



ACADEMIC BOARD

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 18 May 2022

- Present:** Amanda Coffey (Chair), Jodie Anstee, Paul Bennett, Martin Boddy, Evan Botwood (SU President), Suzanne Carrie, Wendy Colvin, Rachel Cowie, John Griffiths, Marc Griffiths, Vanique Kruger, Vikas Kumar, James Lee, Hannah Mathias, Fidel Meraz, Jo Midgley, Cathy Minett Smith, Christopher Moore, Heather Moyes (Secretary), Lyn Newton, Dami Okeyoyin (VP Education), Paul Olomolaiye, Carinna Parraman, Jeanette Sakel, Jim Smith, Emma Weitkamp
- In attendance:** Dan Bougourd (item 4.3), Nick Button (Officer), Nicky Pavitt (item 4.1)
- Apologies:** Steven West, Jason Briddon, Tod Burton, Sally Clark, Hilary Drew, Chris Gledhill, Antony Hill, Katie Jenkins, Helen King, Candy McCabe, Raymond McDowell, Mandy Lee, Danielle Newton, Nicholas Ryder, Richard Strange, Neil Sutherland, Sarah Ward, Thomas Wild, Neil Willey
- Observers:** Grant Mansfield (Board of Governors)

AB.22.05.1 WELCOME

AB.22.05.1.1 Welcome to members

The Chair welcomed new members to the meeting, noting that Professor Steve West was meeting with the Universities Minister and so had sent his apologies to Academic Board. The Chair also welcomed Grant Mansfield as the Board of Governors observer for this meeting.

AB.22.05.1.2 Apologies for absence

The Chair noted apologies for absence received.

AB.22.05.1.3 Declaration of interest

No declarations of interest were notified.

AB.22.05.2 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

AB.22.05.2.1 Previous Minutes

Paper AB.22.05.01 was received

Members confirmed the minutes were an accurate record of the meeting held on 23 February 2022.

AB.22.05.2.2 Action Sheet and Matters Arising

Paper AB.22.05.02 was received

The Chair noted that two actions had arisen from the previous meeting – one had been completed and the other was not yet due.

AB.22.05.2.3

Chair's Actions

Papers AB.22.05.03/04 were received.

Members noted all Chair's Actions that had been taken since the previous meeting, including the approval of a name change for the Centre for Fine Print Research to the Centre for Print Research, and an amendment to Academic Regulations Part J.

AB.22.05.3

STANDING AGENDA ITEMS

AB.22.05.3.1

Update from the Vice-Chancellor

Paper AB.22.02.05 was received.

AB.22.05.3.1.1

Members considered an update from the Vice-Chancellor on matters of relevance to Academic Board.

AB.22.05.3.1.2

In discussion, members noted:

- i. With regard to academic risks, that retention and success targets had been rated as high risk. Although it was the ambition to minimise risk in this area, the rating reflected that it remained a significant risk for all institutions. . The Board of Governors would continue to hold Directorate to account on the management of those risks. LTSEC would also scrutinise the risks.
- ii. Progress had made been in reducing the awarding gap in the previous academic year, which the University aimed to sustain and build upon.
- iii. Congratulations to the Events Team for the success of the graduation ceremonies. It was noted that future planning would try to accommodate an even greater cross section of the University community, mindful of space constraints. Student representatives' concern to ensure the sustainability of events were noted.

AB.22.05.3.2

Update from the Students' Union

Paper AB.22.05.06 was received

AB.22.05.3.2.1

The Students' Union Officers presented their report, highlighting the Action on Sustainability Week, the partnership with the Library for the Celebrating Culture Campaign and Conference, the In My Language campaign, and the work on the mental health agenda. A number of student awards events had also been held recently. The Student Partnership Projects had concluded with some clear outcomes that would now be taken forward.

AB.22.05.3.2.1

Academic Board noted its appreciation to the outgoing Students' Union Officers for their work during the current academic year.

AB.22.05.4 ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**AB.22.05.4.1 Academic Regulations**

Academic Board considered two papers in relation of the Academic Regulations: the first on degree algorithms and the second comprising the proposed Regulations for new students, some of which would be brought in from the 2022 intake. Members were reminded that the full suite of changes to the Regulations was approved in 2019. It had originally been intended that the changes would be implemented in line with deployment of a new Student Information and Records Management system, although this had been delayed. It was noted that the overriding principle for this work had been to simplify the Academic Regulations.

AB.22.05.4.1.1 Undergraduate Degree Awarding Algorithm

Paper AB.22.05.07 was received

AB.22.05.4.1.1.1 Academic Board considered a proposal to revise the University's undergraduate degree algorithm to ensure alignment with sector best practice.

AB.22.05.4.1.1.2 Members heard that enhanced scrutiny of degree algorithms was likely because of recent interventions around "grade inflation". The paper contained a recommendation that a small group would be formed to look at those issues in detail.

AB.22.05.4.1.1.3 During discussion, Academic Board noted:

- i. Although there were no subject-specific considerations within the algorithm, where variant regulations were required to meet PSRB requirements, this could be achieved without difficulty.
- ii. The accompanying communications would be important to ensure that students were making the right choices for them.
- iii. The new algorithms would only apply to new students commencing from 2022/23 onwards.
- iv. The University would continue to monitor the use of grade point average in other parts of the sector and revisit accordingly.
- v. Further work would be done on the EDI analysis, particularly around any impact on awarding gaps, although it was noted that analysis had shown that black and minority ethnic students were not adversely affected by uncapped resits.

AB.22.05.4.1.1.3 Academic Board **approved** the recommendations contained in the paper.

AB.22.05.4.1.2 Proposed Academic Regulations 2023/24

Paper AB.22.05.08 was received

AB.22.05.4.1.2.1 Academic Board considered the proposed regulations, noting that they had previously been considered in detail by the Quality & Standards Sub-

Committee and via a Sounding Board with wide academic and professional service involvement. During discussion, Academic Board raised the following:

- i. There was considerable pressure on staff in the exam marking period that might be affected by an automatic five-day extension (grace) period. It was important that students understood that this was not a mechanism for managing their workload.
- ii. Any delays to student feedback arising from an increase in numbers taking up the extension option would potentially have negative effects, including on mental health.
- iii. The five-day grace period had been based on feedback but had necessarily been a compromise between differing views.
- iv. It was not proposed that additional support would be available over the grace period, and it was important that communications to students reflected that.
- v. Concerns have been expressed that allowing uncapped resits would discourage students from attempting assessments at the first sit (when academic support is available), and that some students may use uncapped resits to their advantage by strategically spreading out their workloads. Mitigations would need to be put in place to ensure fairness in any uncapped resits policy to ensure that students were not using it to gaining an advantage over their peers.

AB.22.05.4.1.2.2 Academic Board voted not to approve the proposed Academic Regulations based on specific concerns about the grace period proposals. As a result, the accompanying proposal around the adoption of the new Regulations could not be approved either.

AB.22.05.4.1.2.3 Members agreed that amendments would be made to the draft Regulations and an agreement reached outside the meeting on how best the concerns of Academic Board could be addressed within the timetable required for a new set of Regulations to be adopted and made available to students.

Action: Chair/Secretary/Director of Student & Academic Services/Student Voice & Academic Policy Team Manager.

AB.22.05.4.2 Ofsted Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan
Paper AB.22.05.09 was received

AB.22.05.4.2.1 Academic Board considered the paper, which had previously been endorsed by LTSEC.

AB.22.05.4.2.2 Members heard that the entire apprenticeship portfolio was now subject to Ofsted inspection and that it could happen any time between now and May 2023. The inspection would look across four themes to make a single judgement about the quality of the University's apprenticeship provision. They would also consider safeguarding, a positive outcome of which was a pre-requisite for achieving anything other than Inadequate in the overall inspection. A result of Inadequate would mean the loss of the license to deliver apprenticeships and so it was incredibly important

the University was adequately prepared for the inspection and was able to articulate its areas of strengths and demonstrate that areas for improvement were being acted upon. During discussion, Academic Board raised the following:

- i. The report could be further strengthened by additional pictures of environment that students were working in, so that inspectors knew what to expect when they visited campus.
- ii. The University was realistic about its potential for reaching an Outstanding award, noting that there was still work to be done in building consistency and a strong evidence base for its current self-assessment as a "Good" provider.
- iii. The language on leadership and management, and the accompanying Quality Assurance, could be strengthened further.

AB.22.05.4.2.3 Academic Board **approved** the Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan for submission to Ofsted and **noted** the arrangements for ongoing monitoring and review.
Action: Secretary

AB.22.05.4.3 Degree Outcomes Statement 2020/21
Paper AB.22.05.10 was received

AB.22.05.4.3.1 Academic Board considered the Degree Outcomes Statement 2020/21, which would be submitted to the Board of Governors with additional information included on the context of the recent ministerial intervention on "grade inflation".

AB.22.05.4.3.2 Members heard that the OfS had recently released analysis considering the increase in Good Honours achieved in students since 2011/12 where it had drawn a distinction between explained and unexplained increases. It had concluded that all institutions had at least some level of unexplained grade inflation and it was expected that this would lead to increased regulatory scrutiny of universities, although it was unclear in which universities the OfS would prioritise scrutinising first.

AB.22.05.4.3.3 During discussion, Academic Board raised the following points:

- i. The OfS' interpretation of unexplained grade inflation did not account for any improvements in teaching practice or student support and was instead based on demographic information.
- ii. The model used by the OfS arbitrarily picked 2011/12 as the baseline year to consider increases in awards against.
- iii. Further work would need to be done for the University to assure itself that it was satisfied with the grades it was awarding.

AB.22.05.4.3.4 Academic Board **approved** the Statement for submission to the Board of Governors, updated with the additional contextual information.

AB.22.05.4.4 Committee elections
Paper AB.22.05.11 was received.

AB.22.05.4.4.1 Academic Board considered proposals to change the rules and culture around the University's committee elections, following a period of low engagement. Recommendations had been produced following a process of consultation with staff to reform the election rules and encourage engagement with the elections process.

AB.22.05.4.4.2 Academic Board **endorsed** the proposals, which would be submitted to Nominations & Governance Committee for approval.

AB.22.05.4.5 Board of Governors Elected Nominee

Paper AB.22.05.12 was received

AB.22.05.4.5.1 Academic Board **approved** the nomination of Professor Jim Smith to serve as the elected non-executive Academic Board nominee on the Board of Governors.

AB.22.05.4.6 Emeritus Professor: Professor David Evans

Paper 22.05.13 was received.

AB.22.05.4.6.1 Academic Board **approved** the appointment of Professor David Evans from the Faculty of Health & Applied Sciences as an Emeritus Professor.

AB.22.02.5 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

AB.22.05.5.1 Subject Readiness Review: Progress

Paper AB.22.05.14 was received.

AB.22.05.5.1.1 This item was deferred.

AB.22.05.5.2 2021 REF results

Paper AB.22.05.18 was received

AB.22.05.5.2.1 Academic Board considered a presentation on the University's 2021 REF results.

AB.22.05.5.2.2 Members heard that 400 members of staff had contributed to the REF submission with 930 outputs. The percentage of 3* and 4* outputs had increased from 61% in 2014 to 76% in 2021. The University had also performed well in Impact. It had slightly improved its position relative to the sector and all but two subject areas had seen improvements.

AB.22.05.5.2.3 During discussion, Academic Board raised the following:

- i. There had been a great deal of variability in environment performance and a lack of transparency in how the quality of environment statements was assessed.
- ii. The outcome had significant reputational impact and it was important to communicate it to existing and prospective staff. It would also generate income, as well as supporting the work in creating and sustaining a thriving research culture.

AB.22.05.5.2.4 Academic Board noted its thanks to all who had contributed to the REF results.

AB.22.05.5.3 Research Readiness Review: Update

Paper AB.22.05.19 was received

AB.22.05.5.3.1 Academic Board noted an update on the progress of the Research Readiness Review.

AB.22.05.5.3.2 Members heard that it comprised six workstreams to be completed by the end of June 2022. A staff consultation day was planned for 26 May with research leaders, PGR students, and professional service staff. Following the reports of the workstreams, a Strategy Realisation Programme would be developed.

AB.22.05.6 SUMMARY REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

Papers AB.22.05.15/16/17 were received

AB.22.05.6.1 Members noted summary reports from sub-committees as follows:

- LTSEC (6 April 2022)
- RKEC (30 March 2022)
- SAPG (29 March 2022)

AB.22.05.7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

AB.22.05.7.1 Academic Board noted and commended the announcement that UWE would participate in the Ukraine Scholar At Risk scheme.

AB.22.02.8 DATES OF 2021/22 MEETINGS

AB.21.12.8.1 Wednesday 6 July 2022

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