

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

SENATE

8th November 2017

MINUTES

Present: Professor Sir David Eastwood (Vice-Chancellor and Principal, in the Chair); Professor K Armour (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)); Dr David Bailey; Ms R Bennett; Mr C Collins; Dr S Conner; Dr A Davies; Dr D Fuller; Dr J Gilson (Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience)); Professor J Green (Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)); Professor A Ginger; Mr A Goldstone; Professor A Guariglia; Professor M Hannon; Dr L Jeffery; Professor T Jones (Provost and Vice-Principal); Professor P Kraftl; Professor P Kumar; Professor F Lough; Professor P Lumley; Ms N Ma; Professor M Mahlberg; Professor I Mandel; Professor R Mason (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International); Dr D Moran; Dr C Needham; Professor M Nimmo (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor Z Pikramenou; Professor J Pritchard; Professor J Rowe; Professor K Rowlingson; Professor G Schaffer (Director of Postgraduate Studies); Professor D Shepherd; Professor T Softley (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research)); Dr K Voelz; Professor G Watson (Interim Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor M Whitby (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor N Wilkin and Dr H Yusuf.

Also present: Ms C Gilbert (Director of External Relations) (for Minute 17/42); Ms H Hands (Governance Assistant); Mr S McAuliffe (Academic Registrar); Ms C McDonough (Assistant Secretary); Mr L Sanders (Registrar and Secretary).

Apologies: Professor D Adams (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor J Arthur (Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Staffing)); Professor J Duberley; Professor D Hannah; Professor P Kearns; Dr T Lockwood; Professor J Martin; Professor U Martin; Professor H Mehanna; Professor P Moss; Professor A Schofield (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor M Simmons; Professor M Sterling; Dr G Timmins.

Absent: Dr R Brandstaetter; Professor C Bunce.

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

17/38 Membership and Terms of Reference

Noted: the membership of Senate for 2017/18 and its terms of reference (SEN.17.11.01).

Resolved: to co-opt six members of Senate on the recommendation of the Vice-Chancellor as set out in Paper SEN.17.11.01.

17/39 Minutes of previous meeting

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 14th June 2017 be approved (SEN.17.11.02).

17/40 Matters Arising from the minutes not addressed elsewhere on the agenda

Reported: that there were no matters arising.

17/41 Vice-Chancellor's Items

Noted: a report from the Vice-Chancellor (SEN.17.11.03).

17/42 Recruitment and Admissions Update

COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

Considered: the report on the outcome of the 2017 recruitment cycle and the current position regarding the number of applications and offers for undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research for 2018 entry (SEN.17.11.04).

Reported that:

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

17/43 Research Grants Performance 2016/17

COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

Considered: the University's research grants performance for 2016/17 (SEN.17.11.05).

Reported that:

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

Resolved: that the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Knowledge Transfer) and all those who had contributed to the success of the University's Research Grants Performance for 2016/17 be thanked for their work.

17/44 Student Surveys 2017

COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

(1) National Student Survey

Considered: a summary of the NSS results for 2017 and actions arising for NSS 2018 (SEN.17.11.06).

Reported that:

- (a) the University's overall satisfaction score remained almost unchanged at 88.55% (89%), the sixth successive year it had been in the range 88%-89%. It had improved its ranking to fourth in the Russell Group from seventh in 2016. Nonetheless, the 2017 NSS outcomes had identified some areas where further work was required to ensure that the University remained among the best performers in future iterations of TEF. The main areas of concern were learning resources (which had higher absolute scores, but was not as strong relative to others in the Russell Group) and assessment and feedback (where absolute and relative scores were not strong). These would be the two key priorities for Colleges and Schools for NSS 2018;
- (b) Schools and relevant Professional Services had already updated or submitted action plans, agreed with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), but Heads of School would need to be proactive in taking leadership in preparation for subject-level TEF (noting that the University was participating in the HEFCE pilot for this) and ensuring delivery of the action plans. Some Schools had already appointed a senior member of staff as 'TEF lead' and this should be considered by other Schools, particularly those whose NSS performance was of concern. University Education Committee (UEC) and University Quality Assurance Committee (UQAC) would receive updates from Colleges to ensure the process was being followed and that progress in key areas was on track

- across the institution;
 - (c) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**
 - (d) new wifi infrastructure had been installed in the Library to improve wifi and early indicators were that this was significantly improving student satisfaction. This was important for the Learning Resources area;
 - (e) UEB on 6th November 2017 had met with student representatives of each College to identify how the University's assessment and feedback could be improved;
 - (f) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**
- (2) Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey

Considered: the outcome of the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2017 (SEN.17.11.07).

Reported that:

- (a) the University's highest response rate of 45% had been achieved as a result of actions identified in the Institutional PGT Review and considerable additional effort on the part of Schools, Colleges and the Guild of Students;
 - (b) the outcomes highlighted areas of positive provision across the University, especially with regard to 'Teaching and Learning', 'Assessment and Feedback', and 'Skills and Development'. Nonetheless, scores in some key areas were below the University's comparators and further improvements were required. A number of enhancements were being implemented arising from the PGT Review. Schools had also identified PGT-specific actions as part of their School Education Plans and Colleges were committed to monitoring the delivery of these plans with reports to their Boards in November and February. Further oversight would also be provided by the University Education Committee and University Quality Assurance Committee;
 - (c) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**
 - (d) a national PGT survey was being developed by HEFCE, with a pilot survey expected in the next academic year.
- (3) Postgraduate Research Experience Survey

Considered: the outcome of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2017 (SEN.17.11.08).

Reported:

- (a) that the University had achieved its highest response rate for PRES to date (43.5%, 1,884 responses). This was also a significant increase on the response rate for 2015 (28%);
- (b) that, overall, 81% of respondents were satisfied with the experience of their research degree programme. This was lower than the University's scores in 2015 (83%) and 2013 (84%) and slightly lower than the 2017 Russell Group score (82%);
- (c) that the 2017 survey covered a variety of issues relating to academic life, including 'Supervision', 'Resources', 'Research Culture', 'Progress and Assessment', 'Responsibilities', 'Research Skills' and 'Professional Development';
- (d) that the University's scores for 'Supervision' were high, noting that 92% of respondents agreed that their supervisor had the skills and subject knowledge to support their research;
- (e) the challenge of raising the scores for 'Research Culture'. **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**
- (f) the priority of continuing to strengthen the sense of postgraduate research community across the University.

17/45 Education Update

Considered: the education update from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) (SEN.17.11.09).

Reported that:

- (a) the Higher Education Futures institute (HEFi) had launched on 10th October 2017. This combined the University's staff development activity (formerly CLAD), digital education innovation and support (formerly TEL-Hub) and research on practice (formerly the Teaching Academy);
- (b) staff and student use of Panopto had increased significantly following technological improvements and the development of a revised code of practice for supporting student learning. It had reached the level of approximately 65% of possible recordings being made based upon lecture counts, against a figure last year averaging 44% over the first three weeks of term. This translated into 33,685 student views of lecture capture recordings (12,000 more viewings than the same week the previous year);
- (c) a member of Senate expressed concern that the use of Panopto would lead to a decline in student attendance at lectures. However, Senate was assured that there was no evidence of this being the case. Indeed, the student members of Senate advised that the preference of students was very much still to attend their lectures but that Panopto was welcomed as a valuable complementary reference point. Its benefits included use if a student was unable to attend their lectures due to illness, as a revision aid and as a further support mechanism for students with learning difficulties or international students whose first language was not English;
- (d) the University was exploring a two semester model (with assessment periods at the end of each semester) together with the designation of a 'summer semester' in recognition of the considerable work that was ongoing between the end of the summer examination period and the beginning of welcome week. A full proposal would be made to Senate in due course;
- (e) a revised approach to the future accommodation of examinations had been approved. This meant that examinations for 2017/18 and 2018/19 would be held in the Munrow Arena (new Sports Hall) and the Slater Hall (rather than in high quality marquees as approved by Senate in November 2016). This was on the basis that Schools would also review their approach to assessment and examinations because these venues were to be used for the next two years only.

17/46 **HEFCE Annual Provider Review 2017**

Considered: the annual report on academic quality, standards and the student experience as required by HEFCE (SEN.17.11.10).

Reported that:

- (a) Annual Provider Review was part of the Annual Accountability Return that all institutions must provide to HEFCE. This required Council to review an annual report on academic quality, standards and the student experience and to sign off a number of statements in the Annual Accountability Return to HEFCE. Paper SEN.17.11.10 was the draft annual report on academic quality, standards and the student experience which would be submitted to Council as evidence for Council to make the required annual assurances to HEFCE;
- (b) under the University's legislation, it was the Senate which had responsibility for teaching, quality and standards. This was a very important point of principle in Universities like Birmingham. Therefore, this report was considered first by Senate, for recommendation to Council;
- (c) Council would be invited to make the necessary assurances based on its regular discussion of education matters as part of its normal cycle of business, and on evidence of several major successes in the past year, including:
 - (i) The award of a Gold rating in the Teaching Excellence Framework.
 - (ii) Shortlisting for the Higher Education Academy's inaugural Global Teaching Excellence Awards.
 - (iii) An improved graduate employment rate (one of the University's KPTs) and an improvement in our QS employability ranking.

- (iv) An improved 'overall satisfaction' rate in the National Student Survey, placing Birmingham first among all Russell Group universities to return published scores.
- (v) Significant improvements in our scores in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, particularly for teaching and learning.
- (vi) c. 75% of subjects in Quartile 1 for two of the three major domestic league tables (our 2020 KPT is to reach 75% in Quartile 1 for all three tables).
- (vii) Being ranked among the top performing English Russell Group universities in the two main HESA performance indicators for widening participation (proportions of students from state schools and from low participation neighbourhoods).
- (viii) The retention rate and graduate employability of the 'Access to Birmingham' widening participation cohort exceeding the University average.
- (ix) Continued strong recruitment against a declining market, including growth in our UG and PGT overseas entrants (one of the University's KPTs) in 2015 and 2016.

Resolved: that the annual report on academic quality, standards and the student experience be approved as set out in Paper SEN.17.11.10.

Recommended to Council that:

- (i) Council approve the University's approach to academic quality, standards and the student experience as set out in Paper SEN.17.11.10;
- (ii) Council provide assurance and confirmation to HEFCE as a part of the University's Annual Accountability Returns that:
 - (a) the governing body has received and discussed a report and accompanying action plan relating to the continuous improvement of the student academic experience and student outcomes. This included evidence from the provider's own periodic review processes, which fully involve students and include embedded external peer or professional review;
 - (b) the methodologies used as a basis to improve the student academic experience and student outcomes are, to the best of our knowledge, robust and appropriate;
 - (c) the standards of awards for which we are responsible have been appropriately set and maintained.

17/47 Student Welfare, Mental Health and Wellbeing at the University of Birmingham

Considered: the annual update on the approach to supporting student welfare at the University and commented on current challenges and developments, noting that the report had particular focus on the area of mental health (SEN.17.11.11).

Reported that:

- (a) the University provided a network of support for its students designed to address the range of welfare needs that students might have whilst studying;
- (b) the University was experiencing similar issues to those experience nationally in respect of:
 - (i) a reported increase in the number of students disclosing needs associated with their mental health and increasing complexity to those needs. The University's Counselling Service was dealing with an increasing number of higher risk and more complex cases. The growth in the numbers of students needing Reasonable Adjustment Plans associated with a mental illness had also presented a more challenging environment;
 - (ii) there were increasing expectations of universities from students and their parents to provide greater levels of support at a lower threshold of concern;
- (c) the University had been responding to recent trends and would need to continue to maintain focus on evolving and developing its approach to mitigate risk and provide appropriate support. For example, it had been recognised that professional specialist roles were required beyond the support which could be provided to students by their academic personal tutor and significant investment had therefore been made by UEB

for 2017/18 onwards to provide a strong network of Wellbeing Officers at College and School level. Having co-ordinated wellbeing services across campus was key to ensuring consistent and effective student risk management and influencing positive outcomes for students. The range of services provided by the University addressed the continuum of mental health from self-help information and resources to support optimising mental wellbeing, through to crisis response and incident management;

- (d) the Guild Postgraduate Officer reported that mental health was also a key priority being addressed by the Guild's Strategic Plan and that the Guild would continue to work with the University in respect of student welfare, mental health and wellbeing;
- (e) the next annual update to Senate would continue to have particular focus on the issue of mental health in view of the current position and sector trends facing the University.

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

17/48 PGR Annual Review

Considered: an update on the 2015/16 Postgraduate Research Annual Review (SEN.17.11.12).

Reported:

- (a) that the PGR Annual Review of 2015/16 had identified a number of positive trends and activities as well as some areas where further improvements were required and the following actions were therefore being implemented:
 - (i) College PGR Leads would ensure work continued towards achieving the 70% and 80% targets set for University level submission and completion rates within the next 4 years;
 - (ii) College PGR Leads would remind all academics examining theses or chairing vivas that they were able to extend the time given for candidates to complete either minor or major corrections by May 2017;
 - (iii) College PGR Leads would ensure that procedural changes were implemented as required prior to the start of the 2017/18 academic year to ensure monthly supervision records were held centrally/electronically within Schools/Institutes;
 - (iv) College PGR Leads would share areas of good practice across Schools/Institutes at the next College PGR meeting;
 - (v) the University Graduate School would review the PGR Annual Review guidance and forms to be used for the 2016/17 review in line with changes to the UG/PGT process;
- (b) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**
- (c) that the Graduate School was also undertaking a benchmarking exercise to compare the University's PGR student outcomes against the rest of the Russell Group. The outcome of this would be reported to UEB;
- (d) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**
- (e) the importance of ensuring that concerns about student progress and development were addressed at an early stage in their postgraduate research.

17/49 Annual Research Integrity Statement to Council

Considered: the University's Annual Research Integrity Statement to Council (SEN.17.11.13).

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, including confirmation of actions taken during the year to support research integrity and to provide assurance that allegations of misconduct were dealt with fairly and transparently.

Recommended: to Council that the University's Annual Research Integrity Statement for 2016/17 be approved as set out at Appendix 1 to Paper SEN.17.11.13.

17/50 Reports from Heads of College

Noted: the report from the Heads of College regarding recent developments (SEN.17.11.14).

17/51 Report from the Nominations Committee

Noted: a report from the Nominations Committee held on 10th October 2017 (SEN.17.11.15).

Resolved that:

- (i) the recommendations for the award of honorary degrees be approved as set out in Paper SEN.17.11.15;
- (ii) the re-appointment of Professor Kate Thomas as Public Orator from 1st January 2018 to 31st December 2021 be approved.

17/52 Report from the Research Committee

Noted: a report from the meetings of the Research Committee held on 25th July and 27th September 2017 (SEN.17.11.16).

17/53 Report from the University Education Committee

Noted: a report from the meetings of the University Education Committee held on 29th June, 15th August, 13th September and 19th October 2017 (SEN.17.11.17).

17/54 Report from the University Quality Assurance Committee

Noted: a report from the meeting of the University Quality Assurance Committee held on 14th March and 25th May 2017 (SEN.17.11.18).

17/55 Report from the Academic Policy and Regulations Committee

Noted: a report from the meeting of the Academic Policy and Regulations Committee held on 22nd June 2017 (SEN.17.11.19).

17/56 Programme of Meetings 2017/18

Noted: the programme of meetings of Senate for 2017/18:

Wednesday 21st March 2018 at 2.00pm

Wednesday 13th June 2018 at 2.00pm