

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ACADEMIC COUNCIL HELD ON WEDNESDAY 9 DECEMBER 2020 VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

PRESENT:	Dr Peter Bonfield (Chair) Jordan Blanchard Tony Burke 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 Professor Andrew Linn Caroline Lloyd Padamjeet Mehta Professor Graham Meikle Jane Stonestreet (to Minute 20.15) Dr Stefan van Dellen Dr Leigh Wilson
IN ATTENDANCE:	Mark Baldwin (Minute 20.16) David Burt (Clerk) Jane Davies (Note taker, Minute 20.16) Paul Elmer (Minute 20.16) Chris Hinge (Minute 20.16) Jane Lamarque (Note taker, Minute 20.16) Professor Terry Lamb (Observer)	Elaine McMillan (Secretary) Kate O' Donnell (Note taker, Minute 20.16) Laima Pacekajute (Observer) Russell Poole (Minute 20.16) Gunter Saunders (Minute 20.16) Emma Standen Dr Joy Tweed (Observer)
APOLOGIES:	Professor Harry Thapar	
ABSENT:	Vedia Can	

20.14 ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 20.14.1 The Chair welcomed all members and attendees and reminded members of the terms of reference for Academic Council.
- 20.14.2 The Chair reminded members also of the Code of Conduct, emphasising the importance of being inclusive and encouraging and listening to the student voice.
- 20.14.3 The Chair briefed members on the agenda for the meeting.
- 20.14.4 The Chair welcomed observers Laima Pacekajute, who is Board Apprentice to the Court of Governors, and Professor Terry Lamb and Dr Joy Tweed, who were observing the meeting as part of the review of Academic Council membership.
- 20.14.5 Members noted apologies and absences as detailed above.
- 20.14.6 No interests were declared.
- 20.14.7 The Chair confirmed there were no requests to discuss starred agenda items (Minutes 20.20 and 20.21) or to raise matters not on the agenda.
- 20.14.8 Members had not submitted any questions in advance of the meeting.

Chair's report

- 20.14.9 The Chair reminded members of the University's current approach to online and face-to-face teaching activities and praised colleagues for their constructive and supportive approach.
- 20.14.10 The Chair confirmed he remains active within sector networks, with government and in the University of Westminster community.

20.15 DEGREE ALGORITHMS

- 20.15.1 The Deputy Registrar (Academic Quality and Standards) and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) for Education presented the Teaching Committee's recommendations in relation to the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment's publication "[Degree classification transparency reliability and fairness - statement of intent](#)" (Document AC 201209A).
- 20.15.2 Members noted the Teaching Committee's conclusion that no action is required on areas where the University aligns with suggested practice.
- 20.15.3 **AGREED** Members supported the Teaching Committee's recommendation not to amend the approach to discounting in the algorithm as it had been updated as part of the Learning Futures programme and resulted in a downturn of good honours degrees in the first two years it was applied.
- 20.15.4 In response to a member's query, the Deputy Registrar confirmed that the Teaching Committee monitors trends in awarding good honours degrees and will receive their next report in January 2021.
- 20.15.5 **AGREED** Members supported the Teaching Committee's recommendation to amend the approach to rounding in the algorithm.
- 20.15.6 **APPROVED** Regulation 4.4.1 in Section 17 and Regulation 18.73 in Section 18 to be amended with effect from the start of the academic year 2021/22 to:

"Module marks will not be rounded. The absolute module mark, to the maximum number of decimal places calculated and recorded by the student record system, will be used in the calculation of the award classification. However, for the purposes of transcripts and other records of student achievement, the published module mark will be rounded to the nearest integer."

20.16 LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC AND HOW THEY IMPACT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF OUR EDUCATION STRATEGY

- 20.16.1 The DVC (Education) and a team of colleagues¹ gave a presentation to prompt debate on the lessons from the pandemic (Document AC 201209B).
- 20.16.2 Presenters, members and attendees split into four breakout groups to discuss three questions:
- What should we start doing?
 - What should we stop doing?
 - What should we keep doing?

¹ Mark Baldwin – Associate Head (Education and Students), College of Design, Cultural and Digital Industries

Dr Tony Burke – Head of the Centre for Education and Teaching Innovation

Dr Paul Elmer - Associate Head (Education and Students), Westminster Business School

Chris Hinge – Director of Estates Planning and Services

Russell Poole – Director of Information Systems and Support

Professor Gunter Saunders – Associate Director (Digital Engagement and Library Services)

20.16.3 All presenters, members and attendees returned to the meeting and the facilitator for each group reported a summary of their discussions. Themes included flexibility in the curriculum and personalised learning; embracing digital teaching and learning onsite and offsite; timetabling and the balance of face-to-face and online activities; teaching and assessment methods; and engagement with employability and employers.

20.16.4 Members noted that these discussions will contribute to a wider review of progress against Being Westminster: Our Strategy 2018-23 and implementation of the Education Strategy 2020-23.

20.17 OFFICE FOR STUDENTS CONSULTATION ON REGULATION OF QUALITY AND STANDARDS

20.17.1 The Deputy Registrar (Academic Quality and Standards) briefed members on the key elements of the Office for Students (OfS) consultation (Document AC 201209C), which included the University's data for the core indicators where the methodology can be replicated.

20.17.2 Members expressed concerns that:

- absolute benchmarks that do not consider institutional context (e.g. students' backgrounds, proportion of first-generation higher education participants) could disadvantage higher education institutions that are more successful at widening participation;
- institutions may inflate grades to exceed benchmarks;
- language in the consultation suggests that employer satisfaction will define the 'right' skills, however:
 - employers and their needs are often transient;
 - higher education is more than delivery of skills for a specific role;
 - this blurs the boundaries between further and higher education, and training and education;
 - this suggests a certain future - universities and the OfS need to plan for an uncertain future;
 - this does not reflect what we value in our diverse student body.

20.17.2.1 ACTION Deputy Registrar (Academic Quality and Standards) to circulate a copy of the University's consultation response to members via the Secretary.

20.18 STRUCTURE OF THE ACADEMIC CALENDAR

20.18.1 The DVC (Education) and the Academic Registrar presented proposals from the Teaching Committee relating to the academic calendar structure² (Document AC 201209D).

20.18.2 Members heard that the Committee proposed changes to the way the detail of term dates and associated dates and deadlines are approved as the current process exceeds the requirements of the terms of reference for Academic Council and Teaching Committee and requires senior committees to spend time on such bureaucratic/administrative detail.

20.18.3 The Academic Registrar reported that the current process prevented a prompt response to the implementation and communication of the change of a bank holiday date and amendments to results publication dates due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

20.18.4 The Academic Registrar confirmed that the Committee is not proposing any change to the structure and principles that have been in operation for the past two years and the structure will

² For this purpose, 'academic calendar' is defined as the timing and sequencing of core student teaching, learning and assessment activities and 'structure' is defined as the high-level principles governing that academic calendar.

continue to be subject to approval by Academic Council (on the recommendation of the Teaching Committee).

- 20.18.5 In response to a member's query, the Academic Registrar confirmed that academic colleagues' views on any proposed changes to the structure will be through their representatives on the Teaching Committee and that the current practice of agreeing exceptions and bespoke arrangements for specific courses will continue.

20.18.5.1 **ACTION Academic Registrar** to confirm to the academic representative for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences whether the Life Sciences MSc courses were included in the list of courses with bespoke arrangements submitted to the Teaching Committee.

- 20.18.6 A member commented that approving dates was a governance not an operational matter and considered that Academic Council needs to agree the detailed information to check the policy that Council has approved is being implemented. The Academic Registrar responded that individual roles are responsible for implementing a wide range of policies at an operational level and are accountable for that through the line management structure.

- 20.18.7 In response to a member's query, the Academic Registrar confirmed that amendments to dates in response to COVID-19 were temporary and any proposal to introduce a permanent change would be subject to approval by Academic Council.

- 20.18.8 **AGREED** Determining the specific dates and associated detail is an operational matter and is the responsibility of the Academic Registrar's Department acting under the delegated authority of the University Executive Board.

20.19 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

- 20.19.1 **AGREED** Minutes of the Academic Council meeting held on 21 October 2020 (Document AC 201209E) are an accurate record of the meeting.

- 20.19.2 Members received and noted an update on actions from previous meetings (Document AC 201209F).

- 20.19.3 **Terms of reference (Action 20.2.2.1)** Members noted that in error, the terms of reference submitted to the October 2020 omitted the new responsibility for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) agreed by Academic Council by correspondence and approved by the Court of Governors on 7 October 2020: "*advising the Vice-Chancellor and Court of Governors on matters concerning equality, diversity and inclusion in our curriculum and teaching practices*". Members received a copy of the terms of reference (Document AC 201209F Appendix).

- 20.19.4 **Annual quality and standards assurance report 2019/20 (Actions 20.3.3.1 and 20.3.4.1)** Members noted that the Secretary to Academic Council published the updated report in the Academic Council online Reading Room and notified members on 1 December 2020 and that the report submitted to the Court included corrected information relating to students complaints as requested.

- 20.19.5 **Temporary changes to the Research Degree Regulations due to COVID-19 (Action 20.7.5.1)** The Director of the Graduate School reported that she had discussed the query with the Deputy Registrar (Academic Quality and Standards) and there were no concerns with the decision taken by Academic Council on 24 June 2020 (Minute 19.42.25).

- 20.19.6 **RATIFIED Exemption from postgraduate regulation (Document AC 201209G)** Members supported the decision taken by Chair's action for an exemption to postgraduate regulation 18.93 for the specified students.

20.20 SUB-COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE 2020/21

20.20.1 **APPROVED** Members approved the following amendments to sub-committee terms of reference (Document AC 201209H):

- **Curriculum Review and Innovation Committee:** New responsibility to “*Satisfy itself that equality, diversity and inclusion matters, particularly the elimination of awarding gaps between different groups of students and the decolonisation of the curriculum have been identified by Colleges in new course planning*”
- **Knowledge Exchange Committee:**
 - New responsibility to “*Support and uphold the University’s commitment to creating an actively inclusive and safe environment in all aspects of governance and decision-making relating to the University’s knowledge exchange activities*”
 - Ex-officio membership amended to include College Leads for Knowledge Exchange x 3, Head of Research and Knowledge Exchange Office (R&KEO), Collaboration Development Manager (R&KEO) and Director of Business Engagement
 - Nominated membership amended to “*Champions of Knowledge Exchange from each College, nominated by Associate Head of College for External Relations (3)*”
 - Secretariat amended to “*R&KE Office nominee*”
- **Student Experience Committee:**
 - New responsibility to “*scrutinise, support and help deliver the University’s commitments to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion with particular focus on the elimination of awarding gaps and decolonising and diversifying the curriculum*”
 - Attendees amended to include Advice and Wellbeing Manager UWSU and Associate Heads of College (Education and Students) x 3

20.21 SUB-COMMITTEE BUSINESS

20.21.1 Members received a report on the business conducted at meetings of the following sub-committees since the last meeting of Academic Council (Document AC 201209I):

- i. Course Validation Standing Panel – 28 October 2020
- ii. Curriculum Review and Innovation Committee – 4 November 2020
- iii. Graduate School Board – 4 November 2020
- iv. Teaching Committee – 11 November 2020
- v. Student Experience Committee – 18 November 2020
- vi. Knowledge Exchange Committee – 19 November 2020

20.22 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Wednesday 24 February 2021 at 1.45pm

Wednesday 7 April 2021 at 1.45pm

Wednesday 23 June 2021 at 1.45pm

Meetings will be conducted via Microsoft Teams until further notice.

20.23 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

20.23.1 The Chair invited feedback on the meeting and members commented that the breakout group discussions (Minute 20.16) were valuable and useful, and they would like to see more facilitated discussion in future.

20.23.2 A student member confirmed that the student voice is being heard at Academic Council.