

# UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

## SENATE

7th November 2018

## MINUTES

Present: Professor Sir David Eastwood (Vice-Chancellor and Principal, in the Chair); Professor D Adams (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor K Armour (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)); Professor S Busby; Dr S Conner; Professor J Curnow; Professor E Fulton; Professor A Ginger; Mr A Goldstone; Professor J Green (Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)); Professor L Green (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Dr C Greenway (Director of Student Engagement); Professor D Hannah; Professor M Hannon; Professor P Jackson; Dr L Jeffery; Professor T Jones (Provost and Vice-Principal); Mr Z Khan; Dr T Lockwood; Professor P Lumley; Professor U Martin (Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Equalities)); Professor M Mazzocco; Professor C Needham; Ms G Palazzi; Professor J Pritchard; Professor K Rowlingson; Professor G Schaffer (Director of Postgraduate Studies); Professor A Schofield (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor D Shepherd; Dr N Sigona; Ms J Small; Professor T Softley (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research)); Professor I Szmigin; Professor J Taylor; Professor M Whitby (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor N Wilkin; and Ms B Williams.

Also present: Ms C Gilbert (Director of External Relations) (for Minutes 18/38 and 18/39); Mr S McAuliffe (Academic Registrar); Mr L Sanders (Registrar and Secretary); Mr N Sidney (Governance Officer).

Apologies: Professor J Arthur (Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Staffing)); Professor C Constantinou; Dr D Bailey; Professor R Black (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Dr A Davies; Dr L Jenkins; Professor P Kraftl; Professor M Mahlberg; Professor I Mandel; Professor R Mason (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International)); Professor P Moss; Professor K Shapiro; Professor M Simmons; Professor M Sterling; Dr G Timmins.

Absent: Mr A Jaatinen; Professor P Kearns; Professor F Lough; Dr H Yusuf.

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

### 18/34 Membership and Terms of Reference

**Noted:** the membership of Senate for 2018/19 and its terms of reference (SEN.18.11.01).

**Resolved:** to co-opt six members of Senate on the recommendation of the Vice-Chancellor as set out in Paper SEN.18.11.01.

### 18/35 Minutes of previous meeting

**Resolved:** that the minutes of the meeting held on 13th June 2018 be approved (SEN.18.11.02).

### 18/36 Matters Arising from the minutes not addressed elsewhere on the agenda

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

18/37 Vice-Chancellor's Items

**Noted:** a report from the Vice-Chancellor (SEN.18.11.03).

**Reported:**

- (a) the post-18 education funding review led by Philip Augar was due to produce an interim report during the autumn of 2018, but this had been delayed to take into account the outcomes of an Office for National Statistics review into how student loans were treated in the national accounts;
- (b) the financial impacts of the potential outcomes of the post-18 education funding review were being modelled by the University, alongside other initiatives being taken forward in anticipation of potential changes to the funding environment;
- (c) a further update would be provided to Senate in due course.

18/38 Recruitment and Admissions Update

**COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE**

**Considered:** the update on the position regarding the intake for 2018 entry and the number of applications received and the number of offers made for undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research for 2019 entry (SEN.18.11.04).

**Reported** that:

- (a) to (j) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**

18/39 University of Birmingham Dubai Update

**Considered:** an update on developments with the Dubai campus (SEN.18.11.05).

**Reported** that:

- (a) work over the last two years had seen the opportunities in Dubai grow. The University's initial criteria and assumptions remained valid and confidence and knowledge of operating in the market had grown significantly, along with potential opportunities beyond delivering degree programmes;
- (b) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**
- (c) the rationale for the University considering a large scale overseas campus were agreed with Council in April 2017 and remained valid:
  - (i) extending the University's reach and reputation: developing the University's global reach by being the first global top 100 university to develop a full campus in Dubai;
  - (ii) income and growth diversification;
  - (iii) diversifying and mitigating risk;
  - (iv) supporting the University's global ambition;
  - (v) pursuing the University's global ambition to the benefit of students and staff;
- (d) the Dubai campus had made a strong start and was progressing well. The refurbishment of the building was delivered on time, the opening of the campus to students was delivered successfully on time and the initial student group was in line with both the quality expected for the University and in size in terms of the business model for this stage in the growth of the campus;
- (e) to (f) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**

18/40 Research Grants Performance 2017/18

**COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE**

**Considered:** the University's research grants performance for 2017/18 (SEN.18.11.06).

**Reported** that:

- (a) there had been a very strong improvement in research awards performance, reaching record levels overall and exceeding the annual target for the second consecutive year;
- (b) to (h) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**

18/41 Student Surveys 2018

**COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE**

(1) National Student Survey

**Considered:** the outcome of the 2018 National Student Survey (SEN.18.11.07).

**Reported** that:

- (a) the University's overall satisfaction score in the 2018 National Student Survey (NSS) was 85.99%. This ranked as 5th of the 22 reported institutions in the Russell Group, compared to 4th of 16 in 2017;
  - (b) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**
  - (c) scores relating to the Library and IT had improved significantly, and the University had opportunity to learn from these examples of good practice;
  - (d) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**
- (2) Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey

**Considered:** the outcome of the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2018 (SEN.18.11.08).

**Reported** that:

- (a) Birmingham had one of the largest postgraduate student populations in the UK, especially at PGT level. It was a very diverse group which included a large number of international students, distance and part-time learners, those studying professional qualifications etc;
- (b) 85% of PGT student survey respondents were satisfied overall this year (compared to 84% last year), higher than Sector and RG averages (both 80%). The University was ranked in the highest quartile sector-wide and in the highest quartile of the Russell Group (RG) in the sample. The University scored above Sector and RG averages in all question areas and achieved improvements for every question except two compared to 2017. In particular, the University had achieved significant improvements within the 'Dissertation' question area, an area identified for action by last year's PGT review;
- (c) the OfS was expected to announce a Postgraduate Taught National Student Survey;
- (d) actions to develop the University's approach to postgraduate studies were in the process of being implemented. A series of visits to explore good practice at universities in Australia, Europe, and the US were undertaken in 2017, which had informed the University's plans in this area. Initial steps to improve this situation were undertaken in Autumn 2017. **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**. Professor Gavin Schaffer had now started in his new role as Postgraduate Dean, the senior academic lead responsible for postgraduate matters, both PGT and PGR (bringing these previously separate, but inter-related areas together in a co-ordinated way), and would be developing the new postgraduate strategy which would include the development of the role of the Graduate School and would be taking forward the series of recommendations set out in Paper SEN.18.11.08 to address the outcome of PTES 2018.

18/42 Education Update

**Considered:** the education update from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) (SEN.18.11.09).

**Reported** that:

- (a) the structure of the new academic teaching year (NATY), which was approved by Senate in June 2018 following wider consultation with staff and students, was being implemented by a dedicated internal change management project team, reporting to the NATY Strategic Oversight Board, which was chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education);
- (b) the team, in collaboration with relevant areas, had developed an implementation plan and identified the key changes that would be required throughout the next two years. During the autumn term, guidance would be issued to Colleges to ensure that Programme and Module Leads had clarity on the streamlined process they would need to undertake to ensure that modules were 'NATY ready';
- (c) the team were also currently working in partnership with academic colleagues, the Guild, and students to develop proposals for the content of the new 'Enrichment Week' and the end of semester 'Assessment and Revision Support' periods;
- (d) the change was integrated with the improvements the University was making to timetabling, the student record system, and the development of a digital module catalogue;
- (e) to support the Birmingham 2026 strategy to increase international undergraduate student numbers, a project board under the leadership of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International) was reviewing potential developments in foundation pathways for international undergraduates. This would explore how the Birmingham International Academy could develop, and what options were available with existing or new partners.

#### 18/43 Annual Report on Student Welfare, Mental Health and Wellbeing

**Considered:** the annual update on the approach to supporting student wellbeing at the University, including trends over the last academic year, impact of investment in services and priorities for the new academic year, and commented on current challenges and developments, noting that the report had particular focus on the area of student mental health and student safety (SEN.18.11.10).

**Reported** that:

- (a) the University took a cross-university approach to student welfare, mental health and wellbeing through an integrated network of professional support services, encompassing the Guild, Chaplaincy and Residences as well as specialist central services and front-line welfare officers, working together under the leadership of the Academic Registrar;
- (b) concerns for student welfare and wellbeing, particularly in respect of mental health, continued to be a high priority across the sector. In the last twelve months there had been a series of announcements from Government and Office for Students;
- (c) investing in and developing mental health and wellbeing services remained an institutional priority. The University committed over £6.1million a year to directly support student welfare, mental health, disability support and wellbeing. This included investments of £1.35m/year since 2015 in new wellbeing roles in Schools, Colleges and Student Services;
- (d) UEB's leadership and consequent prioritisation of student mental health and wellbeing pre-dated the current high profile discourse and the establishment of the regulator. This had meant the University was well placed to address the challenges its students experience, and the University worked with the Guild of Students and contributed to national leadership, expertise and research-informed practice;
- (e) in 2018 Academic Services underwent its quinquennial Vice Chancellors Integrated Review and had discussed and considered extensively the issues of student wellbeing and increased demand for mental health support, with the review panel's conclusions and recommendations adding value in determining the priorities for the year ahead.

**Recommended:** that Council consider the annual update on Student Welfare, Mental Health and Wellbeing at the University.

**Considered**: the outcome of the PGR Annual Review for 2016/17 (SEN.18.11.11).

**Reported** that:

- (a) the Graduate Research Board (GRB) had considered and approved the following recommended actions in relation to the outcome of the PGR Annual Review for 2016/17:
  - (i) College PGR Leads to ensure actions to support improvements to submission and completion rates continue to be pursued and assessed as part of the PGR Annual Review over the coming 3 years;
  - (ii) University Graduate School (UGS) to complete a review of reasons for extension and leave of absence requests and propose potential mitigating measures to GRB by July 2018;
  - (iii) UGS and College PGR Leads to review event provision by September 2018 to ensure adequate activity to support integration of late arrivals and non-UK PGRs, and engagement of MRes students;
  - (iv) UGS to produce procedures regarding supervisor training and College PGR Leads in EPS, MDS, and CoSS to review School/Institute procedures to ensure robust compliance checking methods are in place to monitor initial and biennial refresher training for supervisors by September 2018;
  - (v) College PGR Leads to share areas of good practice across Schools/Institutes at the next College PGR board meeting for consideration of wider adoption and to take action locally to address issues arising where College-level input may be required;
  - (vi) UGS to consult and report by November 2018 on how future PRES data could be presented to be of most value (within the limitations of the national survey format);
- (b) UQAC had approved the report at their meeting on 23rd May 2018, although they asked for clarification on some College level activity, which had now been provided;
- (c) the paper had also been approved by UEB on 2nd July 2018;
- (d) the University was making progress in terms of completion and submission rates, noting the importance of completion rates for the REF because they would be included in environment statements;
- (e) it was highlighted that the Graduate School had compared the University's PGR student outcomes against other institutions for the purposes of benchmarking, and had found that institutions with a similar portfolio to the University fared broadly similarly;
- (f) the importance of ensuring concerns on student progression were addressed early, and the issues associated with managing submission and completion rates in respect of part time students, were noted.

**Noted**: the outcome of the PGR Annual Review for 2016/17 as set out in Paper SEN.18.11.11.

**Considered**: the annual report on academic quality, standards and the student experience (SEN.18.11.12).

**Reported** that:

- (a) the report provided assurance to Council from Senate on academic quality, standards and the student experience and had enabled Council to make an Annual Accountability Return to HEFCE confirming that Council had received and discussed a report and accompanying action plan relating to the continuous improvement of the student academic experience and student outcomes. The report itself had also previously been submitted to HEFCE as part of the Annual Provider Review process;

- (b) the University had been advised that the Annual Accountability Return process would continue under the OfS but that the report itself was no longer required to be submitted to the OfS as the Annual Provider Review process had been discontinued;
- (c) following approval by UEB (on 29th October 2018) and Senate, the report would be presented to Council on 28th November 2018 as evidence for Council to make the required annual assurances to the OfS as part of the Annual Accountability Return which had to be submitted by noon on 3rd December 2018;
- (d) the report encompassed the majority of issues that Council had considered during 2017/18 as part of its normal cycle of business, along with additional evidence from the past year, including:
  - (i) a successful application to join the OfS Register of English Higher Education Providers in England;
  - (ii) a strong performance in the subject-level TEF pilot (which saw the University's provider rating in both models change to Gold);
  - (iii) maintaining the University's position in the top five of reported Russell Group institutions for 'overall satisfaction' as measured through the National Student Survey;
  - (iv) a latest graduate employability rate of 85.8% which placed the University 9th nationally (excluding small specialist colleges) and in the upper quartile of the Russell Group.

**Resolved:** that the annual report on academic quality, standards and the student experience be approved as set out in Paper SEN.18.11.12.

**Recommended:** to Council that the University's approach to academic quality, standards and the student experience be approved as set out in Paper SEN.18.11.12.

#### 18/46 Degree Classification and Related Issues

**Considered:** a presentation on degree classification and related issues, with the following points raised in discussion:

- (a) Universities UK had undertaken data analysis at sector level to test the correlation of changes in the proportion of first class degrees with other quantifiable changes, such as SSR, spend of staff and student facilities, academic services, and prior attainment. The work indicated that the uplift could not be wholly attributed to these measurable inputs, although in older universities the "unexplained" element of the uplift was smaller than for newer universities;
- (b) a discussion paper on degree outcomes was due to be published by UUK in November 2018, and the University was continuing to engage with UUK to help inform the recommendations;
- (c) the University had been undertaking a number of actions in response, including:
  - (i) playing a leading role in the implementation of GPA (Grade Point Average) across the sector;
  - (ii) increased UEB scrutiny during the past 2-3 years and flagging of the issues as a heightened risk institutionally;
  - (iii) degree classification profiling thresholds had been introduced by University Education Committee;
  - (iv) consideration of marking scales, grade descriptors (aligned with UUK) and exam board guidance;
- (d) a range of actions were also being taken forward at School-level via School action plans;
- (e) the current perceptions of employers in relation to grade inflation, and whether there was any shift in employer understanding in terms of degree classification;
- (f) the University's position in relation to other institutions within the sector, and issues associated in comparing data with other institutions, given the differences in the range of courses that were offered;

- (g) the nature of the roles played by internal and external examiners, in regards to the classification of degrees, and how these could develop in future. It was highlighted by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) that the University's standards in relation to degree classification were positively endorsed by external examiners;
- (h) the role of marking criteria (e.g. the use of modules and credits) and degree classification algorithms;
- (i) the topic would be revisited by Senate at a future meeting, during either the summer term of 2018/19 or the autumn term of 2019/20.

18/47 Annual Research Integrity Statement to Council

**Considered**: the University's Annual Research Integrity Statement to Council (SEN.18.11.13).

**Reported**: that the University had, by virtue of its membership of Universities UK, signed up to the commitments of the Universities UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity. The Concordat recommended that an annual statement be presented to the University's Council, confirming the actions taken during the year to support research integrity, providing assurance that allegations of misconduct were dealt with fairly and transparently, and providing a high level statement regarding any formal investigations undertaken.

**Recommended**: to Council that the University's Annual Research Integrity Statement for 2017/18 be approved as set out at Appendix 1 to Paper SEN.18.11.13.

18/48 Reports from Heads of College

**Noted**: the report from the Heads of College regarding recent developments (SEN.18.11.14).

18/49 Report from the Honorary Degrees Committee

**Noted**: a report from the Honorary Degrees Committee held on 9th October 2018 (SEN.18.11.15).

**Resolved**: that the recommendations for the award of honorary degrees be approved as set out in Paper SEN.18.11.15.

18/50 Report from the Research Committee

**Noted**: a report from the meeting of the Research Committee held on 29th June 2018 and 5th September 2018 (SEN.18.11.16).

18/51 Report from the University Education Committee

**Noted**: a report from the meetings of the University Education Committee held on 28th June 2018, 14th August 2018 and 10th October 2018 (SEN.18.11.17).

18/52 Programme of Meetings

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

Wednesday 20th March 2019 at 2.00pm

Wednesday 12th June 2019 at 2.00pm