

SENATE

Minutes of the 352nd meeting of Senate held on 10 March 2021 (by Teams)

Present:

Professor Alec Cameron (Chair)

Jawad Ahmad

Safa-Atiya Ahmed

Dr Leonidas Anastasakis

Professor Ruth Ayres

Eleanor Barton

Professor Pawan Budhwar

Dr Daniel Cash

Helen Curtis

Professor Lauren Devine

Professor Andrew Devitt

Dr Panos Doss

Dr Ruth Edwards

Professor Claire Farrow

Professor George Feiger

Dr Raquel Gil-Cazorla

Dr Joanne Gough

Professor Simon Green

Professor Sarah Hainsworth

Saskia Hansen

Professor Anthony Hilton

Alison Levey

Dr Robbie Love

Dr Jörg Mathias

Dr Goudarz Poursharif

Dr Lucy Rackliff

Gurpal Singh Rai

Professor Edik Rafailov

Neil Scott

Harry Sheppard

Professor Edward Sweeney

Professor Nicholas Theodorakopoulos

Dr Eirini Theodosiou

Dr Sylvia Wong

Dr Stephen Worrall

Dr Uwe Wunderlich

Apologies:

Dr Raj Singh Badhan

Dr Johan Rewilak

Dr Luciano Batista

Saira Hussain

Professor Gill Nicholls

Dr Peter Lewis

Professor Francisco Leyva-Leon

Professor Ivan Wall

Professor Gertrud Reershemius

Professor Paul Topham

Helen Yoshioka

Professor Yuchun Xu

In attendance:

Richard Billingham

Professor Helen Higson (M20/52)

Yvonne Henderson (M20/63-65)

Gary Hughes

Sapreena Kumari (M20/68-70)

Julie Ottley (secretary)

Mark Smith

John Walter

Award of the Senate Gold Medal

20/52 CONFIRMED:

The award of the distinguished Senate Gold Medal for meritorious service to Aston University to Professor Helen Higson by the Vice-Chancellor. The award was in recognition of Helen's expertise and commitment to learning, teaching and pedagogy and her lasting legacy of putting students at the heart of everything.

Governance matters

Senate Membership 2020/21

20/53 RESOLVED:

To welcome Helen Yoshioka as the postgraduate student representative and Eleanor Barton as the undergraduate student representative.

20/54 NOTED:

That Julie Ottley had taken over as secretary to Senate from John Walter who was retiring in the summer.

Minutes

20/55 RESOLVED:

To approve the minutes of the 350th and 351st meetings of Senate held on 11 November 2020 and 20 January 2021.

Matters arising

20/56 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-20-3388-A being a summary of actions taken in response to matters arising from the previous meetings.

University strategy

Senate Effectiveness Review

20/57 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-20-3403-A being an update on the action plan for implementation of the recommendations of the Senate Effectiveness Review, noting:

- A small task and finish group has been established to oversee implementation of the recommendations
- A draft narrative for the role and purpose of Senate and its relationship with Council had been circulated and members were asked to send comments to the secretary. **Action ALL members**

Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive's Report

20/58 RECEIVED:

An oral report from the Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive, noting:

- Following a rigorous external search, Professor Anthony Hilton had been appointed as Executive Dean and Pro-Vice-Chancellor for the College of Health and Life Sciences. Congratulations and best wishes were expressed to Anthony on behalf of the College and the University
- Covid cases among staff and students remained very low. Lateral flow tests should be taken twice a week, three days apart, by all staff and students who were on campus at least twice a week. On campus testing was being carried out by Biomedical Science students providing them with professional work experience
- In person teaching and learning for students studying practical or practice-based subjects requiring specialist equipment and/or facilities returned to campus on 8 March. A road map for further return of operations to campus was being developed
- Recruitment for 2020/21 had been better than expected and in the current round, at the UCAS closing date, the picture was positive with applications 8% ahead of last year. The focus was to increase application and conversion so as to be less dependent on clearing. This would improve the quality of intake and stop the recent slide on entry tariff
- The government response to the Augar Review was still awaited but there were likely two key issues:
 - Student tuition fee to be reduced to £7,500 with the government to make up the difference
 - A minimum entry standard of not below three C grades at A level

- The 'Skills for Jobs' white paper was mainly about FE, however, Aston's partnership with the IoT would support the need for higher technical qualifications
- The Universities Superannuation Scheme continued to be a concern. The latest valuation report proposed increased contribution levels that would be unaffordable for employers and employees. Negotiations were ongoing
- Council had asked for a review of the University strategy as it was now three years into the five-year plan. The review would be in the context of the changes to the sector as a result of Covid and the outcomes of the review would be presented to Senate at a future meeting.

Items raised by Student Representatives/SU Senate

20/59 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-20-3405-A being the Students' Union report to Senate, noting:

- In the SU building the food distribution centre was operating downstairs to support the local community and upstairs was open for students. Elections for the next Sabbatical Officers were taking place this week with all positions having at least three candidates
- The Student Wellbeing Call Centre, a collaboration between Students' Union, Careers+Placements and Counselling, launched on 1 March 2021. 1,400 calls had been made so far to students to understand their wellbeing. Data would be analysed and reported to the University
- Student voice had been very important throughout the year and there had been high engagement. This had provided valuable feedback from the blended learning approach which would be helpful going forward
- The Marketing team had worked in partnership with SU to promote the NSS and this had been a great team effort resulting in a successful campaign
- The SU were thanked for a positive and productive partnership and for their contribution to the Aston Approach.

Items raised by Academic Assembly

20/60 RECEIVED:

An oral report from the Chair of Academic Assembly, noting:

- The next full meeting was on 22 March 2021 when the PVCE would be presenting on the Education strategy
- The Standing Committee were discussing post-Covid working arrangements and the learning from the past year and would present its position in a paper to Executive and Senate.

In-depth discussion – working arrangements post-Covid

20/61 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-20-3406-A being a discussion paper on what working arrangements would apply and the principles which would apply in determining the appropriate post-Covid working arrangements.

20/62 NOTED:

There was overall general agreement for the principles as they reflected the clear vision and strategies that had been in place throughout the Covid period, noting:

- The challenge would be practical implementation to make them operational locally whilst continuing to meet the expectations of all beneficiary and stakeholder groups
- Resources to meet the demands of different working practices, including consistent and stable technology and staff support, would be essential
- Dynamic working was a privilege and therefore there was an expectation of accountability and responsibility to each other thus colleagues must be explicit about when and where they were working
- It was important to seek the Students' Union perspective also and the student voice should feed into local arrangements as we don't want to lose the benefits that have come from this situation
- Students want transparency about staff availability, email response times etc
- Consideration be given to an internal comms 'switch off' period, eg Friday pm.

Senate's Annual Report to Council

20/63 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-20-3407-A being Senate's Annual Report to Council

20/64 NOTED:

- That the report had been mirrored on last year's format as it was prepared before the conclusion of the Senate Effectiveness Review
- In future the report would be more data evident as recommended in the Senate Effectiveness Review.

20/65 RESOLVED:

To approve the Senate's Annual Report to Council for submission.

Report from Learning and Teaching Committee

20/66 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-20-3408-A being a report of key matters from the University Learning and Teaching Committee meetings held on 4 December 2020 and 16 February 2021.

20/67 NOTED:

This was a new report to highlight the key work of the committee in line with recommendations of the Senate Effectiveness Review. The full minutes were in section E of the meeting papers.

Matters referred from Learning and Teaching Committee to Senate

Access and Participation Plan – OfS monitoring return

20/68 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-20-3409-A being the annual monitoring return to OfS providing evidence on progress against commitments to under-represented groups.

20/69 NOTED:

- That because of timing this had not yet been considered at ULTC
- The annual monitoring return was a requirement for OfS registration
- Some of the targets were set in 2011/12 and this was the last time reporting would be against these
- Resources had been actively directed at care leavers and this was reflected in being above target for this group.

20/70 RESOLVED:

To endorse for submission to Council the Access and Participation Plan – OfS Monitoring Return 2019/20 for final approval.

Integrated Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (iCAS)

20/71 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-20-3410-A being a proposal for issuing an integrated confirmation of acceptance for studies (iCAS) in collaboration with CEG UFP Ltd for students studying in the embedded academic centre.

20/72 NOTED:

- Issuing an iCAS would enable students to obtain one visa to cover their study in EAC and subsequently Aston University
- It offered a competitive advantage for Aston and would be a useful student recruitment tool
- It would enhance the commitment of CEG students to study at Aston University if they met the required standards to progress from EAC
- Conditions/recommendations of CPSG and ULTC had been actioned.

20/73 RESOLVED:

To endorse for submission to Council the use of an integrated confirmation of acceptance for studies (iCAS) for final approval.

Change to Ordinance 2.4.5(v): College Learning and Teaching Committees' Terms of Reference

20/74 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-20-3411-A being a proposal to change Ordinance 2.4.5(v) to specify that the Associate Dean Education would chair the College Learning and Teaching Committees.

20/75 RESOLVED:

That the proposal be approved.

Report from Research Committee

20/76 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-20-3412-A being a report of key matters from the Research Committee meeting held on 4 February 2021.

20/77 NOTED:

- This was a new report to highlight the key work of the committee in line with recommendations of the Senate Effectiveness Review. The full minutes were in section E of the meeting papers
- The UK had associated with Horizon Europe and the Active Bid Management Framework had been updated accordingly.

Knowledge Exchange Strategy

20/78 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-20-3413-A being the Knowledge Exchange Strategy.

20/79 NOTED:

- This was the first Knowledge Exchange strategy for the University and sitting across research and education it demonstrated Aston's dual intensity
- Town Hall events were being held where colleagues could hear in depth about the strategy.

REF Submission Final Report

20/80 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-20-3414-A being the REF submission final report summarising the shape of Aston's submission, the management and governance processes and next steps.

20/81 NOTED:

- Aston's submission would be made by the end of the week and this was a huge achievement following a lot of work over a long period of time across the institution
- The number of Aston academics on REF panels was higher than for any previous cycle
- Research power had doubled since 2014 hence the quiet optimism of the submission team
- It was now time to reflect and learn lessons for next REF which had already started.

20/82 RESOLVED:

That gratitude be expressed to all colleagues across the institution involved with preparing the submission with special acknowledgement to PVCR, Director of Research Strategy, Funding and Impact, and College ADRs.

Report and noted

20/83 RECEIVED:

Minutes of Council meeting held on 26 November 2020
Minutes of Learning and Teaching Committee held on 4 December 2020 and 16 February 2021
Minutes of Research Committee held on 4 February 2021
Paper SEN-20-3415-A being the schedule of research grants and contracts

Date of next meeting

20/84 NOTED: The next meeting of Senate would be on Wednesday 2 June 2021 at 14:00.