



ACADEMIC BOARD

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 6 July 2022

Present: Steven West (Chair), Jodie Anstee, Rachel Cowie, Paul Olomaolaiye, John Griffiths, Rania Regaieg, Carinna Parraman, Emma Weitkamp, Sally Clark, Jeanette Sakel, Wendy Colvin, Katie Jenkins, Fidel Meraz, Lily Diyemowei, Amanda Coffey, Neil Willey, Elena Marco, Marc Griffiths, James Lee, Mandy Lee, Paul Bennett, Martin Boddy, Heather Moyes (Secretary), Vanique Kruger, Danielle Newton, Vikas Kumar, Ellie Elstob-Wardle (item 3.3), Lucy Scott (item 3.3), Alice Smith (item 3.3)

In attendance: Nick Button (Officer).

Apologies: Tod Burton, Chris Gledhill, Antony Hill, Raymond McDowell, Jo Midgley, Christopher Moore, Lyn Newton, Nicholas Ryder, Jim Smith, Sarah Ward, Thomas Wild.

Observers: Carolyn Donoghue (Board of Governors)

AB.22.07.1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

AB.22.07.1.1 Welcome to members

The Chair welcomed the new Students' Union Presidents to their first meeting of Academic Board and thanked those members whose terms of office were expiring at the end of the academic year. The Chair also welcomed Carolyn Donoghue as the Board of Governors observer.

AB.22.07.1.2 **Apologies for absence**
The Chair noted all apologies in the usual way.

AB.22.07.1.3 **Declaration of interests**
No declarations of interest were notified.

AB.22.07.2 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

AB.22.07.2.1 Previous Minutes

Paper AB.22.07.01 was received

Members confirmed the minutes were an accurate record of the meeting held on 18 May 2022 with the request of a minor amendment to the minutes of the item on the Academic Regulations to more fully capture the concerns around uncapped resits.

AB.22.07.2.2 **Action Sheet and Matters Arising**
Paper AB.22.07.02 was received

The Chair noted that there were two outstanding actions: the Speak Up project which was not yet due, and the academic regulations that was being reconsidered at this meeting.

AB.22.07.2.3

Chair's Actions

The Chair noted that there had been no Chair's Actions since the last meeting of Academic Board.

AB.22.07.3

STANDING AGENDA ITEMS

AB.22.07.3.1

Update from the Vice-Chancellor

Paper AB.22.07.03 was received.

AB.22.07.3.1.1

The Chair drew attention to the fact that the fast-moving events surrounding the Prime Minister's position and membership of the Government meant some items of the report were already out of date. The ministerial letter on freedom of speech had been included for information, along with the University's response. Academic Board noted its support for the content of the response to the ministerial letter. The Chair also drew attention to the National Student Survey results that had recently been published, highlighting the areas of strength but also the variability in performance that would require additional focus. The data had also been noted in relation to the preparations for the University's submission to the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

AB.22.07.3.2

Update from the Students' Union

Paper AB.22.07.04 was received.

AB.22.07.3.2.1

Instead of their usual written report, the new Students' Union Presidents introduced themselves and their priorities for the coming academic year, including focuses on curriculum and employability, student welfare, environmental sustainability, ensuring the curriculum reflected the diversity of the University, support for students during teaching and exam periods, and improving feedback mechanisms for student reps.

AB.22.07.3.3

Subject Readiness Review Progress Workshop

Paper AB.22.07.04 was received.

AB.22.07.3.3.1

Academic Board received a presentation updating them on the progress of the Subject Readiness Review (SRR). The focus of the project was the quality of performance and currency of the University's learning, teaching, and student experience. The portfolio had been clustered into 17 subject areas, separate from individual Departments, where there were cognate disciplines. The project was taking a robust approach to data gathering to understand the gap between current performance and the 2030 Strategy ambitions, with significant input from staff at all levels.

AB.22.07.3.3.2

Academic Board considered the Strategic Assessment, looking at 'dummy' examples of subject performance. They focused on where they might prioritise interventions and what the prioritised objectives might be. Issues that emerged from this exercise included the time taken to consider the data, the value and use of targets, investment vs

disinvestment concerns, and size and shape impacts. The intention was that the SRR outputs would provoke decision making on areas of the portfolio that should be grown, supported, or stepped away from.

AB.22.07.3.3.3

During discussion, Academic Board also covered the following:

- i. Strategy Academic Portfolio Group and the Board of Governors would receive all 17 subject cluster roadmaps by September.
- ii. The distinction between those data sets that interacted with the NSS and those that did not should be acknowledged.
- iii. There were specific sector factors or trends with the academic environment of a subject that should be included.
- iv. The SRR needed to become embedded into academic practice and how the University measured performance. Objectives in some areas should be located within PDRs for teams and individuals.
- v. A single point of information for data should allow a more strategic approach when new data sets are added, so that the University can consider the entire context and make appropriate action plans arising from that.
- vi. There needed to be a clear training programme for members of staff to understand their roles and their responsibilities, and what they would have access to within the tool.

AB.22.07.4

ITEMS FOR APPROVAL/ENDORSEMENT

AB.22.07.4.1

Academic Regulations

Paper AB.22.07.05 was received.

AB.22.07.4.1.1

Academic Board considered an amended proposal for approval of the Academic Regulations for the 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic years, following a discussion at the May 2022 meeting of Academic Board that had raised issues of concern to be addressed. The amended proposal had been reviewed and endorsed by the University Quality & Standards Sub-Committee.

Attention was drawn to the following:

- vii. The key aspects of the Regulations, including the introduction of uncapped resits, had been agreed by Academic Board in 2019.
- viii. Associate Deans had been tasked with consulting with their relevant colleagues around the issue of the grace period / late submission window. Three options had been considered – the proposal presented in May; the arrangements currently in operation (3 day grace period, plus 7 day extension); or a firm deadline – and the outcome had been agreement to change the terminology from “grace period” to “late submission window.”
- ix. There would be a suite of additional support available for students who were regularly using the proposed late submission window.
- x. There would be a significant communications effort following approval to ensure that students understood the Regulations.

- xi. A Working Group had been established that would look at the processes to manage uncapped resits as part of a wider review of examining boards.

During discussion, Academic Board raised the following points:

AB.22.07.4.1.2

- i. There were concerns that some students would tactically use the combination of the late submission window and the uncapped resits tactically to plan their assessment workload while other students were delivering work on time and during the first assessment period. This could have implications for the University's pass rate, student progression, and academic references for those students. It was very important to effectively communicate effectively to students the potential dangers of attempting to strategically use the system strategically in this way.
- ii. Consultation with academic colleagues had raised concerns about the fairness of the proposals and whether a system of no penalties for use of either the late submission window or resits was desirable. It was noted that both proposals had arisen from extensive consultation which, although had not yielded consensus, had led to these outcomes as the most widely acceptable approach.
- iii. It was noted that, while some students may seek to tactically use the systems in the Regulations, many other students had been supported by these processes and helped to succeed. Flexibility with some deadlines was a common feature in the workplace.
- iv. There were risks for the speed of feedback to students from an additional five-day submission window.
- v. Ensuring that any students in need of specific reasonable adjustments were identified early was important and work to enhance this was already underway, but it was also important not to conflate academic procedures with the need for a strong process of reasonable adjustment tailored to individual student needs.
- vi. Academic Board should be mindful of the requirement not to "bake in" any changes made to assessment during the Covid period that might lead to unexplained increases in Good Honours awarded. Analysis to date considered by LTSEC and reported to Academic Board and the Board of Governors indicated that uncapped resits did not have an impact in this way, but this would be kept under review.

AB.22.07.4.1.3

Members were reminded that Academic Board was advisory to the Vice-Chancellor, who was responsible for taking decisions about the academic activities of the University and noted that the Vice-Chancellor would reflect upon the points raised in discussion to reach a final view on the appropriate approach to the management of assessment deadlines.

On that basis, Academic Board endorsed the following recommendations:

- Replace the current 3-day grace period with a 5-day “late submission window.”
- Remove the current 7 day extension.
- Rename the current 14-day grace period for students with disabilities as “14 day reasonable adjustment window”, noting the additional need to ensure that the right information on reasonable adjustments was being shared with the right academic colleagues.
- Academic staff to ensure high quality pre-submission support was available for all students.
- Assessment Data Checker to be used to provide clarity on eligibility of any assignment for late submission.
- Proactive follow-up of students repeatedly using the late submission window.
- Clear communications plan for students and staff to support the new arrangements.

Action: Chair/Secretary

Alongside that, Academic Board also approved:

- The new format Academic Regulations, for implementation in full from the 2023/24 academic year
- The proposal endorsed by LTSEC that the full suite of academic regulations would be split and implemented across 2022/23 and 2023/24, and
- The new format Academic Regulations for 2022/23, noting that a small number of changes will, by necessity, apply only to new students commencing after 1 August 2022.

AB.22.07.4.2

Academic Governance Structure

Paper AB.22.07.06 was received.

AB.22.07.4.2.1

Academic Board considered changes to the Academic Governance structure in light of the University restructure. The principles behind the proposals were simplification and de-layering, where possible giving responsibilities to individual roles and devolving further responsibility to School level. It was possible that, as the wider restructure continued to evolve, that minor changes would be required by Chair’s Actions to the structure. Attention was drawn to the proposed research structures that would remain largely unchanged, the removal of the Graduate School, and the creation of a new University Ethics Committee. Faculty Boards would be removed, along with College-level ASQCs and new School Boards of Studies would be established to oversee learning and teaching matters at School level, including with responsibility for quality. There would be a transition period between the old and new committees to ensure that continuity of work was considered.

AB.22.07.4.2.2

Academic Board approved the changes, with the amendment of returning the Animal Welfare & Ethics Sub-Committee and the Human Tissue Sub-Committee to the academic governance structure, both reporting to the University Ethics Committee.

AB.22.07.4.3

Freedom of Speech Policy

Paper AB.22.07.07 was received.

AB.22.07.4.3.1 Academic Board considered a proposal to amend the University's freedom of speech policy in light of recent political developments in this area. A key change highlighted to the Board was the duty to promote freedom of speech. The policy had been tested with staff networks and had been open for consultation.

AB.22.07.4.3.2 Academic Board approved the proposed freedom of speech policy.

AB.22.07.4.4 Committee Annual Assurance Reports

Papers AB.22.07.08/09/10/11/12/13/14 were received.

AB.22.07.4.4.1 Academic Board considered and approved the annual assurance reports from the following sub-committees:

- LTSEC
- RKEC
- SAPG
- ACE Faculty Board
- FBL Faculty Board
- HAS Faculty Board
- FET Faculty Board

AB.22.07.4.5 Contextual Admissions Policy

Paper AB.22.07.19 was received.

AB.22.07.4.5.1 Academic Board considered the contextual admissions policy, which had previously been endorsed by LTSEC. The ambition was to use contextual admissions data to gain a more holistic view of an application and looking at an applicant's potential to succeed in higher education. This was now the norm in many universities. The proposal was to use multiple equalities measure from UCAS to aggregate a score that would come through automatically with their application, rather than something a prospective student would have to apply for separately. The standard offer reduction would be 16 points or two grades.

During discussion, Academic Board noted the following:

- i. The whole sector was adopting this approach so it was unlikely to have any impact on relative league table performance, although this would be monitored.
- ii. Additional support would be provided to programme leaders so that they understood which students had been given contextual offers. Students would not be treated differently as standard if they received a contextual offer but would receive the same individualised support package that other students received.
- iii. Further consideration should be given as to how to incorporate success in the extended project qualification in the admissions process.

AB.22.07.4.5.2 Academic Board endorsed the direction of travel on this issue and recommended explicit communications to aid understanding.

AB.22.07.5 ITEMS TO NOTE**AB.22.07.5.1 Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Update***Paper AB.22.07.15 was received.*

AB.22.07.5.1.1 Academic Board considered an update on the University's preparations for its next TEF submission, which had previously been presented to LTSEC. Although the University did not know the outcomes of the OfS consultation yet, they had indicated that they would be pushing back the submission window into early 2023. LTSEC would have oversight of the preparation for the submission with Academic Board kept informed. The submission would require University-wide input to identify the strengths that the University would want to emphasise around experience and outcome.

During discussion, Academic Board noted the following:

- i. It was unlikely that the Requires Improvement award, which had been controversial within the sector, would be removed.
- ii. The preparations for the now abandoned subject-level TEF had revealed that the strong evidence was when taking a whole University approach.
- iii. A poor outcome in a University Ofsted inspection could trigger interest from the OfS. Apprenticeships were considered as a particular group and a separate data point.

AB.22.07.6 SUMMARY REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES*Papers AB.22.07.16/17/18 were received.*

AB.22.07.6.1 Members noted summary reports from sub-committees as follows:

- LTSEC (8 June 2022)
- RKEC (15 June 2022)
- SAPG (28 June 2022)

AB.22.07.7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

AB.22.07.7.1 There was no other business raised.

AB.22.07.8 DATES OF 2021/22 MEETINGS

AB.22.07.8.1 Tuesday 12 July 2022 (joint meeting with Board of Governors)