

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

SENATE

21st March 2018

MINUTES

Present: Professor Sir David Eastwood (Vice-Chancellor and Principal, in the Chair); Professor K Armour (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)); Professor J Arthur (Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Staffing); Dr David Bailey; Ms R Bennett; Professor C Bunce; Mr C Collins; Dr S Conner; Professor John Curnow; Dr A Davies; Professor J Green (Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)); Professor A Ginger; Mr A Goldstone; Professor A Guariglia; Professor D Hannah; Dr L Jeffery; Professor T Jones (Provost and Vice-Principal); Professor P Kearns; Professor P Kraftl; Dr T Lockwood; Professor F Lough; Professor P Lumley; Ms N Ma; Professor M Mahlberg; Professor I Mandel; Professor J Martin; Dr D Moran; Ms Piangfan Naksukpaiboon; Professor C Needham; Professor Z Pikramenou; Professor J Pritchard; Professor J Rowe; Professor K Rowlingson; Professor G Schaffer (Director of Postgraduate Studies); Professor A Schofield (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor D Shepherd; Professor M Simmons; Professor T Softley (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research)); Professor M Sterling; Dr G Timmins; Professor M Whitby (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College) and Professor N Wilkin.

Also present: Ms C Gilbert (Director of External Relations) (for Minute 18/04); Mr S McAuliffe (Academic Registrar); Ms C McDonough (Assistant Secretary); Mr L Sanders (Registrar and Secretary); Mr N Sidney (Governance Officer).

Apologies: Professor D Adams (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Dr D Fuller; Professor M Hannon; Professor U Martin; Professor R Mason (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International)); Professor H Mehanna; Professor P Moss; Professor M Nimmo (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor G Watson (Interim Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College).

Absent: Dr R Brandstaetter; Professor J Duberley; Dr J Gilson (Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience)); Dr K Voelz; Dr H Yusuf.

Papers: The minute book contains copies of all written papers or reports to which reference is made below unless indicated otherwise.

18/01 Minutes of previous meeting

**Resolved:** that the minutes of the meeting held on 8th November 2017 be approved (SEN.18.03.01).

18/02 Matters Arising from the minutes not addressed elsewhere on the agenda

**Reported:** that there were no matters arising.

18/03 Vice-Chancellor's Items

**Noted:** a report from the Vice-Chancellor (SEN.18.03.02).

18/04 Recruitment and Admissions Update

**COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE**

**Considered:** the report on the position regarding the number of applications received and the number of offers made for undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research (SEN.18.03.03).

**Reported** that:

- (a) to (g) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**
- (h) future reports to Senate would include recruitment and admissions numbers in relation to the Dubai Campus.

18/05 Education Update

**Considered:** the education update from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) (SEN.18.03.04).

**Reported** that:

- (a) the University had completed the first stage of its involvement in the TEF subject pilot and had returned its twenty submissions to HEFCE on 28th February 2018. The University would be notified of the outcome in June 2018, noting that the results would be confidential and would not be published;
- (b) as previously reported to Senate, the University was reviewing the structure of its academic teaching year in order to achieve its internal ambitions and in recognition of the changing external context for higher education, and with the intention to deliver benefits for both students and staff. A revised structure would be proposed to Senate in June 2018 following wider consultation, including talks within Schools and 'town hall' style meetings;
- (c) there had been a significant shift in the use of Panopto, with almost 70% of lectures having been recorded during the academic year to date, compared to 45% of lectures over the first four weeks of term 1 in 2016-17. The University had achieved 775,403 views of lecture capture recordings for 2017-18 (300,256 more viewings than the same time in the previous year) and an increase of 73% in hours viewed from 2016-17 to 2017-18. This was positively received by the Guild of Students.

18/06 Student Protection Plan

**Considered:** the Student Protection Plan ahead of its submission for approval by Council on 24th April 2018 and prior to submission to the Office for Students (SEN.18.03.05).

**Reported** that:

- (a) in line with all higher education institutions, the University was required to produce a Student Protection Plan (SPP) as a condition of its registration with the Office for Students (OfS). This would outline how the University would deal with events which could prevent a student from successfully completing their studies - for example, closing a course;
- (b) complete institutional failure of the University of Birmingham was vanishingly small, so the SPP focused on aspects that had a higher (though still relatively minor) risk of occurring, such as a course closure, where the University's preferred approach and practice was to teach out. It therefore considered course closures and changes, and also the enhanced risks attached to the University's provision outside the City of Birmingham;
- (c) the University already had policies that it used to address issues such as course closure resulting from the restructuring of a School, so the SPP should be seen in that context and would only be triggered after the normal consideration and consultation of change through the University's agreements (for example, with the Guild or the University's Quality Code);
- (d) HEFCE had provided the higher education sector with a template and had advised that plans should focus on aspects most relevant to each institution, and that they should be proportionate to the institution's own assessment of risks of different events occurring.

The draft SPP used this example as a broad base but had been altered on the basis of student and Guild feedback to ensure that the document was written in student friendly language. UEB had approved this version of the document on 26th February 2018, and Strategy, Planning and Resources Committee had approved the plan on 8th March 2018;

- (e) further guidance was issued by the OfS on 28th February 2018 which included new requirements. Some of the changes have been incorporated into the draft SPP at Appendix 1 to Paper SEN.18.03.05 but further work was required on it, including a section on refunds and compensation. This would be included in the version of the SPP which was submitted to Council on 24th April 2018;
- (f) the final plan would be hosted on a website for easy access by students and linkage to other policies.

**Resolved:** that the SPP be approved for recommendation to Council on 24th April 2018, with some minor amendments suggested in relation to the following points:

- (i) reviewing Figure 1 of the Plan, and the list of programmes not covered by the SPP (as set out in Appendix 1 of the Plan), in order to ensure consistency in the methodology used and clarity for students;
- (ii) Section 2.6 of the Plan to refer to reasonable adjustment requirements;
- (iii) Section 4 of the Plan to add reference to the option for students to access independent support from the Guild of Students when making complaints;
- (iv) the inclusion of a reference relating to the management of quality assurance in respect of teach out courses.

18/07 Grade Point Average (GPA)

**Considered:** recommendations in relation to the implementation of GPA (SEN.18.03.06).

**Reported** that:

- (a) there had been an ongoing debate in higher education in recent years regarding a move to a GPA system of degree award;
- (b) following the development of a UK GPA scale (two decimal places up to 4.25) the University had taken part in a National GPA Pilot from 2013-15, alongside several other Russell Group institutions;
- (c) the recommendations from the National GPA Pilot report had been accepted in principle by Senate on 23rd March 2016. Senate had also resolved on 23rd March 2016 that a GPA score (to two decimal places) be introduced for students graduating in July 2018, alongside their degree classification, noting that an internal pilot of the new GPA system in Summer 2017 would inform the arrangements for this;
- (d) as a result of the 2017 pilot, it was recommended that undergraduate students graduating from July 2018 onwards continue to receive their degree classification, with additional information on GPA alongside as follows:
  - (i) final GPA scores (based on a 4.25 scale) being derived for all students as a direct translation of their mean average degree mark which would be calculated without normalization or grading;
  - (ii) students in the top 10% of each cohort being awarded a *Cum Laude* epithet to their degree;
  - (iii) the GPA and *Cum Laude* being provided in a supplementary 'GPA Certificate' document;
  - (iv) mean average degree marks being included on students' main transcripts;
  - (v) further developments being undertaken to provide end-of-year GPA to all students based on their mean average marks per year;
- (e) the merits of the recommendation were recognised by some members of Senate as follows:
  - (i) the benefits for employers, noting that those who had been represented on the national pilot had been extremely supportive of the implementation of the GPA system;

- (ii) recognising that GPA would not replace the degree classification, which would continue to appear on certificates and transcripts. Rather, GPA was a further enhancement of existing practice which would provide increased granularity for both students and employers;
- (iii) that Senate, including the student members, had previously expressed its support for and approved the implementation of the GPA system, as noted in (c) above;
- (iv) that the GPA system was a fairer, more transparent and consistent method of grading, noting in particular that it would enable the University to recognise its most excellent student performances by the use of the 'Cum Laude' epithet;
- (v) the benefits for international mobility and the currency of GPA across the world;

(f) some members of Senate, including student members, expressed the following concerns:

- (i) that the University might be subject to additional peer scrutiny as the first Russell Group institution to adopt GPA;
- (ii) that not consulting with all existing students on the routine inclusion of GPA on supplementary transcripts risked a negative response;
- (iii) concern as to whether applicants and students had been notified of the introduction of GPA, and how this related to Competition and Markets Authority guidance;
- (iv) the potentially negative impact on student employability, noting:
  - (a) that there was a risk of students who had achieved an upper second (a common graduate scheme entry-hurdle) being rejected owing to a perceived lower GPA;
  - (b) the concern that not all employers were aware of the plans for and benefits of implementation of GPA and that this might therefore put the University's students at a disadvantage;
- (v) that it was short notice to introduce GPA for students from July 2018 and that not all students were aware of the plans. It was recognised that this had been agreed by Senate in March 2016, but it was not clear what students had been advised by the University in relation to this decision. It was suggested that the new arrangements should only be applied to students entering the University in September 2018 (rather than changing the arrangements for existing cohorts);
- (vi) the importance of monitoring the effectiveness of the Cum Laude system to ensure that it did recognise the most excellent student performances. It was suggested that the recommendation should be re-phrased as being on the basis of 'up to 10%' to give the University flexibility in this regard;

(g) in view of the concerns expressed at the meeting, it was suggested that students graduating in July 2018 should be offered the option of opting into a GPA score. The University could then review its approach to GPA in light of its experience of the July 2018 graduating cohort and report back to Senate on its findings. This would also allow time for further student consultation and re-engagement with the Guild of Students on this issue.

**Resolved** that:

- (i) the recommendations for GPA at (d) above would be trialled on an opt-in basis for undergraduate students graduating in July 2018, noting that students would be invited to opt in after they had received their results;
- (ii) the Academic Registrar would clarify what applicants and students had been advised by the University in relation to GPA, and on how this related to Competition and Markets Authority guidance, and would take account of this when communicating with the July 2018 graduating cohort about the opt in arrangements;
- (iii) the approach to GPA would be reviewed in light of the experience of the July 2018 graduating cohort (including the effectiveness of the Cum Laude system) and the findings reported to a future meeting of Senate. This would also allow time for further student consultation and re-engagement with the Guild of Students on this issue.

18/08 Research Performance Update

***COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE***

**Considered**: the research grants performance information for the six month period from 1st August 2017 to 31st January 2018 (SEN.18.03.07).

**Reported** that:

(a) to (f) ***[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]***

18/09 Research Centres and the Interdisciplinary Environment

**Considered**: recommendations in relation to a new structure for University Research Institutes and Centres (SEN.18.03.08).

**Reported**:

- (a) that a key priority was to strengthen the interdisciplinary research culture of the University;
- (b) that as part of this work, a four-tier structure was proposed in which Research Institutes and Centres (existing or new) would be categorized as one of the following:
  - (i) University Interdisciplinary Research Institute;
  - (ii) University Strategic Research Centre;
  - (iii) College-Recognised Research Centre;
  - (iv) Nationally-Funded Research Centre;
- (c) that approval of the new structure would necessitate revision of Ordinance 2.3, University Research Institutes, and Ordinance 3.13, Directors of University Research Institutes, which required approval by Council. The proposed changes to the Ordinances would be brought to Senate in June 2018;
- (d) that six new posts were being introduced specifically to provide dedicated support for the set-up of research grants and to ensure improved liaison between academics, Finance, and Human Resources, in supporting School/College grant set-up issues;
- (e) that the ongoing contribution and value of the University's Research Institutes and Centres would be assessed through periodic reporting and review;
- (f) the importance of placing greater emphasis on the research impact and public engagement activities of the University Research Institutes and Centres.

**Resolved**: that the new structure for University Research Institutes and Centres be approved, as set out in Paper SEN.18.03.08.

18/10 Amendment of Charter and Statutes

**Considered**: the amendment of the Charter and Statutes of the University (SEN.18.03.09).

**Reported** that:

- (a) the University was seeking approval to amend its Charter and Statutes as follows:
  - (i) To dissolve the Court of the University to give effect to the decision of Council following the review of Court;
  - (ii) To revise three of the definitions in Section 1 of the Statutes;
  - (iii) To allow for removal of the Vice-Chancellor and Principal from the membership of the Remuneration Committee, in anticipation of the new CUC Remuneration Code;
  - (iv) To allow for the delegation by Council of authority to sell, buy, exchange, lease or take leases of the University's real and leasehold estates;

- (b) Court on 8th March 2018 had considered the amendment of the Charter and Statutes of the University and expressed its unanimous support for the amendment, including the dissolution of Court;
- (c) Council on 24th April 2018 would consider the comments of Court and Senate on the amendment of the Charter and Statutes and consider the passing of a Special Resolution of the Council to amend the Charter and an Ordinary Resolution of the Council to amend the Statutes;
- (d) following the passing of the Special and Ordinary Resolutions, the University would seek approval of the amendments to the Charter and Statutes from the Privy Council. The amendments would take effect from the date that the Order was approved by the Privy Council (expected to be June/July 2018);
- (e) a member of Senate enquired regarding the proposed amendment of the Statutes in relation to land transactions. Senate noted that removal of the current restriction on the delegation of the power of Council in relation to the sale, purchase, exchange, or leasing of the University's real and leasehold estates would streamline processes and enable the University to proceed with such transactions, which had become more common, in a more timely manner. Delegations would be set out in the Scheme of Delegated Powers of Council;
- (f) a member of Senate sought further information on the proposed future operation of the Remuneration Committee in light of the change to its membership, especially how Remuneration Committee would take informed decisions on Professional and Grade 10 senior staff pay without the Vice-Chancellor as a member of the Committee. Senate was assured that Council recognised this issue and had resolved that the Vice-Chancellor and Principal would attend meetings of the Committee to advise on the remuneration of Professional and Grade 10 senior staff. He would continue to withdraw from meetings when his own remuneration was discussed.

**Resolved:** that Senate confirmed its support for the amendment of the Charter and Statutes of the University as set out in Paper SEN.18.03.09, noting that these comments would be considered by Council on 24th April 2018.

18/11 Senior Appointments

**Considered:** the re-appointment of the Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (China), Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Equalities) and the Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Staffing) (SEN.18.03.10).

**Reported:** that Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellors were appointed by Council on the nomination of the Vice-Chancellor, having consulted with the Senate.

**Resolved:** that Senate confirmed its support for the re-appointment of the Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellors as set out in Paper SEN.18.03.10.

18/12 Report to Senate on the work of Council-approved Panels during 2017

**Noted:** the report to Senate on the work of Council-approved Panels during 2017 (SEN.18.03.11).

18/13 Reports from Heads of College

**Noted:** the report from the Heads of College regarding recent developments (SEN.18.03.12).

18/14 Report from the Nominations Committee

**Noted:** a report from the Nominations Committee held on 20th February 2018 (SEN.18.03.13).

**Resolved:** that the recommendations for the award of honorary degrees be approved as set out in Paper SEN.18.03.13.

18/15 Report from the Research Committee

**Noted:** a report from the meetings of the Research Committee held on 14th November 2017 and 23rd January 2018 (SEN.18.03.14).

18/16 Report from the University Education Committee

**Noted:** a report from the meetings of the University Education Committee held on 22nd November 2017 and 25th January 2018 (SEN.18.03.15).

18/17 Programme of Meetings 2017/18

**Noted:** the programme of meetings of Senate:

2017/18

Wednesday 13th June 2018 at 2.00pm

2018/19

Wednesday 7th November 2018 at 2.00pm

Wednesday 20th March 2019 at 2.00pm

Wednesday 12th June 2019 at 2.00pm