

THE SENATE

Minutes

This paper presents the confirmed Minutes of the last meeting of the Senate held on Wednesday 2 April 2014 at The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes.

The Senate **approved** these Minutes as a correct record of the meeting on Wednesday 11 June 2014, inclusion of an amendment to Minute 5.6 (S-2014-03-M Minute 2.1).

Alan Burrell
Acting Secretary to the Committee

Julie Tayler
Working Secretary to the Committee
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Attachment:

S-2014-02-M Minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on 2 April 2014

THE SENATE

Minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on Wednesday 2 April 2014 at 2.00pm
in the Hub Theatre, The Open University, Walton Hall.

PRESENT:

1) Ex officio

Mr Martin Bean, Vice-Chancellor
Professor Tim Blackman, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Scholarship and Quality)
Professor Musa Mihsein, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
Professor Belinda Tynan, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching)
Professor Anne De Roeck, Dean, Faculty of Mathematics, Computing and Technology
Professor Kevin Hetherington, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences
Professor Mary Kellett, Dean, Faculty of Education and Language Studies
Mr Jeremy Roche, Dean, Faculty of Health and Social Care
Professor David Rowland, Dean, Faculty of Arts
Professor Hazel Rymer, Dean, Faculty of Science
Professor Rebecca Taylor, Dean, Faculty of Business and Law
Mr Keith Zimmerman, Director, Students
Professor Patrick McAndrew, Director of the Institute of Educational Technology
Mrs Nicky Whitsed, Director, Library Services
Mr Christopher Rooke, Director, Learning and Teaching Solutions

Appointed

2) Central Academic Units

Faculty of Arts

Dr Ole Grell	Dr Lynda Prescott
Dr Graham Harvey	Professor John Wolffe
Dr Paula James	

Faculty of Business & Law

Ms Carmel McMahon	Mr Mike Phillips
Mr Alessandro Saroli	Dr Sharon Slade
Dr Kristen Reid	

Faculty of Education and Language Studies

Dr Uwe Baumann	Dr Steven Hutchinson
Dr Jane Cullen	Dr Tim Lewis
Ms Felicity Harper	Professor Karen Littleton

Faculty of Health and Social Care

Mrs Sue Cole	Dr Mary Twomey
Miss Christine Taylor	Mr Mick McCormack

Faculty of Mathematics, Computing and Technology

Dr David Bowers	Dr Tony Nixon
Professor Joyce Fortune	Dr Toby O'Neil
Mr Derek Goldrei	Mr Brendan Quinn
Ms Maggie Holland	Dr Peter Robbins

Dr Mark Woodroffe

Faculty of Science

Dr John Baxter
Professor Monica Grady
Dr Arlene Hunter

Professor David Rothery
Dr Robert Saunders
Dr Claire Turner

Faculty of Social Sciences

Dr Troy Cooper
Dr Richard Heffernan
Dr Helen Kaye

Dr Raia Prokhovnik
Dr Hugh Mackay
Mr Matt Staples

Institute of Educational Technology

Professor Agnes Kukulska-Hulme
Dr Robin Goodfellow

Professor Eileen Scanlon

Other Central Units

Dr Liz Marr

3) Associate Lecturers

Mrs Frances Chetwynd
Ms Janet Dyke
Dr Isobel Falconer

Mr Bruce Heil
Mr Stephen Pattinson
Dr Walter Pisarski

4) Students Appointed by Open University Students Association

Mr Josh Brumpton
Mrs Marianne Cantieri
Mr Jeferson de Oliveira

Ms Alison Kingan
Dr Sandra Summers
Ms Jacqui Horsburgh

5) Academic-related Staff

Ms Pat Atkins
Miss Karen Bradbury
Mr Mike Christensen
Mrs Emir Forken
Ms Sandi Guest
Mr Martin Kenward
Mr Billy Khokhar

Dr Christina Lloyd
Mr Tony O'Shea-Poon
Ms Clare Riding
Ms Gill Smith
Mr Michael Street
Mr Jake Yeo
Ms Hilary Robertson

6) Co-opted members

Professor Peter Scott
Mr Christopher Goscomb
Dr James Miller

Mr Rob Humphreys
Dr David Knight

In attendance

Mr Alan Burrell, Director of Estates (Acting University Secretary)
Ms Michelle Gander, Head of University Secretary's Office
Mrs Dawn Turpin, Head of Governance
Mrs Julie Tayler, Senior Manager, Governance (Working Secretary)
Ms Teresa Coyle, Manager, Governance
Mr David Matthewman, Chief Information Officer (Minute 8)
Mr Mark Young, Head of Business Improvement, Marketing and SFRS (Minute 8)
Mrs Mary Kirby, Director of Business Services, Student Services (Minute 9)
Dr Sharon Ding, Academic Director, Business Development Unit (Minutes 1 - 9)
Mr Guy Mallison, Director of Strategy (Minutes 1 - 9)

Observing

Ms Kathryn Baldwin, Senior Project Officer, Vice-Chancellor's Office
Mr Lucian Hudson, Director of Communications

APOLOGIES:

Appointed

2) Central Academic Units

Faculty of Arts

Professor Suman Gupta

Faculty of Education and Language Studies

Mr Pete Smith

Faculty of Health and Social Care

Professor Jan Draper

Faculty of Mathematics, Computing and Technology

Dr Nicholas Moss

Dr Leonor Barroca

Professor Andy Lane

Faculty of Science

Dr Nick Rogers

Faculty of Social Sciences

Dr Anastasia Economou

6) Co-opted members

Mr John D'Arcy

In attendance

Mr Fraser Woodburn, University Secretary

Mr Andrew Law, Director of Open Media Unit

1 WELCOME

The Chair welcomed the Acting Director, Learning and Teaching Solutions (LTS), Chris Rooke, to the Senate. Mick McCormick, Faculty of Health and Social Care, and Dr Kristen Reid and Emir Forcken, Faculty of Business and Law, were also welcomed to their first meeting.

2 MINUTES**S-2014-01-M**

- 2.1 With reference to Minute 4.3, an associate lecturer (AL) member said that the intention had been that ALs should be given guidance on the proper use of information they could now access with respect to student records on VOICE. Moreover, the reference to 'staff' in the second sentence, should read 'staff tutors'. Another member added that, for the sake of consistency, the reference to 'staff' in paragraph 4.2 should be amended to 'staff tutors'. The Chair said that the minutes would be amended to accommodate these points of clarification.

Action: GT

- 2.2 The Senate approved the minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on 5 February 2014, subject to the above amendments.

3 MATTERS ARISING**S-2014-02-01**

The Senate **noted** the responses to the matters arising.

4 REPORT FROM AND QUESTIONS TO THE CHAIR

- 4.1 The Vice-Chancellor reported to the Senate on the positive response to the appointment of the new Chancellor, Baroness Lane-Fox of Soho.
- 4.2 The Vice-Chancellor said that, following the February intake, the planning assumptions for undergraduate students in 2013/14 had been exceeded in both England and Northern Ireland, and were within a few percent of them in Scotland and Wales. It was currently predicted that the postgraduate numbers would reach 90% of the planning assumption, although this might improve as many postgraduates did not register until April or May. The University had set an aggressive target to grow these numbers when the overall market was contracting.
- 4.3 With reference to the decline in student numbers and the University's work on recruitment and retention, a member commented that it was important to remember what made the OU different and, in particular, those students that wanted to subscribe to the idea of 'lifelong learning'. The Vice-Chancellor said that the decline, which was largely due to the changes in the funding arrangements, was disappointing. However, it should be noted that there had been a partial reversing of the Equivalent and Lower Qualification (ELQ) policy with regard to engineering, technology and computer science subjects.
- 4.4 The Vice-Chancellor reported that, in January 2014, the government had announced that the Student Opportunity Allocation (SOA), formerly known as the Widening Participation Allocation, would be abolished as part of the ongoing austerity measures. The fund had been worth a total of £327 million in 2013/14, with just over £30 million going to the OU to support its widening access work. Under the guidance of the Government and External Affairs Team, the University had participated in a campaign that had resulted in significant support from MPs, peers and third party stakeholders, who had contacted the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and spoken out in the media to defend the SOA. In the face of such widespread resistance, the government had rethought their position and, in February 2014, BIS had written to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to say that the fund should be protected in 2014/15, with widening

participation given the same status as science, maths and engineering. During the previous week, HEFCE had confirmed that the OU's share of the SOA would increase in 2014/15 to £34.7 million.

- 4.5 The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) was planning to increase its core teaching grant to the Open University in Scotland by 3.5 per cent in 2014/15. Moreover, the SFC had increased its Knowledge Exchange Grant to the OU by 99 per cent, and also awarded the University a £1.2 million grant to lead a project developing open education in Scotland.
- 4.6 The Vice-Chancellor observed that the effectiveness of its governance structures was crucial to the University. As the academic governance review (AGR) entered its final stages, he thanked everyone who had worked on it and engaged with the consultation. There would be much to do in the implementation of the recommendations, but the whole University would benefit from the outcomes.
- 4.7 The Vice-Chancellor informed the Senate that a planned statement on the recent announcement regarding the closure of the East Grinstead regional office would now be taken elsewhere on the agenda (S-2014-02-06).
- 4.8 The Vice-Chancellor also reported on:
- a) the Memorandum of Strategic Intent signed between the OU and the Libyan Universities and the Libyan Open University Development group that set out plans for a long-term, large-scale collaboration to realise the Libyan government's vision of improving access to higher education;
 - b) work with the University of Guyana, who would be launching four degree programmes based on OU licensed content to make it easier for people in remote rural areas to access higher education;
 - c) the work of Dr Annika Mombauer, Faculty of Arts, in sharing expertise and insights on World War I through BBC TV series, debates on Radio 5 Live and at the British Library, and BBC publications;
 - d) the request from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to share details of three OU programmes – Securing Greater Accessibility, Aspire and Great Expectations – to serve as examples of best practice for other employers;
 - e) a research project, carried out by the OU in Wales together with the National Union of Students (NUS) Wales, that looked at why Welsh students chose part-time study and the barriers they faced. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) had been so impressed by the project that they had commissioned an expanded research project to cover the other three nations of the UK;
 - f) the election to Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA) of Eddy Shaw, an AL in Social Sciences. This was a rare honour and the Vice-Chancellor congratulated him on behalf of the Senate.

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**S-2014-02-02A****S-2014-02-02B**

- 5.1 Referring to minute 5.3, a student member said that clear advice was required by students who were becoming concerned about being able to complete their degrees by the end of 2016/17, and were making poor decisions in order to meet the deadline. The Director, Students, Keith Zimmerman, said that he and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic) [PVC (A)], Professor Musa Mihsein, were aware of this issue, and were reviewing both the advice provided and the current policy. Good communications were essential, as there were likely to be more options available to students than they realised.

- 5.2 With reference to Minute 6.10, a member asked what was meant by a 'more digital model of teaching' across all disciplines. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) [PVC (LT)], Professor Belinda Tynan, explained that the discussion had been based around the average age of students, which had dropped to 27 years. This raised issues about curriculum design and the need to review current practice regarding the learning experience. A member suggested that the views of ALs should be sought, as they had direct experience with students. It was important not to make assumptions about young students, whose interface with technology was often primarily through social media. A student member asked what research had been undertaken to support the apparent assumption that there was a preference, linked to age, for online learning. Professor Tynan replied that decisions were not being made on the basis of age; the University monitored and tracked the resources that students engaged with, and asked students what they used to achieve their learning outcomes.
- 5.3 A member observed that levels of student retention and progression were different for younger students, but that the age difference might disguise issues other than the engagement with online learning. The presentation on student numbers in June should also address student retention and progression, and provide evidence for any differentials. The Vice-Chancellor said that the June presentation was intended to present data from the Information Office about student numbers. However, an update from an analytics perspective would be provided at a future meeting by the PVC (L&T). Professor Tynan added that age was not the only differential and the work group were considering many attributes, including gender, with the intention of isolating the more dominant factors. Research was also ongoing with regard to passive withdrawals.
- Action: PVC (L&T)**
- 5.4 Referring to Minute 6.11, a member asked for clarification regarding the issue of The New Unit (TNU) handing over students to Student Services more quickly. Mr Zimmerman replied that the Study Experience Programme (SEP) was working on induction, which was co-ordinated by the Student Support Teams (SSTs), who would decide how ALs were to be incorporated. The Enquirer Experience Programme (EEP) was working to bring students into that induction.
- 5.5 With reference to Minute 9.1, an AL member commented that the Institutional Dashboard was only available to ALs if they were on campus; it was not possible for them to access it from home. The Director of Associate Lecturer Services, David Knight, confirmed that the website should be available to ALs, but there were some issues concerning the server being used that would be investigated.
- Action: DK**
- 5.6 The President, OUSA, Marianne Cantieri, commented that students did not have access to a Dashboard. The Vice-Chancellor said that this would be noted.
- 5.7 In response to a request for clarification regarding the part-time market in Minute 10.2, the Vice-Chancellor said that he had been referring to a single competitor that was a leader in part-time provision, but had seen a significant reduction in the demand for part-time. Consequently, the institution was now expanding its full time provision to compensate.
- 5.8 The Senate **noted** the unconfirmed Minutes and Confidential Minutes from the meeting held on 12 February 2014 (SPRC-2014-01-M).

6 SENATE MEMBERSHIP PANEL**S-2014-02-03**

The Senate:

- a) **approved** the following reappointments to the Senate from 1 September 2014 until 31 August 2018:
- Mr John D’Arcy, Director, The Open University in Ireland;
 Mr Rob Humphreys, Director, The Open University in Wales;
 Dr James Miller, Director, The Open University in Scotland;
- b) **approved** the following appointments to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) from 1 September 2014 until 31 August 2018:
- Professor Helen King, Professor of Classical Studies, Faculty of Arts;
 Professor Peter Taylor, Professor of Organic Chemistry, Faculty of Science (reappointment);
- c) **approved** the following reappointments to specialist judicial bodies:
- i) Academic Staff Promotions Appeals Committee
 Dr Dorothy Faulkner, Research School Academic Co-ordinator, Institute of Educational Technology Academic Team from 1 September until 31 August 2018;
 Mr Derek Goldrei, Staff Tutor, Faculty of Mathematics Computing and Technology, from 1 September 2014 until 31 August 2015;
- ii) Chair and Readership Promotions Appeals Committee
 Professor Michael Stewart, Professor of Neuroscience Faculty of Science from 1 September 2014 until 31 August 2018;
- iii) Disciplinary Tribunal and Grievance Committee Panels
 Professor Nicholas Braithwaite, Professor of Engineering Physics, Faculty of Science from 1 September 2014 until 31 August 2018;
- d) **noted** the matters for report.

7 ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE REVIEW - RECOMMENDATIONS**S-2014-02-04****Introduction**

- 7.1 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) [PVC (LT)], Professor Belinda Tynan, reported that an information session had been held the previous day, and recapped on the points raised during that session in the introduction to the paper. Recommendation 4a regarding AL representation had been withdrawn from the paper and would be subject to further discussion with a small group from the AL Executive (ALE) in May 2014. An AL member thanked Professor Tynan and the Director, Students, Keith Zimmerman for listening to AL representation concerning this recommendation.
- 7.2 Professor Tynan thanked everyone involved in the Project Group and Project Team, and all those who had participated in the consultation. The PVC (L&T) apologised for the apparent omission of students from the paper, but emphasised that they had been part of the Review Group’s discussions. The Group had recommended that there should be no changes to the basis of student membership, which aligned with the OU Student Charter.

7.3 The main finding of the Review Group, which had informed the recommendations, was that “whilst there is broad support for the general approach to participative academic governance a majority feels that current arrangements are complex and inefficient”. Therefore, the tenants or principles that would help the University move forward in the implementation stage were to:

- a) create a less cumbersome and inefficient structure;
- b) reduce the confusion about the relationship between academic governance and management with regard to decision making;
- c) ensure clarity on roles on committees and the basis of memberships;
- d) delete the duplication of discussion;
- e) reduce complexity and the resource intensive nature of the committee structure.

The OU was not failing at academic governance, but it could be more effective and the recommendations were designed to achieve this improvement.

7.4 The recommendations had been outlined in the paper and the PVC (LT) responded to some of the issues that had been raised by members at the information session:

- a) committees would not simply merge and continue with their current workload. During the implementation new terms of reference (ToR) would be developed, business would be delegated to academic management or to a committee lower in the structure where appropriate, and memberships would be reviewed to ensure the right balance of expertise and representation;
- b) whilst workload was a concern, clarity about what business was academic management and what was academic governance would be helpful moving forward;
- c) with regard to implementation, some changes could be made more quickly than others and the next phase would be to develop an implementation plan and timeline that would outline the work required and the people to be involved.
- d) The Senate would be kept informed of progress and, if appropriate, further recommendations would be made.

7.5 The challenge for the University was to maintain a balance between the relational culture of the organisation and how it conducted its ‘academic governance’, and to ensure that the balance of representation and expertise was right. Understanding the difference between academic governance, academic management business, and consultation was key to meeting this challenge.

7.6 A member welcomed the general direction of and speed of change for the recommendations. The external view had been helpful and the consultative process had been valuable. A student member commented that it would be helpful to see the written report on the consultant’s findings on which they had based their recommendations.

7.7 A member suggested that the principles laid out by the PVC (LT) be put down in writing in order to underpin the recommendations and the implementation. Professor Tynan agreed and added that key measurables should be included as the implementation plan was put together.

Senate and Middle Tier Substructure

- 7.8 A member commented that the proposal to introduce a single committee in the area of academic staff promotions (Recommendation 6) might be problematic in the case of appeals. If the appeal was heard by a senior member of the Committee who had not been present when the case had previously been considered, and the recommendation was referred back to the Committee for approval, would the Committee be able to overturn the decision? Professor Tynan said that this was not the intention.
- 7.9 The student member said that the creation of an Education Committee by merging the responsibilities of the current Curriculum and Validation Committee (CVC) and Learning, Teaching and Student Support Committee (LTSSC) (Recommendation 7), whilst keeping the membership 'as small as possible', had raised concerns that student representation would be reduced whilst the member workload increased. Similarly, the merger of three different committees to form one Qualifications and Assessment Committee (Recommendation 9) had big implications for workload, as these committees generated a significant number of papers. It was important to recognise that OUSA representatives were not sabbatical officers and committee work did not constitute a student's day job. The PVC (LT) acknowledged this issue, but said that when the terms of reference were reviewed some of the workload would be transferred to academic management in order that the committee could focus on academic governance. The Director, Students, Keith Zimmerman added that there was a more general issue to be considered with regard to student representation, as internal and external changes had increased the expectations of students. The OU had developed the Student Charter and Relationship Agreement, but the University's ways of working needed to be reviewed as a result.
- 7.10 Another member, who served on both CVC and LTSSC, welcomed the merger of the two committees, but agreed that workload was an issue. Committee papers varied in quality and the implementation phase should consider the way in which information was presented to committees, as this might play a significant part in reducing the workload for committee members.
- 7.11 A student member observed that the review of the work of the new committees, as well as any devolution to faculties, should ensure that they did not simply exist to give formal approval, but also had responsibility, accountability and oversight of the academic business in the OU. Professor Tynan said that this would become clearer as the University moved through the implementation phase.
- 7.12 Some members enquired about the consultation regarding the Master of Research Award Board (MRAB) and the Research Degrees Examination Result Approval Committee (RDRAC) (Recommendation 11). RDRAC met physically only once per year, but much more frequently online. Abolishing some bodies might cause issues with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). Professor Tynan commented that undergraduate examination ratification boards also existed, and there had been a suggestion that they might be combined with RDRAC. These committees would probably be maintained under the Qualifications and Assessment Committee, as they were required to report up through to the Senate, but it was necessary to consider how they might be run more efficiently. The PVC (LT) and PVC (RSQ) would be discussing the options further.
- 7.13 A member observed that there had been a suggestion that items of governance business, such as scholarship, which was part of the strategic plan, should be 'stress tested' through the proposed structure. Professor Tynan said that this would be sensible, although scholarship raised particular challenges as it impacted on learning and teaching, and research.

Next Steps

- 7.14 The President, OUSA, Marianne Cantieri, expressed concern about the devolution of academic governance processes to the faculties, as there was a tendency for them to operate in silos. If academic decisions were devolved, there might be less communication, consistency and sharing of good practice. Professor Tynan said that this would be reviewed at the implementation phase. The Vice-Chancellor said that there was no intention for faculties to work in silos; cross-collaboration was encouraged.
- 7.15 The Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Professor Kevin Hetherington, said that whilst he did not agree that faculties worked in silos, they did have different ways of operating and different arrangements for single and cross-faculty programme committees. There appeared to be a presumption that there was no need to review the faculty committees, but only the work that they did. What was the rationale for moving to a single tier arrangement (paragraph 41b)? Professor Tynan explained that it might be possible to remove the sub tier from the middle tier committees if responsibility for its business was devolved to the faculties. However, the Review Group had agreed that this would be a step too far at present, as the Senate and the Council needed to be assured that the structure was effective. The next steps would include investigation of the roles of faculty and programme committees.
- 7.16 The Dean, Faculty of Mathematics, Computing and Technology (MCT), Professor Anne de Roeck, said that faculties dealt with other business, not just governance, but their overall role did require careful consideration. Other HEI's had more formal academic structures that might provide some ideas. The terms Faculty Committee and Programme Committee were not necessarily helpful, as these set particular expectations. It was essential to remain flexible in order to respond to the different needs of different faculties and subject areas.
- 7.17 With reference to paragraph 44 a), which proposed that the current system of starring items was amended so that business was dealt with electronically, a member commented that the Senate was often the only place in which some issues could be discussed and asked whether comments, queries and decisions received electronically would be minuted. The PVC (LT) said that the idea had been taken from an example of best practice found during the benchmarking exercise. The OU would not be in a position to implement such a system for Senate business immediately, but it could be trialled with a committee lower in the substructure.
- 7.18 Mrs Cantieri thanked Professor Tynan for her assurances regarding students. OUSA had been offered the opportunity to take part in the consultation and would appreciate the opportunity to participate more fully in the implementation phase.

Rejected Recommendation

- 7.19 A member commended the rationale for rejecting the recommendation regarding the reduction in non-academic members of the Senate (paras 48-49), but thought it could be stronger. There were huge numbers of staff involved in the academic life of the University, which was part of what made the OU special. However, it was not clear how SSTs might be given a formal, clear and consistent voice in the revised structure.
- 7.20 Following a vote, the Senate overwhelmingly **agreed**:
- a) recommendations 1-15 on the structure and operation of academic governance;
 - b) that a Steering Group and Project Team for the implementation of recommendations 1-15 be formed.

8 THE ENQUIRER EXPERIENCE**S-2014-02-05**

- 8.1 The Director, Students, Keith Zimmerman, delivered a presentation on the work of the Enquirer Experience Programme. The goal of the EEP was to design a compelling experience to support the journey of prospective UK students towards becoming OU students. It aimed to enable those students to make the best choices, to be aware of the implications of those choices and the commitments they entailed, and to prepare them to be successful in their studies. The new enquirer website, which was scheduled for launch on 24 April 2014, would provide a wide range of services and information aimed at improving the quality of the enquirer's choices and their readiness to study. However, the EEP would not stop after the website launch: live metrics, and experiences from across the OU, particularly from SSTs, would be used to improve processes for the benefit of students and the University. (A copy of the slide presentation is available to Senate members on the Governance website.)
- 8.2 A member observed that the website referred to courses, rather than qualifications and modules, whereas staff were being strongly encouraged to use the terminology of the Qualification (Q) world. Mark Young, Head of Business Improvement, explained that the website endeavoured to use the language of the enquirers. There was no intention to change the internal vocabulary of the University, and students would be educated in this language as they engaged further with the University.
- 8.3 In response to a question about the removal of pathways, Mr Young observed that they were concerned with the structure of the whole curriculum. The website aimed to simplify the student's initial choice; they did not have to select a qualification at this point, as this could be refined later. A member asked what would happen to a student looking for a subject which was part of a pathway, rather than part of a named qualification, for example chemistry. Mr Young said that the site contained a smart course finder. If the student typed in 'chem', the search would expose those qualifications appropriate to that subject area. The student could then explore the qualifications to see which ones offered the required outcomes.
- 8.4 Another member said that it was difficult to see the content of any given qualification on the current website. Whilst it was important to answer enquirers' generic questions, potential students also wanted to know what they would study at levels 1, 2 and 3. Mr Young said that this detail would be available, but within the context of reducing the information burden for students at the point at which they made their first choices. An infographic would be available that provided a full depiction of the qualification, including the elective and compulsory modules. Full module details were also available through the A-Z facility. The Director, Students added that it was difficult to know how much information was too much, but the University would keep the behaviour of enquirers under review and would respond accordingly.
- 8.5 A member asked what would happen if a student decided that they were 'not ready'. Mr Young said that clicking on 'Help' would link the student to information explaining Access courses and where such students might begin, including calls to action to prompt a student to speak to a member of OU staff. Another member asked whether diagnostic tools were available to help students assess whether or not they were ready for OU study. Mr Young confirmed that if particular diagnostics were available on the current site, then they would be on the new site. The PVC (A), Professor Musa Mihsein and the Director, Academic Planning and Resources, Dr Rachel Cragg, would be reviewing the diagnostics more fully.
- 8.6 An AL member asked whether it was possible for a student to enrol on a qualification without having spoken to a member of OU staff. Mr Young said that it was possible to complete enrolment on-line, but many enquirers chose to call staff for advice and, once a student had begun the process, there were many action points at which staff might proactively contact students. In response to a query from a member, the Chief Information

Officer, David Matthewman said that new staff in SRS would participate in an eight week training programme.

- 8.7 In response to a query about whether students received advice on applying for credit transfer, Mr Young said that there was a link on every qualification page to generic information about credit transfer, including policies and practices.
- 8.8 Responding to a member's question about journeys from informal to formal learning, the PVC (LT) said that new content, curated from the Open Media Unit, would be provided on the enquirers' website.
- 8.9 A student member asked whether there had been testing regarding the accessibility of the new website, with regard to background colours, font size and screen readers. Mr Young said that the site had been designed and built to University accessibility standards. Mr Matthewman added that the site had been taken through the Institute of Educational Technology (IET) laboratories for accessibility testing. In response to a query, Mr Young confirmed that signposting to the Disabled Students Allowances (DSA) site was available on the website.
- 8.10 Observing that the EEP was targeted at UK students, a member asked whether there was an equivalent programme looking at non-UK students so that they were also able to benefit from this work. The University policy was for mixed tuition groups, so it was important to ensure that all students were being given the same advice. Mr Young responded that the definition and design of the enquirer experience for non-UK students sat with Global Direct, and that non-Uk students would be routed from the new website to Global Direct as appropriate. However, Dr Sharon Ding had joined the EEP project to ensure that the enquirer experience was normalised for non-UK students.

9 MOTION TO THE SENATE

S-2014-02-06

Introduction

- 9.1 The Director, Students, Keith Zimmerman, made a statement to update members on the decision to close the East Grinstead regional office at the end of the calendar year 2014, which had been notified to the Council on 11 March 2014, and to respond to the motion before the Senate. The lease on the office expired in December 2014. The landlord planned to convert the building to residential accommodation, so the OU was unable to renew the lease. Advice had confirmed that a legal challenge to these plans was unlikely to be successful. The lease costs of alternative premises locally were advertised at more than double the current costs and even after negotiation would be at least 50% higher. The cost of fitting out and migrating to new premises was estimated at in excess of £500K.
- 9.2 An increasingly challenging financial environment meant that the University must continue to ensure that it is securing best value for money for its students who now had to pay significantly higher fees than previous generations. The OU had ambitious targets for improving student retention and progression and to support these priorities the University had to deploy its people and resources effectively to enhance its services to students. The end of the lease in East Grinstead was an opportunity to redirect funding away from property costs and into services for students. However, the decision had not been taken lightly.
- 9.3 The Director, Students and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic) [PVC(A)], Professor Musa Mihsein, had gone to East Grinstead on 13 March 2014 to explain the decision to affected staff and to respond directly to their questions, before communicating the announcement to all OU staff, including Associate Lecturers (ALs) and students. Mr Zimmerman thanked the staff in East Grinstead for the professional way that they had responded to the announcement. It was not anticipated that compulsory redundancies

would be necessary as a result of the closure. However, it was likely that staff would need to relocate, redeploy, or take early retirement or voluntary severance. A paper dealing with the required consultative processes would be considered at the meeting of the Strategic Planning and Resources Committee (SPRC) on 3 April 2014.

- 9.4 Plans were being made for the transfer of operations to alternative University locations, and to consult and support East Grinstead staff on the implications of the closure for them as individuals. A project team had been established to carefully manage the process between now and January 2015, which included colleagues from Central Academic Units (CAUs), Student Services, Human Resources (HR), Estates and Finance. The team would continue to consult with the OU Students' Association (OUSA), the Unions and AL Executive, together with the leaders of CAUs and Student Services. An intranet site had been established to keep all colleagues informed of this work.
- 9.5 The decision had inevitably prompted a wider strategic discussion about the optimal configuration of the locations from which the OU needed to operate. The University was a significant institution in the four political jurisdictions of the UK, which meant that a presence was required in London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast, alongside the OU headquarters in Milton Keynes. The Vice Chancellor's Executive (VCE) had now asked the Director, Students to undertake an analysis of all other locations to determine the optimal configuration of the OU's presence across the rest of the UK, in order to maintain and further develop the University's services to students whilst making the best use of its people and available resources. As yet, no work had been undertaken to define the scope or form of this analysis, as the University was concentrating its efforts on ensuring that the closure of the East Grinstead office was managed well to protect services to OU students and to support staff at what was acknowledged to be a very difficult time. The analysis would, however, be undertaken with the active involvement of CAUs and recommendations would be brought forward to VCE by January 2015.
- 9.6 Student Services would continue to provide services to support the tuition and assessment strategies as determined by the Academic Units of the University. These would continue to change and develop as they had always done, and Student Services would change in response. For example, the last meeting of the Senate had been asked to comment on the draft principles for group tuition, as part of a University-wide consultation on developing a group tuition policy. Student Services was taking account of this consultation – and other similar initiatives – in its planning and the closure of East Grinstead would be carefully managed to protect services to students and Associate Lecturers (ALs) within the University's existing policies.
- 9.7 Mr Zimmerman acknowledged the commitment and dedication to students that East Grinstead colleagues had demonstrated over many years. The project team and colleagues in HR would work with them to ensure that they were supported in ways that were commensurate with the commitment they had shown to OU students.
- 9.8 The PVC (A), emphasised that the decision to close the East Grinstead regional office had not been taken easily, but that it was one that he supported fully. The University would only achieve its priorities of improving student retention and progression by effectively allocating its people and resources. The priority was to ensure that the decision took account of the need to maintain the quality of academic support for students. The PVC (A), together with the Deans, Directors and Student Services, would be working to ensure that the Student Support Teams (SSTs) supported by East Grinstead had a smooth transition to a new location and that the University continued with the work of embedding student support in a qualification based model. The important academic role that Staff Tutors played in research, and in module production and presentation, was recognised. All areas of the University were committed to improving the retention and progression rates of OU students in a challenging financial environment, and this would continue to be

the priority. Professor Mihsein thanked colleagues in East Grinstead for their commitment and professionalism.

Motion

9.9 The Acting University Secretary, Alan Burrell, advised the Senate that the last section of part b) of the motion "... deciding on its recommendations", was outside the powers of the Senate, as such decisions were a matter for the Council. However, the Senate could offer advice and recommendations on such matters to SPRC and the Council. A member of the Senate could also propose an amendment to the wording of the motion.

9.10 Presenting the motion, a member said that he wanted to register the strong concern that many members of the Senate felt regarding the announcement of the closure of the East Grinstead office, but also to propose a way forward for a positive and constructive review of the OU's presence in the English regions. Part a) of the motion, which provided a general affirmation of the role of ALs and regional staff, should be uncontentious. However, many colleagues were feeling anxious in the light of the East Grinstead closure, so it was important that colleagues should be reminded of established University policy. Part b) agreed that there should be a review of specific functions and locations, especially in the light of the introduction of SSTs. However, the review should not be just an operational matter for Student Services; it would have widespread academic policy implications for the University and so it should be owned by and accountable to the Senate. The points raised by the Acting University Secretary were acknowledged, however, so an amendment to part b) of the substantive motion was proposed (John Wolffe) and seconded (Graham Harvey):

*b) agrees that a review of specific functions and locations is appropriate and looks forward to taking a full part in this review and to receiving and ~~deciding~~ **commenting** on its recommendations.*

9.11 Members asked for advice regarding the strongest wording that might be used in the motion that kept it within the Senate's remit. The Chair said that it would be inappropriate for the University Secretary to propose an amendment, but he could provide advice on whether a motion was within the Senate's terms of reference. A member commented that it was not helpful to have to take time out to consider matters of process, when it was important to have a substantial debate. In response to a query from a member, the Acting University Secretary confirmed that the use of the word 'advising' would keep the motion within the Senate's powers.

9.12 Members of the Senate then voted on the amendment to part b) of the motion, as set out in paragraph 9.10. The amendment was overwhelmingly rejected.

9.13 Another amendment to part b) of the original motion was proposed (Bruce Heil) and seconded (Brendan Quinn):

*b) agrees that a review of specific functions and locations is appropriate and looks forward to taking a full part in this review and to receiving and ~~deciding~~ **advising** on its recommendations.*

A member (Richard Hefferman) moved a procedural motion to vote on the amendment without further debate, which was seconded (Matt Staples).

9.14 Members of the Senate voted on the amendment to part b) of the motion as set out in paragraph 9.13. The amendment was overwhelmingly carried.

9.15 A member commented that the change of one word in part b) of the motion did not sufficiently address the Senate's role in the review process. Moreover, part c) should be

removed from the motion, since it urged action that the Senate could not deliver and which was outside its terms of reference. An alternative amendment was proposed (Kevin Hetherington) and seconded (Rebecca Taylor):

*b) agrees that a review of specific functions and locations is appropriate and looks forward to taking a full part in this review and to receiving and deciding on its recommendations **agrees to its involvement in the consultation process around any issues relating to tuition, student support or academic strategy as part of that review;***

c) ~~deplores the lack of consideration for valued colleagues and for the continuity of support for students apparent in the abrupt decision to close region 13, and urges that means be found to keep the East Grinstead office open pending the outcomes of the review.~~

- 9.16 Members commented that this proposed amendment to part b) would weaken the motion, as it was for the Senate to decide what would affect student tuition. A member supported the removal of part c) from the motion, as it was not something that could be assessed. Several other members urged that this amendment be rejected, as it was an important part of the debate. A member urged that the whole amendment be rejected and that the Senate put forward no further amendments until it had had a full debate.
- 9.17 Members of the Senate voted on the amendment to parts b) and c) of the motion as set out in paragraph 9.15. The amendment was overwhelmingly rejected.
- 9.18 A procedural motion that that the Senate should vote on each part of the substantive motion separately was proposed (Monica Grady) and seconded (Marianne Cantieri). The procedural motion was overwhelmingly carried.

Discussion

- 9.19 A member said that the decision to close the East Grinstead regional office had lost the trust of the staff not just in the South East, but across the regions and throughout the faculties. East Grinstead staff had received a written commitment from the senior management in November 2013 that alternative accommodation would be found in East Grinstead. The assistant director had confirmed this at the all-staff regional meeting in December 2013. However, within a few months, a different decision had been taken.
- 9.20 Many members commented on a lack of consultation with faculties, deans, regional staff and unions, and expressed concern about the process by which the decision had been taken, regardless of the decision itself. Several members commented that this and other recent decisions were having a detrimental impact on relations between VCE and academic staff, and on their trust and confidence in the University's senior leadership. One member said that Senate had been described as the conscience of the University, and as such it should be offended by this process. Another member said that the OU had been superbly led by its senior management team over recent years, and it should not now do anything that might damage that.
- 9.21 Members also expressed concern that a decision of such magnitude had been made without having to go through the governance structure, when changes to the names of faculty departments had to be approved by the Senate. The Academic Governance Review and Council Governance Review should address this. It was important to ensure that proper governance was in place regarding the strategic review of all other locations, in order that all stakeholders had the proper input.
- 9.22 A member observed that the 2006 student support review had affirmed the continued role of the regions. It had been confirmed that specific regions would host hub teams and a vision had been put forward for the regional centres becoming a more academic local

presence, focusing on building partnerships with sponsors and higher education (HE) providers. Other members commented that the task of managing the change brought about by the resulting introduction of SSTs had been enormous. Staff had been committed to the transformation, had engaged in training and team building exercises, and had worked hard in order to make the SST hubs in Arts, IET and CICP based in East Grinstead as successful as possible. Implementation of SSTs was meant to have been cost neutral and yet, as they were launching, a decision was being taken to move them. The Director, Students said that the priority had been to make the decision known to staff as soon as possible and that their role in ensuring the successful launch of SSTs was readily acknowledged.

- 9.23 Members commented that faculty staff tutors, faculty managers, and associate lecturers had a local base, local knowledge and local expertise, and worked well as a team to deliver and support OU programmes effectively and efficiently. A local presence was crucial in order to take practical decisions about local activity. The current uncertainty would make it impossible to guarantee continuity of support to students.
- 9.24 Several members commented that a local presence was essential to the support of professional programmes with local employers. The Dean of the Faculty of Health and Social Care (HSC) said that he and his colleagues had been communicating with everyone affected by the closure of the East Grinstead regional office. Employers had been informed that, although the University was closing the regional office, the OU would work to ensure that it still had a local presence. It was important to actively involve CAUs in the consultation in order to explore the scope and benefits of the University's local presence, as well as the important contribution it made to the OU's social justice mission, and to keep students at the heart of the deliberations.
- 9.25 Members observed that issues around leases arose frequently, but had never before driven decisions about the OU's long-established regional academic presence. Several members asked whether the costs of relocating to alternative premises had been considered against the costs of closure. One member commented that the University had spent a considerable sum on a major refit of the East Grinstead office.
- 9.26 The Director, Students, said that he understood that the ending of a lease that required the OU to vacate the premises was unprecedented; it was now easier for landlords to act in this way. The wider analysis of regional offices was not driven by the closure of East Grinstead, but it made it more imperative. As the University was obliged to leave the current premises, discussions had taken place about whether to relocate or to close the office, and the cost of both options had been carefully considered. The University had evaluated the cost of both options and these would be presented to a meeting of SPRC on 3 April.
- 9.27 Members also raised the issue of the value attributed to those staff being lost, and asked what the estimated costs of closing were to staff and students. Several members commented that few staff were in a position to be redeployed or relocated, so this experienced resource would be lost with the closure of the office. .
- 9.28 The Director, Students re-iterated that it was not an easy decision to lose experienced staff and local knowledge. Whilst it was possible to describe the costs of alternative accommodation, it was difficult to put a price on something that could not be readily valued. He confirmed that it was not anticipated that there would be compulsory redundancies, but acknowledged that some staff would not be able to move. These staff would be supported with early retirement or voluntary severance.
- 9.29 A member asked whether it had been assumed that the workload could be absorbed into the capacity of the remaining staff. David Knight, Director of AL Services, responded that he would be leading the work in this area and considering how workload issues might be

mitigated. The Director, Students added that the current assumption was that the current level of staff resource would continue to be necessary, wherever it was based.

- 9.30 Members expressed concern about the anxiety created about the future of regional centres across all regions of the UK. The assurances given to staff gave no guarantee of the existence of regional locations beyond the next two years. A strategic review of other locations would involve Finance and HR, but would also affect academic policy. It would be better to frame a commitment to the retention of students within a strategic review of other locations that included and involved all concerned. Another member commented that there was little time for a full consultation, which would ensure that decisions were based on academic as well as managerial considerations, if the proposals were scheduled to go VCE by January 2015.
- 9.31 The Director, Students confirmed that there were no proposals to do anything other than to close the East Grinstead regional office at the end of the year. The intention was to involve the CAUs in the consultations before any proposals went to VCE. It was difficult to know how large the review would be until it began, but at present January 2015 seemed to be a reasonable target. The University wished to bring the review to a conclusion as soon as possible in an acknowledgement of the uncertainty that the closure had caused. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Academic [PVC (A)] added that it was his responsibility to ensure that students, ALs and staff were supported.
- 9.32 A student member said that communications to students on this matter were essential. The short piece currently on StudentHome was insufficient. The facts about the closure of East Grinstead and the changes to the SSTs involved should be clear to all the students affected by this decision. The strategic review should specifically address the advantages and disadvantages to students of the OU's regional presence.
- 9.33 The Director, Students said that he would welcome advice from OUSA about the information required for students. The interests of students were well understood and the University would continue to consult with them through both informal and formal routes.
- 9.34 A member said that whilst the business decision was outside the remit of the Senate, it was important for the Senate to focus its efforts on engaging with the review that was to follow. The Senate was also not currently in a position to deplore the lack of consideration for the continuity of support for students, and so should vote against part c) of the motion. A member agreed that part c) of the motion was unacceptable, as the level of consideration for staff exhibited by those colleagues having to deal with this decision had been impressive. Another member observed that part c) was urging that the decision to close East Grinstead should be set aside, and that any issues about the wording of the motion should not deflect from this.

Decision

- 9.35 The Senate:
- a) unanimously affirmed the vital continuing work of staff in English regional locations in supporting students and ALs and delivering the academic strategy of the Open University;
 - b) overwhelmingly agreed that a review of specific functions and locations was appropriate and looked forward to taking a full part in this review and to receiving and advising on its recommendations;
 - c) deplored the lack of consideration for valued colleagues and for the continuity of support for students apparent in the abrupt decision to close region 13, and urged that means be found to keep the East Grinstead office open pending the outcomes of the review, (by a vote where 38 members were for the motion, 25 were against and 13 abstained).

- 10 UPDATE ON STUDENT SUPPORT TEAMS S-2014-02-07**
- 10.1 With reference to paragraph 3, which said that information screens had been introduced at the request of staff, a member asked whether these screens could also be removed if staff did not want them. The Director, Teaching and Learner Support, Dr Christina Lloyd, replied that staff would be asked to evaluate the screens and, if they were not serving their purpose, then they would be removed.
- 10.2 Referring to paragraph 8, an AL member said there was some very good teambuilding happening through the forums on the SST websites. However, only 10 of the 17 teams currently had access to such forums. Dr Lloyd said that the SSTs had been live for just two months, but that work was being done to increase the number of forums.
- 10.3 An AL member said that there was anecdotal evidence that some members of SSTs were granting extensions without ALs being aware of them. Dr Lloyd undertook to make team leaders aware of this issue, but urged members to contact her directly if they became aware of any other issues, rather than wait until a meeting of the Senate.
- Action: CL**
- 10.4 A member commented that SSTs were looking at ways of improving communications with ALs, as they were the single most important point of contact with students.
- 10.5 The President, OUSA, Marianne Cantieri, observed that the paper did not mention that every SST now had its own consultation forum that would be launched soon.
- 10.6 The Senate **noted** the report on Student Support Teams.
- 11 THE COUNCIL S-2014-02-08**
- The Senate **noted** the report on matters discussed at the meeting of the council held on 11 March 2014
- 12 WIDENING PARTICIPATION TARGET DEFINITIONS S-2014-02-09**
- The Senate **noted**:
- a) amendments to the definitions of 'disadvantaged groups' for each of the four UK nations in the University's Widening Access and Success strategy (paras 4-7);
 - b) that there is no change to the internal institutional target for recruitment from disadvantaged groups;
 - c) that nation specific targets agreed with funding councils will continue to be monitored and reported at institutional level.
- 13 STUDENT REGULATIONS S-2014-0210**
- The Senate **approved**:
- a) the amendment to the Student Regulations 2014, set out in paragraph 13, to take effect for all student registrations for modules and qualifications which start on or after 1 August 2014;
 - b) that the discretion to apply sanctions under the current regulations is exercised only in those circumstances in which sanctions may be applied under the revised regulations.

14 FUTURE ITEMS OF BUSINESS

S-2014-02-11

The Senate **noted** the potential items for the agenda for the Senate meeting in June 2014.

15 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

Meetings of the Senate will be held on the following dates:

Wednesday 11 June 2014

Wednesday 15 October 2014

Wednesday 28 January 2015

16 GOODBYE AND THANKYOU

On behalf of the Senate, the Vice-Chancellor thanked Hilary Robertson, who was retiring from the University, for her contribution to the University.

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