

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ACADEMIC COUNCIL HELD ON WEDNESDAY 7 APRIL 2021 VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

PRESENT:	Dr Peter Bonfield (Chair) Vedia Can John Cappock Dr Simon Courtenage Dr Paul Curley Adrian Dutch Professor Alex Hughes (Deputy Chair) Dr Sal Jarvis (Deputy Chair) Professor Janet Jones Professor Malcolm Kirkup	Dr Nicholas Lambrou Caroline Lloyd Padamjeet Mehta Professor Graham Meikle Dr Andy Pitchford Jane Stonestreet Professor Harry Thapar Dr Stefan van Dellen Dr Leigh Wilson
IN ATTENDANCE:	Professor Dibyesh Anand (Minute 20.40) Berekhet Berakhy (Minute 20.40) Lynne Berry (Observer) David Burt (Clerk) Jane Davies (Notetaker, Minutes 20.38 to 20.40)	Jane Lamarque (Notetaker, Minutes 20.38 to 20.40) Elaine McMillan (Secretary) Kate O'Donnell (Notetaker, Minutes 20.38 to 20.40) Emma Standen
APOLOGIES:	Professor Andrew Linn	
ABSENT:	Jordan Blanchard	

**20.37 ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- 20.37.1 The Chair welcomed all members and regular attendees. He welcomed Andy Pitchford, Head of the Centre of Education and Teaching Innovation to his first meeting as a member and welcomed Lynne Berry as an observer.
- 20.37.2 The Chair reminded members that all views are welcome and stated that the goal is for the University to be in a better position because of Academic Council's endeavours.
- 20.37.3 Members noted apologies and absences as detailed above.
- 20.37.4 The Chair noted that many members will have an interest in the membership discussion (Minute 20.38).
- 20.37.5 The Chair agreed to a request, submitted in advance, to discuss the University's adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism under Any other business (Minute 20.48.1-4).
- 20.37.6 The Chair confirmed that there were no requests to discuss starred agenda items (Minutes 20.43 to 20.47).
- 20.37.7 Members had not submitted any questions in advance of the meeting.

### **Chair's report**

- 20.37.8 The Chair briefed members on the University's recent submission to the Research Excellence Framework. On behalf of Academic Council, the Chair thanked and commended the team that produced the submission.
- 20.37.9 The Chair confirmed that the University's education programme continues in line with Government guidelines and highlighted the 'Spring into the Future' initiative to support students as they graduate or progress into their next year of study.
- 20.37.10 The Chair informed members that Lynne Berry, an Observer at the meeting, will join the Court of Governors as an independent governor from the end of April and will take over as Chair of the Court in October 2021.
- 20.37.11 The Chair briefed members on the agenda for the meeting.

### **20.38 ACADEMIC COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP STRUCTURE**

- 20.38.1 Professor Graham Meikle, member of Academic Council, introduced the discussion session and referred members to the supporting information circulated in advance (Document AC 210407A).
- 20.38.2 Members split into three breakout groups to discuss diversity in the membership structure.
- 20.38.3 Members returned to the main meeting and a spokesperson from each breakout group summarised the key points of their discussion. These included:

#### **How might we use the membership structure to achieve a more diverse range of academic colleagues and students?**

- Diversity is a broader issue than membership of Academic Council; however, Council should be leading and setting an example
- An apprentice scheme would enhance diversity
- Expanding the student membership and outside of the sabbatical team would provide a stronger student voice
- Ex-officio membership could be reviewed periodically to ensure they reflect the focus of Academic Council at the time; however, this can also be achieved by inviting colleagues to participate in individual meetings or discussions
- A combination of elected representatives and nominees is most appropriate
- The membership could be increased to increase diversity; however, there is a risk that a larger group will lead to less efficient decision-making
- Nominations should be in addition to elected representatives and not instead of them
- Diversity of views and ensuring the right roles and competencies are present is key
- More nominations to supplement or change the balance to increase diversity

#### **What are the risks and benefits of elections and nominations?**

- Elections support some elements of diversity (e.g. different viewpoints); however, are less successful at achieving diversity of protected characteristics and early career colleagues are less confident of gaining support
- Nominations could be used to achieve a more diverse range of members; however, could be less successful at achieving diversity of opinion
- Important that we do not overload student School Representatives; elected student representatives have more time to engage with Academic Council
- Need to ensure there is not a conflict of interest if a member has been nominated, e.g. use of nominations to ensure certain opinions or outcomes
- Potential risk to Academic Council's role in providing assurance to the governing body
- Risk that changes to the structure would reduce the colleague voice

- Nominees may be viewed as 'favoured candidates'; to mitigate this risk appointment of a nominee could require a qualified majority (e.g. at least 60% of all members)

**20.38.3.1 ACTION Academic Council Secretary** to reflect on the feedback and discussion notes and circulate a revised recommendations paper for agreement by email prior to submission to the Court of Governors.

## **20.39 AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENTS**

- 20.39.1 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) for Education presented the approach to the implementation of the Education Strategy's commitment to more authentic forms of assessment (Document AC 210407B), which is recommended by the Teaching Committee.
- 20.39.2 The DVC Education explained that where necessary examinations may be retained (for example if they are required by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies) and that in some cases online timed assessments will be retained to allow course teams time to plan and develop authentic assessments.
- 20.39.3 A member proposed some benefits of examinations and suggested that there would be difficulties delivering authentic assessments for modules with large student numbers. The DVC Education confirmed that course teams could propose retention of examinations or time-limited assessments and include an explanation of the rationale in their proposal.
- 20.39.4 Members expressed support for the proposed approach, referring to significant reductions in awarding gaps since the move from examinations and preparing graduates for employment.
- 20.39.5 A member commented that assessments need to be credible to future employers of our students.
- 20.39.6 A member suggested that workshops in the next couple of months showcasing successful examples of authentic assessments would ease any concerns from colleagues about the approach.
- 20.39.7 **APPROVED** Members supported the proposed approach.

## **20.40 DRAFT EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY**

- 20.40.1 Professor Dibyesh Anand and Professor Alex Hughes, Co-Chairs of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee, and Berekheth Berakhy, Inclusion, Diversity and Equality Officer, joined the meeting for a discussion on the draft EDI Strategy (Document AC 210407C).
- 20.40.2 Professor Hughes briefed members on the structure of the draft Strategy then members split into three breakout groups for discussions.
- 20.40.3 Members returned to the main meeting and a spokesperson from each breakout group summarised the key points of their discussion. These included:

### **1. What are the key priorities in the emerging EDI Strategy?**

- Whilst our undergraduate colleague population is diverse, there is work to do on diversity in other student populations and our colleague population
- EDI communications are critical - all stakeholders should know about the Strategy, the progress we are making and that we are all responsible for delivering it
- There is a need for clear objectives (not indicators of success) and goals to be built into the Strategy
- Strategy development process and the outcome must reflect the wider interest of stakeholders, particularly under-represented groups

- Defining the metrics that measure change and having resources in place to ensure we measure progress
- Diversity of colleagues in general and particularly lack of diversity in part-time visiting lecturers
- Understanding as well as removing the attainment gap

**2. Which elements will be most challenging to implement?**

- Getting communications right without colleagues feeling uncomfortable or disenfranchised
- Providing spaces for difficult conversations
- Long-term change in the diversity of our colleague population
- How we know what we have achieved when the context keeps changing
- Co-ordinating and prioritising EDI work
- Bringing together the wider challenges in society and the University

20.40.4 Professor Anand outlined next steps in the Strategy development process and notified members that there will be an open forum for students and colleagues in May 2021.

20.40.5 The EDI Committee Co-Chairs invited members to send by email any other questions and comments on the draft Strategy.

**20.41 SUB-COMMITTEE STRUCTURE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**Research and Knowledge Exchange**

20.41.1 The Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) for Research presented a proposal for a new committee structure to support research and knowledge exchange (Document AC 210407D).

20.41.2 The PVC (Research) explained that the rationale for the new structure is to deliver more strategic, planned and effective decision-making and reporting and to exploit new opportunities.

20.41.3 A member suggested that the new structure should be reflected at College level.

20.41.4 **APPROVED** Revised committee structure to be implemented from 1 August 2021. This includes:

- Establishment of a new Research and Knowledge Exchange (RKE) Steering Committee, reporting to Academic Council
- Research Committee and Graduate School Board to become sub-committees of the RKE Steering Committee
- University Research Ethics Committee to be retitled University Research and Knowledge Exchange Ethics Committee and to become a sub-committee of the RKE Steering Committee
- Knowledge Exchange Committee to be defunct with effect from 31 July 2021
- Establishment of a new Business Engagement Committee as a sub-committee of the RKE Steering Committee
- Establishment of a new Public and Community Engagement Committee as a sub-committee of the RKE Steering Committee

20.41.5 **APPROVED** Members confirmed terms of reference and membership 2021/22 for the following committees:

- RKE Steering Committee (new)
- Business Engagement Committee (new)
- Graduate School Board (revised)
- Public and Community Engagement Committee (new)
- Research Committee (revised)
- University RKE Ethics Committee (revised)

**Course development, review and revalidation**

- 20.41.6 The DVC (Education) presented a proposal for a new committee structure to support course development, review and revalidation (Document AC 210407E), which is recommended by the Course Development, Review and Revalidation Working Group.
- 20.41.7 The DVC (Education) welcomed a suggestion from a member to include learning resources in the resources listed for course proposal business cases.
- 20.41.8 A member suggested that there should be other Professional Services Directors included in the membership of the new Portfolio Planning Committee.
- 20.41.8.1 **ACTION** University Secretary and Chief Operating Officer to discuss membership with Professional Services Directors and submit any proposal for additional members to the DVC Education.
- 20.41.9 **RESOLVED** Members delegated authority to the Portfolio Planning Committee to approve inclusion of any additional Professional Services Directors in the membership for 2021/22.
- 20.41.10 **APPROVED** Curriculum Review and Innovation Committee to be defunct with immediate effect.
- 20.41.11 **APPROVED** Portfolio Planning Committee to be established as a sub-committee of Academic Council with immediate effect and as a joint sub-committee with the University Planning Committee (UPC) on approval by UPC.
- 20.41.12 **APPROVED** Portfolio Planning Committee terms of reference and membership 2020/21 to be implemented with immediate effect.

**20.42 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING**

- 20.42.1 **AGREED** Minutes of the Academic Council meeting held on 24 February 2021 (Document AC 210407F) are an accurate record of the meeting, subject to a correction to the meeting date.
- 20.42.2 Members received and noted an update on actions from previous meetings (Document AC 210407G).

**20.43 COURSE SPECIFIC REGULATION – WESTMINSTER BUSINESS SCHOOL**

- 20.43.1 **APPROVED** For the BSc Project Management apprenticeship course and from September 2021, Recognition of Prior Certificated Learning will also be accepted for the Certificate of Higher Education Project Management offered at the University of Westminster (Document AC 210407H).
- 20.43.2 **APPROVED** This course specific regulation will apply to all future Cert HE apprenticeships following this model.

**20.44 STAGE 2 ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT**

- 20.44.1 Members received the Stage 2 (postgraduate) annual monitoring outcomes report for the 2019/20 reporting period (Document AC 210407I).

**20.45 VALIDATION AND REVIEW REPORT 2020**

- 20.45.1 Members received an assurance and outcomes report on the validation and revalidation activity conducted during 2020 (Document AC 210407J).

**20.46 SUB-COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

- 20.46.1 Members received a report on the business conducted at meetings of the following sub-committees since the last meeting of Academic Council (Document AC 210407J):
- i. Course Validation Standing Panel –17 February 2021
  - ii. Teaching Committee –10 March 2021
  - iii. Graduate School Board –17 March 2021
  - iv. Student Experience Committee –17 March 2021
  - v. Curriculum Review and Innovation Committee –24 March 2021
- 20.46.2 Members noted that draft minutes from the Knowledge Exchange Committee meeting on 25 March 2021 were not available in time for inclusion in the report; the draft minutes will be available via the Reading Room on receipt.

**20.47 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

All meetings start at 1.45pm and will be conducted via Microsoft Teams until further notice.

Wednesday 23 June 2021  
Wednesday 20 October 2021  
Wednesday 8 December 2021  
Wednesday 23 February 2022  
Wednesday 6 April 2022  
Wednesday 22 June 2022

**20.48 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**IHRA definition of antisemitism**

- 20.48.1 An academic representative from the College of Design, Creative and Digital Industries reported that a group of colleagues in the College considered there was a lack of transparency in the process to adopt the definition and that Academic Council and UCU should have been involved. These colleagues also raised concerns about the potential impact on free speech of the IHRA definition.
- 20.48.2 The Chair outlined the process to adopt the definition from October 2020 to March 2021.
- 20.48.3 The Chair reported that the University Executive Board have agreed to establish a working group to discuss implementation of the definition that will focus on providing an inclusive environment whilst continuing to enable freedom of speech and academic freedom.
- 20.48.4 A member commented that by not discussing the matter at Academic Council, the University missed an opportunity for elected staff representatives to contribute on how adoption of the definition interacts with academic freedom.

**Evaluation of the meeting**

- 20.48.5 At the invitation of the Chair, observer Lynne Berry gave feedback on the conduct of the meeting. She commented that the meeting allowed for a range of views and that members spoke with respect and responsibility, even where there were differing views. She also commented that she could see the University's values and a commitment to equality, diversity and being inclusive through the discussions.