

THE SENATE

Minutes

This paper presents the confirmed Minutes of the last meeting of the Senate held on Wednesday 22 January 2020 at The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes.

The Senate approved these minutes as a correct record at its meeting on Wednesday 1 April 2020.

Mr Jake Yeo
Acting University Secretary

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THE SENATE

Minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on Wednesday 22 January 2020
in the Hub Theatre, The Open University, Walton Hall

PRESENT:

Professor Tim Blackman	Vice-Chancellor
Professor Josie Frase	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Dr Liz Marr	Acting Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students)
Professor Kevin Hetherington	Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Enterprise and Scholarship)
Professor Ian Fribbance	Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Professor Devendra Kodwani	Executive Dean, Faculty of Business and Law
Professor Nicholas Braithwaite	Acting 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

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)

Dr William Brown	Dr Elaine Moohan (remote)
Dr Jovan Byford	Dr Sarah Crafter
Dr Richard Heffernan	Professor John Wolffe
Dr Deborah Drake	Professor Nicola Watson
Dr Alison Penn (Remote)	

Faculty of Business & Law (FBL)

Miss Carol Howells (remote)	Dr Kristen Reid
Dr Caroline Clarke (remote)	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 Toby O'Neil	Dr Mark Slaymaker
Dr Helen Fraser	Professor Simon Green

Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS)

Mrs Anna Comas-Quinn (remote)	Dr Verina Waights
Professor Jan Draper	Mr Jeremy Wilcock
Ms Tyrrell Golding	Dr Elodie Vialleton

Institute of Education Technology (WELS)

Mr Chris Edwards

Professor Eileen Scanlon

Associate Lecturers

Dr Walter Pisarski (alternate)

Dr Sylvie Serpell

Mr Jim Gillen

Mr Rob Parker

Dr Catherine Halliwell

Mrs Frances Chetwynd

Mr John Eastwood (alternate)

Students Appointed by Open University Students Association

Ms Cath Brown

Mrs Stephanie Stubbins

Ms Cinnomen McGuigan

Claire Wallace (alternate)

Ms Alison Kingan

Dr Barbara Tarling

Academic-related Staff

Mr Derek Sheills

Mr Toby Scott-Hughes

Mrs Rukhsana Malik

Ms Elaine Walker

Mr Billy Khokhar

Mrs Maria Crisu

Mrs Gemma Maldar

Mrs Selena Killick

Ms Julia Barkans

Mrs Tracy Lawson

Dr Caitlin Adams

Mrs Kate Signorini

Co-opted members

Ms Susan Stewart

Mr John D'Arcy

Mr Christopher Turner

Dr Claire Baines

In attendance

Mr Jake Yeo, Acting University Secretary

Dr Laura Lauer, Head of Governance

Ms Becky Sexton, Senior Manager, Governance

Observing

Mr Nicholas Barratt, Director, LDS

Mrs Lisa Harris, Head of Academic Strategy

Rachel Gerry, Senior Strategy Manager

Lisa French, Senior Strategy Manager

Anna Henderson, Member of the Academic Governance Advisory Group

Wendy Fowle, Assistant Director, Access, Participation and Success Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students)

APOLOGIES:

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)

Mr Matt Staples

Dr Karen Hagan

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

Professor David Johnson

Dr John Baxter

Dr Jon Hall

Dr Karen Olsson-Francis

Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS)

Dr Kristina Hultgren

Dr Jackie Watts

Ms Susan Kotschi

Mr Andy Rixon

Associate Lecturers

Dr Tim Parry

Dr Linda Walker

Students Appointed by Open University Students Association

Mr Rory Powell

Co-opted members

Mrs Louise Casella

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- 1.1. The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Tim Blackman, welcomed members to the meeting. He also welcomed Mr Gary Elliot-Cirigottis, Director of Library Services to his first meeting of the Senate, Mr Jake Yeo, in his role as Acting University Secretary and Professor Josie Fraser, who was recently confirmed in post as Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The Senate was also informed that members of the Academic Governance Advisory Group were observing the meeting.
- 1.2. The Vice-Chancellor informed the Senate that the papers would be projected onto the screen during the meeting, as was trialled at the October meeting, to continue the move to a more sustainable approach to meeting papers.

2. MINUTES

S-2019-04-M

- 2.1. The Senate **approved** the minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on 16 October 2019.

3. MATTERS ARISING

S-2020-01-01

- 3.1. The Senate **noted** the response to the matter arising from the minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on 16 October 2019.

4. REPORT FROM AND QUESTIONS TO THE CHAIR

Report from the Vice-Chancellor

- 4.1. Professor Tim Blackman reported that he attended several meetings with key stakeholders since the last Senate meeting, including; David Hughes (Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges), Professor David Latchman (Master of Birkbeck), Dr Julie Mills, (Principal and CEO of MK College), Sir Martin Donnelly (Managing Director of Boeing in the United Kingdom & Ireland) and Jennifer Coupland (Chief Executive of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education).
- 4.2. The Vice-Chancellor reported that Chris Millward, the Director for Fair Access and Participation at the Office for Students (OfS) had visited the OU and met the Vice-Chancellor, PVC-Students and Acting University Secretary. While at the OU, he took part in a student-led round table and toured the OpenStem labs. A constructive discussion took place around how student success and performance is assessed, particularly for mature, part-time learners. To better understand the OU's metrics, future engagement with data analysts from the OfS was planned.
- 4.3. Professor Blackman reported that he had started the first of his regular visits to the Nations with Edinburgh, meeting staff and discussing Higher Education-Further Education relationships with Susan Stewart, Director of The OU in Scotland and her senior team. He noted that it was useful to be reminded that 30% of education in Scotland is HNCs and HNDs. The Vice-Chancellor also visited Cardiff in November, where he attended graduation ceremonies and met Kirsty Williams AM, the Education Minister for Wales. John D'Arcy and his team were already engaging with the newly-formed Executive in Northern Ireland. Professor Blackman explained that the University has been formally admitted as an academic partner on the Northern Ireland Science Industry Panel, MATRIX.
- 4.4. Professor Blackman reported that the OfS has issued a communication indicating that cuts in grant funding of around 5% should be expected, which raises concerns for the OU around student premium funding. The OU will be responding further to their consultation.

- 4.5. Talks are taking place between Universities UK (UUK), University and College Union (UCU) and Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) on the pension scheme. The Vice-Chancellor stated that as an employer, the OU is committed to ensuring that USS remains affordable and sustainable.
- 4.6. Professor Blackman expressed gratitude to those who had supported the resolution of recent issues with CIRCE.
- 4.7. Turning to senior appointments, the University had welcomed Mr Paul Traynor as Chief Financial Officer in November 2019 and Ceri Rose as Director of Marketing and Communications in January 2020. Dave Hall will be joining the OU from 1 April as the new University Secretary. He previously held the role of Registrar and Chief Operating Officer at the University of Leicester.

5. ACADEMIC QUALITY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE S-2020-01-02

The Senate **noted** the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting of the Academic Quality and Governance Committee held on 11 November 2019.

6. RESEARCH COMMITTEE S-2020-01-03

Minute 8: Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 submission intentions

- 6.1. A point was raised on behalf of Unit of Assessment (UOA) leads in FASS regarding the OU's preparations for REF, particularly in relation to the data being provided to UoA leads (on income, Postgraduates, outputs and former staff) and the level of administrative and research support available for UOAs. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Enterprise and Scholarship) (PVC RES) responded that he was aware of the concerns around data and that one-to-one meetings were taking place with the Director of Research and Enterprise to address the questions in detail. The PVC RES explained that Research England only provided historic HESA Research Environment Data in November 2019. He explained that the data provided relating to Research Income and PGR completions would first need to be cleansed and then shared with UOAs to verify the confirmed data. For outputs UOAs have been asked to provide more granular scoring, to help differentiate outputs and facilitate output selection using a 13 point scale. Within the PVC-RES office, the number of staff working on REF preparations has increased.
- 6.2. In response to questions around the progress of the OU's Environmental Statement, specifically the impact to UOAs in developing the unit level statements and linking the UOA narrative to the University's narrative, the PVC RES explained that the statement had been discussed at the REF Institutional Review Team (IRT) meeting in December, but it is an iterative approach and an early draft will be shared with UOA Chairs in February for feedback.
- 6.3. A question was raised regarding the distribution of REF income. The PVC RES responded that it will be challenging because in some cases HESA codes do not map neatly onto UOAs. The importance of being equitable was understood, but it was also important to drive as much quality-related research (QR) funding as possible. IRT had agreed a process for attributing income.
- 6.4. The Vice-Chancellor encouraged members to continue dialogue with the PVC RES and the Director of Research and Enterprise regarding REF preparations.

7. EDUCATION COMMITTEE S-2020-01-04

7.1. Minute 14: Classification Algorithm

A member requested an update on the proposals presented to the Education Committee and asked whether there were plans for a revised algorithm to be applied from June 2020. The Vice-Chancellor explained that any change in the classification algorithm would bring external scrutiny, not least from the Office for Students, and that Senate needed to consider all the evidence when making its decision. A paper, setting out the options and supporting evidence, would be presented to the Senate in April 2020. He noted that it was unlikely that any change would be applied this year; UUK were currently undertaking an evidence-gathering exercise and it would be prudent to review their findings before taking action.

7.2. The Senate **noted** the unconfirmed Minutes of the last meeting of the Education Committee held on Wednesday 4 December 2019.

8. STRATEGIC PLANNING AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE S-2020-01-05

The Senate **noted** the minutes from the meeting held by correspondence between 25 October 2019 and 8 November 2019.

9. INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE REPORT TO SENATE S-2020-01-06

9.1. The Senate noted the institutional performance update. Under 'Growth and sustainability', it was highlighted that in the October 2019 report, the 18/19 student recruitment figures were compared with the 19/20 prediction, whereas the January 2020 report compared the October Senate forecast for 19/20 with the current forecast. It was also commented that there is a lot of detail in the report, but that corresponding commentary and context is needed on the dashboard for key figures, such as an explanation for income diversification for example. It was noted that for income diversification, further investigation would also be needed on the overall outturn being below target. It was suggested that page numbers should be added to appendices of the report. It was agreed that changes would be made for the next report.

Action: Director of Strategy

9.2. Clarification was sought on whether the 2021/22 ambition for student numbers should increase, in light of the 2019/20 being exceeded. The Acting University Secretary explained that the 2021/2022 ambition reflects the trajectory of planned growth.

9.3. In response to a question regarding the calculation of staff sickness, particularly in context of the new AL contract, the Vice-Chancellor said that a response would be provided for the next meeting.

Action: Director of Strategy

9.4. The PVC RES informed members that the OU was now ranked 5th nationally for overall student satisfaction in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), which was very positive. Members noted the increase of 3% in overall satisfaction rates from 2018 to 2019 and highlighted that some of the other performance indicators (number of research bids, value of bids etc) had decreased. The PVC RES responded that the income data may not be current, as the figure has risen, largely due to grants in STEM. The current projection from Finance is for £17m by 2021/22, based on current activity.

9.5. It was commented that an increase in students studying at full-time intensity had implications for the OU's model. The Vice-Chancellor commented that this was both an opportunity and a challenge. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students) confirmed that there is a

task and finish group in place to look at potential adjustments for full-time/higher intensity study and recommendations are due to be presented before the summer.

10. ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN

S-2020-01-07

- 10.1. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students) introduced the report. She noted that the OfS may suggest changes to targets, spend or actions, which may mean a further period of negotiation with the OfS before final submission. The Senate and Council will be notified of any changes required by OfS.
- 10.2. The PVC (Students) explained that the Access and Participation Plan (APP) is specific to England and a condition of university registration with the OfS, but the University's Access, Participation and Success Strategy is four Nations by design, so the APP is embedded in the OU's overall four Nation approach. The OfS are clear on the mandatory areas of focus for the APP, which are: Low socio-economic status; Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME)(disaggregated); Disabled students (disaggregated by physical, mental and specific learning difficulties); Mature learners and Care leavers. Some of these areas are a challenge to capture, as there is no benefit to students identifying with particular categories. Optional and context specific areas of focus include; carers, students from military backgrounds, estranged students, refugees, travellers and asylum seekers.
- 10.3. The PVC (Students) explained the approach to the production of the APP has included analysis of OfS data, recognising that sector data and metrics do not reflect the behaviour of OU students, so OfS data has been incorporated with OU data and key differences have been explained in the narrative. OU data is then used to determine the strategic priorities and targets, set based on statistical significance of data and to identify the most significant gaps in performance to be addressed. The Data and Student Analytics team are helping to identify some of the drivers behind the gaps and highlight specific actions that could be taken to improve outcomes. The OfS are aware that there are challenging gaps to be addressed across the sector and are happy for the OU to take a test and learn approach as part of their Plan.
- 10.4. The PVC (Students) asked for comments and questions on the plan.
- 10.5. Members recognised the importance of specific groups cited in the plans, but concerns were raised around the potential risk of taking resource from other groups that might also need additional support. Questions were raised around whether the planned additional support would be welcomed and helpful for all students within the identified characteristics. Members also queried the role of personal pathway advisors and the link and cross-over with the role of ALs.
- 10.6. Members drew attention to the potential issues of inflexibility around procedures and administration, particularly when student needs can be complex and can change throughout the year.
- 10.7. A query was raised regarding how the APP will be integrated with other plans and initiatives across the University, such as the plans for Micro-credentials.
- 10.8. Members highlighted potential issues around the delay in improvements to student declaration rates, due to the Core Systems Replacement and noted that a decrease in declarations, particularly for carers and ethnicity, had already been observed and these issues could impact targets and funding. It was suggested that 'Students whose ethnic declaration is Asian' could be too broad a group. In response to a query around the Race Equality Charter not being referenced, the PVC (Students) responded that it is not specifically mentioned, but it could be explained that it is aligned.

- 10.9. The PVC (Students) thanked members of the Senate for the useful feedback, which would be incorporated into the plan before it was presented to the Council.
- 10.10. Subject to the suggested changes, the Senate **recommended to the Council for approval:**
- a) The proposed targets;
 - b) The planned investment to deliver APP objectives;
 - c) The planned activities to deliver APP objectives.

11. ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE REVIEW: UPDATE S-2020-01-11

- 11.1. Professor Jan Draper, Chair of the Academic Governance Advisory Group (AGAG), presented an update on the work undertaken by the group since the Senate agreed its formation in October 2019. With the tight timescales to present recommendations to the Senate in April 2020, the group were keen to make progress and a number of members of the group convened at the end of November, to focus on the prioritisation of the recommendations made by Advance HE. A workshop also took place on 12 December for Senate members to discuss the recommendations, in order to inform the development of the implementation and action plan. Professor Draper highlighted that there is further discussion needed on the relationship between Senate and Council and the definitions of short/medium and long term changes still need to be established. All AGAG papers can be accessed on SharePoint.
- 11.2. Professor Draper introduced the exercises set-up for the tea break and explained that feedback would be gathered from the session and the AGAG will consider any additional engagement from Senate members that may be needed to inform the implementation plan.
- 11.3. The Senate **noted** progress in taking the recommendations forward, including the development of an implementation plan for approval in April 2020.

12. STUDENT LEARNING AND ADJUSTMENT STRATEGY S-2020-01-09

- 12.1. The Vice-Chancellor introduced the report and noted that preventing these problems reoccurring was very important to the University. He explained that an action plan would be presented to the Senate in April 2020 and that the purpose of the discussion was to establish whether the issues had been correctly identified.
- 12.2. Members welcomed the thorough and joined up review, but some members questioned the perceived underlying assumptions in its approach to students, their circumstances, and how they learn. The Pro-Vice Chancellor (Students) explained that the intention of the report had been to focus on the causes of the issues and the responsibility of the University to resolve the issues. It is now understood how complicated and difficult the issues are and there are a number of teams working to resolve them.
- 12.3. In response to questions around the risk of issues reoccurring, the Vice-Chancellor explained that there was no guarantee that all issues will have been resolved, as there were some inherent difficulties with how materials are produced, but the aim was to minimise problems as much as possible for this year. There was also a parallel, longer term exercise that would be necessary to review the OU's teaching model and how best to

engage with students. Members highlighted that the impact on previous students and staff is still ongoing.

- 12.4. Other concerns included the overall shift to online materials and the suggestion for supporting evidence to be required before students are provided with printed materials, as it may increase barriers for some people.
- 12.5. The Vice-Chancellor closed the discussion, noting the points raised with regard to language, declaration of need and student support which go to the substance of the University's teaching model. An action plan is scheduled to return to the Senate in April 2020 and further feedback and contributions to the PVC Students were welcome.

13. REVISED APPOINTMENT PROCEDURES: PRO-VICE-CHANCELLORS S-2020-01-10

- 13.1. The Committee considered revised procedures for the appointment of a Pro-Vice-Chancellor. It was clarified the term of five years, with the possibility of appointment for a further two years, was consistent with OU practice in senior academic appointments. It was suggested that 2.v in the appointment procedure should be 'HE institution experience' rather than 'with experience of operating at a similar level in a complex organisation'. It was also suggested that, should an external appointment be made, there should be appropriate Faculty input.
- 13.2. The Students Association welcomed the introduction of a student onto the panel and a member of the Students Association reflected that taking part in a recent panel for a senior appointment had been a positive experience.
- 13.3. The Senate **recommended to the Council:**
 - a) a revision to the procedures for the appointment of a Pro-Vice-Chancellor; and
 - b) the process to be followed for the appointment of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Students).

14. AL CONTRACT UPDATE S-2020-01-12

- 14.1. Clarification was requested around how the new AL contract would enable the University to meet the forecasted increasing demands. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor explained that as part of the work being done in connection with the new contract, the University was attempting to identify opportunities where ALs can teach according to their training and experience. The idea is that enhanced flexibility would support ALs' ambitions and the desire to be adaptable, through individual conversations. It would allow people to potentially move between Schools and Faculties, which is already taking place in some instances.

15. ACADEMIC PROMOTIONS REVIEW: UPDATE S-2020-01-13

- 15.1. The progress of the recommendations from the Academic Promotions Scheme Review was discussed and members expressed that it was important for the implementation to be right, but a sense of urgency was needed. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor assured the Senate that there has been a lot of activity on the project, with a number of groups taking forward the workstreams, completing actions where possible. The Senate will be kept informed of progress.

16. ACADEMIC PROMOTIONS ANNUAL REPORT

S-2020-01-14

- 16.1. The Committee considered the report of academic promotions for 2019 and noted that the Academic Staff Promotions Committee (ASPC) had requested several improvements to the report, which had been included.
- 16.2. Questions were raised regarding the inclusion of the White-Other category within the BAME category for analysis, as it gave a false representation of the actual position and made comparison with previous years difficult. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research, Enterprise and Scholarship) explained that Academic Staff Promotions Committee (ASPC) also queried this with People Services and been advised that the rationale for the change was to align with categories used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the OfS. PVC RES invited members to send him their views on the categories used for data analysis.
- 16.3. Members noted that there were still some changes needed to be made to the report (such as the presentation of statistical information) and it was agreed to provide further feedback to People Services on the format of the report and to confirm the position categories used by the ONS and OfS, to be reported back to the April meeting within matters arising.

Action: The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (RES)

17. THE COUNCIL

S-2020-01-15

The Senate **noted** the unconfirmed Minutes of the last meeting of the Council held on 25/26 November 2019 and the meetings conducted by correspondence between 9-11 and 20-31 December 2019.

18. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

Wednesday 1 April 2020 (Council members in attendance)
Wednesday 17 June 2020

Jake Yeo
Acting University Secretary

Becky Sexton
Working Secretary to the Senate
Email: becky.sexton@open.ac.uk
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