



ACADEMIC BOARD

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 12 May 2021

- Present:** Paul Bennett, Martin Boddy, Tod Burton, Sally Clark, Peter Clegg, Katie Jenkins, Amanda Coffey, Olena Doran, Anil Kashyap, Helen King, Vanique Kruger, James Lee, Mandy Lee, Ray McDowell, Fidel Meraz, Jo Midgley, Christopher Moore, Sally Moyle (for Marc Griffiths), Augusta Chidinma Nnajofofor, Jane Ojiako, Paul Olomolaiye, Carinna Parraman, Jackie Rogers, Jeanette Sakel, Jamie Stevens, Deborah Sturge, Sarah Todd, Patricia Voaden, Steven West (Chair), Neil Willey.
- In attendance:** Jodie Anstee, Rachel Cowie, Chris Gledhill, Katie Jenkins, Heather Moyes (Secretary), Richard Strange, Amy Morgan.
- Apologies:** Jason Briddon, Sonja Dragojlovic-Oliveira, Marc Griffiths, Candy McCabe, James Murphy, Nicholas Ryder.
- Observers:** Jenny Body

AB.20.05.1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

- AB.20.05.1.1** The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and noted apologies received.
- AB.20.05.1.2** Jenny Body was welcomed as the Board of Governors' observer.
- AB.20.05.1.3** The Chair reported that Amanda Oliver, who had acted as Deputy Secretary to the Board for the past two years, had moved on to a new role and thanked her for her support.

AB.20.05.2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- AB.20.05.2.1** No conflicts of interest were recorded in respect of the business under consideration at the meeting.

AB.20.05.3 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

- AB.20.05.3.1 Minutes of the last meeting**
Paper AB/21/05/01 was received.

- AB.20.05.3.1.1 The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 3 March 2021 were approved as a true and accurate record of discussions.

AB.20.05.3.2 Action sheet and matters arising

Paper AB/21/05/02 was received.

AB.20.05.3.2.1 The committee noted that all actions arising from previous meetings had been completed or were covered elsewhere on the agenda or were not yet due for completion.

AB.20.05.3.2.2 Members noted that outcome of the Research Excellence Framework submission and any implications for the University would be shared with Academic Board in due course.

AB.20.05.3.3 Chair's actions

Paper AB/21/05/03 was received.

AB.20.05.3.3.1 Members noted that the Chair had endorsed a recommendation to designate NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) as an affiliated institution of UWE Bristol.

AB.20.05.3.3.2 The Chair reported that this was an exciting and positive development and congratulated those involved in shaping it.

AB.20.05.4 STANDING AGENDA ITEMS

AB.20.05.4.1 Update from the Vice-Chancellor

Paper AB/21/05/04 was received.

AB.20.05.4.1.1 The committee received an update from the Vice-Chancellor on matters of relevance to its remit.

AB.20.05.4.1.2 Members noted:

- (i) That the Prime Minister had now confirmed that remaining students could be welcomed back to campus for learning and teaching from 17 May. Requirements for social distancing and face coverings would continue, but more facilities would now be opened up to students, so that they could complete the academic year well. This would impact on the assessment period in the first instance, but would also enable more on-campus engagement with students during Teaching Block Three;
- (ii) That planning for the start of the 2021/22 academic year was in progress despite ongoing uncertainty, and the University was tracking closely data from SAGE and the Department of Education. There would be considerable work over the summer to ensure the University was well-placed to recruit and retain students and to support new and returning students to transition back to campus life. The possibility for further disruption September and October could not be discounted;
- (iii) That the NHS was planning for every adult to have had at least one vaccination by the autumn and that the sector was working with the Department for Education to plan support for both UK and international students to access vaccinations;
- (iv) That the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee and the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee continued to

monitor the key academic risks of behalf of Academic Board and had raised no new concerns, and that new tactical risks were being developed in relation to Degree Apprenticeships and Collaborative Provision;

- (v) That the University was engaging with various regulatory and policy consultations and was taking a student-centred approach. Members' attention was particularly drawn to work around introducing a Post-Qualification Admissions system, concerns about how it might impact on universities' behaviour and the need to ensure prospective students would be supported.

AB.20.05.4.2 Update from UWE Student Representatives

Paper AB/21/05/05 was received.

AB.20.05.4.2.1 The committee received an update from the Vice-President: Education of the Students' Union on matters of relevance to its remit.

AB.20.05.4.2.2 Members heard:

- (i) That the Students' Union would welcome a campaign about access to Covid-19 vaccinations, including specific communications for international students;
- (ii) That the report included a summary of the outcomes of three partnership projects taken forward jointly by the Students' Union and the University over the past year and highlighted the positive outcomes achieved, which the Students' Union was keen to ensure were shared widely with the student community;
- (iii) That a new sabbatical officer team had now been elected and that the outgoing team wished to thank University staff for their support;
- (iv) That the Students' Union had worked with a local charity called Tree Sisters to incentivise students to participate in the elections by planting a tree for every vote cast.

AB.20.05.4.2.3 The Chair thanked the 2020/21 sabbatical officer team for their hard work on behalf of the student community in what had been a particularly challenging year.

AB.20.05.5 Strategy 2030 implementation

Paper AB/21/05/06 was received.

AB.20.05.5.1.1 Members considered a report from the PVC: Research and Enterprise on the implementation of the research strategy.

AB.20.05.5.1.2 Members heard:

- (i) That the outcome of the University's Research Excellence Framework submission would be received in about 11 months' time and that the focus was now on delivery of Strategy 2030;
- (ii) That the strategy focussed on scaling up and driving high-quality, challenge-based research with real world application;

(iii) That the paper provided set out the priorities for the next 18 months and a range of initiatives, but that this need to be underpinned by a shift in culture and mind-set across Faculties around workload and resource allocation for research;

(iv) That there were also exciting opportunities to better integration research with teaching.

AB.20.05.5.1.3

Members noted in discussion:

(i) That Strategy 2030 set out the broad priority areas for research, taking into account the University's strengths and opportunities to increase external funding;

(ii) That Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity, whilst not identified as a research beacon itself, was a priority for the strategy as a whole both in terms of both the conduct of research and areas of investigation and that an EDI research working group with some external representation was being set up;

(iii) That the comprehensive package of schemes to support staff at different career stages was welcomed, including the increase in research time for Associate Professors, and that it would be important to ensure that there was appropriate monitoring of the outcomes of this investment, both for individuals and for the University as a whole;

(iv) The need to ensure that research communities across the institution connected with each other appropriately;

(v) Opportunities to learn from the success of the Wallscourt Fellows programme to grow research capacity;

(vi) The importance of ensuring that research was used to enrich the learning and teaching experience for students.

AB.20.05.6

ITEMS FOR APPROVAL OR ENDORSEMENT

AB.20.05.6.1

Consumer Protection Law Compliance Statement

Paper AB/21/05/07 was received.

AB.20.05.6.1.1

The Director of Student and Academic Services presented a draft Assurance Statement concerning the University's ongoing compliance with consumer protection law during the Covid-19 pandemic.

AB.20.05.6.1.2

Members heard:

(i) That preparation of the Assurance Statement was an OfS requirement and that a final version of paper would be presented to the Board of Governors at its July meeting for endorsement;

(ii) That the paper demonstrated how the University's ongoing mechanisms for ensuring compliance with consumer protection law had continued to operate during the pandemic, including in relation to how the University marketed its provision, ensured robust quality assurance of programmes and arrangements for consultation with students about changes to programmes;

(iii) That the report was supported by a repository of evidence of how the University had continued to support students to achieve, how any

- changes to programmes or services had been communicated to students, and additional steps take to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on students, including the range of enrichment activities provided to enable students to complete the academic year well;
- (iv) That there had so far been no discernible increase in student complaints;
- (v) That it was important the programme teams continued to capture enhancement activities within the Continuous Improvement Tool.
- AB.20.05.6.1.3 Members agreed to remit final approval of the Assurance Statement to Chair's action.
Action: Secretary and Chair
- AB.20.05.6.2 Open Access Policy**
Paper AB/21/05/08 was received.
- AB.20.05.6.2.1 The Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Enterprise presented a proposed new policy governing open access to research outputs.
- AB.20.05.6.2.2 Members heard:
- (i) That the policy had been developed by experts in the Library and had been considered in detail and endorsed by the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee;
- (ii) That open access concerned the sharing of research outputs without charge and that it was a requirement of Research England that any outputs submitted for REF were publically available;
- (iii) That the policy was in line with sector best practice and took into account UKRI guidance;
- (iv) That PhD student theses had to be submitted to the University's research repository but that open access publication could be withheld in certain circumstances, such as where the research was the result of collaborative work with industry and was commercially sensitive, and that applications to embargo were scrutinised by Faculty Research Degree Award Boards;
- (v) That UWE's research repository was now a major interface with the rest of the world and that being discoverable via it was very important for research visibility.
- AB.20.05.6.2.3 The committee approved the policy.
Action: PVC Research and Enterprise and Secretary
- AB.20.05.6.3 Access and Participation Annual Update: Summary**
Paper AB/20/05/09 was received.
- AB.20.05.6.3.1 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor presented the outcome of the Learning, Teaching and Students Experience Committee's consideration of the University's progress against Access and Participation Plan-related targets and associated activities.

- AB.20.05.6.3.2 Members heard:
- (i) That the report indicated that good progress was being made against some gaps in the performance of different groups of students but that there were continued concerns in relation to socioeconomic disadvantage and black students and the gap for disabled students was not reducing as hoped;
 - (ii) That significant work was in progress, the result of which had yet to be fully seen and that LTSEC had been assured that the University had appropriate arrangements in place to monitor actions and progress;
 - (iii) That the report noted various returns to the OfS which had been made, with actions plans in place to ensure that progress remained subject to constant review.

AB.20.05.6.3.3 Members agreed that the report provided assurance that LTSEC has appropriate oversight over the university's Access and Participation Plan targets and that appropriate actions were in place to deliver against those targets.

AB.20.05.6.4 Variation to UWE Regulations: PGCE Online Distance Learning Default Award

Paper AB/20/05/10 was received.

AB.20.05.6.4.1 The Director of Student and Academic Services presented a proposal to vary the academic regulations as applied to the PGCE Online Distance Learning default award.

AB.20.05.6.4.2 The committee approved the proposal.

AB.20.05.6.5 Academic Governance Committee Calendar 2021/2022

AB.20.05.6.5.1 The Secretary to Academic Board presented the proposed academic governance committee calendar for 2021/22.

AB.20.05.6.5.2 The committee approved the calendar.

AB.20.05.7 ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

AB.20.05.7.1 Workshop of Freedom of Speech

Paper AB/21/05/12 was received.

AB.20.05.7.1.1 The Chief of Staff and Clerk to the Board of Governors presented a discussion paper setting out the current sector landscape in relation to freedom of speech and academic freedom.

AB.20.05.7.1.2 Members heard:

- (i) That the workshop was timely, given that the government was due to publish a bill on freedom of speech in universities that day;
- (ii) That freedom of speech was area of particular focus for the current government and for the Secretary of State for Education, although there was little evidence of a widespread problem in the UK and many of the examples cited were not UK-based;

- (iii) That universities needed to take freedom of speech into account in the development of international partnerships;
- (iv) That it was anticipated that universities would be required to review their current policy statements in relation to freedom of speech and academic freedom and that there would be a new duty to promote freedom of speech;
- (v) That the outcome of the workshop would help to inform the University's high-level positioning on the matter and that the committee would be kept informed of further developments.

Action: Chief of Staff and Clerk to Board of Governors

- AB.20.05.7.1.3 The committee then broke out into three discussion groups to consider the following questions:
- How clear as a University do you feel we are about our commitment to freedom of speech and academic freedom and what this means for our staff, students and stakeholders?
 - What core sentiments do you think should be most visible and how best could we facilitate engagement among our staff, students and stakeholders?
 - How far is the lived experience at UWE Bristol in line with the core sentiments you have identified based on your own experiences?
 - Where do you see the main challenges going forward with regards to freedom of speech and academic freedom and how can we make sure we are best positioned to tackle these?

AB.20.05.7.2 Preventing and Addressing Harassment and Sexual Misconduct
Paper AB/21/05/13 was received.

AB.20.05.7.2.1 The committee considered an update and presentation on the University's work relating to harassment and sexual misconduct, including the its alignment to the OfS Statement of Expectations for Preventing and Addressing Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Affecting Students in Higher Education published in April 2021.

- AB.20.05.7.2.2 Members heard:
- (i) That the University had taken an early lead on this area, in collaboration with the University of Bristol and Bristol City Council and was well-positioned to fulfil the Statement of Expectations;
 - (ii) That the OfS aimed to push practice through the Statement and that the paper set out where the University was already fully compliant, where work was in progress to ensure full compliance and where it was at the leading edge of sector practice;
 - (iii) That numbers of reported incidents were rising across all categories, and that reports concerns student-on-student behaviour varied in severity from those that could be addressed under the student conduct

- or professional suitability policies to those that involved potential criminal activity and required police investigation;
- (iv) That potential outcomes for student perpetrators from final warnings and action plans to 1:1 coaching, or suspension/ expulsion from the University;
 - (v) That Campus Climate survey had highlighted significantly more incidents than formal reports indicated and that the Speak Up Project had been established to address barriers to reporting and drive culture change;
 - (vi) That one reason for the increase in reported incidents amongst students was the introduction of the Report and Support system, which made reporting easier;
 - (vii) That Report and Support was due to be rolled out to staff shortly and that this would likely result in a further increase in numbers of cases but should be welcomed as an indication of growing confidence to report;
 - (viii) That work was being taken forward through the Speak Up Project to review relevant staff and student-facing policies, including in relation to how both accusers and those accused should be supported;
 - (ix) The need to ensure appropriate feedback loops were in place and that a protocol had now been agreed and implemented for sharing the outcome of disciplinary cases with reporting students;
 - (x) That work was in progress to develop additional training for staff and students;
 - (xi) That the University has so far been made aware of one incident reported via the external "Everyone's Invited" platform, which concerned behaviour experience by a UWE student off-campus;
 - (xii) That guidance was available for staff on writing references for students who had been involved in disciplinary processes.

AB.20.05.7.2.3

Members noted in discussion:

- (i) That online training needed to be followed up with facilitated in-person discussion and that there were plans to trial a range of approaches included peer-led discussions for implementation after Christmas;
- (ii) That students were particularly vulnerable at the start of the academic year and whether there was scope to bring forward the timelines for this work;
- (iii) The importance of preventative work and action to promote positive behaviours and drive culture change;
- (iv) The need to ensure that the various initiatives were evaluated in order to be clear what made a difference.

AB.20.05.8

Members agreed that Academic Board would continue to monitor this work and that a fuller report on the Speak Up Project would be brought to a meeting of the committee later in the calendar year.

Action: Head of Student and Academic Policy Enhancement, Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity and Secretary.

AB.20.05.9

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 7 July 2021, 14:00-17:00