

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22 APRIL 2020

PRESENT:

Prof Sir Chris Husbands (Chair)	Dr Sam Giove	Prof Alison Metcalfe
Andrew Adegbola	Geff Green	Prof Lisa Mooney
Dr Julie Brunton	Dr Rebecca Hodgson	Sheriff Muhammed
Elaine Buckley	Catriona Hynes	Dr Christine O'Leary
Dr Claire Cornock	Laith Jaafar	Dr Vishal Parikh
Prof Roger Eccleston	Prof Keven Kerrigan	Dr Lucian Tipi
Prof John Francis	Dr Eileen McAuliffe	Prof Chris Wigginton
Dr John Freeman	Dr Neil McKay	Robert Wilson
Dr Elizabeth Freeman		

APOLOGIES:

Dr Helen Best	Dr Toni Schwartz	Susan Wakefield
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IN ATTENDANCE:

Michaela Boryslawskyj, University Secretary (Secretary)
 Leopold Green, Head of Academic Quality and Standards
 Pete Sweeney, Governance and Sector Regulations Adviser (Minute Secretary)
 Carolyn Taylor, Head of Student Policy and Compliance
 Alison Wells, Director of Academic Services

Agenda item 2	Minutes of the Previous Meeting	Minute Ref AB/20/13
Paper Ref AB/1/20M		

13.1 The Board approved the minutes of the meeting on 29 January 2020 as a correct record.

Agenda item 3	Matters Arising	Minute Ref AB/20/14
Paper Ref		

14.1 Minute AB/20/ 02: Industrial Action: The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) reported that the approach taken to mitigate the impact of the UCU strike action in February and March 2020 was in line with that used for the previous action. The University was applying appropriate lessons from this approach in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Agenda item 4	Exceptional Revisions to Assessment and Progression Arrangements for the Remainder of 2019/20	Minute Ref AB/20/15
Paper Ref AB/2/20/4		

15.1 The Board 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 recent weeks:

- 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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- 15.2 Introducing the report, the Head of Academic Quality and Standards emphasised the importance of seeing the revisions as an overall package rather than a set of individual changes. He highlighted the difference between progression and award and how this influenced the approach being taken to different levels of study:
- I. Level 4 was a diagnostic level and grades did not contribute to the final award. The University's approach to progression from Level 4 was consistent with elsewhere in the sector and has since been upheld as appropriate and necessary by Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and Office for Students (OfS) guidance. The aim was to get the vast majority of students through to the next level, where the University could then support them further.
 - II. The no detriment approach to students on Levels 5/6/7 was designed to reduce anxiety for students, whilst also ensuring the rigorous maintenance of academic standards and the need to be able to justify awards. The measures that had been implemented protected standards whilst providing reassurance to students. There would always be exceptional cases which would be managed on an individual basis.
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- 15.3 In discussion, the Board considered the implications of the revised arrangements on the student academic experience and staff workloads. The following points were raised:
- I. Some students may find it difficult to cope with material in their next level of study and would require significant support. Concern was expressed that the progression of weaker students in general would place additional burdens on teaching staff in terms of additional support and it was not clear how this would be resourced. In response, the PVC Learning and Teaching acknowledged the potential risks. She reported that Student Support Advisers were working with Course Leaders to identify those students who might struggle with progression so that they can have a conversation about what they really want to do and what is in those individuals overall best interest. There were valid concerns about staff being asked to do extra work. This was currently under discussion across the University.
 - II. 'No detriment' referral could mean an increased amount of marking for academic staff over the summer. This came on top of other additional pressures including the move to on-line teaching and preparations for extended induction at the beginning of the next academic year. The PVC Learning and Teaching acknowledged that there would likely be an increased amount of marking at levels 5/6/7 but added that this would be countered by not having marking at Level 4 and changes to assessment at levels 5/6/7. Overall, this had reduced assessment by around 25%.
 - III. There was no information as yet as to how the impact of the changes, on students and staff, would be monitored. It was important for the Board to be made aware of this and to see the outcomes of this monitoring at future meetings.
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- 15.4 The Board also considered concerns being raised by some students that the 'no detriment' approach did not go far enough. It noted in particular the calls for a 'safety net' which involved protecting grades by basing awards on grades achieved in Semester 1. Student representatives on the Board explained that they supported this because it would help to assure students that grades would be an accurate reflection of their true potential. In response, the Dean of Students reported that this matter had been considered on several occasions and that he had formally responded to the Students' Union with the University's position. He told the Board that it was important to remember that the package of support went wider than just the regulatory changes made in recent weeks. Alongside this were other support measures such as revisions to the Extenuating Circumstances Policy and Procedure that recognised the difficult and challenging circumstances. The University had a duty to protect the standards of awards and to operate within OfS guidelines. Using Semester 1 marks to determine overall grades could not be applied equally and equitably to all students because of varying patterns of delivery across courses meant that some students would have very few marks confirmed at
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semester 1. The University had recently agreed further guidance to Departmental Assessment Boards about how it should consider marks and was confident that there was a rigorous approach in place to assure students that they would suffer no detriment in assessment.

- 15.5 The Board acknowledged the importance of clearly communicating the 'no detriment' approach. There were instances where students did not appear to understand the messages about what was being put in place and how this could help them. Students also needed to understand that their suggestions had been listened to and the reasons why they could not all be implemented.

Action: Dean of Students to review messages sent to students

Agenda item 5	Quality and Standards Highlights Report	Minute Ref AB/20/16
Paper Ref AB/2/20/5		

- 16.1 The Head of Academic Quality and Standards introduced the report which included reference to the following:
- I. Changes to the course review mechanism which would be retitled to Course Enhancement Plan and focus on a longer term perspective of 3 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.
 - III. An update on the current position regarding the response to the Ofsted inspection of Apprenticeship provision including that the University was not expecting to receive notification of a monitoring visit or re-inspection at the present time.

- 16.2 The Board noted the report.

Agenda item 6	Sheffield Hallam University Degree Outcomes Statement 2019/20	Minute Ref AB/20/17
Paper Ref AB/2/20/6		

- 17.1 At its meeting in February 2019, the Board had received a report on the consultation led by Universities UK (UUK) looking at the increase in graduates receiving First and Upper Second Class degrees across the sector. One of the actions arising from that consultation was that degree awarding bodies were required to produce a Degree Outcomes Statement in line with guidance set out by the QAA by the end of the 2019/20 academic year.

- 17.2 The draft Degree Outcomes Statement presented to the Board set out the University's current position in relation to the Institutional Classification Profile, articulated the activity that had led to this outcome and highlighted areas for further review. Appendix 1 of the Statement set out the University's profile for awarding good honours over the past five years, including data on specific characteristics. The Head of Student Policy and Compliance drew the Board's attention to the following points:

- I. The University had seen a 9% increase in the overall number of good honours degrees awarded to undergraduate students over the past five years;
- II. There was no indication that the current degree calculation algorithms (which had not changed during the past five years) or assessment regulations had contributed to the improvement in degree outcomes for students and therefore there were no proposals for changes to these;
- III. The University had however made significant enhancements to assessment activity between 2012 and 2017 and would continue to focus on improving student outcomes through improved teaching and learning and ensuring that assessment activity was challenging and proportionate;
- IV. The University currently had one of the highest degree awarding gaps between white and BAME students in the sector.

- 17.3 The Chair reported that there had been a high level of scrutiny around this topic prior to the COVID-19 crisis. Whilst there may be more immediate priorities now, the issue of academic standards remained very important. In discussion, members commended the work that had been conducted to produce the Statement and encouraged the University to continue to work proactively with UUK and QAA to help lead the sector in protecting the value of degrees. The following points were raised around the increase in the overall number of good honours degrees:
- I. Care was needed not to view student achievement negatively. The University had invested significant time and focus to deliver improvements in outcomes and this was reflected in the figures. There was a lot of outstanding work being done by students and staff, and instances of cohorts doing well should be celebrated, as long as it was deserved;
 - II. The most likely contributory factor was the implementation in 2012 of a new assessment framework which limited the number of assessment tasks and volume of assessment. There was a clear correlation between larger modules, proportionate assessment and stronger outcomes.

- 17.4 The Board discussed the degree attainment gap and the significance of the issue for the University. Members commented that this gap persisted despite significant developments around assessment and marking practices. This indicated the need to focus more on developing and sharing good practice around teaching. The following points were raised in discussion:
- I. There was a lot of work underway but all colleagues needed to take ownership of the response to this. Examples of this work included the Corporate Student Equity Plan which the colleges were using to drive their inclusive academic practice and the work of the Narrow the Gaps forum. The work of this forum was currently being evaluated.
 - II. Having mandatory online training on inclusive teaching would be helpful. There were already resources for this on the PGCert Teaching in Higher Education which could be more widely used.
 - III. The online training on unconscious bias could be developed further;
 - IV. It was important to ensure that the work on the Race Equality Charter sought a broad voice and considered the breadth of the challenge across all areas of the institution from leadership to student engagement.

It was agreed to forward the Board's comments on staff development and academic practice to the Academic Development and Diversity Team

Action: Secretary

- 17.5 The Board agreed that the Degree Outcomes Statement should now be presented to the Academic Assurance Committee of the Board of Governors for further scrutiny prior to formal approval by the governing body towards the end of the academic year. The Board requested further information and analysis of the International Students Attainment Gap at a future meeting.

Action: Head of Student Policy and Compliance

Agenda item 7
Paper Ref

Update on Apprenticeships

Minute Ref AB/20/18

- 18.1 The PVC Business and Engagement gave a verbal update on the current challenges around the Apprenticeship programme. These included:
- I. Whilst there was no current indication of apprentices withdrawing from their studies at a higher rate than would normally be expected, there was likely to be a significant rise in unemployment amongst apprenticeship students in the coming months;
 - II. Transition to online teaching had involved some block study modules being delivered

- totally online. This had required some very good work from the teaching teams involved. A quality review of the provision would be conducted in due course;
- III. Revised Level 4 progression arrangements did not apply to apprenticeship provision. This was due to the requirement in the apprentice standards for knowledge skills and behaviours and off the job learning at each level;
 - IV. The delay in the Ofsted monitoring visit meant that it was now necessary to plan in parallel for both a monitoring visit and re-inspection.

18.2 In response to comments and questions raised in discussion, the PVC Business and Enterprise made the following points:

- I. No systematic feedback had been received from employers about distance learning at this stage. It was expected that students and employers would become more demanding about online provision the longer the current situation persisted;
- II. Quality review was required to see what online delivery should look like to enhance the student experience. However, care was needed to avoid audit type reviews. A better way of engaging with staff would be to look to showcase the really effective aspects of delivery and look to apply more generally;
- III. Employer Advisory Boards had now been established in every Department. These were useful forums but at varying stages of engagement with stakeholders at the present time;
- IV. Apprenticeships could play an important role in the recovery of local economy although it was anticipated that demand amongst employers would fall.

Agenda item 8	Pro-Vice Chancellor Portfolio Report	Minute Ref AB/20/19
Paper Ref AB/2/20/8		

19.1 The Board noted the reports.

Agenda item 9	Academic Assurance Committee Minutes 14 February 2020	Minute Ref AB/20/20
Paper Ref AAC/1/20M		

20.1 The Board noted the minutes.

Agenda item 10	Review of Meeting	Minute Ref AB/20/21
Paper Ref		

21.1 The Chair thanked members for their contribution to this first remote meeting of the Board. The discussions had brought a wide range of comments from all categories of membership.

Agenda item 11	Annual Business Cycle	Minute Ref AB/20/22
Paper Ref AB/2/20/11		

22.1 The Board noted the forward programme and the intention to hold an additional meeting towards the end of the academic year. The date for this meeting would be confirmed shortly.

Action: Secretary

Agenda item 12	Other Urgent Business	Minute Ref AB/20/23
Paper Ref		

23.1 The Chair reported that the University would not be awarding honorary doctorates in 2020. This decision had been made in light of the uncertainty in relation to this year's graduation. The current list of nominations would be reviewed for 2021 with the option of expanding to include people who had made a significant contribution to the response to the pandemic.

Agenda item 13	Next Meeting	Minute Ref AB/20/24
Paper Ref		

24.1 1 July 2020