

THE SENATE

Minutes

This paper presents the confirmed Minutes of the last meeting of the Senate held on Wednesday 14 October 2020 via Teams.

The Senate **approved** these Minutes as a correct record at its meeting held on 27 January 2021.

Dave Hall
University Secretary

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Working Secretary to the Senate
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Attachments:

S-2020-05-M Minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on 14 October 2020

THE SENATE

Minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on Wednesday 14 October 2020 via Teams.

PRESENT:

Professor Tim Blackman	Vice-Chancellor
Professor Josie Fraser	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Dr Liz Marr	Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students)
Professor Kevin Hetherington	Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Enterprise and Scholarship)
Professor Ian Fribbance	Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Professor Devendra Kodwani	Executive Dean, Faculty of Business and Law
Professor Nicholas Braithwaite	Executive Dean, Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
Professor Fary Cachelin	Executive Dean, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies
Professor Denise Whitelock	Director, Institute of Educational Technology
Mr Gary Elliot-Cirigottis	Director of Library Services
Mr Nicholas Barratt	Director, Learner and Discovery Services

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)

Dr William Brown	Dr Elaine Moohan
Dr Jovan Byford	Dr Deborah Drake
Dr Alison Penn	Professor John Wolffe
Dr Andrew Griffiths	Dr Donna Loftus
Dr Emma Barker	Dr Karen Hagan
Professor Nicola Watson	Professor David Johnson

Faculty of Business & Law (FBL)

Miss Carol Howells	Dr Kristen Reid
Dr Caroline Clarke	Mr Mike Phillips
Ms Eleanor Howie	

Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

Dr Helen Fraser	Dr James Hague
Dr Janet Haresnape	Professor Simon Green
Dr Magnus Ramage	Dr John Baxter
Professor David Rothery	Dr Leonor Barroca
Dr Robert Brignall	Dr Hayley Ryder
Dr Toby O'Neil	Dr Mark Slaymaker
Dr Andy Hollyhead	Dr Claire Kotecki
Mr Donald Edwards	Dr Fiona Moorman
Dr James Bruce	Dr Jon Golding
Dr Kaustubh Adhikari	

Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS)

Mrs Anna Comas-Quinn	Mr Andy Rixon
Dr Carol Azumah Dennis	Mr Jeremy Wilcock
Ms Susan Kotschi	Dr Elodie Vialleton
Dr Kristina Hultgren	Dr Jackie Watts

Dr Joan Simons
Dr Severine Hubscher-Davidson

Professor Jonathan Rix

Institute of Education Technology (WELS)

Mr Chris Edwards

Associate Lecturers

Mr Jim Gillen
Dr Catherine Halliwell
Mr James Hutchinson
Mrs Helen Jeffris (alternate)

Dr Linda Walker
Mr Rob Parker
Dr Walter Pisarski

Students Appointed by Open University Students Association

Ms Claire Wallace (Alternate)
Ms Cinnomen McGuigan
Dr Sandra Summers (Alternate)

Mrs Sarah Jones
Dr Barbara Tarling (Alternate)
Kirsty Lamb (Alternate)

Academic-related Staff

Mr Derek Sheills
Mrs Rukhsana Malik
Mr Billy Khokhar
Dr Fiona Moorman
Dr Hossam Kassem
Dr Caitlin Adams
Mr Jonathan Nimmo
Miss Julie Gowen

Mr Toby Scott-Hughes
Ms Elaine Walker
Mrs Caitlin Harvey
Dr Franziska Florak
Ms Jane Ball
Mrs Kate Signorini
Dr Frances Morton

Co-opted members

Ms Susan Stewart
Mrs Louise Casella

Mr John D'Arcy
Dr Claire Baines

In attendance

Mr Dave Hall, University Secretary
Mr Jake Yeo, Deputy University Secretary
Dr Laura Lauer, Head of Governance

Ms Anna Barber, Director of Strategy
Ms Becky Sexton, Senior Manager, Governance
Mrs Jhumar Johnson, Director of Vice-Chancellor's Office

Mrs Caragh Molloy, Group People Director

Observing

Ms Lucy Taylor
Ms Sally Jordan
Mr Michael Flack

APOLOGIES:

Professor Eileen Scanlon
Dr Sylvie Serpell
Dr Christopher Turner

1 WELCOME

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Tim Blackman, welcomed new and returning members to the Senate following the biennial elections held earlier in the year.

2 REMINDER OF THE SENATE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

S-2020-05-00

As this was the committee's first meeting of the academic year, Senate members were reminded of the Statement of Purpose and Terms of Reference for the Senate.

3 MINUTES S-2020-03-M /S-2020-04-M

- 3.1 In respect of AL contract implementation (minute 1.6), the Vice-Chancellor clarified that the systems required to manage the contract were part of the project plan. The implementation was progressing according to that plan and the system requirements were close to being resolved.
- 3.2 The Senate **approved** the minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on 17 June 2020 and correspondence meeting of 6 July to 13 July 2020.

4 MATTERS ARISING S-2020-05-01

The Senate **noted** the response to the matter arising from the minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on 17 June 2020 (S-2020-03-M).

5 REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

- 5.1 The Vice-Chancellor updated the Senate on student demand, which was increasing despite the challenging external environment. The University saw growth across subject areas and he was confident in the OU's teaching capacity. The Vice-Chancellor thanked all of those involved in supporting those areas of work.
- 5.2 The policy landscape in England appears to point to reform for the tertiary education sector. The Vice-Chancellor reported his membership on a national advisory group working on Further Education reform and noted that FE and HE were being brought closer together, with further changes to come with new policies. In addition, the skills agenda is attracting targeted funding, which is an area of opportunity.
- 5.3 A full programme of events was planned for October's Black History Month, including an event on Race at the OU, featuring Professor Marcia Wilson, who had recently been appointed Dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. A day of talks was planned for World Sustainability Day (28 October). Paul Traynor, Chief Financial Officer (CFO), was the VCE sponsor for sustainability at the OU and will oversee the progress in that area.
- 5.4 The Vice-Chancellor noted that the Academic Governance Review implementation work would now be led by an oversight group and that all Senate members had been asked to contribute through the workstreams. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Quality Enhancement Review (QER) of the OU would take place the week commencing 15 March 2021.
- 5.5 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor was invited to update the Senate on the approach to academic decisions in response to Covid-19. The Emergency Management Team's Academic Implications Group (EMT AIG) which included student members had continued to meet weekly, reviewing the decisions taken and the impact of those decisions. Student results were released on time and the measures taken had been generally well received. Where changes had not worked for students, extra measures had been implemented. An update report would be considered by the committees within the Senate substructure, with a high-level update presented to the Senate at the January 2021 meeting.
- 5.6 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Students (PVC(S)) was invited to update the Senate on the Student Learning and Adjustment Strategy (SLAS). Some students with disabilities were experiencing delays to the receipt of printed materials. She explained that improvements had been made, with 38% of students receiving materials by student use date in 20J. Printable materials had been also made available, with instructions on reclaiming costs and digital audio files were available for the majority of modules. The intention for 21J would be for students to receive their materials two weeks before student use date.

Management information was now significantly more robust, enabling greater understanding of delays, which allowed more timely interventions and communications to students.

- 5.7 OU Students Association recognised the effort and improvements for 20J but expressed concern that there were individual students starting modules with no materials. Communications with students required improvements, with clarity on what the issues were, when the materials would arrive and what accommodations would be made. Members requested that clear data be shared with the Senate on how many students were impacted, in which modules and the timescales for delivery of materials. Members of Senate also highlighted that these issues had also caused additional pressure for staff in a range of areas, including Tutors dealing with students who were most affected. Further information was requested on what percentage of students had the marker for printed materials removed and whether that was in line with expectations. **Action: PVC (S)**
- 5.8 The Vice-Chancellor acknowledged that the situation was not where it needed to be. Work would continue to ensure that suitable communications and apologies were conveyed to students and that the Senate would be kept informed of progress.
- 5.9 The impact of the pandemic on staff was recognised. The Vice-Chancellor reported that VCE and Recovery Group were considering actions to mitigate the negative effects and improve staff well-being.
- 5.10 Members raised a range of queries regarding the Associate Lecturer contract implementation: the impact on Staff Tutors' workload and well-being, the timescales for clarity of the business processes and on the information systems required to support the delivery of the new contract. The University Secretary summarised efforts to resolve the workload management system and noted that the AL Contract change programme had taken a phased approach, in order to ensure that changes and their impacts were managed and sustainable. Further information would be available at a briefing for Senate members before Christmas. The Group People Director added that channels for comments and feedback were also being explored.

6 INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE REPORT TO SENATE S-2020-05-02

- 6.1 The Director, Strategy introduced the institutional performance report. The Senate welcomed the improvement to the Student Success metrics and a suggestion was made to consider the inclusion of metrics on Student voice.
- 6.2 Sickness absence, especially in relation to Associate Lecturers, and its reporting was discussed. The introduction of a new system in November 2020 with ALs using the system from October 2021, would enable comparable reporting of absence. In response to a question on exit interviews, the Group People Director explained that the OU currently collates two different types of exit data, exit questionnaires administered by an external provider, used at institution level, and exit interviews conducted by Faculties and Units, used at a local level. The OU is in the process of engaging with a new provider, to improve the flexibility and value for the organisation.
- 6.3 Further detail was requested on the risk mitigations and timescales for strategic risk four, (Insufficient quality & development of the teaching model & curriculum offer could threaten student numbers and our reputation). The Director, Strategy explained there were positive actions in place to mitigate this risk, kept under review by VCE, with headlines reported to Senate and Council. Despite increase in competition, the University position was robust and work in key areas would keep the OU in a positive position.
- 6.4 The Senate discussed whether the income diversification targets were appropriate and what learning from the results could be fed into the new strategy. The Vice-Chancellor

explained that the CFO was undertaking work to fully analyse income performance and establish what the ambitions should be.

7 DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY'S NEXT STRATEGIC PLAN S-2020-05-03

- 7.1 The Vice-Chancellor introduced the paper, which outlined the approach to the development of the University's next Strategic Plan for the period 2022-2027. Themes arising from the Council's Strategy Workshop on 29 September were: changes in pattern of study and student profiles and how those would be supported, income diversification in line with the OU's mission and planning for the increase in capacity that is needed for growth. The Council also discussed how Research should have a significant position and that sustainability and equality and diversity should be considered throughout the strategy.
- 7.2 Senate would receive regular updates throughout the strategy development process, including a workshop scheduled for February 2021. Plans for wider engagement with key stakeholders included student consultation. Members were invited to contact the University Secretary or Director of Strategy with any suggestions for engagement.
- 7.3 Members welcomed the fact that the strategy was an evolution of the current Strategic Plan and included a systematic review of the existing strategy. Flexibility was a key component of the refreshed strategy to enable the University to respond to the external environment, particularly as there are likely to be changes in society due to the pandemic.
- 7.4 The Senate discussed the ways in which the University's current strategic programmes would continue to act as enabling activities, providing system capability, working with improved tech and equipping all staff with better tools. The Associate Lecturer (AL) Contract programme would also bring the ALs into the faculties, enabling better opportunities for all staff to get involved and contribute ideas and improvements.

8 ANNUAL QUALITY REPORT S-2020-05-04

- 8.1 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Students (PVC(S)) presented the report from the Academic Quality and Governance Committee (AQGC) on the effectiveness of the University's management of academic quality and standards.
- 8.2 Members of Senate supported the clear and comprehensive Annual Quality Report. The Senate **noted** that the report would be used as the annual report on institution-led review submitted to the Scottish Funding Council. The Senate **recommend to the Council** that it endorse the statement of assurance required by the Scottish Funding Council.

9 FUTURELEARN S-2020-05-05

- 9.1 The academic direction of the of OU's strategy for FutureLearn was considered. The Vice-Chancellor noted the success of FutureLearn was key to the delivery of OU Strategic Objectives, supporting the mission to be open to places and methods and helping to reach learners not normally reached.
- 9.2 Discussion focused on the impact that FutureLearn would have on the OU's core business, existing staff workload, financial return, the relationship between FutureLearn and OpenLearn, analysis of demand for microcredentials and the pricing of these, as well as student support. The Deputy Vice Chancellor explained that FutureLearn should not impact on core business and the ear-marked funds within the budget would be released through business cases. There would not be an immediate profit, but funds would not be taken from core OU work or current students.
- 9.3 FutureLearn courses would be more skills focused and vocational, involving a different style of delivery which would be designed to support those specific learners. FutureLearn also met all EU industry standard requirements for disabled students.

- 9.4 It was **agreed** that a revised version of the paper, including further detail on the questions raised, would be presented to the Senate at a future meeting. **Action: Deputy VC**

10 PROMOTIONS REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION S-2020-05-06

- 10.1 The Vice-Chancellor introduced the paper outlining the proposed revisions to the Academic Promotions Scheme, which were reviewed and endorsed by the Academic Staff Promotions Committee (ASPC). The review had improved the clarity and transparency of the scheme, addressed issues with criteria, made changes to reflect the external context and had laid the foundations for a continuous improvement approach. Better quality data in the future would help to measure the equality of impact and identify where improvements are needed.
- 10.2 Clarification was requested on the rationale for lowering the expectation of outputs from four to three in the most recent 6-year period across the board for all staff profiles, as it did not seem to address the objective of mitigating disadvantage and may have detrimental consequences for research intensity, academic standards and institutional reputation. The Group People Director explained that the change was partly driven to introduce flexibility, to make the criteria fairer for disadvantaged groups and those who have had less time for research. It was also due to consideration of the changing Research Excellence Framework context.
- 10.3 Members of the Senate were supportive of the revised Academic Promotions Scheme and it was agreed for the project team to take on board the comments raised by Senate members. This included the assurance that Chairs of panels should behave impartially. It was noted that the Senate would continue to receive updates on the Academic Promotions Scheme.
- 10.4 The Senate:
- a) **approved** the proposed revisions to promotions criteria; and
 - b) **noted** the planned changes to the processes underpinning internal academic promotions, including the potential implications for academic governance arising from these changes.

11 ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE ASSURANCE REPORT 2019/20 S-2020-05-07

- 11.1 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Enterprise and Scholarship) (PVC RES) informed the Senate that the Academic Quality and Governance Committee (AQGC) had considered the Annual Effectiveness Report of Academic Governance on 22 September 2020. The report identified key issues arising from the annual effectiveness reviews (AERs) of committees in the Senate substructure for 2019/20. AQGC had approved a number of proposed changes to committee constitutions within the academic governance structure and agreed recommendations to improve the effectiveness of academic governance.
- 11.2 It was suggested that the averaging of satisfaction levels across responses of 'extremely', 'very' or 'moderately' should be reviewed for future years and the breakdown of responses should be provided to the Council for a more accurate picture. **Action: Governance Team**
- 11.3 The Senate **approved** the removal of the Master of Research Board from the Senate and Research Degrees Committee substructure.
- 11.4 The Senate **approved** the following assurance statement on the effectiveness of the University's academic governance arrangements in 2019/20, to be reported to the Council in November 2020: "The Senate assures the Council that the University's academic governance arrangements have been effective during the 2019/20 year."

12 RESEARCH COMMITTEE S-2020-05-08

Minute 13: Research excellence framework 2021 update

Assurance was sought on the progress of the development of the Institutional Environment Statement. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Enterprise and Scholarship) (PVC RES) explained that progress on the REF preparations is on track. Concerns expressed by the Unit of Assessment leads had been noted and a revised and improved version would be circulated shortly.

13 EDUCATION COMMITTEE S-2020-05-09

The Senate **noted** the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 8 July 2020 and the meeting held between 24th August 2020 and 31 August 2020 via correspondence.

14 ACADEMIC QUALITY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE S-2020-05-10

The Senate **noted** the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting of the Academic Quality and Governance Committee held on 22 September 2020.

15 EMERITUS PROFESSORS S-2020-05-11

The Senate **approved** the recommendations from the Chairs Subcommittee that the title of Emeritus Professor is awarded to:

a) Professor James (Jim) Iley, Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

b) Professor Simon Bell, Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

16 THE COUNCIL S-2020-05-12

The Senate **noted** the unconfirmed Minutes of the meetings of the Council held on 14 July 2020 and the meeting conducted by correspondence between 21 and 28 August 2020.

17 DECLASSIFICATION OF PAPERS

To remain confidential:

S-2020-05-05 OU Strategy for FutureLearn

To be declassified:

S-2020-05-11 Emeritus Professors

18 DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

Wednesday 27 January 2021

Wednesday 21 April 2021 (Council members in attendance)

Wednesday 23 June 2021

Dave Hall
University Secretary

Becky Sexton
Working Secretary to the Senate

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Tel: 01908 653351