SENATE

MINUTES

This paper presents the confirmed minutes of the last meeting of Senate held on Wednesday 21 June in The Hub Theatre, Walton Hall.

Action Required

Senate approved these minutes as a correct record of the meeting on 11 October 2023.

Present

Professor Tim Blackman	Vice-Chancellor
Professor Josie Fraser	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Professor Ian Pickup	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 Nicholas Braithwaite	Executive Dean, Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
Dr Klaus-Dieter Rossade	Executive Dean, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies
Gary Elliott-Cirigottis	Director of Library Services
Dr Nick Barratt	Director of Learner and Discovery Services

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)		
Dr Emma Barker	Dr Andrew Griffiths	Professor David Johnson
Dr Donna Loftus	Professor Elaine Moohan	Professor John Wolffe
Tony Murphy	Dr Lystra Hagley-Dickinson	Dr Eleni Andreouli
Dr William Brown		

Faculty of Business and Law (FBL)		
Ash Odedra	Carol Howells	Professor Caroline Clarke
Claire Maguire	Professor Olga Jurasz	

Faculty of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)		
Dr Kaustubh Adhikari	Professor Richard Holliman	Dr James Bruce
Donald Edwards	Dr Jon Golding	Dr Jotham Gaudoin
Dr Claire Kotecki	Dr Fiona Moorman	Dr Hayley Ryder
Dr Magnus Ramage	Dr James Hague	Professor Monica Grady
Dr Susanne P Schwenzer	Professor Sally Jordan	Frances Chetwynd
Jill Shaw	Dr Kambiz Saber-Sheikh	

Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS)		
Dr Carol Azumah Dennis	Dr Severine Hubscher-Davidson	Paulette Johnson
Dr Mark Addis	Steph Doehler	Dr Elodie Vialleton
Bärbel Brash	Judy Chandler	Dr Gillian Ferguson

Institute of Education Technology (WELS)		
Professor Eileen Scanlon	Professor Rebecca Ferguson	Dr Maria Aristeidou

Associate Lecturers

Dr Catherine Halliwell	Dr Sue McKeogh	Mike Hay
Rob Parker	Mary Shek	Dr Gillian Jack
Tony Cox		
Students appointed by Open University Students Association		
Margaret Greenaway	Laura Marulanda-Carter	Dr Barbara Tarling
Gareth Jones	Nigel Patterson	Cinnomen McGuigan
Academic-related staff		
Jonathan Nimmo	Elaine Walker	Jane Ball
Dr Hossam Kassem	Julie Gowen	Dr Franziska Florack
Caitlin Harvey	Dr Rachel Leslie	Dr Caitlin Adams
Ellen Cocking	Rukhsana Malik	
Co-opted members		
Professor Marcia Wilson	John D'Arcy	
In Attendance		
Anna Barber, Director, Academic	Haf Merrifield, Director of Strategy	Dave Hall, University Secretary
Dr Camilla Briault, Assistant Director, Governance	Jhumar Johnson, Chief of Staff to the Vice-Chancellor's	Sharon O'Kelly, Executive Business Manager, Vice-Chancellor's Office
Paul Traynor, Chief Financial Officer		
Apologies		
Dr Helen Fraser	Professor Joan Simons	Professor Jonathan Rix
Dr Leonor Barroca	Louise Casella	Paul Farrington
Susan Stewart	Claire Wallace	Professor Denise Whitelock
Dr Richard Marsden	Kit Power	Dr Sharon Mallon
Paris Graham	Dr Christopher Turner	Dr Jon Pike
Dr Thomas Martin		

1   MINUTES   **S-2023-02-M**

Senate **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 29 March 2023.

2   REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

2.1   The Vice-Chancellor welcomed members to the meeting and updated Senate on several issues including:

a)   **Generative AI:** A working group had been established and a position statement, providing initial guidance and information on next steps, was available to staff and students.

b)   **Development of the Scholarship Plan:** Senate had been invited to discuss an early version of the plan at a Senate workshop and through an online forum.

c)   **Scotland:** The Withers review of the Skills Delivery Landscape had been published. The OU in Scotland was sponsoring the event with Greta Thunberg at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in August.

d)   **Wales:** David Price had joined as interim director. There had been an uplift of 8% to the student unit of resource and an increase in the disability premium.

e)   **Northern Ireland**: The OU/BBC co-production 'Once Upon A Time in Northern Ireland' had concluded on BBC2, a tremendously impactful series.

f) **Other OU/BBC co-productions:** 'AIDS: The Unheard Tapes' won the Broadcast Award at the Learning on Screen Awards, with 'Panorama: Will the NHS Care for Me?' receiving a special commendation in the same category.

g) The 50th anniversary of the OU's first graduation ceremony had been featured recently across ITV, BBC and regional channels, reaching around 33m viewers.

2.2 Research updates included:

a) The STEM Faculty had recently won £1.4m in grants for space and climate research.

b) The OU had been shortlisted to submit a full proposal for E3 funding for research on 'Online Violence Against Women'.

c) The OU hosted the Chief Scientific Officer from the Department for Transport this month, showcasing the OU's research in transport and logistics.

d) Research Committee had approved the university's first Knowledge Exchange Plan.

e) The PVC, Research & Innovation, updated Senate on recommendations about the next REF exercise published recently by the four UK higher education funding bodies.

2.3 The Vice-Chancellor noted that Marcia Wilson, Dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, would be leaving the OU in August to take up a PVC position at London Metropolitan University. He highlighted some of the important pieces of work that had been led by Marcia and noted the huge impact her appointment had made. He explained that EDI was now embedded in the strategy, planning and reporting of the OU, but there was a lot more still to do. The Dean of EDI had initially been a fixed-term role, so there would be some reflection on the type of leadership role needed in future. At the same time, there would be consideration about how to build on what had been achieved and how implementation and equality by design could be strengthened.

2.5 Senate members echoed the importance of the ongoing EDI work and Marcia's impact on the University. Members expressed that identifiable senior leadership in this area was crucial in taking forward the necessary cultural change and that the role should have a cross-cutting, top-level perspective across the University. It was noted that the timing and the communication of the review and decisions would be key, to avoid the momentum of the work being disrupted or staff morale being impacted.

2.6 The Vice-Chancellor explained that a decision was expected to be made in the Autumn, but in the interim, EDI work would be supported by other senior staff, including Lurraine Jones, who would report to the University Secretary. He noted that the aim was for EDI work not to just to have plans and targets, equality should be embedded into the machinery of the organisation and designed into core mainstream processes.

3 TUITION AND ASSESSMENT REFORM – UPDATE REPORT   S-2023-03-02

3.1 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Students (PVC-S) presented the outline of the progress made to date on the Tuition and Assessment Reform (TAR) pathway of the 4-year budget plan and the decisions taken since the last Senate discussion on 29 March 2023. He highlighted the management and control structures, including the Senate Reference Group and details of decisions and investigations underway or under consideration.

3.2 Senate discussed issues relating to tuition and assessment, including;

a) Consideration of the risks around the robustness of online exams, given the impending increase in AI.

b) The importance of student data; differentiating between different learning events that serve different purposes and the need to disaggregate data by faculty.

c) The potential impact of the reduction in assessment on quality and student experience.

d) The importance of sharing the experiences and knowledge of all staff involved in the tuition and assessment space, to build on good practice.

e) That the oversight/coordination group should be representative in terms of gender and include people with experience in the area.

3.3 The PVC-S noted that:

a) Work on generative AI was taking place, but it was not covered by the paper. He explained that the integrity of exams was crucial and a key part of the work was developing systems and solutions.

b) Data was fundamental to this work. The systems would be key for data, but there were already some effective tools in place, such as the dashboard.

c) Assessment should be used in a balanced and appropriate way. Quality standards should not be reduced, there should be checks and balances in place, whilst also ensuring that students aren't being over-assessed.

d) Staff engagement was critical and there was an intent to be proactive and take a range of voices into consideration.

e) The purpose of the Oversight group was to bring together the work of the ongoing workstreams and to ensure alignment. Representation of the group would be reviewed.

3.4 Senate highlighted the importance of academic input into decisions on tuition and assessment and the need to understand the interaction between the operational and governance decisions taken. Senate asked for clarification on the academic and Senate input on the areas under consideration. The PVC-S explained that consultation was important and that any new proposals would be considered by the Senate Reference Group before proceeding through formal governance and management structures.

3.5 Clarification was requested around the levels of standardisation. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor clarified that there would be exceptions where localised decisions were needed. The aim was to increase efficiencies where appropriate, but without negatively impacting teaching models.

3.6 It was clarified that the savings outlined in the paper would need to come through from a reduction in headcount and FTE, through the measures previously discussed by Senate (MARS, voluntary redundancy), which would happen over time and in a way that was fair to colleagues.

4 ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGIC PLAN S-2023-03-03

4.1 The Director of Accessibility explained that:

a) Accessibility feeds into the heart of the University's mission to be open to people, places, methods, and ideas and the OU's values of inclusivity, innovation and responsiveness.

b) There was an Accessibility Core Group (ACG), made up of colleagues who represent teams, groups and programmes working in the accessibility space across the University

c) Accessibility solves difficulties faced by all, improves the OU experience for disabled students and staff, and comes with legal responsibilities.

d) There was a lot of good work taking place across the University and it was the purpose of the Accessibility Programme to coordinate activity across the OU and provide strategic direction.

4.2 Senate members commented that:

a) The Accessibility Strategic Plan was welcomed.

b) The opportunity for the Accessibility Champions to be linked to the existing Equality Champions across the University should be explored.

c) There should be more of a 'disability voice' in the plan.

d) Postgraduate Research Students (PGR) should be addressed separately in the plan, as they were different from staff and students.

e) People who identify as neurodiverse consider themselves as different, rather than disabled, so that should be considered in the language of the plan.

4.3 It was noted that comments would be taken on board and the final version would be brought to Senate for consideration and approval in October 2023. Additional comments should be sent to the Director of Accessibility, the Accessibility Core Group or fed back at a drop-in session.

5 PROPOSAL FOR THE CREATION OF A NEW FASS SCHOOL OF CREATIVE INDUSTRIES   S-2023-03-04

5.1 Senate members welcomed the Proposal for the creation of a new FASS School of Creative Industries and expressed enthusiasm for the opportunities it would present.

5.2 Questions from Senate included:

a) Whether the experiences of students and staff on the Open degree could contribute to developing, teaching, and embedding of employability skills in new qualifications in this school. Whether the new school would be a good model of collaborative ventures between faculties and potential external stakeholders.

b) Whether the OU could pilot models such as that used by OCA, with multiple presentations, lower presentation and development costs, and agility with curriculum development.

c) Whether the new school would have a strong relationship with research.

d) Whether the new school and its ways of working would intersect with the ongoing work on methods of teaching.

5.2 The Executive Dean, FASS explained that:

a) Employability was fundamental to the new school and there was learning to be taken from the Open Programme for both developing employability skills in new qualifications and the challenges of working across school and faculty boundaries. The intention for the future was to create vocational qualifications linked to the creative arts and industries, many of which were likely to be collaboratively developed across faculties. There would also be opportunities for new partnerships with employers and public bodies in the creative and cultural sector (BFI, Adobe etc).

b) OCA was able to work using a different model that wouldn't be possible with OU systems or at the same scale, but there would be learning from their models, for example how OCA could manage more flexible presentations.

c) It would be a teaching and research school and the intention was that academic staff would be able to undertake research. There would be an exploration of how that would be done and there had already been consideration of how it would be included in REF 2028.

d) The new school would work in lockstep with rest of the university, but it was also an opportunity to innovate and try different approaches, learning that could be useful for the rest of the OU.

5.3 It was noted that the new Head of School would be appointed under the current procedures, but that Remuneration Committee would be reviewing appointment processes in the coming year.

5.4 It was agreed that the Faculty should report back to Senate in 3 years on how the establishment of the new School had progressed.

5.5 Senate **recommended for approval** to Council the establishment of a new School of Creative Industries in FASS.

6   CAMPUS 2030   S-2023-03-05

6.1 The Vice-Chancellor introduced the paper, which provided background to Council's decision at its meeting on 9 May to initiate work on a business case for relocating the Walton Hall campus to a site in central Milton Keynes.

6.2 The Vice-Chancellor highlighted the following points:

a) The reason for focusing on the option to relocate was because a business case would take up to 12 months, requiring considerable work, and would include options for consolidation at Walton Hall.

b) The Walton Hall options would be available if relocation proved not to be the preferred choice.

c) The business case was a response to both opportunities and threats faced by the University and included the development of a new integrated academic provision on-campus, aimed at growing in new markets, predominantly young students and residential international students.

d) It was an opportunity to design the accommodation for the OU from scratch, ensuring it was suitable for new ways of working, accessible, high amenity and sustainable. Remaining at Walton Hall would also cost many millions of pounds to reconfigure and retrofit the buildings.

e) There was a process and timeline for the business case and decision-making, including a dedicated workstream on consultation and engagement. Senate would be a key stakeholder.

6.3 Senate:

a) Discussed the importance of testing the proposal and its opportunities carefully and asked to what extent other options would be explored.

b) Commented on the wider opportunities that could be explored through the MK Campus option, including strategic (younger, new groups of learners), commercial (possible links with libraries, music and esports arenas) and community opportunities (improve integration of Staff Tutors and nations colleagues and PGR student community opportunities).

c) Highlighted the importance of ensuring that the proposal would serve the OU's purpose and mission.

d) Expressed that the 'provider arm' should not risk endangering the OU's core purpose around openness or adversely affecting current students in any way.

    e)   Raised concerns that attracting students from a wider pool, including international students would be difficult, it was something that other universities already struggled with and the OU should take a different approach to other universities regarding international students.

    f)   Raised concerns that the OU did not currently have the expertise in pedagogy for teaching face-to-face or the pastoral and social support for on-campus students.

    g)   Asked for clarification on what arrangements there would be for consultation with the academic community in order to ensure full academic scrutiny and ownership of any decision to move to MK city centre.

6.4   The Vice-Chancellor explained that:

    a)   Other options would be kept available and savings would be made at the Walton Hall campus, but due to the scale and complexity of creating a business case, resources would be focused there. He noted that the viability of the proposal was dependent on new income streams and the case was far weaker without the provider arm.

    b)   The proposal to open a campus for new students would not dilute the OU's mission and incredible role in society and would not close opportunities for students who needed the OU the most. It would also be an opportunity to explore a local civic mission.

    c)   Regarding the attraction of those students, work on demand, market and positioning would be crucial and the proposal would not proceed without assurance on that point.

    d)   There would be challenging decisions to be made in areas such as admissions and international students, which may well stop the project if Council and Senate believed they would put the core mission of the University at risk. The University's finances also needed to be part of those decisions.

    e)   There was already a lot of expertise within the University from across the sector, but to proceed, there would need to be assurance on the ability to provide a good offer to on-campus students. Onsite provision was mentioned in the current OU strategy and was in line with the OU's mission.

    f)   Scoping for appropriate workstreams for the business case work was still underway, but Academic strategy and curriculum would be part of the workstream activities and Senate would be fully involved in the areas under its responsibility (curriculum, teaching models etc) later in the process. There would be a whole programme of work around consultation and engagement.

6.5   Questions were raised regarding how a relocation project would be funded in the context of the OU's current financial situation. The Chief Financial Officer explained that the potential relocation would be a long-term proposition, that would start properly after the current four-year budget plan. There would be necessary costs associated with the production of the business case however and the external expertise and support required. He noted that there was no cost-free option however, as Walton Hall would require considerable work to retrofit the site.

6.6   The Vice-Chancellor explained that the business case would be judged on its impact on future income, sustainability, the OU's long-term mission and goals, and what student needs would be in ten-to-fifty years' time.

6.7   It was confirmed that the paper would be declassified to 'Internal use only', for sharing within the University only. A joint media statement from the OU and Milton Keynes Development Partnership would be released the following week.

7   FINANCE UPDATE   S-2023-03-06

7.1   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 budgeted deficit in the Autumn was £17m and the latest actual forecast was £23.5m.
        ii.   There had been an improvement of approximately £3.5m in the forecast since Q2.
        iii. The latest forecast included the cost of the additional pay award this year.

   b)   On the Accounting position:
        i.   The figures included the provision for MARS, which would cost around £15m to release staff
        ii.   There had been a significant shift in the USS provision

8   REVIEW OF THE STUDENT CHARTER   S-2023-03-07

8.1   The President of the Open University Students' Association explained that the review had only been light touch this year and that a more in-depth review was planned for next year. She noted the importance of the Student Charter being visible and accessible to all OU staff and students, that it should be at the forefront of decision-making and implementation and the Association were happy to collaborate with colleagues to achieve that.

8.2   Senate **approved** the changes proposed in the paper.

9   HONORARY DEGREE NOMINATIONS   S-2023-03-08

   Senate:

   i) **noted** the schedule for the conferment of Honorary Degrees at ceremonies during 2023.

   ii) **approved** 'en bloc' the list of nominations recommended by the Honorary Degrees Committee.

10   EMERITUS PROFESSORS   S-2023-03-09

   Senate **approved** the recommendation from Chairs Committee that the title of Emeritus Professor is awarded to Professor Ross Fergusson from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS).

11   EDI COMMITTEE REPORT   S-2023-03-10

   Senate **noted** a summary of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC) discussion regarding the Annual Academic Promotions Report and subsequent recommendations by the EDIC.

12   ACADEMIC QUALITY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE REPORT   S-2023-03-11

   Senate **noted** a report from the meeting of Academic Quality and Governance Committee held on 23 May 2023.

13   SENATE ANNUAL EFFECTIVENESS REPORT   S-2023-03-12

   Senate **noted** the Senate Annual Effectiveness Review (AER) report.

14   COUNCIL   S-2023-03-13

   Senate **noted** a report of the last meeting of Council held on 9 May 2023.

15   SENATE FORWARD PLANNER   S-2023-03-14

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

16   CHAIR'S ACTIONS   **S-2023-03-15**

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

Future Meeting Dates
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
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