

## THE SENATE

### Minutes

This paper presents the confirmed Minutes of the last meeting of the Senate held on Wednesday 17 June 2020 via Teams.

The Senate approved these Minutes as a correct record at its meeting on Wednesday 14 October 2020.

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University Secretary

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**THE SENATE**

Minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on Wednesday 17 June 2020 via Teams.

**PRESENT:**

Professor Tim Blackman	Vice-Chancellor
Professor Josie Fraser	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Dr Liz Marr	Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students)
Professor Kevin Hetherington	Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Enterprise and Scholarship)
Professor 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	Interim Director, Institute of Educational Technology
Professor Eileen Scanlon	Associate Director Research, Institute of Educational Technology
Mr Gary Elliot-Cirigottis	Director of Library Services
Mr Nicholas Barratt	Director, Learner and Discovery Services

**Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)**

Dr William Brown	Dr Elaine Moohan
Dr Jovan Byford	Dr Sarah Crafter
Dr Richard Heffernan	Professor John Wolffe
Dr Deborah Drake	Mr Matt Staples
Dr Alison Penn	Professor David Johnson

**Faculty of Business & Law (FBL)**

Miss Carol Howells	Dr Kristen Reid
Dr Caroline Clarke	Mr Mike Phillips

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

Dr Stephen Burnley	Dr James Hague
Dr Janet Haresnape	Mrs Diane Butler
Dr Magnus Ramage	Dr Rachael Luck
Professor David Rothery	Dr Leonor Barroca
Dr Robert Brignall	Dr Hayley Ryder
Dr Karen Olsson-Francis	Dr Mark Slaymaker
Dr John Baxter	Professor Simon Green
Dr Toby O'Neil	

**Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS)**

Mrs Anna Comas-Quinn	Dr Verina Waights
Professor Jan Draper	Mr Jeremy Wilcock
Ms Tyrrell Golding	Dr Elodie Vialleton
Dr Kristina Hultgren	Dr Jackie Watts
Ms Susan Kotschi	Mr Andy Rixon

**Institute of Education Technology (WELS)**

Mr Chris Edwards

**Associate Lecturers**

Dr Tim Parry

Mr Jim Gillen

Dr Catherine Halliwell

Dr Linda Walker

Dr Sylvie Serpell

Mr Rob Parker

Mrs Frances Chetwynd

**Students Appointed by Open University Students Association**

Ms Cath Brown

Ms Cinnomen McGuigan

Ms Alison Kingan

Mr Rory Powell

Dr Barbara Tarling

Mrs Sarah Jones (alternate)

**Academic-related Staff**

Mr Derek Sheills

Mrs Rukhsana Malik

Mr Billy Khokhar

Mrs Gemma Maldar

Ms Julia Barkans

Dr Caitlin Adams

Mr Toby Scott-Hughes

Ms Elaine Walker

Mrs Maria Crisu

Mrs Selena Killick

Mrs Tracy Lawson

Mrs Kate Signorini

**Co-opted members**

Ms Susan Stewart

Mrs Louise Casella

Mr John D'Arcy

Dr Claire Baines

**In attendance**

Mr Jake Yeo, Deputy University Secretary

Dr Laura Lauer, Head of Governance

Ms Becky Sexton, Senior Manager, Governance

Ms Anna Barber, Director of Strategy

**Observing**

Ms Helen Cooke, Senior Manager, Access, Open and Cross-curricular Innovation

Mrs Lisa Harris, Head of Academic Strategy

Mrs Kym Gosling, Branch Secretary, UNISON

**APOLOGIES:**

Professor Ian Fribbance, Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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

Dr Helen Fraser

Dr Jon Hall

**Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)**

Dr Karen Hagan

Professor Nicola Watson

**Co-opted Members**

Mr Christopher Turner

**Students Appointed by Open University Students Association**

Mrs Stephanie Stubbins

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**1. REPORT FROM THE CHAIR**

- 1.1 The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Tim Blackman, welcomed members to the meeting. He noted that Cath Brown's term of office as President of the Open University Students Association (OUSA) would end in July 2020 and thanked her for her contribution and service to the Senate.
- 1.2 The Vice-Chancellor also thanked members for their continued support to keep the University operational through the pandemic and for helping to support both students and colleagues. In the consideration of future arrangements, the first priority would be the health and safety of students and staff.

- 1.3 The Vice-Chancellor explained that the University had been engaged in planning and budgeting, considering factors such as the pressures on income caused by the disruption of the pandemic and the opportunities and costs of research and partnerships. He explained that planning would be an evolution of the previous strategy, incorporating the programmes already in place, such as the Access and Participation Plan.
- 1.4 The Vice-Chancellor reflected that the Black Lives Matter movement should act as a spur to the OU's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) agenda. An 'equality by design' strategy, coupled with positive action could realise results to be proud of. In response to a question about the OU's ability to challenge the historical narrative taught in the UK the Deputy Vice-Chancellor reported that discussions had already commenced regarding decolonising the OU's curriculum. There had also been consideration of how the OU could support others, such as possible microcredential resources for teachers for example.
- 1.5 The Vice-Chancellor turned to recent news: a Webby Award won by BBC Ideas featuring an extensive series of OU/BBC digital videos on their OU playlist, reaccreditation under cyber essentials and the OU's involvement in a newly detected green light observed around Mars. He noted that there had been a lot of activity on the Government and external affairs front, particularly in relation to the differences across the four nations. It was asked whether, as the special arrangements for the recovery of the UK were devolved, the OU could have an impact regionally. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that it was an area the OU was conscious of and there would be consideration of a place-based pilot, to avoid missing opportunities, which should also be aligned with the governments' agendas.
- 1.6 In response to a question regarding the AL contract implementation and the possible disruption due to the pandemic, the Vice-Chancellor explained that the implementation was progressing as planned, but the Delivery Board would continue to monitor the situation and take into consideration the feedback from staff and students.

**2 ACADEMIC DECISIONS IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 S-2020-03-01**

- 2.1 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor introduced the paper, which highlighted the approach to academic decisions to date in light of guidance published by the Office for Students and Quality Assurance Agency, to support students and maintain academic quality and standards in response to COVID-19. She thanked the members of the University's Emergency Management Team (EMT) and its Academic Implications Subgroup (AIG) for their work so far, including the President of the OU Students Association, who had played a key role in providing student feedback.
- 2.2 It was asked whether a plan was in place to return academic decision-making to the formally constituted bodies. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor advised that the intention was to return to the formal committee structure as soon as possible, but that the governance arrangements would need to continue to enable agile responses.
- 2.3 Members of the Senate recognised the achievements of the group and the difficult and urgent decisions that had been made over the past few months. It was suggested that the level of clarity could have been increased for some students, particularly those with special circumstances. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor explained that for students, significant work was undertaken to ensure student needs were taken into consideration, communications were shared as soon as possible and were continually improved over the course of the group's work. Internally, there had been representation from all four Faculties on the groups and detailed communications were disseminated to Faculties and ALs through channels such as Boards of Study.
- 2.4 In response to a question regarding the postponed higher-risk new or updated modules, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor explained that they were chosen where there were pragmatic

solutions, using standard postponement procedures and minimising risks. The risk had been deferred to the next presentation, but that could be prepared for.

- 2.5 Several members noted that some of the actions taken during this period had highlighted the lack of understanding by students of assessment strategies. It was suggested that clearer communications were needed in the future and it was asked whether the conflation periods should also be reconsidered. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor advised that the current conflation periods had been well thought through on a sound pedagogic basis and advised against any changes. A piece of work to clarify assessment strategies could be considered, especially as the OU's assessment of modules can be quite varied.
- 2.6 Attention was drawn to the potential impact of the actions taken so far on Module Result Panels (MRPs). The result would be a complex set of decisions that MRPs might take and a risk that there could be differing practices among Cluster Examination and Award Boards (CEABs) and MRPs. Members highlighted the challenge of sustaining both the principle 'to demonstrate that academic standards are being maintained' and the principle of 'no-detriment to students'. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor noted that balancing the two principles was an appropriate area for academic judgment.
- 2.7 In response to the question of whether low income families had been considered explicitly, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor advised that they had, with appropriate adjustments made.
- 2.8 Noting the lessons learned, the Senate **agreed** that appropriate action had been taken to maintain academic quality and standards.

### **3 STUDENT CHARTER REVIEW**

**S-2020-03-02**

- 3.1 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Students (PVC(S)) presented a report on the substantial review of the Student Charter, carried out in partnership between the Office of the PVC(S) and the Students Association (OUSA). This had resulted in a shorter, more focused and more student-friendly Student Charter.
- 3.2 Members welcomed the revised Charter's focus on OU community responsibilities and values and wondered whether it might be more appropriately titled 'Community Charter' or 'Student and Community Charter'. Whilst there was support from Senate members, it was noted that as a student-facing document there were benefits to 'student' being prominent in the title and there may also be regulatory requirements for the University to have a specific 'Student Charter' in place. It was agreed for the name of the Charter to be explored during the next annual review.

**Action: PVC(S)**

- 3.3 When asked about effectiveness monitoring, the PVC(S) explained that a full implementation plan was in development, which would include significant work to communicate the new Student Charter to all stakeholders. The success of the Charter would depend on engagement from staff and students to ensure it was a living and meaningful document.
- 3.4 The Senate **approved** the Student Charter.

### **4 DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT**

**S-2020-03-03**

- 4.1 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Students (PVC (S)) explained that following the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment consultation on the UK degree classification system, sector bodies agreed that institutions should publish a Degree Outcomes Statement, analysing their institutional degree classification profile. The aim was to show commitment to the value of UK degrees and transparent, consistent and fair academic standards.

- 4.2 The PVC (S) noted that additional work would be undertaken to explore the variety of degree profiles related to subject. While these reflected variations in line with the sector, this area merited closer examination. Following comments from members, two areas of the statement would be clarified. The first was in relation to the OU being ranked first in “assessment and feedback” in the National Students Survey. Secondly, the statement’s reference to students’ backgrounds on classification outcomes would be checked against the OU’s Access and Participation Plan targets.

**Action: PVC (S)**

- 4.3 Subject to the above clarifications, Senate agreed to **recommend to Council for approval** the OU Degree Outcomes Statement.

**5 MINUTES** **S-2020-02-M**

The Senate **approved** the minutes of the meeting of the Senate on held on 1 April 2020.

**6 MATTERS ARISING** **S-2020-03-05**

The Senate **noted** the response to the matter arising from the minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on 22 January 2020 (S-2020-01-M) and 1 April 2020 (S-2020-02-M).

**7 INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE REPORT TO SENATE** **S-2020-03-06**

- 7.1 The Director, Strategy introduced the institutional performance report. Following earlier discussions regarding EDI issues, she added that clearer targets are needed and noted that an EDI review was due to be discussed by VCE.

- 7.2 Concerns were raised regarding the explanation of the Gender Pay Gap data. The Director, Strategy, noted that the OU saw an increase in atypical workers which, at the time, were mainly women, but that People Services would look to understand the 2020 Gender Pay Gap data in greater detail.

- 7.3 Attention was also drawn to several EDI issues outlined in the report, including the decrease in the proportion of female, disabled and/or staff members from the BAME communities promoted to senior roles. It was noted that differences across categories of staff, such as separate pay structures, or the opportunity to contribute to the academic governance of the University, could also cause an unequal power dynamic. Members noted that whilst some actions to address these issues had been highlighted, individuals had a responsibility to contribute to an institutional culture which challenged inequality.

- 7.4 Clarification was sought as to how exit interviews would inform the learning and plans to improve the outcomes under this area of culture and whether Associate Lecturers would also receive exit interviews. The Director, Strategy explained that all staff are invited to complete an exit questionnaire, in order to understand the drivers behind people leaving.

- 7.5 Regarding the reference in the report to the impact of COVID-19 on the Student Learning and Adjustment Strategy (SLAS), it was asked whether the alternative formats for 20J would be on track. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Students (PVC(S)) explained that there would be an improvement for 20J and there would also be a better understanding of any potential delays. The re-opening of the warehouse had been a positive step and weekly meetings would be taking place to monitor progress.

**8 ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN** **S-2020-03-07**

The Senate **noted** the approval of the University’s Access and Participation Plan 2020/21 – 2024/25 by the Office for Students on the 28 April 2020.

**9 ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE REVIEW**

The Senate **noted**:

- a) The revised timings and associated progress against the Implementation and Action plan.
- b) The continuation of Academic Governance Advisory Group (AGAG) as a transitional body to early autumn 2020.
- c) Postponement of the creation of a new Oversight Group to succeed the AGAG.
- d) The addition of a group of critical readers to the oversight process.

**10 PROMOTIONS REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT - UPDATE S-2020-03-09**

The Senate **noted** an update on progress with the implementation of the recommendations from the Academic Promotions Scheme Review report.

**11 HONORARY DEGREE NOMINATIONS S-2020-03-10**

Due to feedback being received outside of the consultation period, it was **agreed** that the Honorary Degrees Committee would review the additional comments and present a final paper at the July correspondence meeting, for approval.

**12 PROCESS FOR THE RESCINDING OF AN HONORARY DEGREE S-2020-03-11**

The Senate **approved** the process for the rescinding of an Honorary Degree.

**13 RESEARCH COMMITTEE S-2020-03-12**

Minute 7: Growing Research Income

Assurance was sought that recent decisions relating to the Research Excellence Framework would not undermine the ambition outlined in the report to increase interdisciplinary research. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Enterprise and Scholarship) (PVC RES) highlighted areas of activity already in place to encourage interdisciplinary research, such as long-standing strategy research areas with further funding agreed and work undertaken on setting income targets and building capacity. He noted that the main challenge was the split of income, but that decisions had been made on the income sharing of a number of grants across multiple Faculties. CSR would also be able to support the process in future through apportionment in advance. The Vice-Chancellor noted that the area of interdisciplinary research would also be included in strategy discussions going forward.

**14 EDUCATION COMMITTEE S-2020-03-13**

14.1 Minute 8.1 & 8.2: Qualifications and Assessment Committee

14.2 Questions were raised regarding which FutureLearn students were considered OU students and whether as co-owner of FutureLearn, the OU should ensure comparable accessibility standards. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor advised that the intention was to have different terms, conditions and levels of support for microcredentials on FutureLearn as they are aimed at a specific and different part of the education market. FutureLearn met industry standard requirements. She added that there was currently no objective for additional development in this area or to make FutureLearn closer to the OU core offer. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor informed the Senate that the Council will consider a FutureLearn Strategy in the autumn.

- 14.3 In response to a question regarding the OpenLearn platform, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor explained that users of OpenLearn were not classed as OU students, as they did not register for formal credits.
- 14.4 The Senate **noted** the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 18 March 2020.
- 15 ACADEMIC QUALITY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE S-2020-03-14**
- The Senate **noted** the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting of the Academic Quality and Governance Committee held on 5 May 2020.
- 16 THE COUNCIL S-2020-03-15**
- The Senate **noted** the unconfirmed Minutes of the meetings of the Council held on 16 April 2020 and 12 May 2020
- 17 CHAIRS ACTION S-2020-03-16**
- The Senate **noted** action taken by the Chair since the last meeting of the Senate.
- 18 DECLASSIFICATION OF PAPERS**
- To be declassified:  
S-2020-03-01 Academic Decisions in response to Covid-19
- 19 DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS**
- Wednesday 14 October 2020  
Wednesday 27 January 2021  
Wednesday 21 April 2021 (Council members in attendance)  
Wednesday 23 June 2021

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University Secretary

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