

SENATE

Minutes of the 360th meeting of Senate held on 16 March 2023 (by Teams)

Present:

Professor Simon Green (Chair)		
Dr Maana Aujla		Professor Joel Talcott
Professor Ruth Ayres	Paul Jones	Dr Tahmineh Tayebi
Helen Curtis	Alison Levey	Professor Nicholas Theodorakopoulos
Professor Andrew Devitt	Dr Jörg Mathias	Dr Jason Thomas
Dr Panos Doss	Professor Igor Meglinsky	Professor Paul Topham
Professor Stephen Garrett	Professor Phil Mizen	Dr Eliseo Vilalta-Perdomo
Dr Daniel Hill	Shaid Parveen	Kwan Yuet Adora Wong (SUVPE)
Professor Anthony Hilton	Dr Claire Stocker	Dr Jens-Uwe Wunderlich

In attendance:

Prof Tony Clark (M22/61-63)	Katie McNie (M22/61-63)	Mark Smith
Christina Matthews (M22/55-57)	Julie Ottley (secretary)	

Apologies:

Richard Billingham	Dr Valia Rodriguez-Rodriguez	Dr Stephen Worrall
Gary Hughes	Professor Aleks Subic	Liam Nevin

Absent:

Sana Azhat (SUVPW)	Professor George Feiger	Atul Rana (SUP)
Thomas Davenport	Dr Raquel Gil Cazorla	

22/34 NOTED:
This was the final meeting for Executive Dean of College of Business and Social Sciences and Director of Library Services and thanks were expressed for their participation and contribution to Senate.

Matters for Notification

22/35 NOTED:
Paper AU-SEN-22-5217-A being action taken by the Chair on behalf of Senate since the last meeting on 9 November 2022.

22/36 RECEIVED:

- Report from Academic Assembly (AU-SEN-22-5219-A)
- Student Disciplinary and Fitness to Practice Report (AU-SEN-22-5220-A)
- Schedule of Research Grants and Contracts (AU-SEN-22-5221-A)

22/37 NOTED:
The report from the Students' Union President had not been received.

Matters for Ratification

22/38 CONFIRMED:
The minutes of the 359th meeting of Senate held on 9 November 2022.

22/39 RECEIVED:
Paper AU-SEN-22-5222-A being the case for an award of degree ad eundem.

22/40 CONFIRMED:
Senate approved the award of degree ad eundem to Peter Sheward.

- 22/41 RECEIVED:
Paper AU-SEN-22-5223-A being the upward report from Learning and Teaching Committee meeting of 25 January 2023.
- 22/42 NOTED:
- The Ofsted Monitoring Visit Report in respect of degree apprentices had been published and Aston had secured a 'reasonable progress' outcome for all three themes. A post-visit action plan had been developed to progress actions raised and this would be managed and overseen through the Degree Apprenticeship sub-committee of ULTC.
 - The TEF provider submission and TEF student submission had been submitted ahead of the deadline. Outcomes were expected to be made available to the University, under embargo, in mid-summer before publication in the autumn.
 - The redeveloped ULTC sub-committees had been established, Chairs appointed and briefed and meetings were underway. The review had reduced the number of committees reporting to ULTC.
 - The Academic Integrity Working Group was undertaking work into the likely impact and mitigation for artificial intelligence (AI). AI was a major topic across the sector.
 - A working group had been commissioned to explore the potential adoption of digital badges.
 - A working group had been commissioned to determine the current and future needs for learner analytics.
 - Consideration was being given to the rollout options for the move to Blackboard Ultra for 2023/24, ie big bang or phased implementation. Discussions would take place at CLTC and the outcomes would be discussed at ULTC in April where a decision on the approach would be taken.
- 22/43 DISCUSSED:
- Reassurance was provided that there would be a plan and timeline for the move to Blackboard Ultra. Support and training would be available to ensure the move was smooth and without negative impact on students or staff.
 - Quality of data used for reviews, accreditations etc was raised as a concern. It was noted that a Power BI system was being developed for a move to continual monitoring and enhancement (CME). When this was launched it would enable academic staff to access accurate, real-time academic quality data for taught provision, offering a single source of truth.
- 22/44 CONSIDERED:
Paper AU-LTC-22-5235-B being the Degree Outcomes Statement (DOS).
- 22/45 NOTED:
- There was an expectation from the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) for HE providers to publish a Degree Outcomes Statement which analysed undergraduate classification profiles.
 - This was part of a sector-wide commitment to assure and protect the value and credibility of HE qualifications, and the degree classification system that underpinned them. It was also important for current, past and future students.
- 22/46 DISCUSSED:
- Data for 2021/22 in table 1 was not yet available. The table would be updated when the data was received.
 - Intersectionality data was not published in DOS but had been requested for internal use.
 - Programme Directors were to be reminded that they should meet with students (ref section 6.5)
Action PVCE
 - Table 1 indicated that Black students had the lowest rate for 1st/2:1. This was being looked at to try to understand the reasons for this.

22/47 APPROVED:
Paper AU-LTC-22-5235-B being the Degree Outcomes Statement for external publication on the University's website.

22/48 RECEIVED:
Paper AU-SEN-22-5236-A being the report on academic malpractice 2021/22.

22/49 NOTED:

- There was an increase in the number of recorded academic offences over the last two academic years, however, relative to the overall student population the number was low (2.6% in 2020/21 and 3.48% in 2021/22).
- Plagiarism and collusion were the most common offences and particularly amongst international PGT students and action was being targeted at this group.
- The Academic Integrity Group, reporting to ULTC, was undertaking work to support students and address issues of academic malpractice.

22/50 RECEIVED:
Paper AU-SEN-22-5224-A being the upward report from Research Committee meeting of 15 February 2023.

22/51 NOTED:

- There was not a PGR student representative on URC.
- The REF2028 research output review programme was significantly behind schedule and this was impacting other areas such as the promotions committee.
- The lack of ethics reviewers was causing delays, particularly in BSS.
- A task and finish group had been convened to finalise a draft of the Research Data Management Policy.
- The Responsible Use of Publication Metrics Working Group would be reconvened to explore expanding Aston's 'basket of metrics'.
- A full set of output reviews would be completed by the Colleges using a 30 April 2023 census date and reporting in autumn 2023.

22/52 DISCUSSED:

- Student representatives on University committees was now coordinated by Students' Union and SUVPE would work with Voice coordinator for a better system to ensure student representatives were recruited for next academic year. **Action SUVPE**
- GSMC had PGR reps and it was suggested that one of them be invited to join URC.

22/53 DEFERRED:
Paper AU-SEN-22-5225-A being the Senate annual report to Council on academic governance, quality and standards.

22/54 NOTED:
The report would be considered at an extra meeting on 22 March 2023.

Matters for Discussion

Timetable principles and guidance (AU-SEN-22-5226-A)

22/55 RECEIVED:
A presentation from Director of Student Experience.

22/56 NOTED:

- As part of the plans to automate processes in the timetabling system CELCAT and following feedback from students that the timetable was no longer working for them, a set of timetabling principles had been compiled.

- Key stakeholders across the University had collaborated to compile the principles which had now been agreed by Executive.
- Staff principles and guidance would follow but was in its infancy.

22/57 DISCUSSED:

- A two-hour free period had been added on Friday to provide Muslim students with the opportunity for Friday prayers. Muslim students accounted for 1/3 of the student population.
- A day off per week for students was being considered as part of 'Student Promise' however there were challenges to overcome before this could be implemented.
- The intention was that the staff principles would include giving staff a day per week for research if this could be made to work alongside the teaching timetable.
- The automation process would decide which principles could be accommodated and this would not be known until the programme had been run.
- It was important that homogenous programmes were not pushed to the margins.

College of Engineering and Applied Science strategy and performance analysis
(AU-SEN-22-5226-A)

22/58 RECEIVED:

A presentation from the Executive Dean of College of Engineering and Applied Science.

22/59 NOTED:

- Activities of the College were considered through the lens of six inter-related priorities:
 - Efficiency and effectiveness of structures and operations
 - Digital (research), digital (syllabus), digital (delivery/systems)
 - Substantial growth in research quality, volume, and impact
 - Staff development and value proposition
 - Growth of business-driven income
 - Growth of TNE income
- Design Factory Birmingham was being established, linking to the global DF network, but as a separate entity providing commercial design and prototyping facilities.

22/60 DISCUSSED:

- The big improvement in NSS overall satisfaction for Product Design (+42 to 92%) was highlighted. It was explained that a panel was set up to understand why the programme scored badly and then an action plan was put in place. Professor Topham was happy to discuss this with anyone interested.
- Staff development applied to all staff groups across the College: academic, technician, professional, and across all types of contracts.

Aston Academic Work Allocation Framework (AU-SEN-22-5228-A)

22/61 RECEIVED:

A presentation from the Professor Tony Clark, Chair of Project Board and Katie McNie, Improvement Project Manager.

22/62 NOTED:

- The purpose of the project was to replace numerous Excel-based workload allocation models with a new Workload Allocation Management System (WAMS) to provide a single, consistent, transparent and equitable system for allocating work to academic staff.
- A University-wide Academic Resource Framework would be created and a governance board established to maintain transparency and equity.
- Senior stakeholders had been consulted, current processes mapped and high-level requirements had been gathered.

- A software provider had been identified and a contract was being finalised.
- WAMS would run parallel to current systems in the first year (2023/24) allowing the opportunity for refinement before phasing out current systems.

22/63 DISCUSSED:

- Extra curricula activity, eg open days, being a committee chair, would be incorporated but it had not yet been agreed how this type of activity would be accounted for.
- All activities would be accounted for systematically and reports would highlight areas of overload or avoidance for discussion with managers.

Other business

22/64 NOTED:

- There had been a case whereby a member of staff had been informed by Wellbeing Service to call the police to assist a student.
- It was recognised that the referral process broke down on this occasion and the response was not what would have been expected but was resolved quickly.
- APVC(S) was satisfied that this was an isolated incident and that there was adequate safeguarding training in place.

Dates of meetings 2022/23

22/65 NOTED:

Wednesday 24 May 2023, 14:00-16:30

Background papers for information

22/66 RECEIVED:

Council minutes of 6 July 2022

Research Committee minutes of 15 February 2023