The Open University

SENATE

MINUTES

This paper details the confirmed minutes of the last meeting of Senate held on 1 February via Microsoft Teams.

Action Required

Senate approved these minutes as a correct record of the meeting on 29 March 2023.

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 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
Dr Nicholas Barratt	Director, Learner and Discovery Services
Professor Nicholas Braithwaite	Executive Dean, Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)

Dr Andrew Griffiths	Professor Elaine Moohan	Professor John Wolffe
Dr Lystra Hagley-Dickenson	Tony Murphy	

Faculty of Business & Law (FBL)

Carol Howells	Ash Odedra	Claire Maguire

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

Dr Fiona Moorman	Donald Edwards	Dr James Bruce
Dr Helen Fraser	Dr Hayley Ryder	Dr Susanne P Schwenzer
Dr Kaustubh Adhikari	Professor Sally Jordan	Frances Chetwynd
Dr Claire Kotecki	Jill Shaw	Dr Jon Golding
Dr Kambiz Saber-Sheikh		

Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS)

Bärbel Brash	Dr Mark Addis	Dr Gillian Ferguson
Dr Carol Azumah Dennis	Judy Chandler	Paulette Johnson
Steph Doehler		

Institute of Education Technology (WELS)

Dr Maria Aristeidou	Professor Eileen Scanlon	

Associate Lecturers

Dr Catherine Halliwell	Rob Parker	Dr Sue McKeogh
Mike Hay		

Students Appointed by Open University Students Association

Margaret Greenaway	Laura Marulanda-Carter	Gareth Jones
Nigel Patterson	Dr Barbara Tarling	Claire Wallace

Academic-related Staff		
Rukhsana Malik	Jane Ball	Paris Graham
Julie Gowen	Jonathan Nimmo	Paul Farrington
Dr Hossam Kassem	Dr Rachel Leslie	Ellen Cocking
Caitlin Harvey		
Co-opted members		
Susan Stewart	John D'Arcy OBE	Professor Marcia Wilson
Louise Casella	Dr Christopher Turner	
In attendance		
Hâf Merrifield, Director of Strategy	Dave Hall, University Secretary	Anna Barber, Director, Academic
Dr Camilla Briault, Assistant Director, Governance	Jhumar Johnson, Director of Vice-Chancellor's Office	Paul Traynor, Chief Financial Officer
Sue Thomas, Senior Manager, Governance		
Observing		
Maria Kantirou (Head of Academic Strategy and Planning)		
Apologies		
Dr Eleni Andreouli	Professor David Johnson	Dr Donna Loftus
Dr Emma Barker	Dr Jon Pike	Dr Richard Marsden
Dr Thomas Martin	Dr William Brown	Dr Gillian Jack
Mary Shek	Professor Caroline Clarke	Dr Olga Jurasz
Dr Leonor Barroca	Dr Jotham Gaudoin	Dr Magnus Ramage
Professor Richard Holliman	Professor Monica Grady	Dr James Hague
Professor Joan Simons	Dr Elodie Vialleton	Dr Severine Hubscher-Davidson
Professor Jonathan Rix	Dr Sharon Mallon	Professor Rebecca Ferguson
Dr Tony Cox	Kit Power	Dr Caitlin Adams
Elaine Walker	Dr Franziska Florack	

1   MINUTES   S-2022-04-M

Senate approved the minutes of the meeting held on 12 October subject to the following amendment:

<u>Minute 8.2 (f): Student Outcomes Programme.</u> To read - additional text in italics:

Confirmed that a new appointment process for student representatives to ~~BoS~~ *non-governance appointments (steering groups, working groups etc)* had been set up between the OU Students Association and Faculties.

2   REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

2.1   The Vice-Chancellor welcomed members to the meeting. He noted:

      a)   January marked 50 years since the first OU students graduated with their BA degrees and over 2.3 million people had studied with the OU since then.

      b)   The importance of the high quality of the OU's digital courses, in attracting new students and different kinds of student.

      c)   The importance of government relations, and highlighted:

           i.   The PolicyWISE initiative across the nations, to create a forum to discuss public policy challenges.

ii.   The Minister for Veterans' Affairs in the UK government, meeting students receiving funding from the OU's Disabled Veterans' Scholarships Fund.

iii. The challenges from governments, such as around qualification completion rates and the impact of policy and funding on the OU's model.

d)   The OU had two twinned institutions in Ukraine, the Hor-lif-ka Institute for Languages and the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Molecular Biology and Genetics.

2.2   Regarding the OU's current financial situation, the Vice-Chancellor explained that:

a)   A difficult decision had been made to take four years to correct the financial position, in order to get it right, but this would inevitably mean a few years of uncertainty. It would also require use of the University's reserves.

b)   February and March would be very important in terms of unit planning and budgeting, but there were also important University-wide strands of work taking place, on the estate, tuition, pricing, commercial income and new curriculum.

c)   A final offer had been made by employers to the unions: the highest pay uplift in the sector for 20 years. He noted that UCU was consulting with its members on the offer but was currently going ahead with 18 days of strikes by their members.

d)   Unlike the rest of the sector, the University was unlikely to be able to recruit significant numbers of international students to mitigate the financial challenges, although we were investigating the possibility of increasing our tuition fees.

e)   There had been some good grant news: including nearly £11m of QR funding for research, additional funding in Wales and England for work with the FE sector, and further funding for Micro-credentials from the governments in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

f)   There would be difficult conversations in the coming months regarding reductions in posts. In the first instance the University was launching a Mutually Agreed Resignation Scheme, as well as offering opportunities for staff to reduce their FTE, change their work pattern and take phased retirement.

3   INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE REPORT   S-2023-01-01

3.1   The Director of Strategy introduced the paper, which presented the baseline performance measures reported to Council in November 2022.

3.2   Senate sought clarification on:

a)   The discrepancy between the prediction for long-term shrinkage in student numbers and a target for a 6.2% increase in total students and learners.

b)   Whether any students had been turned away from B and D presentations.

c)   The measures available to enable Senate to review and comment on the effectiveness of updating and strengthening curriculum to increase student numbers, particularly amongst underrepresented groups.

d)   What initiatives were being proposed around student retention and experience and whether there was anything that could be done for students who did well in TMAS but did not submit EMAs.

3.3   The Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Students explained that:

a)   The targets for student numbers were no longer current, but the planning process was underway, and targets were being set.

b)   There were no students turned away from the B and D presentations, but they may not have been offered their first choice. The performance for B had been okay, but retention was an issue, linked to the cost-of-living crisis.

c)   There Senate would discuss the relevant areas of work on the curriculum pipeline and priorities, including:

i.   Activities undertaken by faculties through the four years plans and then active monitoring.
ii. A cross-faculty Curriculum Portfolio Panel (CPP), bringing together a group of stakeholders and subject matter experts from across the University, to consider curriculum-related performance, challenges and opportunities for growth.
iii. Activities around APS, Student Outcomes and work across the four Nations.

d)   There was an Early Alert Indicators Dashboard in place, a tool for ALs to aid student support.

e)   The work of the Student Outcomes Programme would be looking at early student experience, including proposals to pilot an induction framework and to explore outbound calling as a potential tool for identifying issues and providing lifelines.

3.4   Senate sought clarification on:

a)   Why Senate had not received a detailed report on the implementation of the AL contract, due to the impact it had on the workload and well-being of ALs and their managers, module teams and AL Services staff.

b)   What the amber rating for the AL Contract implementation had been based on.

3.5   The Deputy Vice-Chancellor:

a)   Explained that the AL Contract Change Programme was an operational matter, with established governance and reporting through VCE, Audit Committee and Council.

b)   Noted that the Programme Oversight Board had a wide membership, including Staff Tutors, SEMs, UCU and staff from PVC Students. There had also been webinars and workshops taking place.

c)   Noted that the Programme Oversight Board received regular reports on the Programme, which were the basis of the status rating.

d)   Committed to hold a session for Senate members who wanted more information on the AL Contract Change Programme, with an opportunity to ask questions.

Action: Deputy Vice-Chancellor

3.6   Regarding the Staff Barometer Survey from Spring 2022, it was suggested that it would be helpful to see key headlines on all staff groups in relation to feedback on workload. It was explained that the breakdown across staff was shared with Heads of Units and Business Partners through the results dashboard, but that sharing those headlines with Senate would be considered.

3.7   Regarding the 'Stewarding our Finances' section of the report, Senate asked:

a) How variations in student numbers across faculties affected financial planning.

b) How there would be increases in curriculum, alongside reductions in certain areas.

c) What the University would look like in four years' time.

3.8 The Vice-Chancellor and University Secretary explained that:

    a) The aim was for the OU to be leaner and for there to be less bureaucracy.

    b) The vision was still to have an offer for everybody, including young students.

    c) The plan was not to turn the University upside down, but for both the radical and incremental changes to bring the University's costs into balance.

    d) Budget cuts would be needed, but it was important not to make self-defeating cuts and investment cases with a return would be considered positively.

    e) The planning was currently bottom-up, through units developing ideas, plans and cost savings.

    f) The next planning stage would be to look across units, looking at the differences and working collaboratively across units on how savings would be made.

4 REVIEW OF THE OU UG CLASSIFICATION ALGORITHM   S-2023-01-02

4.1 The Vice-Chancellor introduced the proposal for the revision to the OU undergraduate classification algorithm, noting that the proposal had been scrutinised heavily over the last three years.

4.2 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Students (PVC-S) noted that the review had resulted in a new algorithm that was simple and easier to understand by staff and students and that the benefits to students were clear. The current classification algorithm had not been reviewed in 20 years, whereas practice in the sector was every five years.

4.3 The following issues were discussed:

    a) It was confirmed that students would be informed the week commencing 20 February, before the change came into effect on 1 March. It was noted that student communications and statements had been prepared in anticipation of students who may feel disadvantaged, but that the majority of students wouldn't be affected by the change.

    b) The PVC-S reassured Senate that whilst more OU students with protected characteristics would gain better qualifications with the proposed changes, the specific work to address awarding gaps would continue.

    c) Concerns were raised that the paper did not consider differences by discipline, and it was suggested that focus should be redirected there for the OU to become closer to the sector-wide average. It was explained that the awarding profiles of different Schools had been analysed and considered as part of the new algorithm.

    d) Concerns were raised that the change would mean that:

        i. Students would be able to be awarded a First degree without ever having achieved a First.
        ii. As there were already existing processes to reach a decision on an increase, the change proposed would result in a 'double increase'.

    e) It was explained that in the sector it was common to have a number of internal processes to review module results throughout the student journey. However, as the OU had no processes at qualification level, the borderline review would introduce some mitigation for students very close to the borderline. By removing the current second QA test stage and introducing the borderline review, the OU's processes would more closely align to sector practices.

e)   Members suggested that the OU should use progression and completion boards as part of the process. The PVC Students explained that the OU did not currently use some of the processes employed across the sector, due to the scale of the OU and the systems in place. The use of completion and progression boards could be considered, but new systems would need to be introduced and prioritised.

4.4   It was noted that a review of the changes could not be undertaken within a year, as students progressed at different paces. It was agreed that a report would come back to Senate in two years' time, demonstrating the impact of the changes. Work would also take place to consider the implementation and timeline of progression and completion boards.   **Action:** PVC Students

4.5   Following a vote, Senate **approved** by a majority, the removal of the 'Quality Assurance' test from the current OU undergraduate degree classification algorithm and the introduction of a new borderline review to determine degree outcomes, for implementation in March 2023.

5   FINANCE UPDATE   PRESENTATION

5.1   The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) presented an update on the University's finances, covering the following areas:

a)   2022/23 Financial Forecast – Operating position:
   i.   The year started with a budgeted deficit of £10.4m, which was revised to £17m in the Autumn, based on lower-than-expected student numbers at 22J.
   ii. The latest actual forecast (January 2023) was £32.7m deficit, so the variance to the revised forecast was therefore £15.7m.
   iii. Given the controls in place, the expected impact on pay spend and non-staffing spend was not yet evident, but that was often the case in Q1.
   iv. There would be reviews of non-pay spend in key areas of IT, estates, production and marketing and the importance of accuracy in Q2 forecasting would be stressed to all lead budget holders.

b)   2022/23 Financial Forecast – Accounting position:
   i.   The original Plan (agreed budget) was £66.5m deficit, with a revised target in the Autumn of £87.4m deficit.
   ii. The latest actual forecast (January 2023) was £96.1m deficit, so the variance to the revised forecast was £8.7m deficit.
   iii. It was noted that the position was likely to improve as equity investments had recovered from the low point in 2022.

c)   Four Year Budgeting and Financial Recovery: The CFO highlighted the importance of the planning phase that was underway. He noted that there were broadly three categories of financial adjustments:
   i.   Institutional measures such as Estates rationalisation (£16m).
   ii. Teaching and assessment measures (23m).
   iii. Unit-led measures (£56m).

d)   FutureLearn (FL) agreement: It was noted that the share of FutureLearn loss was a lot lower than expected as a result of the agreement that had been reached in November 2022. The CFO gave a summary of the non-financial terms of the agreement, including;
   i.   For the period of five years from completion, the OU would keep existing free content on the FL platform.
   ii. For two years, the OU would keep existing OU paid for content on the FL platform, not provide any OU content (still on the FL platform) to any platforms carried on by any person outside of the OU and not have its paid for content unilaterally removed from the platform.

He emphasised that the clauses should not be construed as restricting the OU from; keeping or making available any OU content on OpenLearn, or from creating and publishing new free or paid for content on sites outside of the OU and/or OpenLearn.

5.2 Senate discussed the approach for the four-year budgeting and financial recovery, noting:

a) That work was at varying stages, all avenues were being explored and there was a sequence to the actions.

b) If there was still a large gap by March, there would need to be more of a top-down approach regarding which activities should cease.

c) The importance of careful decision making, so as not to make self-defeating cuts.

5.3 Senate discussed the tension between growth and making budget cuts. The CFO noted that growth was not the complete solution, but that there should be a percentage of growth where possible and investment cases would be considered.

5.4 Clarification was requested on the position of the OU's reserves. It was explained that the Financial Strategy, which was reviewed each year, sets the organisation's approach to reserves and the OU holds several months' worth of reserves, in order to pay outgoings in the event of loss of income. It was noted that the minimum level of reserves required had been set at £300m.

5.5 It was noted that the PowerPoint presentation would be circulated with the Senate papers in future, with any updates given on the day.

6 UPDATE ON A FACULTY - WELS   **PRESENTATION**

6.1 Fary Cachlin, Executive Dean for the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies, highlighted some of the activities so far this year, including:

a) The annual WELS Student, Tutor, and Teaching Excellence Awards, a celebration of the achievements of students and teaching colleagues, and of innovation in teaching.
b) The first WELS EDI Festival, which offered 16 sessions covering a broad range of topics.
c) A submission from the School of Languages and Applied Linguistics for an Athena Swan Bronze Award. The School of Education, Child, Youth and Sport had received it's Bronze award last year.
d) The first and only Online Confucius Institute. It was noted that the Online Confucius Institute team were continuing to work closely with colleagues in Government and External Affairs to stay abreast of any political discussion around Confucius Institutes more generally.

6.2 On the curriculum front, it was noted that the Faculty was:

a) Further enhancing the health and social care CPD offering, continuing to roll out the new MSc Advanced Clinical Practice with further modules launched last autumn.
b) Continuing to diversify curriculum by adding more short courses to the OU's offerings through the Open Centre for Languages and Cultures.
c) Continuing the development of several new Micro-credentials across various schools. Four Micro-credentials went live in 2022 and a further seven were expected to be launched in 2023.

6.3 The Executive Dean WELS highlighted some of the research achievements, including:

a) Working in partnership with colleagues in STEM to secure £5.8m funding from the Office for Students to develop extended reality studios for the OU.
b) Praise from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, for the 'Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education' project and its positive impact on women and girls in Zimbabwe.

c) The continuation of the global work around gender equality, with an award of just under £25,000 by the British Council to examine the access, barriers, and gender equality issues in STEM education in a university in northern Bangladesh.

d) Several new grants, which had been secured by the Faculty's flagship research centre 'The Centre for the Study of Global Development'.

6.4 It was also noted that WELS had extended their reach across the four nations, with the launch of the Children and Covid Research Network, a joint endeavour with Swansea University, with approximately 50 members from across the four nations and internationally, including academics, public and third sector representatives. With the recent appointments of two Research Fellows in Scotland, WELS now had research staff based in all four nations, giving support to nations staff, and supporting the application of more funding opportunities from the devolved governments.

7 EXTENDED REALITY SESSION   PRESENTATION

7.1 The Executive Dean, STEM, updated Senate on the £5.8m capital investment from OfS to develop Open XR Studios, an extended reality studio. He explained that:

a) The technology would be applied first to curriculum areas in both WELS and STEM in areas such as Nursing, Sports Science, Biomedical Sciences and Environment, but had the potential to benefit teaching in all faculties.

b) The studio would enable learning to be situated in authentic contexts (workshops, workplaces, observatories, theatres, fieldsites or studios) using highly interactive computer-based technology with a high degree of 'agency'.

c) The work builds on the current capability and practice within the OU, such as the use of Labcasts and virtual reality.

d) It was also compatible with the OU's sustainability goal.

7.2 It was noted that the studio would use a range of state-of-the-art equipment to capture, reproduce and render 4D imagery, with the use of screens, tablets and other equipment for the outputs to students. Whilst the potential benefit for disabled students was recognised, the importance of inclusivity was highlighted, making sure that digital poverty was not a hindrance. The Executive Dean STEM noted that the aim was for it to be inclusive and that it would be considered as part of the development.

8 EMERITUS PROFESSORS   S-2023-01-03

Senate **approved** the recommendation from Chairs Subcommittee that the title of Emeritus Professor be awarded to Professor Helen Sharp, Professor Janet Van Der Linden and Professor Graham Harvey.

9 RESEARCH INTEGRITY REPORT AND DRAFT ANNUAL STATEMENT   S-2023-01-04

Senate **agreed to recommend** the Open University's Annual Research Integrity Statement to Council.

10 RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT CONCORDAT ANNUAL STATEMENT   S-2023-01-05

Senate **agreed to recommend** the Researcher Career Development Concordat Annual Report to Council.

11 EDI COMMITTEE REPORT   S-2023-01-06

Senate **noted** a report from the meeting of EDI Committee held on 23 November 2022.

12 ACADEMIC QUALITY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE REPORT   S-2023-01-07

Senate **noted** a report from the meeting of Academic Quality and Governance Committee held on 6 December 2022.

13   RESEARCH COMMITTEE REPORT   S-2023-01-08

Senate **noted** a report from the meeting of Research Committee on 9 November 2022.

14   QUALIFICATIONS AND ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT   S-2023-01-08

Senate **noted** a report on the main items of business discussed at the meetings of Qualifications and Assessment Committee held during the 2021/22 committee year.

15   MODULE RESULTS APPROVAL AND QUALIFICATIONS CLASSIFICATION   S-2023-01-09
PANEL ANNUAL REPORT

Senate **noted** a report on the main items of business discussed at the meetings of the Module Results Approval and Qualifications Classification Panel (MRAQCP) held between 29 Oct 2021 (I3 September conflation) and 27 August 2022 (G1 July conflation).

16   OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL REPORT   S-2023-01-10

Senate **noted** an Annual note a report from the OU Students Association.

17   COUNCIL   S-2023-01-11

Senate **noted** a report of the last meeting of Council held on 22 November 2022.

18   SENATE FORWARD PLANNER   S-2023-01-12

Senate **noted** a report on future business being presented to the Senate.

19   ACTION BY THE CHAIR   S-2023-01-13

Senate noted a report on Chair's actions taken since the last meeting.

Future Meeting Dates
Wednesday 29 March 2023 - Hub Theatre, Walton Hall Campus Wednesday 21 June 2023   - Hub Theatre, Walton Hall Campus

Committee Secretary: Dave Hall
Working Secretary: Becky Sexton
Email: becky.sexton@open.ac.uk