HYMS Joint Senate Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 May 2010

Present:  Professor T Sheldon (Chair)
          Professor G Burgess
          Dr S Holland
          Mr T Ngwena (for M10/ 18-19)
          Professor G Parker
          Professor I Watt

In attendance:  Ms M Badhan
                Dr G Davidson
                Ms K Dodds
                Ms R Royds
                Dr A Wilcox
                Dr P Evans (Secretary)

Apologies for absence were received from Professor N Stafford.

PART A: UNRESERVED BUSINESS

10/11  Minutes

The unreserved minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2010 were approved.

Further to M10/ 4, the Chair reported that no bid for ASNs in HYMS had been submitted in response to HEFCE’s recent announcement of a one-off allocation for 2010/ 11, but that development of a new programme in Biomedical Science remained a possibility when more sustained funding was available.

Further to M10/ 5, it was reported that five candidates had been short-listed for the position of Dean of HYMS, with interviews to be held on 9 June 2010.

10/12  Minutes from HYMS Joint Learning and Teaching Committee

The Committee approved the minutes from the meeting of the HYMS Joint Learning and Teaching Committee held on 18 March 2010.

10/13  Comparable Qualifications for HYMS Higher Degrees

The Committee approved a recommendation from the HYMS Board of Studies and Joint Learning & Teaching Committee that successful completion of the fourth year of the HYMS MBBS be considered a ‘comparable qualification’ that could be used for admission to a HYMS higher degree (taught or research).

During discussion it was noted that:
• The HYMS higher degree achieved through intercalation in this manner would be a joint York/ Hull degree.

• The Regulation in question did not exclude admission to a PhD programme, although such cases would need to be considered by HYMS on an individual basis in the context of potential issues around practical skills, fitness to practice, time out from the MBBS etc.

• The intercalation might be at another HEI and it would therefore be for that HEI to determine the entry requirements.

• It would be useful to develop a clear flowchart for inclusion in student handbooks that set out the options for intercalation at different stages.

10/14 Dean’s Report

The Committee received for information a report from the Dean based on his report to the HYMS Joint Board in March 2010.

Further to the information provided on academic appointments, it was reported that a successful appointment had been made to the Chair in Primary Care and that the Chair in Neuroscience was proceeding to advertisement.

With regard to the undergraduate programme, the Committee noted that the outcome of the general election might have implications for future levels of Service Increment for Teaching (SIFT) funding for medical schools.

The Acting Dean reported that the Postgraduate Centre continued to develop well and was exploring further development of short-course provision.

With regard to the SITS research module in place at York for monitoring PGR students, it was reported that a small MIS team was being recruited to HYMS and would be in place by the autumn.

The Committee supported directing students towards the PhD rather than MD qualification, but noted that the HYMS MD was generally more rigorous and tightly controlled than in other medical schools.

10/15 Programme Titles for HYMS Research Degrees

The Committee approved a recommendation (tabled) from the HYMS Board of Studies that the generic programme titles ‘Medical Sciences’ or ‘Human Sciences’ be introduced for all HYMS research degrees.

During discussion it was noted that the generic titles:

• were required for degree certificates and admission/ registration systems;
• had been approved by the Registrar & Secretary in York and the Academic Board in Hull;
• did not conflict with other programme titles currently in use at either university;
• would need, for reasons of statutory reporting, to be assigned to students at the start of their programmes (although it would be possible for students to transfer in the rare event that this became necessary).
10/16 Term Dates 2010/11 – 2014/15

Noting that appropriate consultation had been undertaken with relevant officers at both universities, the Committee approved the proposed HYMS term dates for the five-year period 2010-11 to 2014-15.

10/17 Academic Dress for Postgraduates

Noting that the first HYMS postgraduate students would graduate in July 2010 and that appropriate consultation had been undertaken with Graduation Offices of both universities, the Committee approved the proposed academic dress designs for HYMS postgraduate awards (MSc, MPhil, MD and PhD).

10/18 Progression/Ethnicity

Further to M10/7, the Committee considered a report setting out the proportion of ethnic minority students failing to progress within the HYMS undergraduate programme [agenda item moved from reserved to unreserved business].

The Chair clarified the key elements of the data provided and highlighted the overarching conclusion that ethnic minority students seemed to be twice as likely to fail to progress at the first attempt. During a detailed discussion the following points were noted:

a) Most of the first-attempt fails recorded would have progressed at the re-sit examination.

b) The final table in the report (‘Multiple Failures by Ethnic Group’) required further clarification.

c) The data were consistent with other medical schools and some other disciplines in higher education, as confirmed by the academic literature on the subject.

d) The raw data did not reveal causality and other social and demographic factors may partly explain the reported variances.

e) It was suggested that other ways of drilling down into the data might also be useful (e.g. analysis of fails by assessment type).

f) The data seemed all the more worrying given the high academic entry requirements and standardised interview process used to select for medicine, which might have suggested a fairly equal progression rate.

g) The report raised questions about student support and implied a need to identify potential failure and to intervene with mitigating actions at the earliest possible opportunity. The HYMS student representative confirmed that providing adequate and appropriate levels of support was an issue to be resolved, especially in the light of the specific pressures associated with studying medicine. It was also noted that mental health problems were stigmatised in some ethnic minority communities.
h) A vital source of further evidence would be qualitative data based on interviews with students, in order to gain a clearer picture of their experiences of the programme and why those who did not progress felt they had failed.

Following the above discussion, the Committee decided to ask the HYMS management and Board of Studies to undertake further analysis of the questions raised by the report, in consultation with relevant colleagues at both universities. It was suggested that work on specific aspects could be commissioned from appropriately qualified individuals (e.g. as a project for a research student). It was agreed that a progress report should be submitted to the next meeting (October 2010) and then a final report to the following meeting (January 2011).

10/19 Dates of Meetings in 2010/11

The dates of meetings in 2010/11 were noted as follows:

Thursday 14 October 2010, 10am
Thursday 20 January 2011, 2pm
Thursday 5 May 2011, 10am