

CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 FEBRUARY 2020

PRESENT:

Professor Paul Wiles (Chair)	Professor Julietta Patnick
Professor Jeff Bale	Dr Stephen Timothy
Elaine Buckley	

IN ATTENDANCE:

AGENDA ITEM

Professor Roger Eccleston, DVC Academic	All
Leopold Green, Head of Academic Quality and Standards	All
Dr Neil Mckay, Dean of Students	All
Professor Alison Metcalfe, PVC Teaching and Learning	All
Daniel Lally, Head of Business Engagement and Growth	5
Ruth Thei, Head of Governance and Sector Regulations (Secretary)	All
Pete Sweeney, Governance and Sector Regulations Adviser (Minute Secretary)	All

Agenda item	Opening Comments	Minute Ref	AAC/20/01
Paper Ref			

1.1 The Chair welcomed Professor Julietta Patnick to her first meeting as a member of the Committee.

Agenda item	2 Declaration of Interests	Minute Ref	AAC/20/02
Paper Ref			

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

Agenda item	5 Meeting on 25 October 2019	Minute Ref	AAC/20/03
Paper Ref			

3.1 The minutes were approved as a correct record.

Agenda item	4 Matters Arising and Other Urgent Business	Minute Ref	AAC/20/04
Paper Ref			

4.1 There were no matters arising or other urgent business.

Agenda item	5 Ofsted Readiness Update	Minute Ref	AAC/20/05
Paper Ref			

5.1 The Committee received an update on the University's progress against the Ofsted Improvement Plan and its readiness for the monitoring visit that would take place at some point before 8 April 2020. The update included a report on Summary of Progress against the Areas for Improvement and the Apprenticeship Position Statement (January 2020), which would be provided to the inspectors to give an indication of where the University was against the seven areas for improvement identified in the initial inspection in March 2019. These documents, plus a report from the external consultants supporting the Project Leadership Team, had been considered by the University Leadership Team at its meeting on 21 January 2020. The Position Statement had been revised in light of challenge raised at that meeting. The Academic Board had also reviewed progress, in terms of the University's response to the quality and standards issues raised by the inspection, at its meeting on 29 January 2020.

5.2 The Committee noted the extent of work that had taken place since its last meeting in October 2019 and reiterated views expressed at that meeting around the strategic importance of the apprenticeship provision given the University's focus on applied learning. Members discussed the University's progress against the inspection findings and its readiness for the monitoring visit with University leaders and managers including the DVC Academic, PVC Learning and Teaching,

Head of Business Engagement and Growth and Head of Academic Quality and Standards. The challenge from governors focussed on the institutional learning since the original inspection and how this prepared the University for the monitoring visit and future inspections. The following points were made in response to comments and questions raised in the discussion:

- I. The University had learned important lessons around triangulating the opportunities presented by apprenticeships with the capacity to deliver and a focus on high quality provision.
- II. Quality improvement measures had been applied across the whole of the apprenticeship portfolio, not just the programmes within the scope of the inspection. The University was satisfied this was the right thing to do but it was important for governors to note that this had slowed down the overall pace of the progress made, and that the rate of improvement would have been quicker had the focus just been on the in-scope programmes.
- III. Extensive consideration had been given to sub-contracting apprenticeship provision given the issues identified in the inspection with the quality of teaching at two external providers. Delivering apprenticeship provision exclusively in-house would remove the risks associated with sub-contracting. However, this approach would restrict some strategic developments including the one with South Yorkshire Police which could only be delivered through sub-contracting. The Committee was given assurances that clear principles had been established to regulate decisions about whether to sub-contract delivery and such decisions would be by exception.
- IV. The quality assurance approach to the rest of the apprenticeship provision was expected to mirror that adopted by Ofsted for Levels 3&4. The University was now better prepared for this type of inspection methodology, including the role and expectations of governors.

5.3 The Committee discussed progress against the finding by Ofsted that governors had insufficient awareness of the quality of a few important aspects of provision and that this restricted their capacity to hold leaders and managers to account and to challenge them to make necessary improvements. Members noted two recent developments:

- I. That Jeff Bale had taken up the role of link governor, which involved him in receiving dedicated briefings and updates and providing support and challenge to leaders and managers, including during the development of the Position Statement. Prof Bale explained he would be meeting with the Project Team immediately ahead of each Board meeting and would update governors as appropriate afterwards.
- II. That the appointment of a governor with apprenticeship expertise was being progressed through the normal recruitment process led by the Nominations Committee.

Members acknowledged the value of the link governor approach given that the inspection methodology required a level of detail they had not previously been required to demonstrate as a governor in a HE institution. Caution was advised however to ensure there remained a clear distinction between executive and governor responsibilities.

5.4 The Committee noted the reference in the Position Statement to ensuring a consistent supply of performance data to the University Leadership Team and Board of Governors to allow continued and further improved rigor in support and challenge. It was agreed that the Committee would also receive a summary of this data at each meeting. In the meantime, Prof Bale assured members that he had reviewed the current set of performance data on behalf of the Committee in his role as link governor.

5.5 The Committee agreed that it could assure the Board that the University was making satisfactory progress on the areas for improvement ahead of the monitoring visit and that governors had sufficient awareness of the quality of provision to ensure that leaders and managers were held to account to make the necessary improvements remaining.

6.1 At its previous meeting, the Committee had expressed concern around the clarity of its role in providing assurances to the Board of Governors on academic matters and around its relationship with the Academic Board. A report had been produced in response to those concerns which considered the processes by which the Board of Governors received assurances around the effectiveness of academic governance and also explored wider issues around the role of the AAC, the information it needed to perform that role and its relationship with the Academic Board. The report proposed:

- I. A more clearly defined role for the AAC for giving an annual assurance to the Board on the quality of academic quality and standards and the effectiveness of academic governance arrangements, advising on regulatory compliance and external inspection requirements, and monitoring key academic risks;
- II. Protocols for testing assurances around academic governance via systematic reporting and dialogue between the AAC (on behalf of the Board of Governors) and the Academic Board;
- III. An annual cycle of business establishing a consistent programme for the AAC and Academic Board.

6.2 The Committee broadly supported the proposed approach whilst noting that further work was needed to articulate academic governance processes, understand the developing external expectations of the Board of Governors around regulatory reporting and to establish an appropriate set of reports and data to the AAC. The following points were raised by governors in discussion on those matters:

- I. Current descriptions of academic governance routes felt overly complex and did not necessarily articulate the relations between Academic Board and the AAC as described in the report;
- II. Other governance committees, such as Finance and Employment, had a clear understanding of their role in providing scrutiny and challenge to the executive and in reporting through to the Board of Governors. A similar understanding was needed between the AAC and Board of Governors;
- III. Consideration of the Board of Governors' reporting requirements needed to take account of there being multiple regulators and professional bodies, not just the Office for Students;
- IV. The ongoing work to establish the flow of business to the Executive Boards was noted. Whilst this was for the executive to manage, the output of this work would impact on the quality of information provided to the Academic Board and subsequently the AAC. It was important to clarify within this flow of business where decision-making and oversight took place;
- V. There was value in the AAC receiving key performance indicators at an appropriate level of detail.

6.3 It was agreed to return to this matter at the next meeting in May 2020 with a further report reflecting on the issues raised above.

Action: Clerk to the Board

Agenda item 7	Industrial Action: Impact on Students	Minute Ref AAC/20/07
Paper Ref AAC/1/20/7		

- 7.1 Strike action by the University and Colleges Union (UCU) had taken place over the eight working days between 25 November and 4 December 2019. The Committee received a report on the actions being taken to mitigate the impact on the student academic experience. These actions included:
- I. Creation of three cross-University groups to share insight, manage impact and mitigate any apparent risks;
 - II. A range of measures to ensure students were not disadvantaged where it was known that there had been an impact on teaching and assessment activities. These measures included extended submission deadlines, alternative learning opportunities and adjustments to the mode of assessment;
 - III. A 'fast-track' version of the student complaints process being employed to facilitate prompt and consistent responses to formal complaints;
 - IV. On-going monitoring of the impact on the student academic experience via moderation and Assessment Board processes.
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- 7.2 The Committee expressed its confidence that the University was managing the impact of the industrial action on students as well as possible. During discussion, members commented that managing the impact of planned action in February and March 2020 might be more complicated given the proximity to the end of semester 2 teaching and Dissertation deadlines for final year students. In response, the DVC Academic reported that the University had a good idea of the areas that would be disrupted based on the patterns of the previous industrial action. Reviews of formal complaints submitted by students in relation to that action indicated a good level of engagement from Heads of Department around implementing alternative learning opportunities and communicating these to students. He added that Departmental Assessment Boards had the authority to exceptionally adjust marking and moderation processes where necessary.
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Agenda item 8	Managing Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) Risk	Minute Ref AAC/20/08
Paper Ref AAC/1/20/8		

- 8.1 The report provided background to the CMA's approach to changes to course and module content and explained how the University was managing curriculum development in the context of its risk appetite when dealing with CMA compliance.
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- 8.2 The following points were made in response to comments and questions raised in the discussion:
- I. The annual course modifications cycle had developed over the past four years in line with emerging guidance from the CMA. The important thing now was to establish an appropriate risk balance. The Head of Academic Quality and Standards stated he was content that the final date for approval as from 2020/21 was appropriate.
 - II. It was important to establish the right level of detail and ensure course information did not provide unnecessary detail of the type that could restrict the flexibility to make changes to delivery in the intellectual interests of students at a later point in the course. It was important to consider the inclusivity agenda however when considering changes to delivery as these could have a significant impact on some students;
 - III. The introduction of Highly Skilled Employment (HSE) at all levels of study in 2019/20 had been difficult for course teams to manage. However, this was a time-limited problem that was being worked through.
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Agenda item 9	Quality and Standards Update	Minute Ref AAC/20/09
Paper Ref		

- 9.1 The Head of Academic Quality and Standards drew the Committee's attention to the impact caused by political unrest and Coronavirus on Sheffield Hallam students on franchised courses being delivered in Hong Kong and China. Teaching had been disrupted throughout the year and decisions would be made shortly about how to mitigate the impact. The Committee observed that whilst the causes of these issues had been out of the University's control, it had a duty to address the impact on the student academic experience. This should be done as a matter of urgency, particularly with regards to those students who are due to complete in 2019/20.

Action: Head of Academic Quality and Standards

- 9.2 The University was due to submit its Statement of Intent in response to the sector review of degree classifications. This would be reported to the AAC at the next meeting in May 2020.

Action: Head of Academic Quality and Standards

Agenda item 10	Academic Board Meeting on 29 January 2020	Minute Ref AAC/20/10
Paper Ref AB/1/20M		

- 10.1 The Committee noted the unconfirmed record of the meeting of the Academic Board held on 29 January 2020.

Agenda item 11	Next Meeting	Minute Ref AAC/20/11
Paper Ref		

- 11.1 25 May 2020