

THE SENATE

Minutes

This paper presents the confirmed Minutes of the last meeting of the Senate held on Wednesday 27 January 2021 via Teams.

The Senate **approved** these Minutes as a correct record at its meeting held on 21 April 2021.

Dave Hall
University Secretary

Becky Sexton
Working Secretary to the Senate
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Attachments:

S-2021-01-M Minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on 27 January 2021

THE SENATE

Minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on Wednesday 27 January 2021 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
Professor Eileen Scanlon	Associate Director Research, 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)

Dr Anna Comas-Quinn	Mr Andy Rixon
Dr Severine Hubscher-Davidson	Mr Jeremy Wilcock

Ms Susan Kotschi
Dr Kristina Hultgren
Dr Joan Simons

Dr Elodie Vialleton
Dr Jackie Watts
Professor Jonathan Rix

Institute of Education Technology (WELS)

Mr Chris Edwards

Associate Lecturers

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

Dr Linda Walker
Mr Rob Parker
Dr Walter Pisarski

Students Appointed by Open University Students Association

Ms Claire Wallace
Ms Cinnomen McGuigan
Dr Sandra Summers

Mrs Sarah Jones
Dr Barbara Tarling
Danielle Smith

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

Mrs Hâf Merrifield, Director of Strategy

Observing

Professor Marcia Wilson, Dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
Mrs Lisa Harris, Head of Academic Strategy

APOLOGIES:

Dr Carol Azumah Dennis
Dr Sylvie Serpell
Mr Jeremy Wilcock
Dr John Baxter
Dr Christopher Turner

1 **MINUTES**

S-2020-05-M

The Senate **approved** the minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on 14 October 2020 subject to the following amendment (insertion in *italics* and deletion in ~~strike through~~):

Minute 10.2: PROMOTIONS REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION

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 ~~categories~~ *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.

2 MATTERS ARISING

S-2021-01-01

The Senate **noted** the responses to the matters arising from the minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on 14 October 2020 (S-2020-04-M).

3 REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

- 3.1 The Vice-Chancellor welcomed members to the meeting, noting that it was also Holocaust Memorial Day.
- 3.2 The results of the autumn staff survey demonstrated not only high levels of satisfaction but also the effect of the pandemic on workloads and stress, on top of the University delivering major IT changes. While there had been some challenges with implementation of the IT changes, he thanked those who had worked hard to resolve the issues and noted that apologies would be sent to both ALs and students who had been affected.
- 3.3 Externally, the UK Government's Skills White Paper and interim response to the Augar review showed a clear direction of travel. While all UK nations were moving toward the creation of a single post-18 tertiary education system, in England it was taking the form of a strong differentiation between academic and technical routes. The UK Government was focused on incentivising the new T-levels at level 3 and higher technical qualifications (HTQs) beyond that in England. There was also continued focus on degrees which were not deemed to deliver good employment outcomes, but the OU was committed to students having a range of subjects to choose from.
- 3.4 The University is making final preparations for its REF submission at the end of March, which reflects a huge amount of work by the Institutional Review Team, Faculties as well as many other colleagues. He added his thanks on behalf of the Senate, to Professor Kevin Hetherington, who would be stepping down as PVC-RES in April.
- 3.5 The OU continued to grow and increase in popularity. As the nature of higher education changes, the University must continue to adapt and lead change. Areas to consider included: 18 and 19 year old learners, full time study, paid-for short courses and microcredentials and opportunities arising out of the shift of skills planning to local level. The new strategy would also be re-energising the University's social mission and values, especially equality, diversity and inclusion, and response to the environmental crisis. Progress is being made by the University on sustainability, including working with the Carbon Trust on becoming carbon neutral by 2030, developing an integrated institutional sustainability plan and playing a role in COP26 in Glasgow later in the year.
- 3.6 It was anticipated that USS would publish its conclusions about required contribution rates to maintain current benefits in mid-February. There would then be further consultation with employers and discussions with UCU and UUK. The OU had been and would be doing all it can to mitigate impacts on what must continue to be an excellent pension scheme. *(Post meeting note: The University's response to the USS consultation last autumn had been shared [here](#).)*
- 3.7 It was noted that members of the Senate would receive an email update from the Academic Governance Review (AGR) Oversight Group in February.

4 FUTURELEARN STRATEGY

- 4.1 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor introduced the paper and thanked members for their input at the webinar and panel discussion. The clarifications made as a result were welcomed by members.
- 4.2 The focus on microcredentials from the Scottish Government was highlighted. The OU had received over £1m so far, with the likelihood of further funding to come. The development of a pipeline of new microcredentials was ongoing and the involvement of the Faculties and Nations in the collaborative meetings would be key. It was also noted that the OU was also involved in the FutureLearn Academic Network.
- 4.3 When evaluating microcredentials the usual monitoring processes applied, such as student numbers and success rates, as well as KPIs around financial measures monitored by VCE. The suite of microcredentials produced by IET to help the HE sector move online had attracted large numbers, some wanting accreditation to show employers, which had been particularly important for people during the current pandemic. It was noted that testing and learning was still ongoing, but the production so far had been collaborative and agile.
- 4.4 The risk of staff overload was being carefully managed by the microcredentials team. Options were also being explored around outsourcing production, with OU staff performing quality checks. For the Learner and Discovery Services team, there was allocated resource, separate to core production, which could be managed fluidly.
- 4.5 Aspects of the student/learner experience had not been included in the paper, but it was noted that there was further work needed on the status of, and the language used to describe those studying microcredentials on FutureLearn. It was also emphasised that the marketing should be very clear about the different routes available.
- 4.6 The Chair thanked members for their contributions. Subject to agreement that the Senate would be kept updated as the academic framework develops, with monitoring thereafter, the Senate gave cautious **approval** for the direction of travel for the OU's use of FutureLearn as a channel to reach distinct groups of learners within the OU's overall portfolio.

5 APPROACH TO ACADEMIC DECISIONS IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 S-2021-01-04

- 5.1 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Enterprise and Scholarship) provided additional information on funding available to PGR students. This included funding from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) for Doctoral Training Partnerships in April 2020. This funding was distributed via Research Councils and matched by the University to give additional support to OU funded students. A second allocation of UKRI funding was made directly to the OU in November 2020, which the University has again match-funded to support other students. The University also established a hardship fund to which PGR students could apply and this has been extended following an award of additional funds to the OU from the Office for Students.
- 5.2 The Senate **noted** the update.

6 DEFINITION OF ANTISEMITISM

S-2021-01-05

- 6.1 The Senate was asked, by Education Committee, to debate and vote on three options, outlined in the paper.
- 6.2 Clarification was sought on the choice of the caveat within the third option presented, a version recommended by the Home Affairs Select Committee. Concern was expressed

that using the caveat would be deeply discriminatory, as it focused on the perpetrator's motives and intent, instead of focusing on the impact on and the experiences of victims.

- 6.3 The Senate discussed the adoption of the definition across the sector. An example was given of a university that had consulted with their Heads of Schools. In another institution, a working group of academics had recommended to their Council that the definition should be retracted or that it should explicitly state that it had no legal force. A member also highlighted the publication of a letter from a group of academics, calling for universities not to adopt the definition.
- 6.4 It was noted that adopting the definition would be an important statement. However, a number of Senate members did not yet feel in a position to agree on one of the options set out in the paper and requested further consultation with University colleagues and students. Some members expressed that they would like to understand further the consequences of adopting the definition on other Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies, what it might mean for other marginalised groups and any impact there may be on staff and students. Concerns were also raised around the practical impact that adopting the definition would have on teaching certain subjects and potential implications for freedom of speech.
- 6.5 A motion was then proposed by Sarah Jones and seconded by James Bruce:
That the paper be deferred to the next ordinary meeting of the Senate on 21 April 2021, following further consultation.

- 6.6 The motion was **carried** overwhelmingly.

7 INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE REPORT TO SENATE S-2021-01-06

The Chair welcomed Hâf Merrifield, the new Director of Strategy, to introduce the Institutional Performance Report. The following clarifications were given:

- a. Publication of the first iteration of the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) would now take place in February 2021.
- b. The University planned increased activity around the National Student Survey (NSS) in order to reach the publication threshold for 2021. It was noted that the required sample would also increase to 27,000 thousand this year.
- c. Acute and temporary problems relating to Adobe Connect would be mitigated by a new version. Further details of the migration would be circulated to the Senate.
Action: Director of Strategy
- d. The Vice-Chancellor outlined some of the actions being taken to reduce the risks around staff capacity (page 22), including around £8m being spent on staff; £6.2m to Faculties and a further £2m made available in year for teaching costs including additional ALs, Nations and Academic Services staff. Further work on resources and priorities would be achieved through the consideration of any additional business cases presented by Units.

8 EMERITUS PROFESSORS S-2021-01-07

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

- a) Professor Hazel Rymer, Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

b) Professor Paul Garthwaite, Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

9 RESEARCH INTEGRITY REPORT AND DRAFT ANNUAL STATEMENT TO COUNCIL S-2021-01-08

The Senate **recommended to Council** the seventh annual statement on research integrity at The Open University.

10 ACADEMIC QUALITY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE S-2021-01-09

The Senate **noted** the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting of the Academic Quality and Governance Committee held on 10 November 2020.

11 EDUCATION COMMITTEE S-2021-01-10

The Senate **noted** the unconfirmed Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee Meeting held on 2 December 2020 and by correspondence between 10 and 24 December 2020.

12 STRATEGIC PLANNING AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE S-2021-01-11

The Senate **noted** the unconfirmed Minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Planning and Resources Committee held on 9 November 2020.

13 RESEARCH COMMITTEE S-2021-01-12

The Senate **noted** the unconfirmed Minutes of the meeting of the Research Committee held on 4 November 2020.

14 CENTRAL DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE S-2021-01-13

14.1 It was noted that the timeliness of case handling was being addressed and an update would be reported to the Senate.

Action: Central Disciplinary Committee

14.2 The Senate **noted** the Annual Report from the Central Disciplinary Committee.

15 SPECIAL APPEALS COMMITTEE S-2021-01-14

The Senate **noted** the report from the Special Appeals Committee of the Senate.

16 ACADEMIC PROMOTIONS: ANNUAL REPORT S-2021-01-15

The Senate **noted** the report of academic promotions for 2020 considered under the remit of the Academic Staff Promotions Committee (ASPC).

17 CHAIR'S ACTION S-2021-01-16

The Senate **noted** action taken by the Chair since the last meeting of the Senate.

18 THE COUNCIL S-2021-01-17

The Senate **noted** the unconfirmed minutes of the last meeting of the Council held on 24 November 2020.

19 AL CONTRACT UPDATE S-2021-01-18

19.1 The University Secretary suggested that in light of the number of detailed questions received in advance of the meeting, a question and answer session dedicated solely to the AL Contract update would be organised for Senate members.

19.2 The members of Senate who had submitted questions in advance, agreed that their questions could be deferred to the dedicated AL Contract session. Members were also informed that they could reflect on the written answers to the pre-submitted questions, located in the [January 27 Senate folder](#).

20 PROMOTIONS REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT – UPDATE S-2021-01-19

The Senate **noted** the completion of the project objectives and the handover plan of the project implementing recommendations from the Review of the scheme commissioned by Senate in 2018.

21 STUDENT LEARNING ADJUSTMENTS STRATEGY – UPDATE S-2021-01-20

21.1 Concerns were raised around several of the mitigations outlined, such as student access to printers and some students not being contacted through the proactive outbound calling campaign. It was noted that the points raised would be captured and explored further. Members welcomed the planned research with students to understand how they use printed packs.

21.2 In responses to concerns raised on the impact of the process on curriculum managers, the PVC (S) explained that the process would be redesigned and improved but noted that it was not a simple process and required changes across the organisation.

22 DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

Wednesday 21 April 2021 (Council members in attendance)
Wednesday 23 June 2021

Dave Hall
University Secretary

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