

**CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 FEBRUARY 2021**

**PRESENT (via Zoom):**

Professor Jeff Bale (Chair)	Professor Julietta Patnick
Angela Foulkes	Professor Paul Wiles

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Michaela Boryslawskyj, University Secretary and Clerk to the Board of Governors  
 Hannah Boyce, Governance and Sector Regulation Senior Administrator  
 Professor Roger Eccleston, DVC Academic  
 Leopold Green, Head of Academic Quality and Standards  
 Dan Lally, Head of Business, Engagement and Growth (for agenda item 5)  
 Dr Neil Mckay, Dean of Students  
 Pete Sweeney, Governance and Sector Regulation Adviser (Minute Secretary)

Agenda item 2	<b>Declaration of Interests</b>	Minute Ref AAC/1/21/01
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1.1 There were none.

Agenda item 3	<b>Meeting on 16 October 2020</b>	Minute Ref AAC/1/21/02
Paper Ref AAC/4/20/M		

2.1 The minutes were approved as a correct record.

Agenda item 4	<b>Matters Arising</b>	Minute Ref AAC/1/21/03
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3.1 Minute 41.3 (Evaluation of No Detriment Measures): The Dean of Students reported that, as indicated at the previous meeting, analysis of student outcomes and assessment results showed:

- I. Good honours having increased by 5% to 83% overall in 2019/20.
- II. The BAME degree awarding gap having decreased by 4% to 15.4%.
- III. Average semester 2 coursework marks having increased by 4% compared with 2018/19.
- IV. Average semester 2 exam performance having increased by 8% compared with 2018/19.

3.2 The Chair reported that he had reviewed the minutes and was satisfied that all other substantive items were either covered on the agenda, were on the forward programme, or had been closed. He asked that from this meeting onwards, an action tracker be appended to the minutes to help review progress of outstanding issues.

**Action: Clerk to the Board**

Agenda item 5	<b>Apprenticeship Self-Assessment Report 2019/20</b>	Minute Ref AAC/1/21/04
Paper Ref AAC/1/21/5		

4.1 The annual Self-Assessment Report (**SAR**) covered the University's entire Apprenticeship provision (levels 4-7) and set out key strengths and areas for improvement. The SAR would be submitted to Ofsted in early February following its endorsement by the Academic Board at its meeting on 20 January 2021. It would also be used by inspection teams to inform the Monitoring Visit and re-inspection. The Head of Business Engagement and Growth drew the following points to the attention of the Committee:

- I. The University had self-assessed as Good (Grade 2) across all areas of judgement aligned to the Ofsted inspection framework.
- II. All areas for improvement and associated actions required for swift improvement identified in the SAR will form an internal Quality Improvement Plan (**QIP**), to be monitored by the Apprenticeship and Work Based Learning Steering Group, Chaired by PVC Business and Engagement. This would be presented to the Committee at its next meeting.

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ACTION: Head of Business Engagement and Growth

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- 4.2 Discussion of the SAR focussed on the document being a key piece of evidence to show that senior leaders and those that govern knew the strengths and weaknesses of the University's apprenticeship provision and had sharp focus on making rapid improvements where necessary. The following points were made:
- I. The University had made significant progress in raising awareness of Apprenticeship provision at Board of Governors level. A key mechanism for doing this had been the regular report from the Chair of the Committee at Board meetings which had been used to update on progress and highlight issues for the attention of the Board. These reports were evidenced in the minutes from those meetings. The Board also received the minutes from the Academic Assurance Committee and Academic Board meetings at which Apprenticeship provision had been discussed in detail over the past eighteen months.
  - II. The importance of the Board understanding the differences between the approach taken by Ofsted and other regulatory approaches could not be understated. This message had been given to the Board previously and should be repeated in the Chair's Report at its next meeting.
  - III. It was important that the University continued to explain to Ofsted the differences between the role of governors in a higher education setting to that in a school or college setting. In the higher education setting, the phrase 'those that govern' was not just limited to those on the Board of Governors and included a wider range of people.
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- 4.3 The Committee received the SAR, noting:
- I. The scrutiny and challenge from the Academic Board prior to its decision to endorse the SAR for submission to Ofsted.
  - II. The Committee's ongoing role in receiving the QIP and reporting any concerns or potential risks to the Board of Governors and the Vice-Chancellor.
  - III. The progress that had been made in raising awareness of Apprenticeship provision at Board level and the importance of ensuring the Board understood the implications of the changes to monitoring and inspection arrangements.
  - IV. That Apprenticeships remained an important element of the University's portfolio and that they formed part of the detailed discussions currently taking place around future strategy and balance of the portfolio.
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- 4.4 The Head of Business Engagement and Growth reported the following regarding monitoring visits and future inspections by Ofsted:
- I. The University had received an interim visit in December 2020. This had gone well and had provided a good opportunity to test a targeted response to the inspection.
  - II. Guidance had now changed about the next stage. Ofsted would be conducting an online Progress Monitoring Visit which was expected before the end of March 2021.
  - III. Reinspection was expected after 1 April 2021. He reminded the Committee that all Apprenticeship provision would be in-scope for the inspection from this date. This meant an increase from 51 students within 3 Departments to approximately 1500 students within 12 Departments.
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- 4.5 Discussion of the forthcoming Progress Monitoring Visit focussed on the likely expectations of governors during the monitoring visit and the support they would require beforehand. The Committee noted the insights from members with wider experiences of Ofsted processes and welcomed their expertise and input.
- Action: University Secretary to discuss involvement and briefing of governors with the Chair of the Board, Chair of AAC and the Vice-Chancellor.**
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- 5.1 The Annual Quality Review Report (**AQR**) set out how the University continued to exercise its responsibilities for the regulation, quality assurance, and enhancement of educational provision through its academic governance structure. The Head of Academic Quality and Standards highlighted the following points for the Committee's attention:
- I. Overall, University procedures were operating effectively to maintain academic standards and to ensure and enhance the quality of academic provision.
  - II. There were however areas where particular attention would need to be paid. These included managing the balance between agility and risk associated with collaborative and apprenticeship provision, the forthcoming monitoring visit and full inspection by Ofsted, end point assessment requirements and the resource required to support their delivery, the risk of fragmentation within the sector around how universities were regulated, the political situation in Hong Kong, the transition to online delivery in response to Covid-19, and the impact of some of regulatory changes in response to Covid-19 which remained to be seen.
  - III. There were also significant achievements to celebrate including the Sheffield Business School obtaining AACSB approval in March 2020 which placed it in the top 6% of business schools in the world, and new academic partnerships developed with South Yorkshire Police and Sensory Integration Education.
  - IV. The AQR had been endorsed by the Academic Board as providing assurance of the robust academic governance structure operating in the University.
- 5.2 The Committee's consideration of the AQR was informed by the content of the report, details of the scrutiny and challenge that had taken place at the Academic Board, and discussions with senior leaders and managers including the DVC Academic, Head of Academic Quality and Standards, Dean of Students, and University Secretary and Clerk to the Board. Comments and questions from the Committee focussed on the University's ongoing approach to assessment given the on-going pressure on the sector around the increase in good honours and 'grade inflation'. In response, the DVC Academic reported that:
- I. The key principle of the University's approach to assessment was that it produced an accurate reflection of student achievement.
  - II. At its meeting in September 2020, the Academic Board had approved proposals for the development of assessment policies and processes. Workstreams within the ongoing Assessment Review Project included a review of the degree algorithm against recently published sector principles, and development of a proposal to move to grade-based assessment as a central plank of the approach to assessment.
  - III. He assured the Committee that any move to grade-based assessment would not make the University an outlier in the sector. The impact of any changes would be modelled to mitigate any risks.
  - IV. Updates on the Assessment Review Project were on the forward plan for future meetings of the Committee.
- 5.3 The Clerk to the Board reported that the OfS had written to Vice-Chancellors in January 2021 asking for a self-assessment of their institution's compliance with consumer legislation and in compliance with OfS Condition of Registration C1. The University's self-assessment was underway and would be reported to the Board at its meeting in March 2021. The OfS had indicated that it was not planning to act unless there was evidence of a significant breach or disregard for legislation. There remained however, a risk of student complaints or class action across the sector as a result of changes to course provision necessitated by the pandemic.

- 5.4 The Committee agreed that it could assure the Board as to the overall quality of the University's academic provision and that processes were in place to maintain, review and enhance this quality. This assurance would be reported to the Board at its meeting in March 2021.

**Action: Chair of the Committee**

Agenda item 7. **Student Voice Report** Minute Ref AAC/1/21/06  
Paper Ref AAC/1/21/7

- 6.1 The report presented the Student Voice Report 2019/20 and the interim update on the University's response to the issues raised in that report. The President of the Students' Union drew attention to the University's response, stating that he welcomed the work that had taken place and the University's commitment to listening to the student voice. He highlighted the following areas where the Students' Union required greater commitment from the University:

- I. Around the availability placement, volunteering, and internship opportunities.
- II. For student wellbeing and mental health.
- III. Providing the Union with physical space within Colleges to support its engagement strategy.

- 6.2 In discussion, the Committee:

- I. Commended the Students' Union for the quality of the report.
- II. Noted the volume of work that had taken place to act on the recommendations.
- III. Welcomed the collective working between the Students' Union and University which was evident in this report and in the work reported elsewhere on the agenda on developing the fair assessment measures for 2020/21.
- IV. Encouraged further consideration about the best ways to feedback to students to assure them their views were being listened to.
- V. Congratulated the Union for the impressive way it had responded to the pandemic in representing its members.

Agenda item 8. **Supporting Fair Assessment Outcomes** Minute Ref AAC/1/21/07  
Paper Ref AAC/1/21/6

- 7.1 The report detailed the range of assessment support measures in place for academic year 2020/21 and enhancements to this support for semester 2 to ensure fair outcomes for students amidst the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. A review of the uptake of semester 1 measures indicated similar usage to that before the pandemic. However, the changing environment in which teaching, learning and assessment were delivered continued to be challenging and further support was felt necessary to ensure fair outcomes for students through the remainder of the academic year. The measures approved by the Teaching and Learning Leadership (TaLL) Group enhanced the support currently offered through the Extenuating Circumstances Policy and Procedure and comprised:

- I. Increasing the extension period from 5 working days to 10 working days.
- II. Broadening the scope of the Request to Repeat an Assessment Attempt (**RRAA**) policy to allow all students with approved RRAAs to retake assessments they have passed. This would also apply to previously approved RRAAs.
- III. Recognising the impact of Covid pandemic as an extenuating circumstance that does not require further evidence.

- 7.2 In receiving the report, the Committee noted:

- I. The assurance given to the Academic Board that in implementing the additional support measures, the University was aiming for a robust and personalised approach which was in accordance with the latest guidance issued by the OfS whilst ensuring that student outcomes remained fair, valid, and secure and that the value of the Sheffield Hallam degree was protected.

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- II. The comments at Academic Board from Students' Union representatives welcoming the response they had received to their request for additional support and the measures that had been implemented.
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7.3 The Dean of Students reporting the following in response to comments and questions from members:

- I. Regarding the impact of the measures on staff, he reported that there was a lot of learning from 2019/20 to help understand and pre-empt pinch points. There was likely to be a high volume of requests for the 10-day extension to submission deadlines and this would create pressure for teaching and professional services staff in meeting assessment board deadlines. This was being looked at currently. There was not expected to be a high uptake in students with an approved RRAA requesting to retake modules they had already passed. Students were being advised to only consider doing this if it would have a significant impact on their overall grade.
- II. Regarding the impact of the measures on student outcomes, it was difficult to predict if it would lead to an increase in good honours because there was a range of student engagement and developments to teaching and assessment which would also need considering. A marginal increase on the position two years ago was perhaps the most likely scenario.

Agenda item Paper Ref	9. <b>Academic Assurance Committee Membership</b>	Minute Ref AAC/1/21/08
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- 8.1 The report explained the processes being followed to fill vacancies on the Committee. The Clerk to the Board reported that, at its meeting on 10 February 2021, the Nominations Committee would:
- I. Consider two recommendations from the Board Selection Panel convened to review expressions of interest in the post of academic staff governor co-opted from the Academic Board. These recommendations were: that the recommended candidate was appointed to the Board of Governors and, that this person was also appointed to the Academic Assurance Committee.
- II. Receive a progress report on action being taken to fill the long-standing vacancy for an external co-opted member. The Chair reported that he had recently met with a candidate who had expressed an interest in the position.

8.2 The Committee also considered a proposal that the principles behind the decision to expand its membership to include academic staff representation from the Academic Board might also be extended to include student representation. In discussion, members strongly supported the proposal and agreed to recommend it to the Board. It was suggested that this representative should be drawn from one of the four Students' Union representatives on the Academic Board although it should be for the Students' Union to determine who that person should be.

8.3 The Clerk to the Board reported that the recommendation from the Committee would be incorporated into the response to the wider Board Effectiveness Review when it reported in March 2021 to ensure consistency with that process and so that any other changes could be considered by the Board at the same time.

**Action: Clerk to the Board**

Agenda item Paper Ref	10-12 <b>Items to Receive</b>	Minute Ref AAC/1/21/9
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- 9.1 The Committee noted the following reports:
- I. Unconfirmed minutes for the meeting of the Academic Board on 20 January 2021 (AB/1/21/M)
- II. Academic Board Papers (AAC/1/21/11)
- III. Annual Cycle of Business (AAC/1/21/12)

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Agenda item	Date of Next Meeting	Minute Ref
10.1	21 May 2021	AAC/1/21/10

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