

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ACADEMIC COUNCIL HELD ON WEDNESDAY 21 OCTOBER 2020 VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

PRESENT:	Dr Peter Bonfield (Chair) Mr Mark Baldwin Jordan Blanchard Tony Burke Dr Simon Courtenage Dr Paul Curley Professor Alex Hughes (Deputy Chair) Dr Sal Jarvis (Deputy Chair) Professor Malcolm Kirkup	Dr Nicholas Lambrou Professor Andrew Linn Caroline Lloyd Padamjeet Mehta Professor Graham Meikle Jane Stonestreet Professor Harry Thapar Dr Stefan van Dellen Dr Leigh Wilson
IN ATTENDANCE:	David Burt (Clerk) Mrs J Lamarque (Minutes) Helen Owen (Observer)	Lin Phillips (Observer) Emma Standen
APOLOGIES:	Vedia Can John Cappock	Adrian Dutch Elaine McMillan (Secretary)

20.1 ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 20.1.1 The Chair welcomed all members, attendees and observers and confirmed expectations for the meeting. Independent governors Helen Owen and Lin Phillips were in attendance to participate in the discussion of the annual quality report (Minutes 20.3.1 to 20.3.5) and as observers for the rest of the meeting.
- 20.1.2 Members noted apologies as detailed above.
- 20.1.3 No interests were declared.
- 20.1.4 The Chair confirmed there were no requests to discuss starred agenda items (Minutes 20.8 to 20.11) or to raise matters not on the agenda.
- 20.1.5 Members had not submitted any questions in advance of the meeting.

Chair's report

- 20.1.6 The Chair reminded members of the University's current approach to online and face-to-face teaching activities and summarised feedback from students, which had been largely positive and included students' appreciation for academic colleagues. Members heard that students and Professional Services colleagues have commented on the positive elements of learning or working remotely.
- 20.1.7 The Chair informed members that the University is strong financially and offers students flexible arrangements for university owned accommodation due to COVID-19. He also briefed members on the numbers of students in student accommodation with confirmed COVID-19 or self-isolating.

- 20.1.8 The Chair informed members that the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) for Education is leading on pulse surveys for students and colleagues on their experiences during the pandemic.
- 20.1.9 In response to a member's question about colleagues' safety concerns, the Chair confirmed that the Being Safe, Feeling Safe Team review the situation weekly and are working with the public health leads at Brent and Westminster councils. Both council leads are content with the measures the University has in place.
- 20.1.10 In response to a member's question, the Chair confirmed that the University will implement government guidance if it requires universities to move teaching online before the University's scheduled end of term date.

20.2 GOVERNANCE MATTERS

Code of Conduct

- 20.2.1 **AGREED** Members reaffirmed their commitment to the Academic Council Code of Conduct.

Terms of reference and membership

- 20.2.2 **AGREED** A specific responsibility for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) to be added to the terms of reference.

- 20.2.2.1 ACTION Academic Council Secretary** to draft appropriate EDI responsibility to be ratified by email before the next meeting.

Schedule of business 2020/21

- 20.2.3 **AGREED** The schedule of business delivers the responsibilities specified in the terms of reference.

Review of the Academic Council membership structure

- 20.2.4 The Chair informed members that the 2019 Court of Governors effectiveness review resulted in an action plan that included an action to review membership of Academic Council and identify opportunities to strengthen Council through greater diversity and high-quality membership.
- 20.2.5 In response to a question from an observer, the Chair confirmed the review would be conducted internally.
- 20.2.6 A member queried whether the review would recommend more members at levels below or above the post of 'Dean'. A member noted that the membership already includes colleagues at different levels with different backgrounds and experiences. The Clerk to Academic Council confirmed that as the Articles pre-date the restructuring where the role of Dean became defunct, the University has adopted an interpretation of the level of Dean that ensures appropriate governance¹.
- 20.2.7 Some academic representatives considered the membership should retain strong input from elected academic colleagues and students, with representation of academics from all colleges and schools.

¹ The Articles of Association state "*The majority of members of the Academic Council shall comprise members of the staff holding the post of Dean or a post senior thereto.*"

Post meeting note: In July 2018, the Court of Governors agreed to adopt a broad definition of 'Dean' for the purposes of the Articles of Association. This includes: a head of college, school (inc. Graduate School), other academic unit (e.g. research institute or the Centre for Teaching Innovation), or administrative division (i.e. Professional Services directorate). (Minute 232.5.3, Court of Governors, 18 July 2018)

20.3 IMPROVING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Annual quality and standards assurance report 2019/20

- 20.3.1 The Deputy Registrar (Quality and Standards) presented the Annual Quality and Standards Assurance report 2019/20 (Document AC 201021D), which is recommended by the Teaching Committee.
- 20.3.2 Members heard that there remains a lack of clarity from the Office for Students (OfS) on arrangements for quality assurance. The University (and others in the sector) continue to apply the Higher Education Funding Council for England guidelines pending a range of consultations expected from the OfS this academic year.
- 20.3.3 The Deputy Registrar informed members that the report has been updated to reference the approved Education Strategy; however, data for several metrics is not available until the end of October and the report will be updated prior to submission to the Court of Governors.
- 20.3.3.1 **ACTION Academic Council Secretary** to circulate the updated report to members.
- 20.3.4 A member noted that the summary of outcomes of student complaints quoted in paragraph 25 does not align with the total number of complaints submitted.
- 20.3.4.1 **ACTION Deputy Registrar** to check and revise this element of the report prior to submission to the Court.
- 20.3.5 **AGREED** Academic Council Chair and independent governors Helen Owen and Lin Phillips to confirm to the Court that the assurance statements have been met.

Outcomes of the National Student Survey and action to improve the student experience

- 20.3.6 The DVC (Education) presented the National Student Survey (NSS) outcomes report 2020 (Document AC 201021E).
- 20.3.7 The DVC (Education) congratulated those colleagues who had achieved an improved result.
- 20.3.8 The DVC (Education) reported that the University is significantly below the sector for questions relating to teaching community and feedback and there is inequity between our student groups, with black students demonstrating the lowest levels of satisfaction.
- 20.3.9 The DVC (Education) informed members of the four planning priorities for 2020/21, which have been shared with all the Schools and Colleges and summarised ongoing work on these four priorities:
- Teaching and how it becomes practical, active and challenging
 - How we can support students and personalise their learning
 - Engage with professions and industries our students want to work in
 - Quality assessment and feedback
- 20.3.10 Members discussed the OfS-led review of the NSS noting that there will be further consultation. The DVC (Education) emphasised that the NSS provides information about provision and what may need to change and, should the OfS end the NSS, the University would still want to ask our students about their experiences.

Outcomes of the Graduate Outcomes Survey and action to improve the student experience

- 20.3.11 The DVC (Employability and Global Engagement) presented the first Graduate Outcomes Survey report (Document AC 201021F); Graduate Outcomes replaces the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey.

- 20.3.12 The DVC (Employability and Global Engagement) informed members that the survey reflects the outcomes of students who graduated in 2017/18 and that 10 out of 12 Schools are below the sector benchmark for highly skilled employment. She explained that colleagues from the Department of Strategy, Planning and Performance and the Careers Employment Service are meeting with Heads of Schools to discuss their improvement plans in response to the survey outcomes.
- 20.3.13 Members heard that School plans will be led by the Heads of School, working with School Employment Directors and should include key areas such as work-based learning, engaging employers in the curriculum, communicating employability advice, advisory boards and enhanced engagement with the Careers Employment Service. The DVC (Employability and Global Engagement) summarised ongoing work on these areas.

Learning Futures annual impact report

- 20.3.14 The Head of the Centre for Education and Teaching Innovation (CETI) presented the final Learning Futures annual impact report (Document AC 201021G).
- 20.3.15 The Head of CETI informed members that as there has been significant change since the end of the Learning Futures programme including the University's transformation programme, changes in the workforce and a new Education Strategy this final report would focus on the future rather than reflecting on the past.
- 20.3.16 The Head of CETI asserted that Learning Futures had a lot of positive outcomes; however, there is some way to go to meet its aspirations.
- 20.3.17 The Chair highlighted the particularly positive influence of Learning Futures on grade inflation and noted that the University should build on that outcome.

20.4 ACADEMIC REGULATIONS

Temporary changes to the Academic Regulations to address the impact of COVID-19

- 20.4.1 The Deputy Registrar (Quality and Standards) presented an update report on actions taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to protect the student experience during the 2019/20 academic year and proposals for temporary changes to the Academic Regulations for 2020/21 (Document AC 201112H).
- 20.4.2 Members noted that Teaching Committee agreed that online timed assessments would continue to replace examinations in January 2021.
- 20.4.3 Members noted that Teaching Committee agreed that online timed assessments would be retained for most students in May 2021, with provision made, where possible, for courses with Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies requirements for on-site examinations².
- 20.4.4 **APPROVED** Temporary revisions to regulations approved for 2019/20 that allow students to submit mitigating circumstances for COVID-19 related reasons without requiring documentary evidence to continue into 2020/21.
- 20.4.5 **APPROVED** Temporary revisions to regulations relating to work placements and study abroad modules and approved for 2019/20 to continue into 2020/21.
- 20.4.6 Members discussed the implementation of a standard 24-hour period for submission of online timed assessments and the need to ensure that provision is made for students with individual arrangements (such as extra time) should Schools decide on a different approach. A member noted that wherever possible the University should design curriculum that is proactively

² The University Executive Board endorsed this decision on 13 October 2020

inclusive to support students who haven't declared a disability/adjustment and/or are not registered with the Disability Learning Support Service.

Temporary changes to the Research Degree Regulations to address the impact of COVID-19

20.4.7 The Director of the Graduate School presented proposed temporary changes to the Research Degree Regulations to address the impact of COVID-19 (Document AC 201021I).

20.4.8 **APPROVED** Temporary revisions to regulations approved for 2019/20 that allow students to submit claims for mitigating circumstances and/or an extension for COVID-19 related reasons without requiring documentary evidence to continue into 2020/21.

Course specific regulations for programmes in the Westminster Law School

20.4.9 Jane Stonestreet, Assistant Head of Westminster Law School, presented a proposal for course specific regulations applicable for programmes in the Westminster Law School (Document AC 201021J).

20.4.10 Members noted that the proposal relates to progression regulations for the Law School that allow undergraduate students with insufficient credits the opportunity to complete a level, to progress or to graduate.

20.4.11 **APPROVED** The following course specific regulations are to be adopted with immediate effect for cohorts that started in September 2018 and September 2019 and for progression from Level 4 and Level 5:

- (1.5) In programme planning, the Core Foundations of Legal Knowledge modules can exceptionally, with agreement of the relevant Course Leader, be studied at a higher level for students progressing to Level 5 and Level 6, and affected by the amended progression rules, for the life of their degree.
- (1.6) As part of the Law Progression Summer School in August, Law students are offered the opportunity to replace 20 optional credits at Level 4 and 40 optional credits at Level 5 to complete that level or to enable progression to the next level, and Law students at Level 6 are offered the opportunity to replace 40 optional credits to enable completion of their studies in the same year of study.

20.4.12 **APPROVED** As a transitional arrangement for 2020/21 only, students in the Westminster Law School may progress with 80 credits passed.

20.5 SUB-COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE 2020/21

20.5.1 **APPROVED** Members approved the following amendments to sub-committee terms of reference:

- **Course Validation Standing Panel:** New responsibility to *"Ensure that the University's commitments to an actively anti-racist, inclusive and safe environment are reflected in the course development process and clearly articulated in course documentation."*
- **Graduate School Board:**
 - New responsibility to *"consider and carry out the University's commitment to equity and inclusivity for all doctoral research students and colleagues without racism or harassment in all discussions and decisions."*
 - Additions to membership: School PhD Co-ordinators (1 per School) and Research Environment and Scholarly Communications Lead
 - Maximum tenure of 3 years applied to the Doctoral Researcher representatives

- **Research Committee:**
 - New responsibilities 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 research”;*
 - *“Ensure appropriate resourcing and support for researcher development to ensure continued compliance with the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researcher”;*
 - *“Consider and support the University’s commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion for research matters specified above” [i.e. all other responsibilities]; and*
 - *“Oversee and receive reports from the Research Communities” [replaces responsibility to monitor the Strategic Research Development Fund]*
 - Amended definition of responsibilities relating to research plans; issues raised by College Research Committees; income from research projects and research student numbers; and researcher development.
 - Membership: amendments to role titles and removal of the Research Development and Awards Manager and Director of External Relations (or nominee)
 - Secretariat: Update from Research Office to Research and Knowledge Exchange Office
 - Insertion of a statement that *“A declared or noted conflict of interest must be recorded in the Minutes”*
 - Meetings: addition of *“Consideration and review may be given via correspondence outside of meetings by members including Chair’s Action where agreed.”*
- **Teaching Committee:**
 - New responsibility to *“Maintain a strategic oversight of, and take a lead in the identification of issues relating to, the University’s commitments to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion as they relate to learning and teaching, specifically commitments relating to decolonization, and diversification and closing of awarding gaps.”*
 - Director of Academic Professional Development added to ex-officio membership
 - One University Director of Learning and Teaching removed from the nominated members
 - UWSU Advice and Wellbeing Manager added to the attendees

20.6 COURSE DEVELOPMENT, REVIEW AND EVALUATION TASK AND FINISH GROUP

- 20.6.1 The DVC (Education) briefed members on the proposed task and finish group to review operations of the Curriculum Review and Innovation Committee (CRIC), which aims to achieve a more agile, collegiate process that considers sustainability of courses at an early stage.
- 20.6.2 The DVC (Education) informed members that an exploratory meeting has taken place and three further meetings are planned with outcomes expected to be two sets of recommendations.
- 20.6.3 **AGREED** DVC (Education) to establish an Academic Council Working Group as proposed to review CRIC and its processes.

20.7 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

- 20.7.1 **AGREED** Minutes of the Academic Council meeting held on 24 June 2020 (Document AC 201021M) are an accurate record of the meeting.
- 20.7.2 Members received and noted an update on actions from previous meetings (Document AC 201021N).

Chair’s action taken between meetings

- 20.7.3 **RATIFIED** **Exceptional Regulations due to COVID-19 (Minute 19.42)** Members supported the decision taken by Chair’s action for an exemption to regulation 4.6.2 for a student.

20.7.4 **RATIFIED** Course specific regulation – Law School (Minute 19.58.3) Members supported the decision taken by Chair's action to confirm a course specific regulation for the Graduate Diploma in Law.

20.7.5 **Temporary changes to the Research Degree Regulations due to COVID-19 (Minute 19.42.25)** A member queried the decision, suggesting that the proposal conflated two points regarding mitigating circumstances and research degree regulations and asserting that should the temporary change remain it would cause confusion.

20.7.5.1 **ACTION** Director of Graduate School and Academic Standards Manager to resolve the query and report back to the Chair and Academic Council.

20.8 STUDENT DISCIPLINARY PANEL MEMBERSHIP 2020/21

20.8.1 **AGREED** Student Disciplinary Panel membership to be implemented as proposed for 2020/21 (Document AC 201021O).

20.9 EVALUATION OF STUDENT REPRESENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

20.9.1 Members noted the outcomes of the evaluation, which had been considered by the Student Experience Committee (Document AC 201011P).

20.10 DRDP ANNUAL MONITORING SUMMARY REPORT

20.10.1 Members received the annual monitoring report, which had been considered by the Graduate School Board (Document AC 201121Q).

20.11 SUB-COMMITTEE BUSINESS

20.11.1 Members received a report on the business conducted at meetings of the following sub-committees since the last meeting of Academic Council (Document AC 201021R):

- i. Course Validation Standing Panel – 20 July 2020 and 9 September 2020
- ii. Curriculum Review and Innovation Committee – 1 July 2020
- iii. Graduate School Board – 1 July 2020 and 23 September 2020
- iv. Research Committee – 5 October 2020
- v. Teaching Committee – 30 September 2020

20.11.2 Members noted that the draft minutes from the meeting of the Knowledge Exchange Committee on 25 August were not received in time for inclusion and that the Academic Council Secretary will upload the draft minutes to the online Academic Council Reading Room on receipt.

20.12 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Wednesday 9 December 2020 at 1.45pm
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.

20.13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

20.13.1 Members did not raise any other items of business.