

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

ACADEMIC ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on Friday 24 May 2019

Present: Prof Paul Wiles (Chair), Prof Jeff Bale, Dr Stephen Timothy, Mr Martin Conway (University Secretary + Clerk to the Board)

In attendance: Prof Sir Chris Husbands, Vice-Chancellor
Leopold Green, Head of Academic Quality and Standards
Dr Neil McKay, Dean of Students
Daniel Lally, Head of Business Engagement and Growth (for agenda item 6)
Pete Sweeney, Governance Services (Minute Secretary)

Apologies for absence from Dr Julie Morrissy

Paper reference	Minute reference	
	AAC/19/01	Declaration of interests
		There were no declarations of interest.
AAC/2/18M	AAC/19/02	Meeting held on 26 October 2018
	2.1	The minutes were <u>confirmed</u> as a correct record.
	2.2	In relation to Minute AAC/18/12 (University Annual Quality Review and Action Plan), it was agreed that a progress report on timetabling would be presented to the next meeting in October 2019. This meeting should also receive a background paper on how postgraduate research supported the overall research strategy.
		Action: University Secretary + Clerk to the Board
AAC/2/19/5	AAC/19/03	Academic Assurance Committee Terms of Reference
	3.1	The Vice-Chancellor reported that the Office for Students (OfS) was becoming increasingly confident in its regulatory function. This placed added responsibility on the Board of Governors for providing assurances on academic matters. He therefore welcomed the decision to increase the frequency of Academic Assurance Committee meetings. It made sense for the Committee to provide specialist advice on the academic health of the University through its focus on the processes by which the University monitored the quality and standards of its academic provision.
	3.2	The Committee <u>noted</u> the minor changes to the Terms of Reference and suggested the following additional amendments: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. Section 3.1 to be extended to include reference to '<i>Ofsted or such regulatory bodies that may exist</i>'. II. Section: 7: The PVC Teaching and Learning and the Dean of Students to be included in the list of those who will normally attend meetings where business relevant to them is to be

discussed.

- 3.3 The Chair drew attention to the fact that the external co-option remained vacant and asked for this to be progressed. It was suggested that someone with an economic development function within the region might be approached.

Action: University Secretary + Clerk to the Board

AAC/1/19/6

AAC/19/04

Higher Degree Apprenticeships

- 4.1 Ofsted had inspected the University's apprenticeship provision in March 2019. The report graded the University as 'requires improvement' across all areas in the inspection. The programmes in scope were the Foundation Degree and NVQ in Engineering and the Operations Departmental Manager Level 5 higher apprenticeship. A total of 97 learners across 37 employers were in scope including sub-contracted provision at 4 further education providers. This inspection did not cover Level 6 Degree apprenticeships or Level 7 Masters apprenticeships, which accounted for the majority of the University's apprenticeship provision.
- 4.2 The Committee received the Short Term Recovery Plan which responded to the findings of the report. A monitoring visit was expected around November 2019 ahead of a re-inspection, under a new framework, which was expected around April 2020.
- 4.3 The Vice-Chancellor reported that the outcome of the inspection raised issues around policy, governance and management. The University was content to grow work-based learning provision in light of reasonable evidence that students were choosing this ahead of part-time provision. However, the drive to grow in this area had led to decisions being made before processes were fully in place. Ultimately, the findings were not acceptable and the University would deal with it and put things right.
- 4.4 The following points were raised in discussion:
- i Members asked whether the University was confident that it had systems and processes in place to respond to the findings of the inspection and whether it had the capacity to deliver the actions in the Action Plan. The Head of Business Engagement and Growth reported that Ofsted had acknowledged that systems and processes were in place but that it was too early for them to see the impact of these. All actions in the plan were due to be completed by September 2019, ahead of the monitoring visit. A recently constituted Apprenticeship and Work Based Learning Steering Group would be responsible for ensuring that actions were carried out within the timescales set and that on-going monitoring was implemented. The actions marked in red on the Action Plan were at the highest risk of not being completed because of dependencies with other areas of the University. The Steering Group would focus on these in particular.
 - ii The Committee noted that the core of the concerns raised by Ofsted was the quality of sub-contracted teaching at two external providers and asked how the University planned to manage to this. In response, it was stated that additional real-time controls, including monthly reporting and

monitoring, were now in place to get a better feel for the quality of delivery. There were variances in the quality of delivery between various sub-contractors and the challenge was how the University managed and supported them. Ultimately, if the quality of sub-contracted delivery did not improve then the University would have to end the relationship. Members commented that the timescale for the monitoring visit meant the University could not wait too long before deciding to act.

- iii The Committee drew attention to the fact that arrangements with other providers had proved difficult in the past. The Board would need to be assured that sufficient due diligence processes were in place before embarking on new areas of business in the future.
- 4.5 On the basis of the report and discussions at the meeting the Committee felt able to assure the Board that the University had a recovery plan. It would continue to monitor the University's progress against this plan and the preparations for future inspections.
- 4.6 The following actions were agreed around strengthening monitoring and reporting to the Committee and the Board:
 - I. A report showing progress against the recovery plan to be presented to the next meeting of the Committee in October 2019.
 - II. This issue to be a standing item on future Committee agendas for the foreseeable future.
 - III. Details on how the University is preparing for the next inspection to be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.
 - IV. A session on higher degree apprenticeships to be built into the next Governors' Strategy Event in October 2019.

AAC/1/19/7

AAC/19/05

Proposed Revisions to the Annual Review Process and Periodic Review Process

- 5.1 Annual Review is a process undertaken by academic staff with responsibility for the design, delivery and enhancement of courses and modules. In order to enhance and meet the aims of annual review, and in light of the replacement of HEFCE and Annual Provider Review with the Office for Students, the annual review cycle was being brought forward to align with the academic cycle. The reporting period for annual review would therefore take place between the months of June and October. This would enable reporting to the Committee and to the Board to be more reflective of the most recent academic year and for it to link better with the business planning process.
- 5.2 In discussion, members welcomed the shortened timescale and asked how the University could ensure that it would be delivered. The Head of Academic Quality and Standards reported that the Assistant Deans for Student Experience within faculties had agreed the proposal and would be responsible for delivering it.

AAC/1/19/8

AAC/19/06

Annual Quality Review Action Plan 2018

- 6.1 At its meeting in October 2018, the Committee subjected the Annual Quality Review Report to detailed scrutiny prior to recommending it as a basis for the Accountable Officer to give necessary assurances via the Annual Assurance return. The Action Plan was a living document which

was continually updated to reflect the progress of the various work-streams against the stated delivery and impact targets. The Head of Academic Quality and Standards reported that a number of the issues previously covered in the Action Plan were now being addressed within the University step-change projects.

- 6.2 The Vice-Chancellor reported that progress was being made on timetabling. He advised however that the more turbulent student recruitment market would introduce instability into the process. The Committee would receive a progress report on timetabling at its meeting in October 2019.
- 6.3 The Committee noted the Action Plan. Members requested that future iterations should be divided between actions intended to be delivered in the following academic year and those with a longer timescale in order to aid its monitoring of delivery.

Action: Head of Academic Quality and Standards

AAC/2/19/9

AAC/19/07

The Student Voice

- 7.1 The University had an obligation to involve and engage students and there was likely to be more focus on this going forward under the Office for Students, as evidenced in the expectations for engagement in the Access and Participation Plan. The report gave a high level oversight about the range of metrics used to capture the student voice. It focused on the three key mechanisms: student representatives, module evaluation and surveys.
- 7.2 In discussion, members acknowledged that the Student Voice Report, published by the Students' Union, formed only a small part of the wider exercise of capturing the student voice. Also, dependent on content, it may not identify issues related to the academic experience or learning and teaching matters. However so far it was the only formal report on the matter that the Committee had received and in future it needed to receive other information on the student's involvement and response to the academic teaching. The Dean of Students reported that the Committee would in future also receive the National Student Survey (NSS) results. These were due to be issued in July so would be reported to the meeting in October 2019.
- 7.3 In response to questions about how the information collected could be linked to national metrics, the Dean of Students reported that key questions asked in the standard module evaluation questionnaire were mapped to the NSS. The University also participated in a number of national benchmarked surveys, including the NSS, Graduate Outcomes and the Advance HE Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey. There was a significant degree of alignment between some question blocks on those surveys. The Committee asked for future sight of this macro analysis.

Action: Dean of Students

AAC/2/19/10

AAC/19/08

Educational Partnership Planning and Approval Process

- 8.1 The Head of Academic Quality and Standards provided an update on

international educational partnership proposals currently being considered through the Educational Partnership Planning and Approval Process. This process had been designed to manage and mitigate risk in order to avoid issues experienced under previous approval arrangements.

- 8.2 The University Secretary and Clerk to the Board reported that the Student Protection Plan, which was a condition of registration with the Office for Students, extended to international educational partnerships. Any decision to enter into a new partnership might fall into the definition of a 'reportable event' which would require the University to notify the Office for Students.
- 8.3 The Committee noted the planning and approval process and the oral report on potential partnerships currently within this process.

AAC/19/09 **Next Meeting**

25 October 2019