

**SENATE**

**MINUTES**

This paper presents the confirmed minutes of the last meeting of Senate held on Wednesday 29 March in The Hub Theatre, Walton Hall.		
<b>Action Required</b>		
Senate approved these minutes as a correct record of the meeting on 21 June 2023.		
<b>Present</b>		
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 and Innovation)	
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 Nicholas Braithwaite	Executive Dean, Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics	
Professor Denise Whitelock	Director, Institute of Educational Technology	
Gary Elliott-Cirigottis	Director of Library Services	
Dr Nick Barratt	Director, Learner and Discovery Services	
<b>Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)</b>		
Dr Andrew Griffiths	Professor David Johnson	Dr Donna Loftus
Professor Elaine Moohan	Dr Eleni Andreouli	Dr Emma Barker
Dr William Brown	Professor John Wolffe	Dr Jon Pike
Dr Lystra Hagley-Dickinson	Dr Richard Marsden	Dr Thomas Martin
Tony Murphy		
<b>Faculty of Business and Law (FBL)</b>		
Ash Odedra	Carol Howells	Professor Caroline Clarke
Claire Maguire	Dr Olga Jurasz	
<b>Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)</b>		
Dr Claire Kotecki	Donald Edwards	Dr Fiona Moorman
Frances Chetwynd	Dr Hayley Ryder	Dr Helen Fraser
Jill Shaw	Dr Jim Hague	Dr Jon Golding
Dr Jotham Gaudoin	Dr Kambiz Saber-Sheikh	Dr Leonor Barroca
Dr Magnus Ramage	Dr Susanne P Schwenger	Professor Monica Grady
Professor Richard Holliman		
<b>Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS)</b>		
Bärbel Brash	Dr Carol Azumah Dennis	Dr Elodie Vialleton
Dr Gillian Ferguson	Professor Joan Simons	Professor Jonathan Rix
Judy Chandler	Dr Mark Addis	Dr Sharon Mallon
Paulette Johnson	Dr Severine Hubscher-Davidson	
<b>Institute of Education Technology (WELS)</b>		
Professor Maria Aristeidou	Professor Eileen Scanlon	Professor Rebecca Ferguson

<b>Associate Lecturers</b>		
Tony Cox	Dr Gillian Jack	Mary Shek
Rob Parker	Dr Catherine Halliwell	Mike Hay
<b>Students appointed by Open University Students Association</b>		
Margaret Greenaway	Laura Marulanda-Carter	Dr Barbara Tarling
Claire Wallace	Nigel Patterson	Gareth Jones
<b>Academic-related Staff</b>		
Jonathan Nimmo	Elaine Walker	Jane Ball
Dr Hossam Kassem	Julie Gowen	Dr Franziska Florack
Caitlin Harvey	Dr Rachel Leslie	Paris Graham
Ellen Cocking	Kit Power	Paul Farrington
Rukhsana Malik	Dr Caitlin Adams	
<b>Co-opted Members</b>		
Professor Marcia Wilson	Louise Casella	John D'Arcy
Susan Stewart		
<b>In Attendance</b>		
Anna Barber, Director, Academic	Hâf Merrifield, Director of Strategy (attended for S-2023-02-05)	Dave Hall, University Secretary
Dr Camilla Briault, Assistant Director, Governance	Jhumar Johnson, Director of Vice-Chancellor's Office	Sharon O'Kelly, Executive Business Manager, Vice-Chancellor's Office
Paul Traynor, Chief Financial Officer		
<b>Observers</b>		
Maria Kantirou (Head of Academic Strategy and Planning)		
<b>Apologies</b>		
Dr Christopher Turner	Dr James Bruce	Dr Kaustubh Adhikari
Professor Sally Jordan	Steph Doehler	Dr Sue McKeogh

## 1 MINUTES

**S-2023-01-M**

Senate **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2023 subject to the post-meeting amendment below, as following the meeting, the option to purchase annual leave had been considered but not implemented.

### Minute 2.2: Chair's Report

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 ~~and purchase additional annual leave.~~

## 2 REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

2.1 The Vice-Chancellor welcomed members to the meeting and:

- a) Noted the challenges faced as the University rebalanced its income and expenditure, as well as the interesting and exciting opportunities for shaping the University during that process.
- b) Discussed the fact that opportunities around growth in student numbers were dependent on new curriculum. It was also noted that the unit of resource per student had not kept pace with pay increases or inflation in other costs. There may be some headroom to increase fees despite fee capping, but it was a complex area.

- c) Expressed the intention for the OU to remain a good employer, including undertaking the staff reductions needed in a fair, supportive, and organised way. He noted that the national pay award was being implemented, with an advance payment in April of 2% or £1000, whichever is the highest, backdated to 1st February, and then a further rise of at least 3% in August, taking the overall award to 5% and more for those on lower grades.
- d) Highlighted that qualification completion was not just important for students and the University's income, it was a performance measure that the University was regulated on by the Office for Students (OfS). Despite a lot of dialogue with the OfS about how the OU should be measured, they were very likely to see the OU's completion rates as not good enough, if progress was not made. Their focus was on the full-time sector at the moment, but in 2024 there would be scrutiny of the OU.
- e) Noted that the OU was primarily attractive to students who could manage without maintenance loans, so primarily mature students in work, or students with disabilities, for whom online learning is also often the only practical way they can study. It was also noted that the OU had a relatively small but growing number of young students and in contrast to the OU's traditional demographic, young people were increasing in the population. Progress would need to be made on programmes that could be studied at a full-time intensity to cater to this emerging market.
- f) Explained that there may be the opportunity to trial a new kind of on-site offer aimed at younger students if the move to the city centre was a feasible option. The options for estates planning would be discussed later in the meeting, but it was emphasised that the work was at an early stage and there would be wider consultation when the options had been tested and costed.
- g) Explained that there were several upcoming changes within VCE. Fary Cachelin had been appointed as Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Regents University in London and an interim appointment was being made. Liz Marr was retiring in May and Ian Pickup would join as PVC (Students) in April. Louise Casella would be retiring in the summer, and an interim appointment would be made. Dev Kodwani and Ian Fribbance would also be ending their terms as Executive Deans later in the year.
- h) Noted the recent announcement in England confirming that rather than two separate part-time and full-time fee caps, there would be one credit-based fee cap as part of the new Lifelong Loan Entitlement due to be introduced in 2025. The aim was to encourage more flexible higher and further education provision that could be part of lifelong participation in tertiary education, which may work well for the OU.
- i) Highlighted some recent work in the Nations with government, college and public engagement, including:
  - i) In Wales, funding was recently secured for the Medru/Skills Factory project with Bangor University, as well as funding for the FE National Enrichment Programme and fee waivers for microcredentials.
  - ii) In Scotland, the OU/BBC co-production 'The Women Who Changed Modern Scotland' had attracted great interest, with BBC Scotland saying that the preview screening was their best-ever engagement event.
  - iii) In Northern Ireland, an OpenLearn course 'Why Riot? Community, Choices, Aspirations' had been launched, and had been featured on BBC Northern Ireland's main TV news and The View current affairs programme.

iv) The Northern Ireland Skill Up Programme had recently completed its latest round of recruitment, with government funding for 140 postgraduate places and over 720 microcredentials.

j) Noted that King Charles had visited Milton Keynes to celebrate MK's new city status. In his speech, he had stated that Milton Keynes was 'a home of innovation through The Open University'. It was noted that the King was an Honorary Graduate of the OU, receiving his honorary doctorate in 1982.

2.2 It was asked what the University's response would be to the emergence of artificial intelligence tools, such as ChatGPT. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students) explained that numerous conversations and activities were taking place across the University, so a piece of work was underway to consolidate the different areas and to develop a position statement, a framework and a task and finish group. Although there were concerns about the use of these generative AI tools, there was also enthusiasm for the opportunities they might bring. It was noted that fast action was needed in this area and that there would be an update at the next Senate meeting. **Action:** PVC (Students)

2.3 Senate:

- a) Raised concerns that new business was not being considered or marketed, which was having implications for some of the professional programmes, particularly in nation-specific initiatives that were in line with policy and funding streams.
- b) Suggested that, with the pace and size of the changes taking place, the critical review documents from 2019 could be revisited, to review the lessons and set an appropriate pace.
- c) Asked how the recent ALE and ALA proposals would affect Senate membership and the Senate elections.

2.4 The Vice-Chancellor explained that:

- a) New opportunities were still being explored through the normal faculty processes, but that prioritisation was key in the current climate.
- b) Looking at the critical review work would be considered, but that lessons had previously been determined, and it would be an additional activity for colleagues when there was already a lot to do.
- c) The role of the ALA had been to provide committees with AL members, but as ALs were now integrated into faculties, they would be elected to committees using a similar process to the current Senate and sub-structure elections from faculties.

### **3 FINANCE UPDATE**

**S-2023-02-05**

3.1 The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) presented an update on the University's finances, recently shared with VCE, Finance Committee, and Council, covering the following areas:

- a) 2022/23 Financial Forecast – Operating position:
  - i. The budgeted deficit was £17m in the Autumn, based on lower-than-expected student numbers at 22J.
  - ii. The latest actual forecast (Q2) was £27m deficit.
  - iii. The variance to the revised forecast was still £10m, but the target was to close the gap in Q3 and Q4.

- iv. The forecast included the new cost pressure associated with the pay award, payable from February (4.4m), which had not been expected.
- b) The Accounting position, which takes the operating position and adds the non-core, one-off expenditure, would be better than the revised plan, due to:
  - i. Investments returning to previous levels.
  - ii. Future losses from FutureLearn mitigated, following its sale.
  - iii. Improvements in the USS provision.
- c) Summary and headlines:
  - i. The accounting deficit was currently £75m.
  - ii. In net terms, the OU was not generating cash this year, which was not sustainable long term.
- d) Approach to Use of Reserves
  - i. Reserves had remained stable for the last five years at around £500m.
  - ii. Previous strategic spend (technology and change projects) had been managed through operating surpluses and gains on investments, rather than reserves.
  - iii. This year there would be a drop of around £75m.
  - iv. Reserves were needed for contingency, liquidity, and investment in infrastructure.
  - v. Reserve levels were reviewed by Finance Committee and Council each year and the current policy had been agreed at no less than approximately £300m.
- e) The CFO reminded Senate of the four-year budget and financial recovery process and highlighted:
  - i. The target was to save £95m recurrently.
  - ii. There had been a positive start to the process, with units identifying £51.5m of the £56.5m.
  - iii. The challenges around workforce changes would be complicated and difficult.
  - iv. The reserves position assumes delivery of the £95m savings, so although reserves would be used to some extent, a return to operating balance was needed.

### 3.2 Senate requested clarity on:

- a) The number of posts that were possibly redundant based on unit options and the number of posts that may be impacted in other ways.
- b) How the University would ensure that students would still be supported following a reduction in posts.
- c) Whether the figure related to the loss of FutureLearn included staff time preparing courses and whether Senate would receive a further report on FutureLearn.

### 3.3 The Vice-Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer explained that:

- a) The changes proposed had identified potential impacts on over 700 posts, which did not include reductions needed in tuition and assessment. That figure had been identified through several methods. With stage one of the unit planning, the number of posts hadn't been explicit for all areas, so the Strategy Office had attributed figures, based on the sums given by units. Further detail would be developed through stage two, but the aim was to be as transparent as possible throughout the process. The changes would happen in various ways, such as staff turnover, reduced FTE, re-grading posts, MARS, and voluntary severance, and would take place in stages. The idea was to implement the most appropriate processes for both staff and improving finances.
- b) Any proposals related to academic strategy or performance, would be considered by Senate. Changes that would normally be made through the Senate sub-structure, would continue to do so.

Council had final responsibility for the sustainability of the organisation, but it would need to be achieved through ways that weren't detrimental to students.

- c) The Share of FutureLearn loss figure represented the loss of FutureLearn from the University's accounts and did not include production costs and input. However, the products were still on the platform, so the work had not been lost. In terms of a wider review of FutureLearn, there had been regular reports to Council, Senate, and Finance Committee. The reporting had been as transparent as possible, but there were some commercially sensitive areas. As a start-up, FutureLearn had delivered outstanding educational opportunities and microcredentials had been very successful at diversifying the University's offer, but FutureLearn as a company had become too high risk and a drain on resources. A report would come to Senate as soon as it was possible.

**Action:** Chief Financial Officer

3.4 Senate noted concerns about the proposal for faculty reconfiguration:

- a) It had only been six years since the last faculty merger
- b) Any change was likely to cause disruption and cost, as well as anxiety for staff
- c) The consultation was limited in terms of time and colleagues involved
- d) It was unclear what lessons had been learned from previous faculty mergers

3.5 The Vice-Chancellor explained that no decisions had been made. The consultation was ongoing, and all feedback would be taken into consideration. In the current climate, there would need to be consideration of uncomfortable proposals.

#### **4 MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING STRATEGY PROGRESS REPORT S-2023-02-03**

Senate noted the progress made toward delivering the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, between the period June to December 2022.

#### **5 STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM S-2023-02-04**

5.1 Senate noted that given the imminent passing of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill, there would be a short delay in the completion of the review of the Statement to give time to consider any changes required as a result of the new legislation.

5.2 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) explained that following the approval of the Statement, there would be time to ensure that there was understanding across the University, using methods such as workshops, possibly around late summer, or early autumn.

#### **6 TUITION AND ASSESSMENT S-2023-02-02**

6.1 Senate members were asked to discuss where there may be opportunities to think differently about the OU's teaching and assessment models with a view to accelerating/reprioritising those aspects of work under the Teaching and Learning Plan. Members worked in small groups, recording ideas to be shared and discussed with other Senate members during the meeting break.

6.2 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students) explained that:

- a) The discussion was in the context of the need to reduce costs, as part of the 4-year budget plan, whilst still supporting effective learning for students.
- b) The paper circulated in advance contained provocations and had been intended to stimulate discussions, to think the unthinkable.

b) The discussions were an opportunity to collate the views of Senate members. It was very much a first stage, gathering ideas to be developed.

6.3 Senate **agreed** to the establishment of a time-limited Senate Reference Group to act as a sounding board for project team members. It was requested that a volunteer from each discussion group would populate the Working Group.

## **7 ESTATES PLAN**

7.1 The Vice-Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer explained that:

- a) The options being outlined to Senate were at a very high level yet to be tested and costed.
- b) The University's finances were not the only driver for this work, there was a need to consider the way the University worked and the type of provision that might be developed.
- c) Advisors had been appointed to help with the design of options and modelling of financials.
- d) The detail was being worked up quickly, but it would take time to reach a preferred option.
- e) Whichever option was taken, including staying at Walton Hall, there would be a lot of work to do.
- f) Council were continuing to discuss the different options.

7.2 The Chief Financial Officer outlined the options being considered:

- a) Option 0: Do minimum. Stay on the Walton Hall site, reduce workspace, and spend on retained buildings.
- b) Option 1: Create an ideal layout at Walton Hall. Would involve proper consideration of the right space to achieve the University's sustainability ambitions. Reduce workspace and sell some land.
- c) Option 2: Move to Milton Keynes City Centre. Relocate to the city centre site offered by MK Council. Sell Walton Hall site.
- d) Option B: A base case option between doing the minimum and the ideal layout. Reduce workspace, sell land in parcels, and avoid significant re-modelling and disruption. The option to compare the others against.

7.3 Senate sought clarification on:

- a) What processes were underway to accurately build a detailed picture of the needs of the different units, teams, schools, and departments in the University, in terms of both the amount and kinds of space.
- b) How Senate and all staff would be engaged with feedback and decisions and what information would be made available to help avoid rumours.
- c) Whether the cost of rebuilding labs and moving equipment had been considered, including the impact on outputs, publications, and future bidding.
- d) To what extent accessibility was being considered in the options.
- e) Whether there were opportunities to use parts of the Walton Hall site for staff and student accommodation.
- f) To what extent sustainability was being taken into account, including the impact of knocking down buildings and building new ones.
- g) Whether attracting businesses to the Walton Hall site could bring income.
- h) In the sale options, how much of the OU's reserves would need to be spent.

7.4 The Vice-Chancellor and Chief Financial Officer explained that:

- a) Information from Units on 'New Ways of Working', data on current building usage, and specific advice on specialist STEM and technical spaces, were all feeding in to build a picture of the requirements.
- b) Regarding the engagement process, it was yet to be finalised, but there would be regular updates and opportunities to feed back. The viability of options needed to be assessed before they were discussed with the organisation, but that was estimated for the Summer or Autumn. There was a governance process in place and there would be further discussions at Senate. Senate members were encouraged to take care what was discussed outside of Senate in terms of managing rumours.
- c) Consideration of the cost and impact of moving labs was part of the work and may rule out some of the options being considered.
- d) Accessibility was one of the considerations, but its prominence would be increased.
- e) Opportunities for staff/student accommodation were part of the planning parameters and the site in Milton Keynes City Centre would lend itself to that use.
- f) Sustainability was already a key factor in the estates considerations, particularly due to the University's commitment to environmental sustainability.
- g) Income through businesses on the Walton Hall site were being explored,
- h) The financial modelling being undertaken would include looking at the use of reserves, as well as the level of reserves needed if the OU's estate became smaller.

## **8 UPDATE ON THE STUDENT OUTCOMES PORTFOLIO**

**S-2023-02-01**

8.1 Senate discussed an update on the work of the Student Outcomes Portfolio in relation to the Office for Students B3 condition of registration. Senate:

- a) Noted that outcomes predicted for 22J were worse than for 21J, but there were still actions that could be taken to ensure positive outcomes for 22 J students.
- b) Suggested that faculty, qualification, and module management should look at increasing support in the run-up to exams/EMAs and resits, to ensure that ALs could provide individual support sessions for their students as far as possible.
- c) Suggested the reasons for low engagement with the already considerable provision for resit support, should be investigated.
- d) Noted the benefit of ALs using the Early Indicators Dashboard, but questioned how its effectiveness could be improved, as ALs could only look at the performance of their students in their relevant modules.

8.2 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students) explained that:

- a) The predicted outcomes were based on VLE engagement and TMA submission rates, discussed at the Portfolio Board meeting in January. Faculties, Boards of Study, and modules all had access to the data within their dashboards and were taking action accordingly.
- b) Support for Resit and Resub students was one of the priority projects as part of the institutional assessment programme.



- c) A task and finish group was in place looking at support for students, which had found that the onus was on the student to ask for help. A pilot had been planned to test a more proactive approach, that would hopefully lead to the scaling up of an institutional baseline approach to supporting students in this position.
  - d) Work was underway with ALs and Staff Tutors to understand their needs around student support, including the ability to see a 360 view of a student. Colleagues in KMI and DSA were working on that across all modules.
- 8.3 Concerns were raised around the increase in plagiarism and students being targeted by essay mill sites. It was suggested that an increase in support for students in this area was needed. The Vice-Chancellor explained that work was being done in this area and that comments and suggestions could be sent to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students).

**9 UPDATE FROM A FACULTY – FASS S-2023-02-08**

Due to time restraints at the meeting, the faculty update was deferred to the June 2023 meeting.

**10 EMERITUS PROFESSORS S-2023-02-09**

Senate **approved**:

a) that the title of Emeritus Professor be awarded to Professor Gerry Mooney from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS), Professor Leslie Budd from the Faculty of Business and Law (FBL), and Professor John Butcher from the Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS).

b) minor revisions to the procedures for the award of the Emeritus title.

**11 EDI COMMITTEE REPORT S-2023-02-10**

Senate **noted** a report from the meeting of EDI Committee held on 15 March 2023.

**12 ACADEMIC QUALITY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE REPORT S-2023-02-11**

Senate **noted** a report from the meeting of Academic Quality and Governance Committee held on 28 February 2023.

**13 RESEARCH COMMITTEE REPORT S-2023-02-12**

Senate **noted** a report from the meeting of Research Committee on 1 March 2023.

**14 STRATEGIC PLANNING AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE REPORT S-2023-02-13**

Senate **noted** a report from the meeting of Strategic Planning and Resources Committee held on 20 September 2022 and 28 February 2023.

**15 CENTRAL DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE AND SPECIAL APPEALS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT S-2023-02-14**

Senate **noted** a report covering student misconduct cases referred to Central Disciplinary Committee and Special Appeals Committee of the Senate between 1 August 2021 and 31 July 2022, including trend information relating to the 2022/23 reporting period.

**16 COUNCIL S-2023-02-15**

Senate **noted** a report of the last meeting of Council held on 7 March 2023.

**17 SENATE FORWARD PLANNER**

**S-2023-02-16**

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

**18 CHAIRS ACTIONS**

**S-2023-02-17**

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

<b>Future Meeting Dates</b>
Wednesday 21 June 2023 – On campus
Wednesday 11 Oct 2023 – Online
Wednesday 31 January 2024 – On Campus
Wednesday 17 April 2024 – Online
Wednesday 19 June 2024 – On Campus

Committee Secretary: Dave Hall  
Working Secretary: Becky Sexton  
Email: [becky.sexton@open.ac.uk](mailto:becky.sexton@open.ac.uk)