

Confirmed record of the meeting on 29 January 2020

Present: Prof Sir Chris Husbands (Chair), Andrew Adegbola, Elaine Buckley, Dr Claire Cornock, Prof Roger Eccleston, Prof John Francis, John Freeman, Laith Jaafar, Dr Neil McKay, Sheriff Muhammed, Dr Christine O'Leary, Dr Vishal Parikh, Dr Lucian Tipi. Geff Green, Rob Wilson, Sam Giove, Dr Rebecca Hodgson, Dr Eileen McAuliffe

In attendance: Michaela Boryslawskij (Secretary), Leopold Green (Head of Academic Quality and Standards), Conor Moss (Group Director Business Engage, Skills and Employability and Dean of Work-Based Learning – for Ofsted Readiness Update) Carolyn Taylor (Head of Student Policy and Compliance), Alison Wells (Director of Academic Services), Pete Sweeney (Governance and Sector Regulations - Minute Secretary).

Apologies for absence: Dr Julie Brunton, Charlotte Ellender, Dr Elizabeth Freeman, Catriona Hynes, Prof Kevin Kerrigan, Dr Rebecca Mallett Prof Alison Metcalfe, Dr Toni Schwartz, Susan Wakefield, Prof Chris Wigginton.

Minute
reference
AB/20/01

Opening Comments

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed new members who had joined the Academic Board as a result of revisions to the constitution to reflect changes in academic leadership resulting from the Academic Organisation Project. The revised constitution had been approved by the Board of Governors at its meeting earlier in January 2020. He also welcomed Laith Jaafar who was attending his first meeting as a student representative.
- 1.2 Clashes with other meetings and events meant that several members were absent from the meeting, including the Pro Vice-Chancellors. The Chair apologised for these scheduling issues which he would seek to avoid in future.

AB/20/02 **Industrial Action** (paper AB/1/20/1)

- 2.1 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 Academic Board received a report on the actions taken to mitigate the impact on the student academic experience. These actions had 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.

A further update would be presented to the next meeting of the Board in April 2020.

Action: The DVC Academic to report orally to the next meeting.

2.2 Discussion focussed on the University's approach for reviewing and responding to complaints from students. Questions were asked as to why the standard process of considering Stage 1 complaints within the student's faculty had not been followed and why there had been no student representation on the panel considering the complaints. Responses from the DVC Academic, Dean of Academic Strategy and Director of Academic Services included the following points:

- I. The approach to complaints had taken account of guidance issued by the Office of Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) on handling complaints arising from industrial action. Institutions were advised to consider streamlining complaints processes to minimise potential delays and reduce demand on resources, including dealing with similar complaints in batches.
- II. In line with this guidance, Formal Stage 1 complaints were being considered by an Industrial Action Panel rather than the standard practice of them being reviewed by individual complaint investigators within the complainant's faculty. This approach enabled the Panel to take a consistent stance on the common issues across the complaints whilst also taking account of each student's individual circumstances. Most of the complaints had come from students within the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities and it would have been very difficult for that faculty to be able to resource investigating each complaint.
- III. Students' Union representatives were not involved in responding to complaints within Stage 1 the standard process, so it was not felt appropriate to include them in complaints relating to industrial action. The wider issue of student involvement in the complaints process would be considered going forward.

2.3 In response to a question about institutional learning from the approach described above, the DVC Academic reported that the key lessons related to establishing a clear sense of priorities more quickly, clearer communication with stakeholders and putting cross-University structures in place sooner.

AB/20/03 **Ofsted Readiness Update** (paper AB/1/20/2)

3.1 At its meeting in September 2019, the Academic Board had discussed the Ofsted Action Tracker which had been produced as part of the response to an Ofsted inspection of apprenticeship provision that had graded the University as 'requires improvement' across all areas in the inspection. The Board had expressed concern around the pace of progress and potential risks in terms of the re-inspection and encouraged action to address the situation as a matter of urgency. The Group Director of Business Engagement, Skills and Employability and Dean of Work-Based Learning presented an update on progress against the Apprenticeship Improvement Plan and the University's readiness for an inspection visit, which was expected any time up until the end of March 2020. The update included the following points:

- I. The Apprenticeship Improvement Plan had been developed following a comprehensive quality review carried out by external apprenticeship improvement partners, supplemented by the work of the University's Academic Quality and Standards team.
- II. The Improvement Plan been scrutinised and interrogated for impact through the revised governance arrangements that held leaders and managers to account for performance overall, and for the progress and achievement of individual apprentices.
- III. The number of those in scope for the Ofsted inspection was a small, and distinctive, cohort within the wider apprenticeship population. Improvements had been applied across the University's entire apprenticeship population (in excess of 1200 apprentices), using the inspection framework as guide for best practice.

3.2 The Chair stressed the importance as being able to present Ofsted with a coherent plan that had institutional support and had been scrutinised at appropriate level. He asked the Academic Board to focus on the response to the quality and standards issues raised by the inspection. This level of scrutiny and challenge would form an important part of the overall evidence base to demonstrate appropriate scrutiny and challenge.

3.3 In discussion, members noted the progress that had been made since the previous meeting. Comments and questions were raised in relation to: the robustness of the University's delivery model for work-based learning, its approach to the training and development of staff, monitoring the quality of sub-contractor provision and, ensuring that leaders and managers were able to use self-assessment and management information well enough to support rapid improvement to the quality of provision. The following points were made in response:

- I. Significant changes had been made to the work-based learning framework with robust design principles in place for this type of provision. Developments around practice and the understanding of applied learning were ongoing with some pockets of excellence having been established. Overall, the University was moving towards mainstreaming this provision.
- II. Appropriate staff development and training was an essential part of the mainstreaming process. Some of this was already in place, for example the Hallam Academic Award, which now covered work-based learning. However, this only captured new staff and consideration was needed about provision for existing staff.
- III. Previous arrangements for monitoring the quality of sub-contracted teaching had proved to be inadequate. Additional measures had been implemented including a strategic review of each sub-contracted relationship, a clear articulation of expectations and timeframes aligning to University processes to ensure oversight of learner progression, a consistent approach to Learning, Teaching and Assessment at all sub-contractors and monthly reporting and monitoring.
- IV. Use of self-assessment and management information by leaders and managers had developed rapidly and had secured significant improvements for the remaining apprentices. Software was in place to support leaders and managers and additional support was being provided by the Academic Quality and Standards and Business Engage, Skills and Employability departments.

3.4 The Chair thanked the Board for its contributions.

AB/20/04 Quality and Standards Highlights Report

4.1 The Head of Academic Quality and Standards gave an oral update on quality and standards matters. He drew the following issues to the Board's attention:

- I. Further to the issues reported in the Ofsted Readiness Update, bespoke versions of Assessment Boards and external examiner arrangements were now in place to support apprenticeship provision and a similar approach would be taken to foundation years. This represented a practical example of how the approach to mainstreaming would work.
- II. Provision in Hong Kong had suffered from the on-going political unrest and the current outbreak of coronavirus. This had resulted in significant disruption on courses delivered in Hong Kong and to partners in China.
- III. The Academic Quality and Standards team was currently establishing its working relationships with the new Colleges and the PVC portfolios.

A written report would be presented to future meetings.

Action: Head of Academic Quality and Standards to present a written report to the next and future meetings.

AB/20/05 **Annual Report on the Student Disciplinary Regulations** (paper AB/1/20/4.1)

5.1 The Academic Board received a copy of the Annual Report on the Student Disciplinary Procedure which had been considered by the Board of Governors at its meeting on 28 January 2020. The Head of Student Policy and Compliance reported the intention to bring forward future reporting to the beginning of the academic year in line with reporting on other student casework such as student appeals, student complaints, academic conduct, fitness to practice and capacity to study. This would enable the Academic Board to take an overall view of the issues emerging from annual reports that may be impacting on the quality and standards of academic provision and on the student academic experience.

5.2 Discussion focussed on how confident the University could be that the cases being reported reflected actual behaviour on campus. There was acknowledgement that the number of cases being reported appeared to be relatively low although advancements in reporting, particularly around Report and Support, was making a difference to the number of students raising issues. The University should not view an increase in cases being reported as a negative thing as this could demonstrate increased awareness and confidence in raising issues. Alongside this however would be an increased focus on prevention and positive articulation around expectations of student behaviour.

AB/20/06 **Managing Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) Risk** (paper AB/1/20/4.2)

6.1 The Academic Board received a copy of the report to be presented to the Academic Assurance Committee at its meeting on 14 February 2020. 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.

6.2 Discussion focussed on what were believed to be the barriers to compliance. A structural and disciplined approach to decision-making was required, with a move away from embedded historical and cultural behaviour. More understanding was needed amongst course teams around the complexity of course design and the need to make certain decisions much earlier in the design stage. Ultimately, the University needed processes which enabled decisions to be taken in efficient order during the business cycle whilst allowing scope for flexibility where required. CMA should not be the driver for this.

6.3 The Chair acknowledged that the introduction of the Highly Skilled Employment element of the Hallam Model for 2019/20 had caused problems for course teams. It had been necessary however to implement this at the earliest possible point, as the University risked falling behind its competitors in this provision.

AB/20/07 **Academic Developments**

7.1 In the absence of a PVC Portfolio report at this meeting, the DVC Academic gave an oral report on the ongoing developments around the portfolio review and the operational task and finish groups. These groups had been established to build on work in response to issues raised in the Staff Experience Survey and the industrial dispute. In response to a question regarding student workload, he reported this was being considered in work looking at assessment and feedback and the scheduling of assessment.

AB/20/08 **Academic Board Business Cycle** (paper AB/1/20/6)

8.1 An annual cycle of business had been produced to enable the Academic Board to effectively carry out the core functions within its terms of reference. This set out a consistent programme on which the Board could effectively engage and challenge the University executive on key academic matters. The programme was indicative, and items would be added where appropriate. In discussion, members made several suggestions for additional items to be considered by the Board. These were collected by the Secretary for further consideration.

Action: Secretary to revamp the business programme.

AB/20/09 **Record of the Meeting on 25 September 2019** (paper AB//3/19M)

9.1 The minutes were agreed as a correct record.

AB/20/10 **Matters Arising and Other Urgent Business**

10.1 There were no matters arising or other urgent business.

AB/20/11 **Review of the Meeting**

11.1 The Chair thanked members for their contribution to the discussions and invited them to reflect on the good points of the meeting and what might have worked better. In discussion, members felt there had been a good standard of debate with an appropriate level of challenge throughout. The agenda presented a broad range of items which had enabled all members to contribute in a positive, open manner. It would help future meetings if papers were clearer as to the input required from members and support was given to student members to enable them to contribute more. The breadth of student input was missing at present, though it was noted that one newly appointed representative had been unable to attend this meeting. Agendas would benefit from more opportunity for discussion on how to improve the student experience and recognition that the Board's remit was wider than just teaching and learning matters.

AB/20/12 **Next Meeting**

12.1 22 April 2020