

THE SENATE

Minutes

This paper details the confirmed Minutes of the last meeting of Senate held on Wednesday 26 January 2022 at 2.00pm, via Teams.

The Senate approved these Minutes as a correct record at its meeting held on 30 March 2022.

Dave Hall
University Secretary

Becky Sexton
Working Secretary to the Committee
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Attachments

S-2022-01-M Minutes of the last meeting of the Senate held on Wednesday 26 January 2022

THE SENATE

Minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on Wednesday 26 January 2022 via Teams.

PRESENT:

Professor Tim Blackman	Vice-Chancellor
Professor Josie Fraser	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Dr Liz Marr	Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students)
Professor Kevin Shakesheff	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
Gary Elliot-Cirigottis	Director of Library Services
Nicholas Barratt	Director, Learner and Discovery Services

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)

Dr William Brown	Professor Elaine Moohan
Dr Alison Penn	Dr Deborah Drake
Dr Andrew Griffiths	Dr Donna Loftus
Dr Emma Barker	Dr Richard Heffernan
Dr Janine Liladhar	Dr Karen Hagan
Professor Nicola Watson	Professor John Wolffe

Faculty of Business & Law (FBL)

Carol Howells	Dr Kristen Reid
Dr Caroline Clarke	Eleanor Howie
Mike Phillips	

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

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

Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS)

Dr Anna Comas-Quinn	Andy Rixon
Dr Severine Hubscher-Davidson	Professor Rosina Marquez-Reiter
Susan Kotschi	Dr Elodie Vialleton
Professor Joan Simons	Dr Jackie Watts
Dr Kristina Hultgren	Dr Carol Azumah Dennis
Professor Jonathan Rix	

Institute of Education Technology (WELS)

Chris Edwards	Professor Rebecca Ferguson
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Professor Eileen Scanlon

Associate Lecturers

Mary Shek

Dr Catherine Halliwell

Mike Hay

Dr Anita Pilgrim

Rob Parker

Dr Sue McKeogh

Students Appointed by Open University Students Association

Danielle Smith

Cinnomen McGuigan

Nigel Patterson

Sarah Jones

Dr Barbara Tarling

Gareth Jones (alternate)

Academic-related Staff

Derek Sheills

Rukhsana Malik

Billy Khokhar

Julie Gowen

Dr Hossam Kassem

Dr Caitlin Adams

Toby Scott-Hughes

Elaine Walker

Caitlin Harvey

Jane Ball

Kate Signorini

Jonathan Nimmo

Co-opted members

Susan Stewart

Louise Casella

Professor Marcia Wilson

John D'Arcy OBE

Dr Christopher Turner OBE

In attendance

Dave Hall, University Secretary

Hâf Merrifield, Director of Strategy

Dr Camilla Briault, Assistant Director,
Governance

Caragh Molloy, Group People Director

Anna Barber, Director, Academic

Becky Sexton, Senior Manager, Governance

Jhumar Johnson, Director of Vice-Chancellor's
Office

Paul Traynor, Chief Financial Officer

Observing

Cristian Dumitru, Senior Strategy Manager,
Risk & Performance

APOLOGIES:

Claire Wallace

Dr Frances Morton

Jeremy Wilcock,

Dr Sylvie Serpell

Dr Franziska Florack

Professor David Johnson

Dr Fiona Moorman

1 MINUTES

S-2021-04-M & S-2021-04-CM

1.1 The following comments were received:

- a) the summary of the AL Executive Chair's comments on the motion (minute 11.3) had not captured the fact that broader AL consultation was welcomed;
- b) for minute 11.6, the comment had been that the ALA/ALE were more representative of diverse Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities than the AL body.

1.2 The University Secretary explained that minutes should provide a representation of the meeting, rather than a verbatim record. As the comments received did not highlight substantive errors or incorrectly represent the debate, the minutes would not be amended.

1.3 Clarification was requested on the procedures in relation to motions.

Action: University Secretary

1.4 Regarding the use of the Teams chat function during Senate meetings (minute 4.8) it was suggested that using the chat helped to increase the sense of social presence in meetings. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that it could be used to welcome colleagues, talk in the break and sign off, but not to contribute to the meeting, in order to respect those who were speaking. The use of the chat function would be kept under review.

1.5 Senate **approved** the minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on 13 October 2021.

2 MATTERS ARISING

S-2022-01-01

Senate **noted** the responses to the matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2021.

3 REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

3.1 The Vice-Chancellor welcomed members to the meeting. He thanked Senate members for their work on the new University Strategy, Learn and Live, which had been launched following Council approval in November and noted that:

- a) Senate would continue to have an important role in assessing progress against the new set of institutional success measures, to be approved by Council in March;
- b) there was a focus on how the University should serve the 4 Nations of the UK, particularly in the context of significant policy and funding reforms by the Nation and UK governments over the next few years;
- c) other challenges faced by the University would include much greater regulatory scrutiny, demographic and cohort changes and a cap on the English undergraduate fee;
- d) despite the unexpected shortfall with student recruitment this year, growth was expected, but the composition of that growth would change;
- e) there was a tighter financial position, but investment into strategic change, and EDI, sustainability and research commitments would continue;
- e) forming part of the new strategy would be the plans for Teaching and Learning and Research, both of which were due to be discussed initially at Senate in March before coming back in June for approval.

3.2 It was noted that the emergency pandemic measures for TMA marking times and special circumstances, and the blanket measures for student extensions had now come to an end. The return to standard policies would be kept under review.

3.3 The Vice-Chancellor highlighted some updates on policy and funding changes from the Nations, including:

- a) confirmation of funding in Northern Ireland, a 1.5% increase broadly in line with expectations, plus additional skills funding this year for microcredentials and short courses of around £1.8 million;
- b) work in Wales on the new Tertiary Education Bill. Health Education and Improvement Wales had commissioned an additional 65 nursing places from the OU;

- c) nearly £300,000 of funding from the Scottish Government on skills, including 200 funded places on micro-credentials and regional OpenLearn champions to deliver workshops and learning clubs. Talks were also taking place on how to develop the social care workforce in Scotland;
- d) a successful bid from WELS to the Isle of Wight NHS, a contract worth £2 million for Nursing Assistant and Nurse Apprenticeships and in the School of Engineering and Innovation, fifteen Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships had been secured.

- 3.4 It was noted that the Vice-Chancellor had joined the first meeting of the Lifelong Loan Entitlement Steering Group chaired by the HE Minister and was due to have discussions with the Secretary of State for Education on how the OU might be able to support level 4 and 5 provision in English FE colleges. The Vice-Chancellor highlighted some serious risks faced by the OU, including the recent publication of the Office for Students' proposals for a tougher set of measures on continuation and progression into employment and the probability that minimum prior academic attainment requirements would be introduced for eligibility to student loans.
- 3.5 On pensions and industrial action, the Vice-Chancellor explained that the national consultation with employees on the proposed USS reforms had now closed, with the Joint Negotiating Committee expected to make its final decision on reform by 28th February. If a final decision was not made, contributions would have to increase significantly from April to pay for existing benefits. It was noted that UCU and UUK were in talks about developing a low-cost pension option but on other matters there was still deadlock. UCU was also in dispute over pay and casualisation. It was noted that the OU was in the process of undertaking the HE sector's largest ever transition of staff from fixed term to open ended contracts with the Associate Lecturer programme.
- 3.6 Regarding the Associate Lecturer programme, it was noted that details of programme priorities for the next 6 months were being finalised. One key objective was to create more opportunities to discuss the programme, which was the subject of a motion in Senate at the last meeting. The vote and the arguments on both sides had been reported to the last meeting of Council.
- 3.7 On other internal changes, work continued to resolve the current problems with the new IT systems and lessons would be learnt for future IT change. An update would be given to staff on student systems in the next week and a final decision on the new implementation plan and budget would be made by Council in July.
- 3.8 The Vice-Chancellor informed Senate that People Services were working on a design thinking workshop to develop their next phase of improvement activity. As well as a Staff Barometer Survey planned for March and a broader staff survey planned for October, People Services were also working on other opportunities for staff to have their voices heard and Senate members were encouraged to contribute to the feedback.
- 3.8 The Vice-Chancellor highlighted the success of the recent OU collaboration with the BBC, Green Planet, which resulted in over 95,000 visitors to the broadcast site and that OpenLearn had reached the 100 million visitors milestone. It was also noted that The Open University Students Association, celebrated its 50th anniversary this year. Senate members were encouraged to complete Union Black, the OU's free course on Britain's Black Cultures and Anti-Racism, which had re-opened for registration.

- 4.1 The Vice-Chancellor introduced the Institutional Performance Report and noted that Senate would be provided with the most up to date available in future, instead of the report received at the last Council meeting. Senate were reminded that there would be a new report, following the development of the new strategic measures.
- 4.2 It was asked whether the satisfaction and wellbeing of Postgraduate Research (PGR) students was reported within the institutional performance measures. It was also commented that the support of an appropriately resourced and responsive Research Degrees Office was key to ensuring the successful future of PGR students. Senate noted that student satisfaction for PGR students was captured through Advance HE's national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and in the most recent survey, the university was ranked 6th overall nationally for student satisfaction. It was explained that data on PGR students would be fed through the Research Committee and under the new strategy, there would also be an increase in the PGR data reported but that the comments would be taken on board by the Research, Enterprise and Scholarship Unit.
- 4.3 Senate members raised concerns around the ability of staff to undertake research activity due to the increase in workload throughout the pandemic, both in terms of the supervision of research students and in terms of module production. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Enterprise and Scholarship) noted that concrete actions to address those issues would arise from the new Research Plan and discussions were taking place with faculties to help on pre and post award processes for externally funded work, to support efficiency. Members of Senate were encouraged to contribute their ideas on how to improve the situation by attending the Research Plan workshops. It was also noted that the Research Mechanics Review work would consider the way that postgraduate supervision was calculated under 'research' rather than 'teaching'. It was noted that workload planning around research and teaching would be discussed by VCE-Academic.
- 4.4 Members noted that the NSS results for the University saw a very small drop in Satisfaction. The rest of the sector's results seemed to be impacted by the pandemic, but OU students would have also been impacted, so the score was still a good result. It was noted that Academic Services were leading on a piece of work looking at improving student satisfaction / decreasing dissatisfaction across the services, working with the Student Satisfaction Improvement Working Group (SSIWG).
- 4.5 Regarding the progression gap and awarding gap for Black students, Senate discussed the training and tools available for staff to best support Black students, including the Union Black course, the development of an Inclusive Curriculum Tool and work with teaching staff on training and development. Senate discussed whether a progress 8 type measure would be useful in helping to monitor and tailor activities for students. The Dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion noted that the focus should be on the organisation and what could be done to address student deficits.

5 FINANCE UPDATE

PRESENTATION

- 5.1 The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) presented a new regular item on the University's finances, covering the following areas:
- a) Financial Governance: It was explained that VCE proposes the annual budget, which is reviewed by the Finance Committee, before it is proposed to Council for approval. Both external and internal audit processes provide scrutiny throughout the year.
 - b) 2020/21 Financial Highlights: The extract from the financial statements illustrated that income increased by over £87 million in 2020/21. The adjusted operating

position, which demonstrates underlying sustainability, was higher than planned at £52.1 million.

- c) 2021/22 latest Forecast: The CFO explained that the operating position (performance across core operating activities) was an important measure of the University's financial performance. The planned surplus for this year was £11.8 million (2.0% of revenue) and the lower current forecast of £4.6 million (0.8% of revenue) was mainly due to a reduction in student numbers. Expenditure was also forecast to be £4 million below budget. A variance to plan of £9.0 million was also highlighted for the accounting position (the operating position, plus one-off expenditure, investment returns and FutureLearn). It was also noted that the significant increase in the USS deficit provision would be reflected in the University's 'bottom line' this year.
- d) 2022/23 Financial context: It was noted that there would be lower student numbers than originally planned in 2022/23. A substantial amount of investment had been approved for the current financial year, including; £50.3m increase above 2020/21 budgets from inflation and volume planning assumptions, £19.0m additional resource (above baseline) to support Unit capacity and delivery plans and £15.7m mainly for central budgets including capital expenditure. A budget provision of over £50 million was also in place for activities to deliver strategic change.
- e) Context to the financial planning: The CFO explained that the University was in a strong financial position, but there were a number of risks that needed to be managed, including an uncertain policy and funding environment, pay and pension negotiations/inflation and lower than previously planned student numbers.

5.2 The following comments were discussed:

- a) Regarding 'income from other sources' it was noted that the University achieved a good return on equity investments, but that a breakdown of the other sources would be circulated to Senate members. **Action:** Chief Financial Officer
- b) It was noted that growth had returned to the year-on-year trend i.e., pre pandemic levels. Detailed work has been undertaken to separate out the pandemic growth impact for 2020/21.
- c) In relation to the investment into FutureLearn, it was noted that it had been making a loss, but as a relatively new business that was expected and that it had gained value and been growing in revenue. It was clarified that FutureLearn did not affect the operating performance of the University and the investment had been made several years ago. It was also noted that in the very near future a decision would need to be made regarding whether additional funds should be invested in FutureLearn. An update on FutureLearn would be brought back to Senate
- d) It was noted that learning from the recent change programmes would be used to ensure that future projects were delivered effectively and efficiently, with the appropriate resources (and benefit realisation plans) in place.

6. EDI COMMITTEE

S-2022-01-04

6.1 The Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion introduced a proposal to establish an EDI Committee. The following comments were discussed:

- a) It was noted that whilst the committee membership included a range of individuals from various networks and faculties, the key to ensuring that all voices would be heard was to undertake wide and effective staff engagement. As well as the experience of the members, feeding into the work of the committee would also be; information from the staff networks through standing items on the agenda, work on the Access, Participation and Success Strategy and Access and Participation Plan, EDI Champions and VCE Sponsors for networks.
- b) It was clarified that all protected characteristics would be covered by the committee. The specific reference to mental health and wellbeing was due to fact that the most marginalised groups in society were more likely to experience poor mental health and wellbeing, so it was important for the committee to consider both areas together. It was noted that there was a lot of work around accessibility taking place across the organisation and although not explicitly listed in the terms of reference, it was also within the remit of the committee.
- d) It was noted that the EDI Committee would be reporting into Senate. The Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion explained that the effectiveness of the committee would be reviewed after a year.

6.2 Senate **approved** the establishment of an EDI Committee of Senate. The Committee will be formed to commence business at the inaugural meeting scheduled for early 2022.

Action: Governance Team

7 ANNUAL STATEMENT ON RESEARCH INTEGRITY S-2022-01-05

Senate **approved** the draft annual statement on research integrity, recommended by Research Committee, for presentation to Council.

8 EMERITUS PROFESSORS S-2022-01-06

Senate **approved** the recommendation from Chairs Subcommittee that the title of Emeritus Professor is awarded to Professor Andy Lane, Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

9 ACADEMIC QUALITY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE S-2022-01-07

Senate **noted** the unconfirmed Minutes of the last meeting of Academic Quality and Governance Committee held by correspondence between 16-23 November 2021.

10 EDUCATION COMMITTEE S-2022-01-08/S-2022-01-08A

Senate **noted** the unconfirmed Minutes of the meeting of Education Committee held by correspondence between Wednesday 17 November and 1 December 2021 and the unconfirmed Minutes of the last meeting of Education Committee held on 1 December 2021 at 14:00 via MS Teams.

11 STRATEGIC PLANNING AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE S-2022-01-09

Senate **noted** the unconfirmed Minutes of the meeting of Strategic Planning and Resources Committee held on 20 October 2021.

12 RESEARCH COMMITTEE S-2022-01-10

- 12.1 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Enterprise and Scholarship) informed Senate that development of the Open University's Research Plan was underway, including the active involvement of the Research Committee. He explained that there would be a paper on the Research Plan at March Senate for discussion, followed by an approval paper in June.
- 12.2 It was asked whether Senate would be updated on the review of the PGR Manager system that had been initiated by the Graduate School. The PVC-RES explained that Senate would have access to updates through the Research Committee, which would be sighted on the review.
- 12.3 Senate **noted** the unconfirmed Minutes of the meeting of Research Committee held on 10 November 2021.

13 CENTRAL DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT S-2022-01-11

- 13.1 The increase in the volume of cases that escalate to CDC and the subsequent workload pressure within the Student Casework Office was highlighted. A concern was also raised around the reference in the report to the challenges of identifying and evidencing exam misconduct in remote exams. With the continuation of remote exams, it was asked what systems would be put in place and what support would be provided to relieve the additional workload on module team members, who had to check assessment questions on various websites.
- 13.2 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students) informed Senate that the increase in the volume of cases was reflected across the sector in relation to the pandemic. She explained that the experience of 20/21 would help to inform the resource needs for 21/22 and that Academic Conduct Officer capacity had been stepped up in faculties. The policy had also changed to align remote exams with other forms of examination, which would permit ACOs to investigate future remote exam misconduct referrals. While the problem would not be solved entirely by writing better exams, further consideration of assessment design could help, focusing on the potential for students to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding, skills and application, rather than recall.
- 13.2 Senate members welcomed the idea of a review of Academic Conduct Policy. The importance of the student voice in the review was noted and it was suggested that it would be useful to harness the experience of the student representatives on the Central Disciplinary Committee. It was also asked whether there was additional pastoral care that could be provided to students with a declared disability, due to the high number with the cases referred to the CDC in 2020/21.
- 13.3 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students) thanked Senate for the comments on the report, which she would be taking forward. Senate **noted** the report covering student misconduct cases referred to the Central Disciplinary Committee of the University between 1 August 2020 and 31 July 2021.

14 CHAIRS ACTIONS S-2022-01-12

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

15 THE COUNCIL S-2022-01-13

Senate **noted** a report of the last meeting of Council held on 24 November.

16 SENATE BUSINESS PLANNING

16.1 Senate agreed that the following points would be considered as part of the approach to Senate meetings:

- a) What time of day Senate meetings should be held.
- b) How the initiatives around the Open Degree should report into Senate.
- c) Whether an update from the Students' Association should be reported to Senate.

Action: University Secretary

17 DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

Meetings will be held on the following dates:

Wednesday 30 March 2022

Wednesday 22 June 2022

Dave Hall
University Secretary

Becky Sexton
Working Secretary to the Committee
Email: becky.sexton@open.ac.uk
Tel: 01908 653351