

## **Learning and Teaching Strategy Consultation Lent Term 2006**

1. Thirty-five responses to the consultation were received (see annex 1) and in addition comments were noted from the 51 attendees at lunchtime meetings. Most respondents engaged constructively and thoroughly: only one institution thought that the exercise was a waste of time and money.
2. This summary is intended to give a flavour of the comments received and the agendas emerging, some or all of which could be built into the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. The consultation document can be seen at annex 2.
3. On the whole respondents confined themselves to the areas and topics outlined in the document, and so perhaps it is legitimate to accept that these do strike most members of the University as being the obvious areas of strategic interest. Although respondents made some suggestions for other areas to be covered in the strategy, none of these fell outside the topics already identified.

### **General comments**

4. It was obvious from comments to all parts of the consultation document that certain themes were of paramount importance in the successful implementation of any strategy. It was quite clear that the strategy must bear in mind the following background:

- local autonomy of Faculties and Departments must be respected;
- there is little desire for further centralisation of support or funding;
- there is absolutely no desire for increased paperwork or 'teaching-related administration';
- resources, including funding, must find their way down to local level;
- certain central providers are already perceived to contribute to the support of learning and teaching (Staff Development, Education Section, CARET, Language Centre, Careers Service): there is a need to co-ordinate their activities better;
- there is a need to foster better communication between the central providers and Faculties and Departments;
- the time pressure on academics must be acknowledged in any new initiative.

### **Consultation topics**

#### *Context*

5. Generally, respondents recognised the context given in the document. Other suggestions included giving more profile to support for graduate teaching and learning; the need to give diversity and inclusive practice a higher profile; recognition that Cambridge welcomes mature students, and recognition that students are taught to think, are exposed to creativity and innovation, and are enabled to learn throughout life.

#### *Ethos and culture*

6. Again, the description of the University's ethos and culture was largely recognised by respondents. They also suggested other elements to be included: the effect of the RAM and operation of the Schools on teaching and learning; assessment; a more careful description of the place of skills in the curriculum; the importance of social conscience and social awareness as a quality to be developed.

#### *External factors*

7. Many additional external factors were suggested, including various forms of legislation. More than one respondent also made the point that it is not clear whether the University intends to respond to all these external factors, and if so, how? Other suggestions for specific mention included: the introduction of variable fees and bursaries; the access and widening participation agenda; the Bologna accord and its implications; the pervasiveness of the internet and open learning resources.

#### *Reflection on and critical analysis of learning and teaching provision*

8. Most respondents considered that the University already engaged adequately in reflection and critical analysis. It was felt that these activities are best instigated and carried out at local level. Reassuringly, several respondents identified a link between University quality assurance procedures and reflection and critical analysis. It was felt that such procedures (e.g. internal review, appraisal, peer observation) were adequate for this purpose and no further mechanisms (and, particularly, no further paperwork) was wanted.

#### *Central facility for pedagogic support, innovation and co-ordination*

9. Opinion on whether the University required a central facility was mixed. Certainly, almost no-one was in favour of establishing another free-standing unit within the University to take on pedagogic support. The most favoured suggestions were co-ordinating the efforts of the central support providers better and emphasising the work of CARET. Again the strong desire for local autonomy in deciding what kind of support and innovation was appropriate, and the possibility of using funding at a local level for pedagogic support, came through clearly. The current efforts of Staff Development, CARET and the Education Section were all acknowledged and valued, but it was felt that there could be better communication between those and other support institutions and with and between Faculties and Departments.

#### *Equality and diversity in the student experience*

10. There was no enthusiasm for central goals or targets in relation to Equality and Diversity, respondents suggesting that issues should be addressed at the local level. However, it was also noted that a clearer articulation of central policy and principles was necessary. Few respondents had experienced issues concerning student diversity, except for support needs of students from non-traditional backgrounds and English language competence of overseas students. It was suggested that educational technology could play a part in meeting the varying needs of the student body, and that student achievement should be monitored to see whether the playing field was indeed level for all students. The diverse backgrounds of teaching staff, and the implications that this might have for teaching activities, was also noted.

### *Place of technology in learning*

11. Again respondents were not in favour of further discrete, centralised provision. It was felt that central support was already adequate, and that if further enhancement was needed this could be supplied by existing providers such as CARET or the Computing Service. Simplicity, robustness and ease of use and maintenance were noted as being essential for any developments which were to be used at local level (as well as the resources to implement them). A University-wide VLE was welcomed only as an opt-in arrangement. The place of technology in the student skills and the inclusive practice agendas was recognised.

12. It was noted that a university-wide understanding of the place of e-learning was required.

### *Skills and training*

13. Respondents felt that the description of the place of skills in the curriculum given in the document needed refinement. It was acknowledged that Cambridge students acquire a wealth of skills apart from knowledge skills during their courses. Although not separately assessed on the whole, these other skills were embedded in curricula, were an integral part of the learning process, and were valued as a valid outcome of student learning. It was felt that this should be articulated more clearly both to students and to employers, and students should be given clearer information about opportunities to acquire skills, and clearer guidance on identifying their skills. The acquisition of social awareness and social skills through volunteering opportunities was noted as a valuable contribution. Issues relating to the acquisition of transferable skills by students with different needs were noted.

### *Staff development*

14. Current Staff Development provision was felt to be good and appropriate. There was little enthusiasm for expanding staff development provision and none for a compulsory teaching qualification. The time pressure on academics who wished to engage in staff development was noted, as was a reluctance to spend time on development in a culture which was perceived (by some) not to reward teaching effort. It was felt that personal development should be valued more and established more firmly within the University's culture, and there was a suggestion that all roles should have time built in for reflection.

### *Recognition and reward of teaching excellence*

15. Many respondents felt that teaching activities were not sufficiently rewarded but noted that to reward systematically would require some kind of evaluation. It was envisaged that criteria for evaluation would be subjective, invasive or unreliable, and add to the bureaucracy of learning and teaching. However, at least one respondent felt that the task was not impossible and that further research on the way to reward teaching should be carried out

### *Contribution of Colleges*

16. Almost all respondents felt there was further scope for interaction with Colleges, although some drew a distinction between collaboration (possible) and co-ordination of activities (doubtful). All aspects of undergraduate and graduate

teaching and admissions were included as candidates for greater interaction, but the most commonly raised issue was that of the integration of CTOs in Faculties and Departments, and the reward for College teaching by UTOs.

#### *Dissemination of Good Practice*

17. Various respondents identified transmission of good practice as a key element in maintaining and enhancing excellence, and as part of a culture which valued learning and teaching. Some questioned how feasible it was to use good practice from one institution in an entirely different one. Some felt that the Good Practice activities recently launched through Learning and Teaching Support were adequate and appropriate. Others suggested that the Education Section and Staff Development between them provided all the support necessary for good practice activities and no new provision was warranted.

#### **Emerging agendas**

18. From the above comments, and bearing in mind the detailed comments of respondents, it is possible to identify certain emerging agendas: student skills; inclusive practice; communication; co-ordination of the activities of central support providers; reward for teaching. These are considered in more detail below.

#### *Student skills*

19. There are various indications that the University needs to keep student skills as part of its strategy. Currently, support for transferable skills is tied into the University and Colleges' Personal Development Planning project. It would seem logical that this project needs to continue in some form, but with a remit to investigate more thoroughly the clearer articulation of the importance of skills in the curriculum and better information to students on how to acquire skills. In particular social awareness (with a tie-in to Volunteering activities) and inclusive skills support should be investigated. Inclusivity should extend to all parts of the student body. Skills for life-long learning should also be given a higher profile. Support for English language skills remains a priority. The place of educational technology in delivering the skills agenda requires exploration.

#### *Inclusive practice*

20. Progress on encouraging academic institutions to adopt principles of inclusive design when developing the curriculum has been slow and patchy, despite the introduction of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act. Proactivity in providing an accessible and inclusive learning and teaching environment will enable the University to respond more completely to the Disability Discrimination Act, as well as to other equality legislation. Exploration is required of how best to embed inclusivity in the University, and in particular, how creation of new courses can recognise the diversity of the student body. Inclusivity should also extend to the skills agenda (see above), and the use of educational technology in meeting the need for inclusivity needs investigation.

#### *Communication*

21. Communication on learning and teaching issues amongst central providers, between central providers and academic institutions, and amongst academic institutions was singled out as an important need. The Learning and Teaching

Support Initiative has started to address this need, and the University needs to investigate how this work will continue and how it fits into the activities of other central providers (see below). There is also a need to explore whether other channels for effective communication are necessary.

#### *Co-ordination of the activities of central support providers*

22. The consultation showed no enthusiasm for a central pedagogic unit. Instead it was felt that much of the expertise needed for pedagogic support was present in the University already, but the units providing it could better co-ordinate their activities. The University needs to explore how this co-ordination might be brought about, maintained, and be encouraged to produce effective outcomes. Bearing in mind responses to the consultation, currently the key institutions would appear to be the Careers Service, CARET, CMI Educational Programmes, Disability Resource Centre, Education Section, Language Centre and Staff Development.

23. At the same time the University will need to consider how additional expertise, not currently present at an adequate level in the university (e.g. curriculum development, pedagogic innovation, co-ordination and management of funding initiatives) can be established.

24. Research will also be required on how best to engage Faculties and Departments in the activities of central providers, whether that be funding local initiatives, embedding central practitioners locally on a temporary basis, allowing academic staff leave to work centrally on a temporary basis, or other activities.

#### *Reward for teaching.*

25. Various issues were identified as requiring exploration. Research on how teaching can be best rewarded in an institution like Cambridge need to be undertaken with a view to establishing whether it is feasible to reward systematically through a process like the senior promotions process; such an exploration would need to deal with the time pressures experienced by academics, and the perceived conflict between teaching and research activities. In terms of College interactions, the position of CTOs within Faculties and Departments and the recognition and reward of activities of UTOs in Colleges were the issues most commonly identified by respondents as being in need of resolution.

#### **Monitoring and evaluation**

26. In addition it was pointed out that the strategy would need to be monitored and evaluated, and it was suggested that a small group might be set up to do this.

#### **Further action**

27. The Education Committee is invited to consider whether the emerging agendas are those which should be pursued further with a view to their forming the core of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy.

**GMK**

## **Respondents**

## **Annex 1**

### **Colleges**

Lucy Cavendish  
Robinson

Total 2

### **Faculties and Departments**

Archaeology, Department  
Biological Anthropology, Department  
Chemical Engineering Syndicate  
Computer Science, Syndicate  
Continuing Education, Institute  
Divinity, Faculty Teaching Committee  
English, Faculty Board  
Geography, Department Teaching Committee  
History and Philosophy of Science, Board  
History, Faculty  
International Studies, Centre  
Law, Faculty Board  
Mathematics, Faculty Board  
Modern and Medieval Languages, Faculty Board  
Oriental Studies, Faculty Board  
Philosophy, Faculty Board  
Physics and Chemistry, Faculty Board  
Social Anthropology, Department  
Veterinary Medicine, Faculty Board

Total 19

### **Academic-related and other institutions**

Careers Service  
Disability Resource Centre  
Equality and Diversity Section  
Health and Safety Division  
Language Centre  
PHEP Advisory Group  
Staff Development Committee

Total 7

### **Personal submissions**

Biochemistry, academic staff  
CARET  
Economics, support staff  
Modern and Medieval Languages, academic staff  
Oriental Studies, academic staff  
Social and Political Sciences, academic staff  
Staff Development Officer

Total 7

Total submissions = 35

Comments were also recorded from 51 attendees at lunchtime meetings