

SENATE

Open Minutes

Of the meeting held on Wednesday, 18 December 2019 in G5.05.

Present:

Nick Braisby	Vice-Chancellor (Chair)
Miriam Moir	Head of Registry Services (Secretary)
Julie McLeod	Interim Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education)
Ellie Smith	Academic Registrar and Secretary
Russel Stone	Head of School, Media & Creative Industries
Kevin Maher	Head of School, Business, Law & Computing
Paul Morgan	Head of School, Human and Social Sciences
Phil Wood	Head of School, Aviation & Security
Florin Ioras	Director of Enterprise and Research
Louisa Berry	Elected representative, Aviation & Security
Lauren Vincent	Elected representative, Art, Design and Performance
Daisy Toscano	Elected representative, Health Care and Social Work
Dearbhla Gallagher	Elected representative, Human and Social Sciences
Helen Ajyo-Ajayi	Elected representative, Nursing and Allied Health
Richard Jones	Nominated representative, Education Committee
Tao Warburton	Students' Union President

Apologies:

Julie Irwin	Director of Student Success
Lee Curtis	Head of School, Health Care and Social Work
Sri-Kartini Leet	Head of School, Art, Design & Performance
Karen Buckwell-Nutt	Head of School, Nursing & Allied Health
John Hathaway	Elected representative, Business, Law & Computing
Rob Penhaligon	Elected representative, Media & Creative Industries
Sainey Faye	Nominated representative, University Partnerships Board
Margaret Greenfields	Nominated representative, Research and Enterprise Committee
Brooke Pilbeam	Student's Union Vice-President

In Attendance:

Gavin Brooks	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
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Welcome/Apologies for absence/ Conflicts of Interest

19.132 Senate members were welcomed to the last meeting of the 2019 calendar year. The Chair noted that there were a large number of absences from Senate and that the meeting was only just quorate. Apart from unavoidable personal reasons, apologies had been given because of annual leave, teaching, recruitment events and other commitments. The Chair reiterated that Senate, as the supreme academic body of the University, should be given precedence over other meetings and events and noted that he would send a

communication to members to that effect, along with a reminder of the responsibilities of being a Senate member. **ACTION:** Chair

19.133 It was further noted that a number of ex-officio members were absent, and it was agreed that the membership roles would be considered again, exploring the inclusion of substitutes. **ACTION:** Chair, Secretary, E.Smith

19.134 Apologies for absence were received. No conflicts of interest were declared.

Minutes of the meetings held on 25 September 2019 and 18 November 2019

19.135 The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2019 were approved as an accurate record.

19.136 The Minutes of the joint Senate/Council meeting held on 18 November 2019 were approved as an accurate record.

Status of Actions

19.137 The actions taken since the last meeting were noted as having all been completed, apart from one which was on the agenda for further discussion.

Chair's Actions

19.138 No Chair's Actions had been taken since the last meeting of Senate.

Senate Representatives

19.139 Senate noted that since the last meeting, John Hathaway had been elected as one of the two Senate representatives on Council serving for two academic years.

19.140 Senate noted that Helen Ayo-Ajayi had volunteered to join the External Examiners' Approval Panel.

Senate Debate December 2019:

Grade Inflation or Moral Panic? (SEN19.30)

19.141 The Chair noted that this was the first of a series of debates, put forward and chosen by Senate members, in response to Senate's desire to focus part of each meeting on the discussion of topics pertinent to the University and the sector as a whole.

19.142 A position paper (SEN19.30) had been made available to members which showed two views of the current sector-wide debate on Grade Inflation.

19.143 One view focused on the upward trend of the numbers of First and Upper Second class degrees being awarded and the fact that this could not be explained once all other factors of student characteristics were taken into account. Reasons for this continuing increased level of performance were under public scrutiny, and assurance that standards were being maintained was needed in order to maintain public confidence in the value of degrees.

19.144 The second view wrote of the moral panic generated by the inference in the first view and raised concern that the spectre of grade inflation would undermine good teaching and assessment practices, and result in grades being driven down so that "standards" could be seen as being maintained.

19.145 Senate members debated and discussed the topic of grade inflation (bearing in mind the fact that Bucks' increase in the proportion of upper degrees was lower than that across the sector) and raised the following points which could impact on the trend:

- The type of course offered
- Regulations regarding the calculation of classification

- Algorithms for degree calculations
- Value provided by external examiners – key benchmark of comparability
- Marking of practice-based modules
- Professional qualifications of staff and membership of HEA
- Marking practices for specific disciplines
- Assessment type – move from exams to coursework/practical
- Better support for students eg in academic writing
- Modularity – options chosen by students where assessments best support their skill sets
- Pressure from graduate employers seeking upper degrees
- Competition in the sector - contribution of proportion of upper degrees to league table positions

19.146 It was noted that at Bucks the emphasis was on raising the attainment levels of students, and that the support provided to enable students to achieve their awards should be recognised. Further support could be provided by recognising that many of our students have to work to support families and their studies, and that travel costs need to be taken into consideration when timetabling teaching sessions.

19.147 Following the discussion Senate was given a brief presentation on the Statement of Intent published in May 2019 which has resulted in Universities producing Degree Outcome Statements by the end of the academic year. These will cover:

1. Institutional degree classification profile
2. Assessment and marking practices
3. Academic governance
4. Classification algorithms
5. Teaching practices and learning resources
6. Identifying good practice and actions
7. Risks and challenges

19.148 To facilitate the writing of the Degree Outcomes Statement a working group has been formed and a timeline has been produced. Senate members were informed that they would be welcome to join the group and further details would be circulated. **ACTION:** E.Smith

OfS Reportable Events(SEN19.31)

19.149 As an update, Senate's attention was first drawn to the fact that the OfS full Regulatory Framework came into effect from 1 August 2019, and that since then the University has seen an increase in the OfS's monitoring of returns and data.

19.150 Requests for information from the OfS regulation@officeforstudents.org.uk come through to Bucks by various communication channels. It was stressed to Senate that members should take note (and make their teams aware) that all such requests need to be centrally logged and should be forwarded to the Academic Registrar. Responses will be collated and these discussed and approved by UET by the stated deadline.

19.151 Since being included on the "Register of English higher education providers", the University has been required to comply with all the ongoing conditions listed in paper (SEN19.31). It was noted that regular reports on monitoring compliance would be provided to Senate and Council.

19.152 The full list of Reportable Events was provided to Senate. Again it was stressed to Senate that members and their teams should be aware of the new reporting requirements placed on the University and its partners, and be ready to respond promptly to internal requests for information which would contribute to the University's official collated response to be sent to the OfS via a dedicated portal.

19.153 Members were encouraged to discuss the paper with their teams, and the Academic Registrar offered to speak to team meetings.

Annual Monitoring Overview (SEN19.32)

19.154 The Minutes of the Education Committee held to discuss Annual Monitoring on 6 November 2019 and the Student Achievement Annual Summary Report 2018-19 were provided to Senate. It was noted that full discussion of the SAMMs and the University Annual Summary Quality reports had taken place at Education Committee, and the Student Achievement Report had also been received by the joint Senate Council meeting. No further comments were received.

Professoriate (SEN19.33)

19.155 It was noted that a number of Professor and Associate Professor appointments had been announced, and congratulations were extended by Senate to all.

19.156 A paper regarding the establishment of a Professoriate had been discussed at the meeting of Senate in September 2019. Senate had asked for the proposal to be re-drafted specifically around:

- The Professoriate's exact purpose – Senate's view was that it should be to drive forward academic debate through, for example, public lectures
- Concerns that a number of its proposed roles overlapped with both Research and Enterprise Committee and with Education Committee, which could lead to confusion as to where decisions could formally be made
- ToR number 10 regarding advising on the honorific titles process overlapped with the Honorary Awards Committee of Council
- Recognition of professional practice needed to be included
- More clarity over the reasons for members of the Professoriate meeting as a group, and as to the benefit of members attending meetings

19.157 A revised paper (SEN19.33) was presented to Senate. While some of the points had been addressed further comments were made concerning the heavy emphasis on research rather than on scholarship and professional practice. More parity between the research and teaching elements, and greater inclusion of professional practice involvement would strengthen the proposal.

19.158 It was further suggested that the Professoriate could provide updates on its activities to Senate.

19.159 Senate agreed that the revised proposal could be approved by Chair's Action.

ACTION: Florin Ioras/Chair

Programme Approval and Amendment Policy (SEN19.34)

19.160 A new *Programme approval and amendment policy* was presented to Senate. This document combines and replaces three existing policies, and has been directly informed by the new UK Quality Code and sector best practice. It focuses on policy, removing process and forms which can then be kept up-to-date more easily.

- 19.161 One key change in the Policy was for there to be open-ended validation timeframes, and removing the need for revalidation. Monitoring would use existing mechanisms to ensure academic currency.
- 19.162 Wide consultation had taken place, and both Academic Planning Committee and Education Committee recommended the policy to Senate.
- 19.163 Senate welcomed the approach of the policy and commented that it was a great improvement and would encourage new course development.
- 19.164 Senate approved the *Programme approval and amendment policy* to come into effect from January 2020, and for the documents it replaces to be rescinded.

External Examining Policy (SEN19.35)

- 19.165 A new *External Examining policy* was presented to Senate as a direct replacement for the current *External Examiners Handbook*. It has been directly informed by the new Quality Code and sector best practice.
- 19.166 The document's approach is to focus on the framework and guiding principles for external examiners, and to remove details of process.
- 19.167 The new Policy was presented to Senate on the recommendation of the External Examiners' Approval Panel and Education Committee.
- 19.168 Senate approved the *External Examining policy* to come into effect from January 2020, and for the document it replaces to be rescinded.

Reasonable adjustments for disabled students (SEN19.36)

- 19.169 An amended *Reasonable Adjustments for disabled students policy* was presented to Senate.
- 19.170 The document had been updated in line with changes to the academic management structure, and included the provision of interim adjustments for students awaiting external disability assessment following a successful pilot of the process.
- 19.171 The document was presented on the recommendation of Education Committee.
- 19.172 A query was raised as to the provision of resources for distance-learning students with disabilities, and it was agreed that this should be added to the document.

ACTION: Julie McLeod

- 19.173 With that proviso, Senate approved the amended *Reasonable Adjustments for disabled students policy* to come into effect from January 2020, and for the document it replaces to be rescinded.

Vice -Chancellor's Report (SEN19.26)

- 19.174 Senate received the Vice-Chancellor's report on recent developments within the University and the sector as a whole. The Vice-Chancellor further noted that recruitment had been positive, but that the legacy of reduced recruitment in previous years was still impacting on the University. It was noted that partnership recruitment had exceeded its target. Senate members were reminded that recruitment for the February cycle was important.
- 19.175 The Vice-Chancellor noted the changes in the University Executive Team. Gavin Brooks, Deputy Vice Chancellor from January 2020, was welcomed to Senate. Rod Mercer, Director of Finance, was leaving UET, as was Julie McLeod, Interim Pro-Vice Chancellor of Education, who had made a considerable positive impact on Bucks in the short time she had been at the University, and Senate gave her a vote of thanks.

19.176 In addition to the items in the report, the Vice-Chancellor initiated a discussion on sustainability, particularly climate change. Bucks was to join a sector group advising HEIs on their response to the climate emergency, while a new role would be created to look at sustainability across the University. This initiative was welcomed with enthusiasm from Senate members, and it was proposed that consideration be given to adding responsibility for sustainability to all job descriptions.

ACTION: Chair

University Council Report (Minutes 18 November 2019)

19.177 Minutes of the last Council meeting had been made available to Senate.

19.178 It was noted that Council's next meeting would focus on DRIVE.

Students' Union Report (SEN19.38)

19.179 Senate welcomed the report from the Students' Union.

19.180 It was noted that the SU Leadership Academy, a new initiative to enable 25 students to benefit from tailored sessions designed to develop their leadership skills, was going very well and feedback from students had been positive.

19.181 Attention was also drawn to the success of the conference for student representatives.

19.182 Concern was expressed over a number of students who were unaware of their tuition fee debt, and over the level of heating at the Uxbridge Campus. These would be investigated. **ACTION:** Julie McLeod

Reports to Receive:

Education Committee (9 October 2019)

19.183 The Minutes from the meeting held on 9 October 2019 had been circulated. The focus had been on NSS Action Plans.

Research and Enterprise Committee (9 October 2019 and 24 November 2019)

19.184 The Minutes from the meetings held on 9 October 2019 and 24 November had been circulated. The focus had been on PRES outcomes and REF updates.

Academic Planning Committee (18 September 2019 and 24 October 2019)

19.185 The Minutes from two meetings -18 September and 24 October 2019 – had been circulated.

19.186 Senate was reminded that the Minutes of these meetings were confidential and business sensitive.

Matters for Endorsement:

External Examiner Approval Panel (SEN19.39)

19.187 Senate received the update from the External Examiner Approval Panel and endorsed the decisions made in each instance.

19.188 One query was raised about the appointment of external examiners from near competitors. It was agreed to revisit the criteria.

ACTION: Ellie Smith

New Programmes of Study and Revalidations (SEN19.40)

19.189 The report detailed recommendations to Senate of programmes presented to Approval Panels where conditions had been signed off and those awaiting sign off. Senate endorsed those programmes where conditions had been signed off.

19.190 It was noted that FD Sports Studies was not included and this would be investigated outside the meeting.

19.191 It was suggested that course closures should be added to the form. **ACTION:** Ellie Smith

Change of Course Title (SEN19.41)

19.192 A recommendation from the Course Amendment Panel to change the following course titles was presented to Senate:

From: BA (Hons) Music Management and Studio Production

To: BA (Hons) Music Production and Business

From: BA (Hons) Music Management and Studio Production with Foundation Year

To: BA (Hons) Music Production and Business with Foundation Year

19.193 The Head of School noted that the new titles would better reflect the language used in the industry. No changes were to be made to course content. All applicants for September 2020 would be contacted regarding the title change.

19.194 Senate approved the change of course titles proposed.

Dates of the next meetings

19.195 The next meeting of Senate is on Wednesday 25 March 2020 at 2.00pm. The Senate debate will be Knowing our Customers – being relevant and unique.