

THE SENATE

Minutes

This paper presents the confirmed Minutes of the last meeting of the Senate held on Wednesday 25 January 2017 at The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes.

The Senate **approved** these Minutes as a correct record of the meeting on 7 April 2017 subject to the inclusion of amendments to Minutes 3.1, 13.4 and 13.11.

Keith Zimmerman
University Secretary

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THE SENATE

Minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on Wednesday 25 January 2017 at 2.00pm
in the Hub Theatre, The Open University, Walton Hall

PRESENT:

1) Ex officio

Mr Peter Horrocks	Vice-Chancellor
Professor Hazel Rymer	Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching Innovation)
Professor Kevin Hetherington	Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Strategy)
Mr Ian Fribbance	Interim Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Professor Rebecca Taylor	Executive Dean, Dean, Faculty of Business and Law
Professor Simon Kelley	Executive Dean, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies
Professor Mary Kellett	Executive Dean, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies
Professor Patrick McAndrew	Director of the Institute of Educational Technology
Ms Rosie Jones	Director of Library Services
Mr Chris Rooke	Director of Learning and Teaching Solutions

Appointed

2) Central Academic Units

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS)

Faculty of Arts

Dr Cristina Chimisso	Professor David Johnson
Dr Naoko Yamagata	Dr Elaine Moohan
Professor Ole Grell	Professor John Wolffe

Faculty of Social Sciences

Dr Jovan Byford	Dr Helen Kaye
Dr Deborah Drake	Dr Troy Cooper
Dr Anastasia Economou (remote)	Dr Richard Heffernan
Dr Catriona Havard (remote)	

Faculty of Business & Law (FBL)

Miss Carol Howells	Dr Devendra Kodwani
Dr Kristen Reid	Dr Sharon Slade (remote)
Mr Mike Phillips (remote)	

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

Faculty of Science

Dr John Baxter	Professor David Rothery
Dr Janet Haresnape	Mrs Diane Butler
Professor Hilary MacQueen	Professor Claire Turner

Mathematics, Computing and Technology

Dr David Bowers	Dr Leonor Barroca
Dr Rachel Hilliam	Dr Stephen Burnley
Professor Andy Lane	Dr Jon Hall
Dr Toby O'Neil	Dr Hayley Ryder
Mr Brendan Quinn	Dr Ann Walshe
Dr Magnus Ramage	Dr Gareth Williams

Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS)

Education and Language Studies

Ms Annie Eardley	Mrs Anna Comas-Quinn
Professor Regine Hampel	Ms Tyrrell Golding
Dr Indra Sinka	Dr Elodie Vialleton
Dr Uwe Baumann	

Health and Social Care

Professor Jan Draper	Dr Aravinda Guntupalli
Mr Mick McCormick	Dr Verena Waights
Mrs Sue Cole	

Institute of Educational Technology (IET)

Dr Anne Adams	Professor Eileen Scanlon
Mr Chris Edwards	

Other Central Units

Dr Liz Marr

3) Associate Lecturers

Mrs Frances Chetwynd	Dr Fiona Aiken
Dr Clare Spencer	Dr Tricia French
Dr Hilary Partridge	Dr Linda Walker
Dr Tim Parry	

4) Students Appointed by Open University Students Association

Ms Lorraine Adams	Dr Barbara Tarling
Miss Claire Smith	Mrs Nicola Simpson (alternate)
Mr John Murphy	

5) Academic-related Staff

Mr Mike Innes	Mrs Clare Ikin
Mr Michael Street	Mr Jake Yeo
Ms Pat Atkins	Mr Denzil DeSouza
Mrs Joanne Smythe	Ms Elaine Walker
Mr Simon Horrocks	Mr Phil Berry
Mr Billy Khokhar	Mrs Maria Crisu
Miss Barbara Poniatowska	Mrs Selena Killick

6) Co-opted members

Professor John Domingue	Ms Susan Stewart
Mr Rob Humphreys	Dr David Knight
Mr John D'Arcy	Mr Jonathan Wylie

In attendance

Mr Keith Zimmerman, University Secretary
Mrs Dawn Turpin, Head of Governance
Ms Sue Thomas, Senior Manager, Governance
Miss Teresa Coyle, Manager, Governance

Observing

Ms Kathryn Baldwin, Vice-Chancellor's Business Manager
Mr Lucian Hudson, Director of Communications
Ms Laura Mullan, Internal Communications Manager
Mr Stephen Conway, Director of Research, Office of the PVC RAS
Mr Michael Flack, Head of Strategic Planning and Policy (for Minute 10)
Professor Iain Gilmour, Associate Dean, STEM (for Minute 13)

APOLOGIES:

Appointed

2) Central Academic Units

Faculty of Science

Dr Karen Olsson-Francis

4) Students Appointed by Open University Students Association

Mr Chris Pane

Ms Danielle Smith

6) Co-opted members

Mr Tony O'Shea-Poon

In attendance

Mr Andrew Law, Director, Open Media Unit

1 WELCOME AND THANKS

- 1.1 The Vice-Chancellor, Mr Peter Horrocks, welcomed, in absentia, Danielle Smith, representative of the OU Students Association, and Nicola Simpson (alternate). He also welcomed Mr Ian Fribbance to his first meeting in his substantive role as Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.
- 1.2 On behalf of the Senate, the Vice-Chancellor thanked Professor Simon Kelley for his long and dedicated service to the University and congratulated him on his appointment as Head of the School of Geosciences, University of Edinburgh.

2 MINUTES

S-2016-04-M

- 2.1 The Senate approved the minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on 19 October 2016 subject to the inclusion of the following amendments:
 - Minute 11.32 (amendment underlined below)
- 2.2 The University Secretary read comments received from the Director of the OU in Wales who was participating in the meeting remotely. He observed that concerns raised by staff in Wales, Scotland and Ireland in relation to specific impacts in the nations on the quality of the student experience and problems with funders were not reflected in the paper (11B) and had not been acted upon. He requested that this dimension be considered as part of the review(s), which he had already made a written request to input into on behalf of himself and staff based in Wales. He suggested the review must look at the wider organisational culture that allowed a predictable and predicted situation to happen. He also expressed his thanks to all staff who had worked hard to mitigate things
- 2.3 Minute 11.34 (amendment underlined below)

A member commented that although many colleagues could see the difficulties emerging with the GTP there had not been a forum for them to express these and bring together the views of those working in Student Services, IT, Faculties and also ALs.

3 MATTERS ARISING

S-2017-01-01

- 3.1 In response to a question, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Strategy) and Deputy Chair of the Academic Staff Promotions Committee (ASPC) confirmed that the guidance on the new scheme would be published imminently. This would include guidance specifically for staff tutors and regional/national academics and would be available in February. He also confirmed that the report to Senate on promotions during 2017 would be presented to the Senate at the January 2018 meeting and a report on promotions in 2016 would be presented following consideration by the ASPC.
- 3.2 The Senate **noted** the response to the matter arising from the minutes of the meeting of the Senate held on 15 October 2014 (S-2014-04-M).

4 REPORT FROM AND QUESTIONS TO THE CHAIR

- 4.1 The Vice-Chancellor explained that the agenda for the meeting provided an opportunity to understand the areas where the University needed to improve and some of the ways in which it was proposed to make those improvements, especially through the academic strategy. Mr Horrocks hoped that 2017 would be a significant year in the history of the University, with the foundations being laid for major improvements in both academic performance and economic sustainability.

Student numbers

- 4.2 Mr Horrocks reported that despite an inspiring advertising campaign released over the festive period, current forecasts suggested that student numbers would be -2.8% behind targets, representing an overall fall in full time equivalent (FTE) student numbers from 70,683 last year to 69,309. Although continuing undergraduate students in February were 4% higher than anticipated, there were fewer (estimated -6%) new students. Postgraduate performance continued to be relatively strong (+65% ahead). Across the four nations of the UK, Wales and Scotland were ahead of targets set; Northern Ireland was behind. Work continued on the key objective of “More Students Qualifying”, but rates of student success, however defined, were not yet at the point at which they needed to be.

Political environment

- 4.3 The political environment continued to be insufficiently supportive of part-time education and in England it was particularly adversarial with little expectation of increased support for the foreseeable future. The Nations faced similar fiscal challenges, albeit on a lower scale. However in Wales positive developments were expected following the publication of the report of the review of higher education funding and student finance arrangements in Wales led by Professor Sir Ian Diamond. It was also encouraging to hear in Northern Ireland that new part time and postgraduate loan regulations had been approved

Teaching Excellence Framework

- 4.4 The Vice-Chancellor informed the Senate, in confidence until 26 January 2017, that the University had taken the decision not to submit an application to receive an assessment in the TEF for this year. The metrics proposed to assess teaching were at this point not well suited to the University’s distinctiveness and an outcome that did not accurately reflect the quality of our provision could deter future students from studying with the OU, which could impact on efforts on widening participation. Mr Horrocks said that the University intended to work closely with the Government to resolve the measurement issues and join the TEF subsequently.

Income and funding

- 4.5 In respect of the University’s financial position, Mr Horrocks reported that although the University had returned to showing a surplus last year, after losses in in the preceding two years, the current year was budgeted to show another deficit. In December a series of current year budget cuts were made to address the financial implications of the shortfalls in student numbers but Mr Horrocks emphasised that this could not be a long term strategy for a sustainable future. It was also likely that there would be a reduction in the University’s allocation from the Student Opportunity Fund (SOF).

- 4.6 Mr Horrocks informed the Senate that following clear guidance from the Council, fees had been increased by 2.8%. Marketing research suggested student numbers would not be impacted significantly but Mr Horrocks emphasised that the longer-term aim remained the setting of fees at the minimum sustainable level, given new competition entering the market.

- 4.7 The Government had launched its new industrial strategy and the University welcomed the commitment to “test ambitious new approaches to encourage lifelong learning” including promoting ways for students to transfer between courses and institutions and a review of the careers offer for people of all ages. Mr Horrocks emphasised that there could be real opportunities for the University in these areas, but it would need to compete to secure them.

OU Redesign

- 4.8 Mr Horrocks reflected on the challenges faced by the University and informed the Senate that it was an appropriate time to consider how the University operated and how it was sustainable for the long term. A more flexible, student-centred teaching model was required to improve academic performance in an organisation better able to respond to the

changing external environment. This was essential to continue to serve the main purpose of creating educational opportunities and social mobility for all who seek to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential. Mr Horrocks explained that the Academic Strategy was critical to this development and would set direction and priorities for the academic endeavour of the University. The Vice-Chancellor's Executive (VCE) had commissioned the OU Redesign (OUR) project to ensure the University was fit to deliver on the strategic objectives endorsed across the University and mandated by the Council.

- 4.9 The OUR Working Group which included academic and professional services staff, supported by KPMG, was tasked with the delivery of a redesigned model for the University and a high-level plan, setting out how the changes required over the subsequent 12-24 months would be implemented. Mr Horrocks assured the Senate that it would receive an update of the work of the project at each of its meetings before the Council considered the final report. Mr Horrocks emphasised the importance of the Academic Strategy in this work and reminded Senate that it was deserving of members' time and focus at the meeting.

Tuition delivery

- 4.10 Mr Horrocks explained that the Group Tuition Policy was a separate item on the agenda but he wished to thank all staff for their continued efforts to stabilise the current situation and make improvements for the October presentations.

Regional locations

- 4.11 The Vice-Chancellor concluded his remarks by paying tribute to those staff in London and Gateshead, where the offices would be formally closing on 31 January 2017. Their assistance and support to students and colleagues both during the transition and over the course of their OU careers, had been illustrative of their dedication and professionalism. Mr Horrocks thanked them for their service and wished them well for the future.
- 4.12 In response to an invitation for any questions or comments, a member sought clarification of the University's relationship with KPMG. He was aware of their work reviewing the Group Tuition Policy and also their partnership with the University to launch a degree apprenticeship. He expressed concern that by working with the University to improve efficiency through the OUR project it could potentially present a conflict of interest for the company. He was also concerned that the report following the initial examination of the problems with group tuition (GTP) had been prepared without consultation with key stakeholder groups and had not been shared with the University. The University Secretary assured the Senate that protocols were in place within the University and KPMG to cover issues relating to possible conflicts of interest and these were monitored by the University's Audit Committee. The Company had been commissioned to assist with the project as it had offered a very advantageous terms and was experienced in similar projects. The interim report on GTP was intended to be a snapshot of the situation at a particular time and identified issues for further investigation and a full report.
- 4.13 Another member reflected that the Senate was due to consider some far reaching proposals at the meeting relating to the academic strategy and also governance. He queried whether in the light of the OUR project it might be inappropriate to make decisions on these initiatives at this point. The Vice-Chancellor responded that the project was working to a tight deadline.
- 4.14 A member reiterated the thanks given to Professor Simon Kelley, for his service to the University. He commented that the newly appointed Executive Dean for the Faculty of Science, Technology and Mathematics (STEM) was an external appointment and he enquired how VCE would be informed of academic matters from the Faculty whilst the new Executive Dean acquired knowledge of the Faculty. He also enquired whether in future the process for appointing Executive Deans would consider internal candidates in the first instance. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the process for appointing Executive Deans

was approved by both the Senate and the Council and their role was to represent the academic voice of the University.

- 4.15 Another member commented that she appreciated the acknowledgement of the challenges that the University faced. However she was concerned that the announcement of the OU Redesign project had left staff shocked and without support as they faced further change. She noted that the report of the staff survey had not been issued yet but she emphasised that the University required the support of staff and at present she did not believe this to be the case. The Vice-Chancellor assured the Senate that staff would be fully informed of the OUR plans. He emphasised that the challenges that the University faced were serious and although the marketing campaign had produced many enquirers they had not been translated into registrations. It was essential therefore for work to start on examining the University's curriculum, costs and the competition.

5 STRATEGIC PLANNING AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE S-2017-01-02

S-2017-01-02B: Minute 6.5

- 5.1 A member enquired whether any further information was available on the potential to enhance the University's presence post-Brexit. The University Secretary responded that the work was continuing but was still confidential due to commercial sensitivities but he could provide an update outside of the meeting if required.
- 5.2 The Senate **noted** the unconfirmed Minutes and Confidential Minutes from the meeting held on 2 November 2016.

6 ACADEMIC QUALITY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE S-2017-01-03

The Senate **noted** the minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2016

7 RESEARCH COMMITTEE S-2017-01-04

The Senate **noted** the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2016

8 EDUCATION COMMITTEE S-2017-01-05

The Senate **noted** the minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2016

9 SENATE WORKING GROUP: LOCATIONS S-2017-01-06

- 9.1 A member enquired as to what evidence was available to support statements made at the last meeting of the Senate that work was progressing well in respect of the reorganisation of the University's locations. Another member drew attention to the reference in paragraph 2 (a) in the report to staff tutors and others who had become home workers experiencing significant isolation. He felt this affected their ability to become part of academic communities and the technology to enable them to participate remotely in meetings was inadequate. The Director, Academic Services, reassured the Senate work was ongoing with Human Resources on issues in relation to homeworking and staff tutors were actively encouraged to engage with Student Recruitment and Support Centres (SRSCs) and Student Support Teams (SSTs).
- 9.2 The Senate **noted** the report of the meeting held on 12 January 2017.

10 GROUP TUITION S-2017-01-07

- 10.1 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning Teaching and Innovation) (PVC-LTI) introduced the report and explained that it provided an update on the tuition position. She confirmed that

the majority of timetables for 2017B presentations were published the previous week and the remaining ones were expected to be published imminently. Over 20,000 bookings had been made up to 24 January 2017. Professor Rymer also confirmed that venues had been confirmed for all but 19 of around 4,300 tutorial events and tutors were assigned to all but 33 events. She acknowledged that anxieties continued in respect of the 2017J presentations as these would put greater demands on systems and staff. A programme of enhancements to the Learning Events Management (LEM) system would commence over the next two months which addressed issues from feedback from the 2016J presentations and would provide a more efficient approach to managing timetable data.

- 10.2 Professor Rymer drew attention to the reviews of the Group Tuition Policy (GTP) currently underway. The KPMG review focussed on experience and perspectives on the problems encountered in 2016J whilst the Education Committee's review took an academic perspective. The situation across the four nations was also being closely monitored and colleagues in AL Services were reviewing any evidence of problems passed to them particularly those relating to associate lecturer (AL) appointments and distribution of face to face events. Faculties were working hard to ensure all their cluster managers were well briefed and working closely with AL Services teams in the nations. Professor Rymer reported that faculties had agreed timelines for 2017J planning including reviews of tuition strategies, incorporating consultation with ALs and cluster managers between now and late April.
- 10.3 Professor Rymer explained that data for online attendance for tutorials for 2016J presentations was not obtainable as the relevant systems functionality was not available though was currently undergoing testing. Attendance data for face to face sessions in the early part of the 2016J presentation was unreliable but guidance was given to cluster managers that tutorials should not be cancelled on the basis of student bookings.
- 10.4 A new management structure, the Group Tuition Programme, had been established, based around two delivery projects, one for 2017B/D/E presentations, and one for 2017J. Professor Rymer informed the Senate that she was the chair of the Programme Board that consisted of representatives of Executive Deans and the OU Students Association. It would be meeting fortnightly and a priority was to ensure an extensive faculty interface, as well as interfaces with other key projects, such as venues management.
- 10.5 A member expressed her disappointment that reliable data was not available on student attendance at tutorials. This was essential to be able to demonstrate to students that attendance at tutorials was a key factor in achieving success. Another member emphasised the importance of collecting this data and was disappointed it was not available to make comparisons and evaluations between attendance at face to face and online events. He also asked if there was flexibility in the system to enable face to face provision to be provided to students if required. The PVC-LTI responded that the aim was to encourage attendance at face to face tutorials but an online alternative would also be provided. It was regrettable that data was not easily available for 2016J presentations but this would be resolved for 2017J presentations.
- 10.6 A representative of the OU Students Association thanked Professor Rymer for the detailed update. She reiterated the views expressed by the representative of the OU Students Association on the Education Committee who had welcomed the reviews into different aspects of the GTP and its implementation but was concerned that the reviews needed to be brought together in a cohesive way to ensure the GTP was examined in its entirety.
- 10.7 Another student representative expressed her disappointment that the paper did not make greater reference to the issue of restoring the geographical link between students and their tutor. She also requested that the management of waiting lists for tutorials was given greater attention. She was aware that students signed up to multiple events but did not

always cancel the ones they did not attend and this affected the provision of spaces for other students. Professor Rymer confirmed that geographical links were being restored where possible. Another member commented that geographical links were not the only factors affecting tutor student allocations. She was aware that although some tutor/student allocations had been made on a geographical basis, some tutors were required to cover large areas so were not necessarily delivering tutorials in their immediate areas. She also expressed her disappointment that reliable data would not be available to evaluate attendance at tutorial events.

- 10.8 A representative of associate lecturers (ALs) commented that there appeared to be little evidence of ALs being involved in the development of tuition strategies for 2017J presentations. He requested that this be expedited quickly. He also requested that GTP was a standing item for Senate to consider beyond the start of the 2017J presentations. He also considered it important that information from the reviews of the GTP were shared widely to staff. He also reiterated that the working group set up under the auspices of the Education Committee would undertake an objective and independent assessment of the policy's academic impact and whether it was the right policy to deliver tuition. A member informed the Senate that consultation with ALs had commenced in the STEM Faculty. He also sought clarification of the membership of the Education Committee's working group examining the academic impact of the GTP.
- 10.9 Another member commented that it was essential that information from students with special requirements who registered to attend tutorials was passed to ALs so the required equipment was available to support them. The Director, Access, Careers and Teaching Support assured the Senate that work to improve the LEM system continued and that Venue Management Teams should liaise with ALs over provision of additional support.
- 10.10 The PVC-LTI acknowledged the difficulties in providing coherent data on tutorials but assured the Senate that this matter was being worked upon. Professor Rymer confirmed that the Senate would receive regular reports relating to the GTP and that there would also be reports from the three reviews. The Vice-Chancellor also confirmed that the reviews would be shared with the Senate. Professor Rymer offered to circulate the membership of the Education Committee's Working Group to the Senate.

Action: PVC-LTI

- 10.11 A member enquired what financial implications the recent major projects such as the closure of regional locations, faculty restructuring and group tuition policy had had for the University and specifically whether there had been cost savings. The University Secretary commented that financial data on the effects of the Faculty mergers was not available. The mergers were not intended as cost saving exercises and were instigated to improve operational efficiency. He confirmed that the decisions on locations was realising the intended savings and these were being reinvested and would be reported to the Council. The Group Tuition Policy had not been introduced to produce savings and costs had subsequently been incurred to resolve the difficulties which arose.

- 10.12 The Senate **noted** the report.

11 ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE REPORT

S-2017-01-08

- 11.1 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Strategy) (PVC-RAS) introduced the report and explained that it presented the latest set of key academic performance indicators and also proposals for developing regular reporting on academic performance to the Senate. They proposed future provision of a holistic set of indicators (quantitative and qualitative) aimed at assuring and sustaining the University's Academic Excellence as defined in the Students First strategy.

- 11.2 A member drew attention to the decline in the proportion of service requests closed within two working days. She was concerned that “teething problems” referred to previously had been ongoing for some time and enquired whether the decline was due to staffing shortages or problems in the operating model. She also enquired whether the indicator was in fact correct. The Director, Academic Services explained that operations were at a steady state in respect of staffing and that work was ongoing to develop more nuanced performance indicators.
- 11.3 A representative of the OU Students Association expressed her concern over the evidence of downwards trends in the key indicators and requested that the report also showed where responsibility lay for the performance against the targets. Another student representative wondered whether data obtained from the National Student Survey (NSS) would be useful to include in the report. The PVC-RAS agreed to include details of the Senior Accountable Executives for targets in future reports and to provide more detailed information where long term downwards trends were identified. He pointed out that the NSS was conducted annually so results would be reported upon when available. In response to a question, Professor Hetherington acknowledged that in presenting the report in future, he would be mindful of the level of detail within it, however comprehensive reports would be presented when necessary.
- 11.4 The Senate:
- a) **noted** the latest report on academic performance, and
 - b) **agreed** the proposals for further development of the report.

12 EXTERNAL RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

- 12.1 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Strategy) (PVC-RAS) reminded the Senate that the report on the external research environment had been deferred from the October meeting of the Senate. Research income was currently considerably below the current target and Professor Hetherington considered it appropriate to discuss this with the Senate.
- 12.2 The University’s Research Plan agreed by Senate in January 2015 set out an ambitious vision for research at the University aiming for breadth and introducing major strategic research areas to create points of differentiation for the University and encourage collaborations. The measures of success of the plan included being amongst the top 40 universities in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2025, increased research income, research students, and staff retention. Professor Hetherington explained that the University’s share of external research income was in decline but costs associated with research (as measured through TRAC-R) were increasing. Overall, a significant proportion of research costs were institutionally funded, effectively from student fee income. The external funding environment was increasingly competitive which had led to lower success rates for the University. Significant changes to the REF were also anticipated as a result of the Stern Review of the REF in 2016.
- 12.3 Professor Hetherington pointed out that a number of challenges were facing the University in meeting the ambitions of the plan. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) was currently consulting on the recommendations of the Stern Review and a key proposal was that in future exercises all research active staff should be returned in the REF and allocated to a Unit of Assessment. There would be no selectivity and all staff who had research activity specified in their contracts would be expected to be returned. Professor Hetherington reminded the Senate that in the last REF exercise in 2014, 59% of academic staff at the University were not submitted. The proposed change and its implications would present a significant challenge for the University and its ambitions to secure a place in the top 40 ranked universities by 2025 was likely to be unachievable. Professor Hetherington

concluded that the current approach to supporting research endeavour within the current breadth was becoming unaffordable.

- 12.4 The draft Academic Strategy set out an alternative approach which was considered to be more realistic and more aligned to the objectives of the Students First strategy. Professor Hetherington explained that this would focus on supporting research in areas of high demand curriculum which were (or were expected to become) internationally excellent (i.e. successful in the REF) or met a strategic need set out in the Students First strategy. The University would decommit from research that did not meet those criteria. A level of institutional investment in research would be agreed that was affordable and sustainable and appropriate to the pursuit of the Students First strategy. Resources would also be invested in scholarship to inform the curriculum, student experience and external engagement. Professor Hetherington emphasised that this approach was a realistic response to the external environment and was compatible with the objectives for University growth.
- 12.5 The Vice-Chancellor proposed that questions relating to the presentation be taken during discussion of the next item, the Academic Strategy.

TEA BREAK

13 ACADEMIC STRATEGY

S-2017-01-09

- 13.1 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Strategy) (PVC-RAS) introduced the paper and reminded the Senate of the work that had previously taken place to develop an academic strategy for the University. He identified a number of factors in recent years including the decisions about equivalent and lower qualifications fees (ELQ), and the changes to funding in 2012 that had had a significant impact upon the University. In terms of headcount, the University had lost 75,000 students since 2012 and in terms of the University's mission to reach out to promote educational opportunity and social justice through study, this represented 75,000 missed opportunities to improve lives. Professor Hetherington explained that the sector in which the University operated was likely to become more competitive in future with the Government signalling intentions to open up higher education to new providers on a more commercial basis using market forces to drive down prices. Many new competitors would look to distance learning models to provide their services and offer their products in the most popular subjects potentially undercutting the University's curriculum offers, albeit with different motives. If those scenarios were realised student numbers could fall further and the future viability of the University could be in question.
- 13.2 Professor Hetherington did not envisage that future for the University. He believed that its future was rooted in the Students First strategy, providing a vitality to the University's mission and to promote growth in student numbers. He strongly believed that the Academic Strategy would help to secure that growth by using academic excellence to champion the strengths of the University and support students to achieve their success. Such a strategy needed to be resilient and create priorities and opportunities. Through it, the University would look to develop a teaching career pathway for academic staff as a priority and encourage them to shape and define teaching and learning. Professor Hetherington urged the Senate to support the strategy as a key driver in the future growth of the University.
- 13.3 Professor Iain Gilmour, academic lead for the strategy explained that there had been extensive consultation so far in the development of the draft strategy. Feedback received had been instrumental in shaping the strategy and he believed it would be ready to present to the Senate at its next meeting in April for formal approval.

- 13.4 A member referred to the earlier presentation on the external research environment and expressed concern that the institutional investment in research was presented as incompatible with the Student First strategy and as an inappropriate way to spend 'students' money'. The member argued that this position overlooks the distinctive value that research adds to student experience, the University's reputation, and the quality of its curriculum. He also urged the University not to refer to investment as 'students' money' unless it does so consistently, for instance when justifying the investment in MOOCs, or when discussing the costs of university restructuring, or the failed GTP implementation.
- 13.5 Another member noted that the draft strategy did not include reference to professional staff at the University who carried out research to improve the student experience, for example Library staff. She enquired whether the strategy would take into account the impact of such activity.
- 13.6 A member participating remotely queried whether there would be consistent and transparent principles across faculties for decommitting from curriculum where demand was low. She also sought clarification of the reference to research not being supported if it did not align with curriculum or support a strategic need. She was concerned that this could adversely affect much of the scholarship work undertaken in the University which was often cross-university and did not always align with faculty priorities. She enquired when further information on the principles around what was in scope would be available to ensure valuable insight was not lost. The member also sought reassurance that regional academics would not automatically be assumed to be on the teaching path referred to in the strategy. Professor Hetherington explained that further work would be undertaken on the size and shape of the University's curriculum and transparency would be a key element of this work. He also assured the Senate that the University valued scholarship and did not intend to decommit from it. Assurance was also given that regional/national academic staff would not automatically be assumed to be following a teaching pathway. Less than 12 regional academic staff were submitted to the last REF so it was important to ensure that their talents were used to best advantage.
- 13.7 A member expressed his support for the need for the University to adapt to be sustainable and for the references in the draft strategy to synergy between teaching and research. However he was concerned that as stated in section 3 (a) the University would decommit from areas of curriculum where demand was lacking to increase student numbers in prioritised curriculum areas. He acknowledged that difficult choices would be required but "demand" was not quantified in the strategy and he considered that many modules recruited students in steady numbers and thus had a significant impact on the University's finances. He was concerned that there would be a significant risk to focussing only on areas perceived as strong. Students could be frustrated by a lack of choice and look to competitor providers. It was also unclear as to how the University would respond if the pattern of student demand changed. He expressed his support for the development of a resilient curriculum but did not consider that demand was an indicator of resilience. He also expressed his concern that research would be focussed only on areas of high demand curriculum. He believed that the strategy should set a direction of travel for the University and that some further adjustments would help to it to gain the support of the academic community. Professor Hetherington agreed to examine further the concept of defining parameters for resilience. He emphasised however that the University could not afford to sustain areas of research outside its main curriculum simply in the hope of expansion. Research would be supported where there was a clear curriculum need and it helped the University to achieve its strategic objectives but if it could not demonstrate evidence of these requirements then it would not be supported.
- 13.8 Another member drew attention to Aim 4 on page 12 of the strategy and commented that research improved the employability of students and also showed developing trends. Professor Hetherington agreed that research into supporting student endeavour was

required. Another member commented that the wording of Principle 4 recognised the depth of the University's research into the way students are taught and learn. Another member commented that the strategy combined excellence and affordability and the same arguments could be applied to other University activities.

- 13.9 The Director of the OU in Wales stated that, in response to a previous contribution, he did not see any disingenuousness in the presentation and pointed to the significant consultation work that had been carried out in developing the strategy. He suggested that references to external engagement in the strategy required further thought including when applied to work across the four UK nations. He commented that as defined in the strategy, external engagement appeared to have an economic focus however it was broader than that and encompassed work in other spheres such as wider culture and civil society, and in such areas as the creative industries. Referring back to the presentation on the external research environment, the Director of the OU in Wales pointed out that funding received from the governments and funding bodies alone in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland matched or exceeded the TRAC-R deficit and that this territorial dimension of the University's income needed to be surfaced and better understood in the institution, as income from those nations was being used to underpin research activity carried out almost exclusively in Milton Keynes. The PVC-RAS agreed to look again at the question of being overly economic and to examine the external engagement sections further
- 13.10 A representative of the OU Students Association was concerned that the strategy lacked clarity with Principle 1 stating that a diverse curriculum would be offered yet other parts referred to only offering high demand curriculum. She also enquired as to how the proposed work of the OU Redesign project would impact upon the strategy. Another student member enquired whether it was possible to rotate modules rather than decommit from curriculum areas. Professor Hetherington assured the Senate that the aim was to develop an innovative, attractive and flexible curriculum.
- 13.11 Another member commented upon the reference in the draft strategy to the importance of building communities and suggested that the position of regional academic staff who had expressed concerns over isolation be considered in relation to the strategy. Another member urged the University not to stifle diversity across the University and to take full advantage of the breadth of its staff. He welcomed reference in the paper in paragraphs 16 and 17 to the development of an equality analysis and requested that the EIA (Equality Impact Assessment) be carried out as stated.
- 13.14 Referring to the list of differences likely as a result of the strategy, a member pointed out that he would prefer to see reference to "stronger" academic communities in point (a) as academic communities already existed in the University. He also reflected on the strengths of the University such as a strong student base and significant expertise in its staff. He believed however that staff felt excluded with decisions being taken at high levels. He wanted systems developed that enabled staff to develop modules using their creativity and expertise. Another member acknowledged the requirement for change but added his view that staff did not feel they were consulted enough and felt initiatives were directed to them.
- 13.15 Another member emphasised the role of research in developing new curriculum. He cited an example in his own faculty where a very successful new subject area had been launched as a result of innovative research by his colleagues. Another member requested that reference to world leading research be included in the University's overall vision. There were ways to overcome the challenges identified and the University should not give up on its ambitions for research. Another member supported this view and enquired whether students were aware of the value of research in driving forward innovative curriculum. She strongly believed that decommitting from research could cause reputational damage to the University. Another member queried whether any

benchmarking had taken place to examine other universities' academic strategies. Concern was also expressed that staff had had to contend with the effects of locational changes and the difficulties with the group tuition policy and they might not have had the time or energy to fully engage with the development of the strategy.

- 13.16 A representative of the OU Students Association stated that she believed students wanted to be part of a world class university which included commitment to research. She did not feel students had been sufficiently consulted on the development of the strategy and requested it be redrafted.
- 13.17 In response to the points raised, Professor Hetherington emphasised that decisions on strategic priorities for curriculum in line with the aims and principles of the Academic Strategy would be taken at Faculty level. Decisions would only be taken at institutional level if they related to entirely new areas or exceptions. He assured the Senate that the diversity of staff at the University would be recognised and championed. He emphasised that he was not proposing a position where the University would not carry out research, but that it would be used to deliver success within cost restraints. Professor Hetherington reiterated that an extensive programme of consultation had taken place during the drafting of the strategy and the OU Students Association had been represented on the project's Steering Group since the outset.
- 13.18 Another member was pleased to see comments expressed previously had been reflected in this draft of the strategy. She supported the aspiration to align teaching and research at the University but was concerned that this was stated as a definitive principle in the strategy and felt it should be started as an aim. She also queried how scholarship would be supported in future. Another member commented that the development of strategic partnerships was a significant area of growth for the University and he enquired how the strategy reflected this activity.
- 13.19 A member commended the authors on the drafting of the strategy but was concerned that it did not reflect how research was essential to create a vibrant academic community. He had calculated that the costs of research per individual member of academic staff at the University were not high and research was vital for the future sustainability of the University. Another member commented that if the University decommitted from certain areas of the curriculum then this would not necessarily mean increases in student numbers for other areas. She was concerned that if research was stopped in an academic area then the University's reputation in that subject would be reduced and academic staff would not be recruited to those areas. Another member did not support the vision to create teaching only careers.
- 13.20 A member emphasised the need for the University to have a sustainable curriculum and agreed that an academic strategy needed to define it. However he did not consider that the draft presented was appropriate. He commented that it was contradictory and ambiguous and did not explain how decisions would be made in line with the strategy. He also felt the references to exceptions to the strategy were unclear. He expressed his support for the OU Students Association member's comment that the strategy was not viable for the University. He urged the University to reflect again on the content of appendix 2 which set out feedback from academic units on the strategy and redraft it using that content as a starting point.
- 13.21 The Executive Dean, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies (WELS) spoke from the perspective of managing a faculty. She considered that faculties had robust management of teaching and research activities and were already working in many of the ways proposed by the strategy. Faculties had made decisions in the past to decommit from certain activities. The strategy would give significant opportunities to faculties to be self-determining and create stronger vibrant academic communities with greater opportunities

for staff to move between areas of work and for promotion. She acknowledged the drafting might not be exactly correct yet but she believed the strategy was a good initiative for the University.

- 13.22 The PVC-RAS acknowledged that the reference to exceptions in the strategy required clarification and emphasised that he believed very strongly that the University was in an excellent position to harness great teaching talent and develop this as an attractive career route for many academics. He agreed that there was potential through the strategy to develop other forms of curriculum and qualifications in partnership with others, such as apprenticeships and continuing professional development. He emphasised to the Senate that the aim of the strategy was to help the University serve its students well.
- 13.24 The Vice-Chancellor, speaking in his role as the chair of the Senate, reiterated the requirement for the University to improve its performance. He emphasised that with low completion rates and a reduction in research income, the University was not serving its students well enough and improvements had to be made which would invariably result in difficult choices. The University needed its strategy to guide it making these choices. Mr Horrocks reported that the Finance Committee had expressed its concern over the sustainability of the University and taking no action was not an option. He urged the Senate to reflect on this position and see the importance of robust criteria set by the University's academic body.

14 COUNCIL GOVERNANCE REVIEW REPORT

S-2017-01-10

- 14.1 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Research and Academic Strategy, and chair of the Academic Quality and Governance Committee (AQGC) introduced the paper and suggested that the Senate initially focus on the views of the AQGC.
- 14.2 A member supported the suggestion in paragraph 6 that a meeting be held with the Council to consider business of joint concern. Another member also supported this and commented that in light of the experience surrounding the decisions relating to the University's locations it was essential not to weaken any collaboration between both bodies. He emphasised the need to retain strong representation of the Senate on the Council and wished to see the Strategic Planning and Resources Committee (SPRC) retained until the new Joint Business Committee was fully defined and established.
- 14.3 Another member supported the proposal for a joint meeting between the Council and the Senate and endorsed the previous comments that it was currently not an appropriate time to consider reducing the representation of the Senate on the Council. He too called for greater information on the proposed new joint business committee. He expressed his concern that many of the proposals would have the effect of reducing the influence of the Senate and he could see no clear rationale for the suggestion that the size of the Senate be reduced to below that of the sector average. He was also concerned that the Governance and Nominations Committee of the Council had considerable power and authority and did not consider it appropriate for it to be deciding the balance of the membership of the Senate on the Council.
- 14.4 Another member endorsed the views that it was not appropriate to be considering any possible reduction in the size of the Senate. The University was a complex organisation and the composition of the Senate reflected the different perspectives. There was no justification to reduce the size and she requested that proposal be abandoned. Another member expressed his concern over suggestions that the size of the Senate be reduced. He felt this could seriously affect its role as a body to challenge and provide different views and perspectives.

- 14.5 Another member agreed that the size of the University's Senate did not need to align to the sector average and it should reflect the complexity of the organisation. He reflected on the views in the report that the governance of the University was essentially sound and suggested that it may be appropriate to pause on proceeding with implementation until the outcome of the OU Redesign report was known.
- 14.6 The Director, OU in Wales commented that SPRC provided a forum for representatives of the Senate and Council to consider strategic issues and he would be disappointed if it was disestablished. He also commented that he did not consider that the Council membership reflected sufficient expertise in issues relating to all four nations and he did not feel this was adequately addressed in the report of the review. Another member queried the recommendation that the size of the Council be reduced to 16-18 members as he could not see a clear justification for this proposal. A member also suggested that the internal membership of the Council appeared rather limited and did not fully reflect the complexity of the University.
- 14.7 The University Secretary acknowledged the points raised and assured the Senate they would be relayed to both the AQGC and the Governance and Nominations Committee of the Council.

15 SINGLE QUALIFICATION REGISTRATION RULE S-2017-01-11

- 15.1 A representative of the OU Students Association expressed their support for the proposals and commented that they amended a decision taken previously, that the Association had originally opposed. Another member requested that the University's websites make the consequences of the change much clearer for students.
- 15.2 The Senate **approved**:
- a) the proposals, as detailed in paragraphs 19 to 40 of the paper relating to the 'single qualification registration rule'
 - b) the change to the Academic Framework and to principles 11 and 22 of undergraduate qualification and modular study

16 SCHEDULE OF DELEGATION S-2017-01-12

The Senate **approved** the revised Senate Schedule of Delegation.

17 EMERITUS PROFESSORS S-2017-01-13

The Senate **approved** the recommendations from the Chair and Readership Subcommittee that the title of Emeritus Professor was awarded to Professor Gill Perry and Professor Helen King, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

18 THE COUNCIL S-2017-01-14

- 18.1 A member queried the reference in paragraph 13 of the report (S-2017-01-14A) to the views of OU Student Association members on the group tuition policy not being raised at the meeting of the Senate in October 2016. She considered that the views had been raised and were recorded in the minutes of that meeting.
- 18.2 The University Secretary offered to look again at the wording of the report from the Council and the minutes of the meeting on 23 November 2016 from which it was compiled.

18.3 The Senate **noted** the reports of matters discussed at the last meeting of the Council held on Wednesday 23 November 2016.

19 ACTION BY THE CHAIR

S-2017-01-15

The Senate **noted** the report on action taken by the Chair since the last meeting of the Senate.

20 FUTURE ITEMS OF BUSINESS

S-2017-01-16

The Senate **noted** the potential items for the agenda for the meeting of the Senate on 5 April 2017, at which Council members will be in attendance.

21 DECLASSIFICATION OF PAPERS

Post meeting clarification:

S-2017-01-02B:	SPRC Confidential Minutes	To remain confidential
S-2017-01-13:	Emeritus Professors	Declassified
S-2017-01-14B:	Council confidential report:	To remain confidential

24 DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

Wednesday 5 April 2017 – with Council members in attendance
Wednesday 7 June 2017

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