broadly, but we have ambitious growth targets for postgraduate research enrolments while simultaneously seeking to enhance the postgraduate research experience. Reviewing postgraduate taught programmes is important for somewhat different reasons. As a university committed to professional education and responsive to the needs of a national and international knowledge workforce, we need to ensure that our postgraduate taught programmes are purposefully linked to our overall educational strategies, and particularly our plans for becoming a major contributor to executive education and training and high-level skills formation.

These are all profoundly important educational issues that we must address and resolve if we are to make Manchester one of the best universities in the world. I am therefore establishing three separate review processes:

- **Undergraduate Education.**
- **Postgraduate Taught (PGT) Programmes, and**
- **Postgraduate Research (PGR) Programmes.**

These will be strategic, root-and-branch reviews. Tinkering at the edges will leave the University a very large, highly credible, increasingly stressed provider of good quality higher education, *but without any realistic prospect of matching the best universities in the world in this vital dimension of its mission.*

We must not settle for that. Rather, at what is still an early stage in the development of the new University, we must seek fundamental “step change” improvement in the

quality of our educational programmes and outcomes, and in the myriad enabling activities that support teaching and learning.

The reviews are not in any sense about reducing costs or saving money. They are emphatically and wholly focussed on quality improvement. In each case the Terms of Reference will direct the reviewers to questions about the fundamental purposes and goals of higher learning, and require them to base their findings and recommendations on the most fundamental and searching appraisal of the University's current performance against the best educational standards, practices and outcomes in the world.

2. The Review Schedule

The *Review of Undergraduate Education* will be conducted between September 2007 and March 2008, with the *Review of Postgraduate Taught Programmes* and the *Review of Postgraduate Research Programmes* following in 2008, as workload pressures associated with the RAE and the Undergraduate Education Review diminish.

As President and Vice-Chancellor, I will chair the *Review of Undergraduate Education*. I regard this as one of my most important priorities over the next few months.

The Chairs of the *Review of Postgraduate Research (PGR) Programmes* and the *Review of Postgraduate Taught (PGT) Programmes* will be determined in due course.

3. The Review of Undergraduate Education

The Review of Undergraduate Education will embrace all aspects of teaching and learning, including the overall Manchester student experience. It will be charged with developing a comprehensive set of recommendations for achieving step change improvement in the quality of undergraduate education in the University and is being established on the basis that it will undertake the review at a fundamental level and without being constrained by existing structures and processes.

3.1 Terms of Reference. In reporting on its deliberations, the Review of Undergraduate Education will make recommendations covering:

- The need to ensure that undergraduate education is accorded parity of esteem with research and research training in the plans, structures, resource allocation models and institutional culture of the University;
- Opportunities for revising policies and/or operating procedures both to enhance the quality of students admitted and to improve the University's performance in relation to its widening participation goals;
- Options for improving policies and practices in relation to the setting and/or maintenance of academic standards to ensure that all Manchester graduates are assessed, and their achievements duly certified, against appropriate international benchmarks of excellence;

- Options for improving the recruitment, development, reward and recognition of outstanding academic teachers;
- Steps that might be taken to improve the structure, design and development of undergraduate curricula to ensure that curriculum development is informed by agreed educational purposes and priorities, and designed to maximise the quality of student learning;
- Major changes in teaching practices and in the provision of tutoring, mentoring and academic advice to ensure that all Manchester students have access to highly interactive learning environments based on frequent, meaningful personal contact with academic teachers and mentors;
- Opportunities for maximising the potential of on-line learning to enhance the quality of undergraduate education, both as a repository of rich, interactive learning objects and as a medium for sophisticated bilateral and unilateral interactions within learning communities;
- Options for changing the range and mix and improving the quality of academic, social, cultural and individual support services offered to students, in order to enhance the Manchester student experience; and
- Further steps, if any, that might be taken to position Manchester as a destination of preference for outstanding undergraduates.

3.2 Review Structure and Timetable. The Review of Undergraduate Education will operate through an overarching Undergraduate Education Review Committee and will have responsibility for overseeing the work of eight subordinate Task Forces and melding the advice of these Task Forces into a final Report accompanied by the range of Recommendations envisaged above.

The eight separate Task Forces, each charged with reviewing a specific aspect of the overall undergraduate educational experience, are being established as follows:

- (i) **Admissions and Standards** (Chair: Professor Clive Agnew)
- (ii) **Appointment, Promotion and Support of Academic Teachers** (Chair: Professor Kersti Borjars)
- (iii) **Institutional Priorities, Structures and Commitment** (Chair: Professor Phil Withers)
- (iv) **Curriculum Design and Development** (Chair: Professor Alan Gilbert)
- (v) **Personalised Learning** (Chair: Professor Alistair Ulph)
- (vi) **On-Line Learning** (Chair: Professor Colin Stirling)

(vii) **Library and Information Services** (Co-Chairs – Mrs Jan Wilkinson and Professor Kevin O’Brien)

(viii) **Student Support Services** (Chair: Mr Albert McMenemy)

Professor Pat Bailey will assume responsibility for the student liaison dimension of the work of the review.

A Briefing Paper entitled, *Positioning Manchester as a Premium Provider of World Class Undergraduate Education*, has been prepared to inform and assist the work of the Task Forces by identifying key issues and priorities and suggesting approaches that the Task Forces might take.

Each Task Force will be expected to report by the end of December 2007. A Report, including recommendations, will then be finalised for presentation to the Senate on 6 February, 2008, before going to the Faculty and Schools Conference later in February and the Board of Governors Conference in March.

3.3 Fundamental Challenges. There are three areas where it is clear from the outset that fundamental re-thinking will be necessary are.

- ***The undergraduate curriculum.*** Given their student:staff ratios and workload pressures on teaching staff, large, comprehensive providers of undergraduate education cannot hope to improve the quality of student learning while retaining a smorgasbord approach to curriculum design and development. Unless we succeed in eliminating all vestiges of such an approach, and developing instead much more focused, purposeful, carefully designed curricula that we are able to resource properly, we will be unlikely to achieve any *breakthrough* in the quality of undergraduate education.

- ***The Manchester learning experience.*** *The most important single characteristic of world class higher learning is the provision of personalised, richly interactive student learning.* There are no viable alternatives. Manchester *must* find innovative ways to escape larger classes with their higher *student:staff ratios* and an increasingly depersonalised student experience if it is to offer genuinely world class undergraduate education. That will mean offering *all* our students genuine opportunities for meaningful personal interaction with teachers, mentor and advisors. There is no short-cut to quality that avoids finding a satisfactory solution to this problem.

- ***On-line learning.*** In the small learning communities characteristic of the world’s best small, most richly resourced universities, the desirability of providing students with state-of-the-art on-line environments is already well-recognised. In the medium term no university, however blessed with physical learning infrastructure and face-to-face personal learning interactions, is going to be able to ignore the need thoroughly to integrate on-line learning into traditional learning environments. But for a large university unable to avoid increasingly depersonalised face-to-face interactions between teachers and taught, *developing effective on-line solutions to the challenge of enriching student learning is already a vital imperative.*

Identifying these three areas as in need of fundamental re-thinking and innovation redevelopment does not imply that equally fundamental imperatives will not emerge

from the work of all the other Task Forces established as part of the overall Review.

3.4 Next Steps. The initial meeting of the Undergraduate Education Review Committee is planned for late September. Its membership will include the Chairs of the eight Task Forces, together with Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning) not already included as Task Force Chairs, a student member and a number of the University's leading academic teachers.

In the meantime, the composition of the Task Forces, which will involve students and teaching staff, will be determined following consultation led by Vice-President/Deans and Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning) and embracing members of Senate.

Alan Gilbert
President and Vice-Chancellor
September 2007

SELECTED SOURCES:

Alexander W. Astin, *What Matters in College: Four Critical Years Revisited* (Jossey-Bass, 1993)

Derek Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges* (Princeton University Press, 2006)

S. Hu, S. and G.D. Kuh, "Computing Experience and Good Practices in Undergraduate Education: Does the Degree of Campus 'Wiredness' Matter?", *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, Vol. 9, No. 49 (2001, November 24).

David L. Kirp, *Shakespeare, Einstein and the Bottom Line* (Harvard University press, 2003)

Peter T. Knight and Paul R. Trowler, *Departmental Leadership in Higher Education* (Open University Press, 2001)¹

George D. Kuh, et al, *Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter*, (Jossey-Bass, 2005)²

George D. Kuh, et al, *Assessing Conditions to Enhance Educational Success: The Inventory for Student Engagement and Success* (Jossey-Bass, 2005)

George Kuh, Thomas Laird and Paul Umbach, "Aligning Faculty Activities and Student Behaviour", *Liberal Education*, Vol. 90, No. 4 (Fall, 2004), pp. 24-31.

Thomas Laird, "Surfin' with a Purpose: Examining How Spending Time Online is Related to Student Engagement", *Student Affairs Online*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Summer 2004).

Richard Light, *Making the Most of College: Students Speak their Minds* (Harvard, 2001)

Donald Markwell, *A Large and Liberal Education* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2007)

Frank Newman, et al, *The Future of Higher Education: Rhetoric, Reality, and the Risks of the Market* (Jossey-Bass, 2004)³

¹ Especially Chapter Six, pp 99-118.

² Especially Chapters T20-Seven, and Fourteen

³ . Especially Chapters Eight and Nine, (pp. 135-179)

M. Lee Upcroft, *Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student* (Jossey-Bass, 2005)

Harold T. Shapiro, *A Larger Sense of Purpose: Higher Education and Society* (Princeton University Press, 2005)

Vincent Tinto, *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition* (Uni. Of Chicago Press, 1993)

Tom Wolfe, *Declining by Degrees: Higher Education at Risk* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

See also a major collection of Research Papers published by the National Survey of Student Engagement, a regular national survey in the US conducted by the Indiana University Centre for Postsecondary Research:

<http://nsse.iub.edu/html/pubs.cfm?viewwhat=Research%20Paper>