

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22 MAY 2020**

**PRESENT (viaWebex):**

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

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

	<b>AGENDA ITEM</b>
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
Dan Lally, Head of Business Engagement and Growth	8
Carolyn Taylor, Head of Student Policy & Compliance	7
Pete Sweeney, Governance and Sector Regulation Adviser (Minute Secretary)	All
Hannah Boyce, Governance and Sector Regulation Senior Administrator	All

Agenda item 2	<b>Declaration of Interests</b>		Minute Ref AAC/20/12
Paper Ref			

12.1 There were no declarations of interest.

Agenda item 3	<b>Meeting on 14 February 2020</b>		Minute Ref AAC/20/13
Paper Ref AAC/1/20/M			

13.1 The minutes were approved as a correct record.

Agenda item 4	<b>Matters Arising</b>		Minute Ref AAC/20/14
Paper Ref			

14.1 In relation to minute 20/6.1 (Understanding the Role of the Academic Assurance Committee), the Clerk to the Board reported that the practices to establish clear protocols with the Academic Board were now being implemented. The sequencing of business and presentation of papers would demonstrate the scrutiny that had taken place at the Academic Board and help the Committee to assure the Board of Governors that the University had robust processes in place to monitor the quality and standards of academic provision. Further work was taking place around the role and terms of reference of the Committee and this would be brought to the July meeting.

**Action: Clerk to the Board**

Agenda item 4	<b>Updates Since the Previous Meeting</b>		Minute Ref AAC/20/15
Paper Ref			

15.1 The Clerk to the Board reported that the governance structure had moved significantly since the last report to the Board. A pared down system of internal governance had been introduced with the pillar boards and other groups paused for the immediate future. The revised system was being led by the Gold Group with a Future Strategy Group looking at Autumn 2020 delivery as a priority. The University Leadership Team remained the primary executive decision-making body. Academic Board was continuing to function as normal and an additional meeting had been arranged to ensure it could continue to provide regulatory oversight of decision-making.

15.2 The DVC Academic reported on preparations for Autumn 2020. The academic year was expected to start on time and to provide an excellent student experience. Autumn would be different from the past nine weeks where students had been completing their studies. The approach would be driven by Government guidance and consideration of the student experience and anxieties. It was currently anticipated that most of the delivery would be delivered remotely but with some on-campus activity. A set of principles had been produced to assist Departments in preparing

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materials for delivery and these would be circulated to the Committee outside of the meeting. Plans were still evolving but would be presented to the Committee in time for it to consider and provide assurances to the Board. The arrangements for this would be reported in due course.

**Action: Clerk to the Board**

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- 15.3 The Chair reported that he would be speaking to the Chair of the Board shortly to discuss how the Board could best fulfil its responsibility to ensure that changes to the delivery of teaching had been properly considered. The Committee was dealing with critical matters at the moment and the Board may need to spend more time on these than it had done in the past.

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Agenda item 5

**Exceptional Revisions to Assessment and Progression  
Arrangements for the remainder of 2019/20**

Minute Ref AAC/20/16

Paper Ref AAC/2/20/5

- 16.1 The Committee received the report which explained the exceptional actions taken to revise assessment and progression arrangements for the remainder of the 2019/20 academic year in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the governance pathway by which the actions had been approved. Annex 1 to the report set out the three recommendations approved by Academic Board in March 2020:

- I. Automatic Pass and Progression for Foundation Year and Level 4 students: approved by Chair's Action on 31 March 2020.
  - II. A 'no detriment' approach to referrals for students at Levels 5/6/7: approved by Chair's Action on 31 March 2020.
  - III. Alternatives to traditional examinations: approved by Academic Board (via correspondence) on 19 March 2020.
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- 16.2 In considering the report, the Committee noted the opinion and advice from the Academic Board following its scrutiny of the exceptional measures in April. The Academic Board had highlighted the need to manage potential risks to the student academic experience by students progressing to level 5 when unprepared to do so and also the additional pressures on academic staff if the no detriment referral opportunity led to a significant amount of additional marking over the summer. The Committee's discussion focussed on the overall rationale for the approach taken by the University and why this did not include the 'safety net' which was the subject of a current campaign being led by the Students Union. The following points were made in response to comments and questions raised in the discussion:

- I. The 'safety net', which used average marks, had been considered at length by the Gold Group and a formal response had been issued to the Students Union.
  - II. The use of average marks, while appearing a simple approach, would not apply to a large number of undergraduate and postgraduate students including those on professional courses, those with insufficient credit from semester 1 due to the course structure or extenuating circumstances, or on courses where learning builds to meet the course learning outcomes during the year, often in the form of a 'capstone' assessment which brings together the learning on a course such as a project or dissertation. Using average marks therefore would not provide either equity to students or the necessary support to complete the assessments upon which credit and degree awards are based.
  - III. The University's approach was designed to support all students to continue their learning and to demonstrate this learning through appropriate assessment so that they could achieve meaningful awards. The approach was multi-faceted and included ensuring no detriment through the Assessment Boards' careful consideration of student and cohort performance, using current and previous marks to adjust outcomes where an impact is seen, and providing an uncapped retake should a student remain dissatisfied with this outcome.
  - IV. The University was confident that approach struck the right balance between fairness and making justifiable awards and progression decisions. It was comfortable that its approach
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was compliant with regulatory requirements and met the interests of students.

- 16.3 The Committee agreed that, on the basis of the material it had received and its discussions with senior academic leaders at the meeting, it could assure the Board of Governors that proper consideration had been given to the exceptional revisions to ensure they supported students and protected the value of degrees. It was important however that the University managed the potential reputation risks around the 'safety net' campaign by establishing a clear narrative for what it was doing and explaining this clearly to students.

Agenda item 6	<b>Quality and Standards Highlights Report</b>	Minute Ref AAC/20/17
Paper Ref AAC/2/20/6		

- 17.1 The Committee received the report which referenced the following developments:
- I. Changes to the course review mechanism which would be retitled to Course Enhancement Plan and focus on a longer-term perspective of three years, whilst still incorporating continuous improvement and review at course level.
  - II. Arrangements for collaborative provision in Hong Kong in response to the impact of both political disruption and most recently COVID-19 which caused major disturbances to the delivery of Sheffield Hallam provision in Hong Kong during 2019/20 academic year.

- 17.2 In discussion, the Committee welcomed the proposals Course Enhancement Plans as an important development in the approach to quality management. The intention to enable changes to be identified more quickly was helpful at the current time. The Committee asked to look at this further at the beginning of the next academic year.

**Action: Head of Academic Quality and Standards**

Agenda item 7	<b>Sheffield Hallam University Degree Outcomes Statement 2019/20</b>	Minute Ref AAC/20/18
Paper Ref AAC/2/20/7		

- 18.1 All degree awarding bodies were required to produce a Degree Outcomes Statement, in line with guidance set out by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) by the end of the 2019/20 academic year. This was one of the actions emerging from a consultation led by Universities UK in 2018-19 looking at the increase in graduates receiving First and Upper Second-Class degrees (good honours). The Committee received the draft University Degree Outcomes Statement and supporting material relating to the UUK Algorithm modelling against historic outcomes and impact on classification and a sector comparison of assessment regulations in relation to degree outcomes.

- 18.2 In considering the report, the Committee noted comments from the Academic Board following its scrutiny of the Statement in April. The Academic Board had advised: that the University should work proactively with UUK and QAA to help lead the sector in protecting the value of degrees; that student achievement should not be viewed negatively and reflected significant investment in time and focus to deliver improvements; and that the most likely contributory factor to the increase in the overall number of good honours degrees was the implementation of a new assessment framework in 2012.

- 18.3 In discussion, the Committee concurred with views expressed by the Chair of the Academic Board that the issue of maintaining academic standards remained a high priority and one on which the Government would continue to focus. It noted that the questions emerging from the consultation were not necessarily those being raised in political debate, which focussed more about the need for employers to be able to discriminate between people coming out of University. However, the draft Degree Outcomes Statement did provide a robust response to what was required of it.

- 18.4 The Committee agreed that based on the material received and its discussions at the meeting, it could recommend approval of the Statement to the Board of Governors.

Agenda item 8	<b>Update on Apprenticeships</b>	Minute Ref AAC/20/19
Paper Ref		

19.1 The University was continuing to plan for a monitoring visit by Ofsted. The cancellation of the expected visit in April 2020 provided an opportunity to continue to embed and implement the various changes that had been made in response to the inspection. Jeff Bale, in his role as Link Governor, reported that he had met with members of the Project Team ahead of the meeting and had reviewed a revised Position Statement and update. He stated that although little had changed from the version presented to the Committee in February 2020, the number of students in scope had risen slightly following recent recruitment. This was a positive development that would help the University demonstrate the improvements that had been made.

19.2 The Committee considered whether there might be an opportunity to actively promote the value of apprenticeships and exploit its expertise in this area. The DVC Academic Report that the position of apprenticeships was being considered within the Review of Portfolio. This would be presented to the Committee in due course.

**Action: DVC Academic**

Agenda item 9	<b>Academic Board Meeting on 22 April 2020</b>	Minute Ref AAC/20/20
Paper Ref AB/2/20M		

20.1 The Committee noted the unconfirmed record of the meeting of the Academic Board held on 22 April 2020.

Agenda item 10	<b>Annual Business Cycle</b>	Minute Ref AAC/20/21
Paper Ref AAC/2/20/10		

21.1 The Committee noted the report and asked for an evaluation of the impact of the revised assessment and progression arrangements to be added to the forward programme. The Clerk to the Board reported that a similar question had been raised at Academic Board and reports would be presented in due course.

**Action: Clerk to the Board**

Agenda item 12	<b>Next Meeting</b>	Minute Ref AAC/20/22
Paper Ref		

22.1 24 July 2020