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Senate

Open Minutes

Date of meeting: **Wednesday, 17 December 2014**

Duration of meeting: **13:30 to 16:30**

Location: **G5.05, High Wycombe Campus**

Attendance

Name	Faculty / Directorate	Category of membership
Ruth Farwell	Vice Chancellor's Office	Chair
Miriam Moir	Academic Quality Directorate	Secretary
Marcus Wood	Academic Quality Directorate	Minute Secretary
Ian Plover	Vice Chancellor's Office	Ex Officio
Shân Wareing	Vice Chancellor's Office	Ex Officio
Vicky Vass	Design, Media & Management	Ex Officio
Lorraine Watkins-Mathys	Design, Media & Management	Ex Officio
Sue West	Society & Health	Ex Officio
Ruth Gunstone	Student Services Directorate	Ex Officio
Ellie Smith	Academic Quality Directorate	Ex Officio
Barbara Dexter	Learning & Teaching Directorate	Ex Officio
John Boylan	Design, Media & Management	Ex Officio
Carol Pook	Society & Health	Ex Officio
Alison Shreeve	Design, Media & Management	Ex Officio
Frazer Mackenzie	Design, Media & Management	Ex Officio
Phil Wood	Design, Media & Management	Ex Officio
Piers Worth	Society & Health	Elected
Jake Kaner	Design, Media & Management	Elected
Allen Stroud (from 15:30)	Design, Media & Management	Elected

Name	Faculty / Directorate	Category of membership
Richard Jones	Design, Media & Management	Elected
Connor Baker	Students' Union	Elected

Apologies

Name	Faculty / Directorate	Category of membership
Alison Chambers	Society & Health	Ex Officio
Lauren Griffiths	Society & Health	Ex Officio
Ruth Clemow	Society & Health	Ex Officio
Jo Rixon	Society & Health	Elected
Sue Axe	Society & Health	Elected
Linsey Taylor	Design, Media & Management	Elected
Matt Gilbert	Students' Union	Elected

Absent

Name	Faculty / Directorate	Category of membership
None		

Welcome

14.43 The Chair welcomed all members to the meeting, including several new members. Seven apologies for absence were formally recorded.

Minutes of the previous meeting

14.44 The minutes of the meeting of 11 June 2014 were approved as an accurate record.

Status of actions from the previous meeting

14.45 Senate reviewed the action sheet and there was one item as follows:

a) Report on student recruitment to newly-validated courses (Paper SEN14.33)

Senate received the report. It was noted that this had been requested following concerns relating to the proximity of course approval to the end of the academic year and the subsequent impact on recruitment to those courses (Minute 14.35).

The Director of Academic Quality noted the frequency of part-time courses which had not recruited and queried whether the University should continue to recruit to part-time versions of full-time courses.

It was noted that several courses were part of the Professional Practice programme. This had an additional February intake and was likely to pick up additional students from students enrolled on stand-alone modules linked to courses.

Senate did not establish a clear correlation between late validation and under-recruitment, but did note that new titles found it harder to recruit and needed to be planned earlier in the cycle.

It was agreed that the Pro Vice Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) would review the list with the Director of Marketing to ensure that recruitment patterns were fully understood.

Action: Pro Vice Chancellor Learning and Teaching

14.46 There were no further matters arising

Chair's Actions taken since the previous meeting

14.47 Senate reviewed the Chair's Actions taken and formally endorsed the decisions taken in each case.

Senate Terms of Reference

14.48 The Senate terms of reference and revised membership were available for note.

14.49 Senate noted the election of the following Senate member to serve on University Council to 31 July 2016:

- Lauren Griffiths (Society & Health)

Vice Chancellor's Report to Senate (SEN14.34)

14.50 The report was noted. Attention was drawn to the following:

- a) The removal of the student number control by HEFCE and the consequent increased focus on quality where there has been a rapid expansion or decline of a provider's student numbers: where this had not been properly planned it could negatively impact on the student experience.
- b) HEFCE's business plan and focus on the definition of 'teaching excellence' and metrics as to how this can be calculated. However, this is complex and challenging, and has led to other proxy measures e.g. contact time. It was important that Bucks is able to define how it understands excellence in teaching.
- c) Ongoing consultation on the possible procurement of a new quality assurance system for UK HE from 2016-2017 onwards which may result in a radically different approach.

14.51 The Pro Vice Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) was invited to brief Senate on the outcomes of the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise following the disclosure of results to the University under embargo on 16 December 2014.

It was noted that Bucks had submitted in four units of assessment, submitting fewer staff than to the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE2008), and achieving the following overall percentage profiles for 3* (Internationally Excellent) and 4* (World Leading) research as follows:

Unit of assessment	FTE	3* (%)	4* (%)
Allied Health & Nursing	7.1	26	2
Art & Design	9.6	42	14
Business and Management	2.33	33	8
Sport	5	14	0

It was noted that Impact was also highly rated with both national and international recognition and that this was an upward trajectory for the University which would support a future bid for research degree awarding powers (RDAP). It was hoped that the results might lead to some modest research funding for Bucks, with a further announcement anticipated in the spring of 2015.

Senate welcomed the results and congratulated those involved. Results would be published nationally on 18 December 2014 and would be formally embargoed until that point. An announcement would be circulated to the University via Digest once the embargo had been lifted.

Strategic University Review & Evaluation (SURE) Reports 2013-2014 (Paper SEN14.35)

- 14.52 The Chair outlined that it was a role of Senate to form an opinion annually as to whether academic standards had been maintained within the University. This was undertaken using evidence compiled during the SURE process. It was noted that the judgement included both taught degree programmes, using evidence compiled by QEC, and research degree programmes, following consideration of evidence by RDC.
- 14.53 The Pro Vice Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) outlined the process undertaken with respect to taught degree programmes. QEC had convened a specific meeting to review a number of reports prepared by both Faculties, and the Learning & Teaching, Student Services and Academic Quality Directorates. QEC reviewers had been assigned to audit individual reports to consider how items had been identified and addressed. It was noted that this was the second year of the exercise in its current format. Writing had improved with tighter reports prepared and greater scrutiny of the evidence base. Reviewers were able to undertake objective analysis with greater critique. This had led to a series of recommendations from QEC (see paper and Minute 14.58 below).
- 14.54 Senate considered the institutional report compiled on External Examiners. It was noted that this had focused on embedding processes. The following issues were identified:
- Timeliness of appointment remained an issue for Faculties
 - External attendance at Boards had shown improvement with 83% attendance noted
 - Publication of external examiner reports (with responses) on Programme Committee Blackboard shells in accordance with the UK Quality Code Indicator of sound practice
 - Further embedding of responses in annual reports to close the feedback loop to external examiners
 - Some confusion over the process for approving responses before return to external examiners
 - Overall RAG ratings for reports similar to previous years. Only 5 Amber reports and 2 Red. There is a need to look at Faculty support for external examiners as this has been a prevalent issue
 - Overall external examiners support the view that the University is meeting academic standards and is comparable to the sector.

The report also included an audit of University staff with current external examiner positions at other HEIs. There is a need to update figures although these are broadly accurate and show an 11% take-up by staff which was considered low. This would be taken forward as part of the preparation for applying for research degree awarding powers (RDAP) in due course.

- 14.55 Senate was updated on the two Red reports in DMM. The first was considered to be an isolated incident which had been dealt with. The second report related to Musical Theatre provision at Amersham & Wycombe College which had previously been

considered by Senate and QEC (see Minute 14.05). This was linked to other Amber reports at the College and other partner providers. It was noted that Musical Theatre provision had been successfully revalidated and the appointment of an additional tutor would follow in due course with assurances received to that effect. QEC would review all Red and Amber reports at its meeting in February 2015 and any causes for concern would come to Senate for its meeting in March. It was also agreed that external examiner reports at partner providers would be factored in to the review of the partnership strategy being undertaken by the Pro Vice Chancellor (Society & Health).

Action: Pro Vice Chancellor Society & Health

14.56 Senate considered the Achievement Reports prepared by both Faculties and by AQD:

a) DMM Achievement Report

The following issues were noted:

- Overall improvement in degree classifications and employment rates (latter now 92%)
- Department Action Plans drawn up to address issues identified during the National Student Survey
- A peer review process to consider reports had operated within the Faculty and had worked well

It was noted that the SURE process as a whole had generally worked well, but attention was drawn to the need to improve the availability of data as the current position was not optimal. A need was identified for the newly-formed Information Hub to generate timely data for consideration as part of SURE.

b) S&H Achievement Report

The following issues were noted:

- Progression data equal to or better than those in previous years. Also improvements in postgraduate achievement
- Varying picture regarding employability. Some work in progress in the Social Sciences area
- Improved uptake in the NSS with plans in place to build on this in the next round
- All External Examiner Annual Reports were rated as Green, although some reports had been delayed

Overall, it was noted that there was a need for the Faculty to review the number of reports prepared for SURE. Similarly to DMM, the provision of timely and consistent data remains an issue.

c) AQD Achievement Report

This was the outcome of a number of reports from underlying areas, available via the QEC Blackboard shell. 64 actions were identified across all reports, 38 complete with some continuing into 2014-2015. Key points were as follows:

- Better categorisation of the progress against actions put in place in the previous year to indicate, for example, whether expected progress by year end has been achieved for actions due to take place over several years.

- Closer working with the Learning & Teaching Directorate e.g. academic appeals, conduct, curriculum development and staff development issues
- Concern over the numbers of Chair's Actions at Assessment Boards, particularly in S&H where there had been an increase this year (to be explored)
- Review of external examiner workload to be undertaken following the increase in the number of partner providers and franchising of courses
- The need to mitigate risk in respect of partners overall.

14.57 In respect of research degree provision, Senate considered the report prepared for RDC. The following issues were noted:

- Higher recruitment, in large part due to enrolments on the Professional Doctorate programme
- Full-time provision remains low although the new bursaries agreed through the Big Deal on Course should help this
- All students were reviewed individually and RDC had confirmed the thoroughness of the exercise
- Feedback from students through an internal PRES had shown substantial improvement in a number of areas
- This year saw the introduction of a PhD admissions panel to conduct initial scrutiny of applications. This had the additional benefit of identifying possibilities for cross-Faculty supervision
- There was a challenge to identify research supervisors. This had been exacerbated following recent staff departures
- Pastoral Faculty Research Student Tutors had been reintroduced and had been welcomed

Overall, the report supported continued confidence in quality and standards of research degree provision at Bucks.

Senate queried the criteria for research supervision. It was noted that this had recently been reviewed and related to research outputs and staff development activities, currently set at the threshold of sector expectations. In terms of RDAP it was important for the University to demonstrate that supervisors were actively contributing to original knowledge. A paper would be presented to SMT in January in respect of RDAP requirements.

14.58 Senate noted the recommendations arising from the overview prepared by QEC and allocated responsibilities as follows:

Action	Responsibility
1. Clarify processes for responding to external examiner reports and ensure that an expectation of faculty checking is built into this. Consider providing staff development in this area.	Deans of Faculties
2. Improve data use and availability and include equality monitoring in this. This to include academic partners.	Chair to liaise with Steve Dewhurst
3. Close loop of lessons learned from academic appeals and academic misconduct analysis into Learning & Teaching development and curriculum design	AQD / LTD

Action	Responsibility
4. Bring together staff development activities from across the University into a linked and strategically focused plan. This to include development opportunities provided by AQD, HR and L&T.	Chair of QEC
5. Review investment in partnership tutors with a view to protecting the Bucks risk and making the University into a better partner. Explore the introduction of an 'über' partnership tutor in each faculty with an overview of plans and expectations across partners. Include partner colleagues in appropriate development opportunities	Alison Chambers as part of review of Partnership Strategy
6. Make the language of action plans 'SMART'; currently they are often aims rather than actions.	AQD / LTD / Faculties
7. The Library Services report to be developed into a contextualised strategic plan in next year's cycle with reference to stakeholder expectations.	Shân Wareing
8. Ensure that any missing reports or reports that require amendments are brought to the February meeting [of QEC] to close the reporting loop.	AQD
14.59 The Pro Vice Chancellor (Design, Media & Management) noted that, in her position as a new member of staff at the University and a new member of Senate, and in comparison to other HEIs with which she was familiar, the University had a very thorough and well-exercised set of processes for quality assurance.	
14.60 Following detailed consideration of the evidence and discussion, recommendation from QEC and RDC, as well as endorsement from individual members as noted, Senate <u>agreed</u> that academic standards had been maintained by the University for the academic year 2013-2014. The Chair would report this formally to Council.	

Activities Week (Paper SEN14.45)

- 14.61 The paper was noted. The Chair explained that Senate was not being asked to reach a conclusion at the meeting, but she was looking to get a broad view to inform actions going forward and any subsequent decision. The University was seeing low take-up of the opportunities available during Activities Week and there was a question as to whether continued expenditure represented good value for money.
- 14.62 Senate engaged in a wide-ranging discussion about Activities Week. The following themes / issues emerged:
- An increase in demand on the counselling services during weeks 6 and 7 and the need for some form of break in week 8 given the levels of stress among some students
 - The need for any such week to be voluntary, especially given the lack of a formal attendance requirement more generally
 - Higher rates of staff sickness during term 1 and the consideration of the impact on resourcing
 - 'Wycombe-centric' activities in the current Activities Week programme
 - The need to cater for different courses and the activities should be part of a planned programme at course level: learning should be targeted around a course team with University services supporting them

- Students have ‘voted with their feet’ and want a break; Nursing courses, for example, would prefer a structured “reading week”.
- Year-long activities programme vs an activities ‘week’. More complementary activities. A year long programme could contain a menu of activities which could be built into the course where appropriate.
- Lack of any clear, specific student priority on how the week should be spent
- The need to differentiate between ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’ activities and the contrast with the Enterprise Festival activities which are well received
- Consideration of the University’s employability agenda and the natural flow of the academic year
- Consideration about the nature of guided learning and its definition
- Issues of staff engagement with activities week
- Communication issues, especially with regard to academic activities during the week and the impact of communication of students’ expectations of what the Week is about
- Benefits of an opportunity for interdisciplinary activities to take place at a set time
- Opportunity for students to experiment outside their course
- The distinction between ‘Activities’ and ‘Week’

14.63 There was general agreement that, in its current configuration, Activities Week was not as successful as had been expected. Although there was a strong call for more course specific activities at times to suit the specific course, the Chair reminded members that this had been tried, unsuccessfully, during 2012-2013. There was also a strong focus on developing students’ employability and the development of a year-long employability programme with different strands of events/activities which students and courses could buy into. Even if it were agreed, it was noted that there would be resource implications to consider such an approach and this was unlikely to be in place until 2016-2017. It was accepted that there were communication issues with advertising Activities Week to students; however, there was an undercurrent of negative communication where some students had been given the impression from staff that taking the week off and going home was acceptable.

14.64 Further discussion noted the need to establish a clear definition of ‘guided learning’ and the need to establish more clearly what students themselves would prefer. Finally, to take seriously the notion of a complementary curriculum, a funded year-long approach should be investigated.

14.65 Senate noted the need to commission more work in this area to collate student feedback through focus groups and discussion (rather than questionnaires); this should include part-time students. Work is ongoing through the Learning and Teaching Directorate to address some aspects of guided learning. It was agreed that the Pro Vice Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) would conduct research with students into their preference for use of scheduled time. Further discussion would also be undertaken into the possibility of an enhanced employability programme. A formal proposal would be brought to Senate in March 2015; a decision would also be reached on specific action for 2015-2016. In the meantime the February 2015 Activities Week would proceed as planned with an encouragement to students and staff to engage as much as possible.

Action: Pro Vice Chancellor (Learning and Teaching)

Learning and Teaching Strategy (Technology Enhanced Learning) (Paper SEN14.36)

- 14.66 Senate was asked to approve amendments to the Learning and Teaching Strategy: first to align the strategy to the UK Professional Standards Framework; second to incorporate the Technology Enhanced Learning Strategy. Amendments had been recommended by the Learning and Teaching Committee.
- 14.67 It was confirmed that technology enhancements also applied to Missenden Abbey where postgraduate students were taught. It was noted that improvements were already planned for the Abbey.
- 14.68 The amendments were approved.

Academic Appeals Procedure (Paper SEN14.37)

- 14.69 Senate was asked to approve major amendments to the Academic Appeals Procedure following recommendation by QEC.
- 14.70 It was noted that amendments had been made in response to an appeal which had been considered by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) and in light of their recommendation.
- 14.71 It was further noted that additional changes would be required in due course following the publication of the OIA Good Practice Framework. These would be considered by the committee structure in due course.
- 14.72 The amendments were approved.

External Examiner Update (Paper SEN14.38)

- 14.73 The report was noted. Senate endorsed the Chair's Actions indicated in the paper to approve new nominations or make changes to existing remits as necessary.
- 14.74 Senate was also asked to approve the termination of Alan Wood, the external examiner for Pre-Registration Nursing, for non-fulfilment of examiner duties, vis-à-vis non-submission of the external examiner annual report. The request was endorsed by the Faculty. Senate approved the termination.
- 14.75 Senate reviewed the report on external coverage and noted in particular the six examinerships outstanding from October 2014. Academic Deans were actioned to resolve this as soon as possible.

Action: Sue West / Lorraine Watkins-Mathys

- 14.76 Members noted the difficulty appointing external examiners and requested more support for the appointment for external examiners following the decision to cancel the University's subscription to FindExaminers.com (see QEC14.78). The Chair emphasised that external examiners were required by the University and course teams should tap into existing resources. Members were reminded that the University subscribed to the external examiners JISCmail list and members could submit an advert via AQD. GuildHE and the various Mission Groups could also be used to make colleagues in other institutions aware of vacancies.

Validation: Recommendation of awards for approval (Paper SEN14.39)

- 14.77 The report was noted. Senate endorsed the QEC Validation Sub-group Panel's recommendation as indicated in the report. It was noted that conditions for the FDS Air Transport Management with Commercial Pilot Training programme had been met with effect from 16 December 2014.
- 14.78 Senate separately approved those courses where the recommendation was to 'approve' or 'approve with conditions' where conditions had been met as follows:

- BA (Hons) Organisation Capability Development (PT, FDL)
- FDS Sc Air Transport Management with Commercial Pilot Training (with new partner 'Flying Time) (PT, FDL)

14.79 Courses listed where conditions had yet to be met would be approved by subsequent Chair's Action.

Quality and Enhancement Committee (Paper SEN14.40)

14.80 The Executive Summary from the QEC meeting of 12 November 2014 was received.

Student Experience Committee (Paper SEN14.41)

14.81 The Executive Summary from the SEC meeting of 29 October 2014 was received.

University Research Committee (Paper SEN14.42)

14.82 The Executive Summary from the URC meeting of 21 November 2014 was received.

Equality and Diversity Committee (Paper SEN14.43)

14.83 The Executive Summary from the EDC meeting of 7 October 2014 was received.

Learning and Teaching Committee (Paper SEN14.44)

14.84 The Executive Summary from the LTC meeting of 15 October 2014 was received.

Any Other Business

14.85 There were two items of business not noted on the agenda:

- a) The Chair noted that Professor John Boylan would be leaving the University to take up a professorial appointment at the University of Lancaster. Professor Boylan had been at the University for 25 years. During that time he has chaired both QEC and in particular RDC, and had been a member of Senate for many years. Senate recorded its thanks to Professor Boylan for his tireless work on its behalf and that of the University and wished him success in his new appointment.
- b) The Deputy Vice Chancellor noted that the Vice Chancellor and Chair of Senate, Professor Ruth Farwell, would be retiring from the University at the end of January 2015 and that this was consequently Professor Farwell's 37th and final Senate meeting. It was noted that there would be formal opportunities to bid farewell in January but Senate members recorded their thanks and best wishes to Professor Farwell on her retirement.

Date of next meeting

14.86 The next meeting of Senate would take place on Wednesday 18 March 2015 at 1.30pm in G5.05, High Wycombe campus.