SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY   AAC/2/19M

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

ACADEMIC ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on Friday 25 October 2019

Present: Professor Paul Wiles (Chair), Elaine Buckley, Dr Julie Morrissy

In attendance: Michaela Boryslawskyj**,** University Secretary and Clerk to the Board
Professor Roger Eccleston, DVC Academic
Leopold Green, Head of Academic Quality and Standards
Professor Kevin Kerrigan, PVC Business Engagement (for the item covered in minute 19/14)
Dr Neil McKay, Dean of Students
Professor Alison Metcalfe, PVC Learning and Teaching
Conor Moss, Group Director of Business Engagement, Skills and Employability (for the item covered in minute 19/14)
Daniel Lally, Head of Business Engagement and Growth (for the item covered in minute 19/14)
Pete Sweeney, Governance and Sector Regulations (Minute Secretary)

Apologies for absence from Professor Jeff Bale and Dr Stephen Timothy

Minute reference

AAC/19/10	**Opening Comments**
10.1	The Chair welcomed Elaine Buckley to her first meeting as a member of the Committee.
AAC/19/11	**Declaration of interests**
11.1	There were no declarations of interest.
AAC/19/12	**Meeting on 24 May 2019** AAC/1/19M
12.1	The minutes were confirmed as a correct record.
AAC/19/13	**Matters Arising and Other Urgent Business**
13.1	AAV/19/7.2: The Committee congratulated the University on the NSS results which had been presented to the Board previously.
13.2	There was no other urgent business.
AAC/19/14	**Ofsted Readiness Update** AAC/2/19/5
14.1	At its previous meeting in May 2019, the Committee had:

      I.   Noted the outcome of the Ofsted inspection of the University's apprenticeship provision which had graded the University as 'requires improvement across all areas of the inspection';

II.	Received the Short Term Recovery Plan which had been produced in response to the findings from the inspection;

III.	Agreed a set of actions around strengthening the monitoring and reporting to the Committee and to the Board, including having progress reports as a standing item on Committee agendas for the foreseeable future.

14.2	The Committee now received the Apprenticeship Improvement Plan. Section 1 of the Plan provided a summary of the key actions to date, population overview and the key risks and outstanding actions that were considered by the University Leadership Team at its meeting on 8 October 2019. Section 2 provided an updated against each of the seven areas identified as requiring improvement. The University's response was being supported by an external consultancy and two of the consultants joined the meeting for the first part of the discussion. Questions raised by the Committee to the consultants included whether the actions within the Improvement Plan were sufficient to address the issues raised by the inspection, whether the University should continue to recruit in this area and, around the role that governors and the governance structure was expected to play. In response, the consultants offered the following advice:

I.	The actions identified in the Improvement Plan were the type of actions that would be expected in such a response. It was essential however that these were delivered with sufficient pace and rigor. In this respect it was noted that recent challenge from the University Leadership Team had led to demonstrable progress. A key risk for the University was in having sufficient time to demonstrate the impact of these actions, depending on when the re-inspection took place;

II.	The decision to suspend recruitment to both programmes in scope until assurances were in place was an appropriate one that had demonstrated decisive action. A consequence of this however was that progress against actions would be based on the small cohort of students who remained in learning in 2019/20 having not completed and achieved in 2018/19;

III.	A critical matter to address was demonstrating that sufficient focus was being given to the subcontracted NVQ. This included ensuring, and evidencing, that frequent review meetings were taking place;

IV.	The University needed to decide who would be involved in the re-inspection visit and ensure that those with overall responsibility for ensuring that review meetings were happening were included in this;

V.	Governors had an important role to play in challenging the University executive about what was happening to drive quality forward. It was essential that this challenge could be clearly evidenced via minutes of meetings. The external consultants recognised the complexity and scale of the University's operations, advising that Governors needed to be clear where responsibility for oversight lay.

14.3	The Committee discussed the Apprenticeship Improvement Plan with University managers including the PVC Business Engagement, Group Director Business Engagement, Skills and Employability and Head of Business Engagement and Growth. This discussion raised the following points:

I.	The relatively small number of students within the scope of the inspection raised questions around the proportionality of the

University's response and around the overall value of being involved in Level 4 apprenticeships. In response it was stressed that the University must address the issues raised in the inspection irrespective of whether or not it intended to continue at Level 4. Failure to do so would impact on the ability to recruit at higher levels and would therefore damage the whole of the apprenticeship programme. It was likely also that QAA would be using a similar inspection regime for the Level 6/7 provision. Going forward, the University was not advocating significant growth in Level 4 apprenticeship provision. The portfolio was being consolidated with focus on enhancement and improvement, with recruitment targeted around specific areas with established records of strong delivery;

II. There was a clear rationale for the University moving into the apprenticeship market. However, the issues raised in the inspection had arisen from insufficient focus on due diligence to identify the risks. The University needed to learn from this and ensure it could avoid similar issues with other new provision, for example with sub-contracting the South Yorkshire Police Programme. In response the Committee was assured that a formal structure was in place to manage this area of work, led by the Apprenticeship and Work Based Learning Steering Group;

III. The Improvement Plan placed a lot of emphasis on systems, process and data. There appeared to be less emphasis on staff development and engagement. It was essential that academic staff fully understood the apprenticeship environment and that this understanding was embedded into the philosophy of delivery in order to make changes.

14.4 The Committee agreed that it could assure the Board that the University had an appropriate plan in place to recover from the inspection. Progress against this plan was being overseen and challenged at executive level. There remained however a significant risk around the University's capacity to demonstrate sufficient progress and impact should the re-inspection fall towards the beginning of the re-inspection timeframe. The ongoing review of portfolio would help the University understand its direction of travel with apprenticeships. Furthermore, there needed to be more discussion as to the precise role of Governors at the final stage in the governance and assurance process for these courses and whether it would fit with Ofsted expectations.

AAC/19/15 **University Annual Quality Review 2018/19** AAC/2/19/6

15.1 The University's arrangements for annual review were intended to provide the Board of Governors with sufficient confidence and assurance in the management of quality and standards. The Annual Quality Review (AQR) report represented the output of work that had begun at course level before progressing through faculty structures, the University Teaching Quality Committee and the Shaping Futures Board. The following process points were noted:

I. An Action Plan in the style of previous years had not been produced. This had been a legacy of previous assurance arrangements with HEFCE and the format was now felt to be inappropriate. Work was ongoing to develop a plan that had more impact;

II. Unlike in 2018, the Office for Students (OfS) was not asking the Accountable Officer to give necessary assurances around the quality of provision via Part 2 of the Annual Accountability return. As such,

the Committee was not required to recommend the AQR to the Board as a basis for it authorising the Accountable Officer to give these assurances;

III. However, the Board still required assurances from the Committee about the quality of the University's academic provision and of any ongoing risks.

15.2 The DVC Academic highlighted the strong sustained increase in student satisfaction rates that had underpinned the Sunday Times award as University of the Year for Teaching Quality. The AQR did however raise some matters to be addressed and he drew particular attention to:

I. Preparations for subject TEF;
II. Progress towards and ongoing risks associated with meeting all the requirements in respect of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) guidance for HE providers;
III. Activity undertaken to enhance the student experience, attainment and progression of Foundation Year students;
IV. The BAME attainment gap.

15.3 The Committee discussed the AQR with University managers including the DVC Academic, PVC Teaching and Learning and the Head of Academic Quality and Standards. This discussion raised the following points:

I. Whilst the increased focus on foundation year provision was understandable, the expansion in student numbers presented similar risks to those experienced with apprenticeship provision. This also represented another form of teaching that stretched beyond the traditional and therefore was asking more of teaching staff. In response it was stressed that, unlike with apprenticeships, the University had been delivering foundation year provision for several years (in the form of extended degrees) and therefore had experience in the area. Student numbers had grown and currently represented around 3% of all provision. Questions about the place and scale of the foundation year were being considered by the Portfolio Review Group as part of its consideration of the overall balance of provision;
II. The risks to CMA compliance posed by the volume of late curriculum modifications were significant, not least because compliance with consumer protection law was also a condition of registration with the Office for Students. This was something the Committee should keep under review;
III. Addressing the BAME attainment gap had been identified as a University strategic priority and the Committee and Board should continue to challenge on this.

15.4 It was noted that the AQR had not been reviewed by the Academic Board before being presented to the Committee. This raised questions as to whether the University was maximising the value of the Academic Board and also around the respective roles of the Academic Board and Academic Assurance Committee in providing oversight of, challenge to and assurance about the quality of academic provision. Further consideration should be given to this in order that the Committee was clear about its role in providing academic assurance to the Board and the information it needed to fulfil that role.

Action: Clerk to the Board.

15.5 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. The extent of what had been achieved during the year in terms of indicators of teaching quality, and the reputational benefits for the University, should be acknowledged. The increase in foundation year numbers presented challenges but the University had clear sight on this and numbers were being controlled. There remained a risk around CMA compliance which was being addressed and which the Committee would keep under review.

AAC/19/16 **Student Voice Report 2018/19 and University Response** AAC/2/19/7

16.1 The Student Voice Report made eleven recommendations for University consideration under three thematic areas: academic experience, student wellbeing, and student finances. The ones within the academic experience theme were pertinent to the Committee's remit and covered four issues:

    I. Diversity in the course curriculum;
    II. Class size and attendance;
    III. Timetabling;
    IV. Student workloads

16.2 The Dean of Students reported a clear alignment between the academic experience issues raised in the Student Voice Report and findings reported in the Annual Quality Review. As such, the University response reported on developments that were already happening.

16.3 The Committee thanked the Students' Union for a positive, constructive and critically reflective report. This would now be referred to the Board for consideration of the report in its entirety at its meeting in November 2019.

AAC/19/17 **Draft Annual Report 2018/19** AAC/2/19/8

17.1 The draft Annual Report was designed to help the Committee reflect on its effectiveness in 2018/19 by providing details on the coverage of its remit, operational effectiveness and duties under the Equality Act 2010. The report included questions that were being asked of each of the Board's committees around; members understanding the role of the Committee, having sufficient knowledge to discharge the responsibilities of the Committee and having opportunities for independent constructive challenge and scrutiny.

17.2 Discussion raised the following points for inclusion in the final report that would be presented to the Board at its meeting in November 2019:

    I. Discussions throughout the meeting had highlighted issues around the Committee's role in the governance structure and what the Board required of it;
    II. The current constitution rendered a meeting inquorate if more than two lay members were absent. It may be necessary to consider increasing the number of lay members on the constitution;
    III. The matter of the external co-option required rapid further consideration.

Action: Clerk to the Board

AAC/19/18   **Next Meeting**

14 February 2019