

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

SENATE

13th June 2018

MINUTES

Present: Professor Sir David Eastwood (Vice-Chancellor and Principal, in the Chair); Professor K Armour (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)); Ms R Bennett; Professor R Black (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor C Bunce; Mr C Collins; Dr S Conner; Dr A Davies; Professor J Duberley; Dr J Gilson (Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience)); Professor A Ginger; Professor J Green (Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)); Mr A Goldstone; Professor A Guariglia; Professor D Hannah; Professor M Hannon; Dr L Jeffery; Professor T Jones (Provost and Vice-Principal); Professor P Kraftl; Dr T Lockwood; Professor P Lumley; Ms N Ma; Professor M Mahlberg; Professor I Mandel; Professor R Mason (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International)); Professor U Martin; Dr D Moran; Ms P Naksukpaiboon; Professor C Needham; Professor M Nimmo (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); 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 M Simmons; Professor M Sterling; Dr G Timmins; Professor M Whitby (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); and Dr H Yusuf.

Also present: Dr A Rae (Deputy Director of External Relations) (for Minute 18/21); Mr S McAuliffe (Academic Registrar); Mr L Sanders (Registrar and Secretary); Mr N Sidney (Governance Officer).

Apologies: Professor D Adams (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor J Arthur (Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Staffing)); Dr D Bailey; Professor J Curnow; Professor T Softley (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research)); Professor P Kearns; Professor J Martin; Professor H Mehanna; Professor P Moss; Professor Z Pikramenou; Professor D Shepherd; Professor N Wilkin.

Absent: Dr R Brandstaetter; Professor F Lough; Dr K Voelz.

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

18/18 Minutes of previous meeting

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 21st March 2018 be approved (SEN.18.06.01).

18/19 Matters Arising from the minutes not addressed elsewhere on the agenda

Reported: that there were no matters arising.

18/20 Vice-Chancellor's Items

Noted: a report from the Vice-Chancellor (SEN.18.06.02).

18/21 Recruitment and Admissions Update

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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.18.06.03).

Reported that:

- (a) to (j) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**
- (k) the University was well-placed overall in terms of its preparation for admissions, and that additional investment in staffing posts, including within the College of Social Sciences, and the Birmingham Business School, had meant that the University's staff-student ratio had reduced from 15:1 to 14:1, making it one of the more generous ratios among the Russell Group.

18/22 Education Update

Considered: the education update from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) (SEN.18.06.04).

Reported that:

- (a) the University had been notified of the outcome of its involvement in the TEF subject pilot assessment;
- (b) the Higher Education Futures institute (HEFi) had achieved all the objectives that it had set for its first academic year, and the inaugural HEFi Conference on 29th June 2018 was fully subscribed, with 350 registrations;
- (c) all University students and staff would have access to their own licence for PebblePad, the University's new online portfolio building tool, from 29th June 2018. To support the initial use of PebblePad, a portfolio-based personal academic tutoring resource had been produced, a series of staff communications were being issued and workshops for training staff had been arranged;
- (d) the use of Canvas and Panopto across the University continued to increase, with the number of assignments created in Canvas increasing by 19%, the use of discussion forums increasing by 21%, and the online submission of work increasing by 12% in the last 12 months. Panopto student views in 2017/18 for semester one and semester two increased by 76% and 61% respectively compared to 2016/17, and there had also been a significant increase of 44% in the number of Panopto sessions recorded for 2017/18 compared to 2016/17;
- (e) the first phase of the timetabling project was in progression, and consisted of a data gathering exercise in order to improve and enhance existing processes and inform the approach to modelling;
- (f) a report on access and participation would be submitted to Senate during the 2018/19 academic year, following consideration by University Education Committee.

18/23 Grade Point Average (GPA)

Considered: an update on the progress of the implementation of GPA (SEN.18.06.05).

Reported that:

- (a) in March 2016 Senate approved the introduction of a GPA score (to two decimal places) for students graduating in July 2018, in addition to the standard system for determining degree classification, which would be maintained and run in addition to GPA;
- (b) in March 2018, following successful completion of a technical pilot, Senate approved that a GPA and *Cum Laude* certificate would be made available to the graduating cohort of July 2018 as a trial on an opt-in basis;
- (c) consequent to the Senate decision of March 2018 to move forward with the trial, discussions between UEB and the Guild in April 2018 concluded that the trial implementation of GPA and *Cum Laude* could be deferred until the summer of 2019 to allow for greater communication and guidance to students about the benefits of the

award, and the process for opting into the trial. This deferral would include the proposal to include mean average degree marks on students' main transcripts;

(d) progress on the trial, and the engagement with students on the implementation of GPA, would be reported to Senate during the 2018/19 academic year.

Resolved: that the implementation of GPA and *Cum Laude* on an opt-in basis be deferred from July 2018 to July 2019 to allow for greater student engagement.

18/24 Changes to Rebalance the Academic Teaching Year

Considered: a report on the proposed new structure for the academic teaching year from 2020-21 and proposed academic semester dates for the period 2020-21 to 2022-23 (SEN.18.06.06).

Reported that:

(a) following review by external consultants and engagement with staff and students, it was proposed that the University modernise the structure of its academic teaching year;

(b) the major changes were:

- (i) the introduction of a formal assessment period at the end of Semester One such that semesters could be self-contained;
- (ii) increased time for assessment support;
- (iii) the introduction of an off-timetable 'enrichment week' for students;
- (iv) a recognition of the work undertaken already by staff in the 'summer period';

(c) Semester One of the proposed structure was eleven teaching weeks followed by a revision/assessment support week. After the Christmas student vacation there would be two weeks of assessment and a week of student enrichment activities. Semester Two would be eleven teaching weeks (within which would be the Easter student vacation) followed by two weeks of revision/assessment support and three weeks of assessment;

(d) the main benefits of the new structure were:

- (i) a more balanced teaching year for staff and students;
- (ii) new opportunities for students to gain additional skills;
- (iii) enhanced assessment support for both coursework and examinations;
- (iv) equitable treatment of students whether their summative module assessment was by coursework or examination;
- (v) the ability to offer shorter periods of mobility making mobility accessible to a wider range of students;
- (vi) a more flexible curriculum;
- (vii) the potential to offer new, innovative programmes including major-minor and interdisciplinary;

(e) the recommended change to the academic teaching year was to be viewed alongside a range of projects designed to modernise teaching infrastructure, including digital timetabling, the development of a digital module catalogue, and the upgrade to the student record system. Taken together, the changes would bring the University into closer alignment with other leading universities in the sector;

(f) consideration had been given to the timing of the implementation of the new structure in conjunction with the REF submission;

(g) a member of Senate enquired as to the impact of the proposed new structure on the balance of teaching and research activity for academic staff. Senate noted that external consultants had conducted an impact assessment of the new structure, including comparisons with other institutions, and consideration of the implications for implementation. This showed that universities with a stronger research performance than Birmingham had an academic teaching year similar to that being proposed for the University. A range of academic staff had been consulted on the proposals, including Directors of Research, Directors of Education and Heads of Education from across the Colleges. The proposals had been considered by UEB and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Knowledge Transfer) was supportive of the proposed new structure.

Resolved: that the new structure for the academic teaching year from 2020-21 and proposed academic semester dates for the period 2020-21 to 2022-23 be approved for recommendation to Council on 27th June 2018.

18/25 Quality Assurance

(1) UG/PGT Annual Review 2016/17

Considered: a report on the outcomes of the University-wide annual review processes pertaining to undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision in the academic year 2016/17 and the resulting School Education Plans for 2017/18 (SEN.18.06.07).

Reported that:

- (a) during summer 2017, the University's Annual Review process, which covered undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision, asked Schools to consider key quantitative and qualitative data for the 2016-17 academic year, and complete a School Education Plan (SEP) for the 2017-18 academic year;
- (b) following completion of the process within Schools, College Quality Assurance and Approval Committees, College Education Committees and College Boards considered the SEPs. The SEPs were then reviewed by the University Quality Assurance Committee (UQAC) and University Education Committee (UEC), which reported to UEB on the common themes arising from the SEPs and summarising actions underway;
- (c) key priorities from each College identified via the SEPs through the processes had been collated and disseminated in an annual summary report, which had been considered by relevant College and University Committees and would be reported to UEB.

(2) UG and PGT External Examiners Reports 2016/17

Considered: a summary of comments made by external examiners assigned to undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate programmes (PGT) for the academic session 2016/17 (SEN.18.06.08).

Reported that:

- (a) the vast majority of comments from UG and PGT External Examiners were positive and confirmed that academic standards were consistent with those across the sector;
- (b) following discussion at UQAC, the University summary reports, alongside College-specific summaries, were considered at College Quality Assurance Committees (or equivalent) to ensure actions to address any identified issues were taken forward and items of good practice were disseminated to School colleagues;
- (c) a working group, reporting to University Education Committee and subsequently UEB, had been considering degree classifications and would be undertaking further analysis during the 2018/19 academic year, taking into account the comments of external examiners alongside other indicators of academic standards, such as benchmarked statistical data.

(3) Report on Appeals, Complaints, and Grievances to Council and Complaints to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator

Considered: a paper on appeals, complaints and grievances to Council and submissions to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) in the academic session 2016/17 (SEN.18.06.09).

Reported that:

- (a) appeals and complaints remained at very low levels;
- (b) complaints submitted to the OIA were at a lower level than expected for the size of the University. No complaints had been found by the OIA to be "justified" or "partially justified", which took the University to five years without a single complaint being held as "justified";

(c) to (d) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**

(e) the continuing low number of appeals and complaints was testimony to the robustness of the University's procedures and to the work of staff and students who served on Appeal Committees and Review Panels, as well as to the high quality of support provided by all staff in underpinning processes;

(f) the paper would be considered by Council on 27th June 2018.

18/26 University Strategic Framework Key Performance Targets

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Considered: the University Strategic Framework Key Performance Targets Update (SEN.18.06.10).

Reported:

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

(c) that the KPT Update would be considered by Council on 27th June 2018.

18/27 Amendment of Ordinances

Noted: that the report on the Amendment of Ordinances had been deferred to the next meeting of Senate in November 2018.

18/28 Reports from Heads of College

Noted: the report from the Heads of College regarding recent developments (SEN.18.06.12).

18/29 Report from the Nominations Committee

Noted: a report from the Nominations Committee held on 15th May 2018 (SEN.18.06.13).

Resolved that:

- (i) the recommendations for the award of honorary degrees be approved, as set out in Paper SEN.18.06.13;
- (ii) the Committee be renamed as 'Honorary Degrees Committee' from 1st August 2018;
- (iii) the recommended appointments to the membership of the Committee be approved, as set out in Paper SEN.18.06.13.

Recommended: to Council that Ordinance 4.5.2 be updated to reflect the new name of the Committee.

18/30 Report from the Research Committee

Noted: a report from the meeting of the Research Committee held on 20th March 2018 (SEN.18.06.14).

18/31 Report from the University Education Committee

Noted: a report from the meetings of the University Education Committee held on 15th March 2018 and 10th May 2018 (SEN.18.06.15).

18/32 Programme of Meetings

Noted: the programme of meetings of Senate for 2018/19:

Wednesday 7th November 2018 at 2.00pm
Wednesday 20th March 2019 at 2.00pm
Wednesday 12th June 2019 at 2.00pm

18/33 Closing Remarks

On behalf of Senate, the Vice-Chancellor thanked:

- (a) all members who would be retiring from Senate at the end of the session;
- (b) Ms Rose Bennett, for her work as the Guild's Postgraduate Officer and as a student member of Senate;
- (c) Dr Julie Gilson, who would be stepping down as Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) at the end of her term in August 2018;
- (d) Professor Myra Nimmo, who would be retiring from the University at the end of the academic year.