

SENATE

Minutes of the 362nd meeting of Senate held on 15 November 2023 by Teams

Present:

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| Professor Aleks Subic (Chair) | Dr Daniel Hill | Atul Rana (SUP) |
| Kirsty Allan (SUVPW) | Ann-Marie James | Dr Valia Rodriguez-Rodriguez |
| Professor Ruth Ayres | Paul Jones | Dr Claire Stocker |
| Richard Billingham | Professor Osama Khan | Professor Joel Talcott |
| Professor Michael Caine | Alison Levey | Professor Nicholas Theodorakopoulos |
| Thomas Davenport | Dr Jörg Mathias | Dr Jason Thomas |
| Professor Andrew Devitt | Professor Igor Meglinsky | Professor Paul Topham |
| Professor Stephen Garrett | Professor Phil Mizen | Dr Eliseo Vilalta-Perdomo |
| Dr Raquel Gil Cazorla | Shaid Parveen | Kwan Yuet Adora Wong (SUVPE) |
| Professor Simon Green | Professor Zoe Radnor | Dr Jens-Uwe Wunderlich |

Apologies:

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|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Dr Maana Aujla | Gary Hughes | Dr Stephen Worrall |
| Professor Anthony Hilton | Dr Tahmineh Tayebi | |

Absent:

Dr Panos Doss

In attendance:

| | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Dalia Dasgupta (item C3) | Liam Nevin | Mark Smith |
| Professor Chris Langley | Julie Ottley (secretary) | Andrew Wilson (item C1) |

Matters for Notification

- 23/01 NOTED:
Paper AU-SEN-23-5877-A being action taken by the Chair to approve on behalf of Senate:
1. Gagandeep Dagun (Associate Head (Education), Aston Pharmacy School) to act as a substitute for the Deputy Chair of MPharm Stage 1 and 2 Examination Board.
 2. Appointment of Helen Cameron as an Emeritus Professor in the College of Health and Life Sciences.

- 23/02 RECEIVED:
An oral report from the Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, noting:
- The best wishes of everyone on Senate were conveyed to PVCHLS who was recovering at home following a recent health scare. Thanks were expressed to HLSDD for covering during this period.
 - 170 staff would be attending the VC Awards and Aston Achievement Awards evening (the largest ever for this event) and this was a reflection of the outstanding contribution of staff to Aston's success.

- 23/03 NOTED:
- Reports from: (i) Students' Union (AU-SEN-23-5894-A)
(ii) Academic Assembly (AU-SEN-23-5878-A)
 - Report on Serious Disciplinary and Fitness to Practice cases (AU-SEN-23-5879-A)
 - Schedule of Research Grants and Contracts (AU-SEN-23-5880-A)
 - Senate Standing Orders (AU-SEN-22-4990-A)

Matters for Ratification

- 23/04 CONFIRMED:
The minutes of the 361st meeting of Senate held on 24 May 2023.

Matters arising

M22/78 Upward report from University Research Committee of 5 May 2023.

That University Research Committee reconsider that Epigeium Ethics Training be mandatory for all academic staff, noting this had strong endorsement from Senate.

23/05 NOTED:

- That this had been actioned by University Research Committee and Colleges were advised of the change and communications sent out accordingly.
- Work was ongoing with Organisational Development for the mandatory Epigeium training to be part of the University's overarching management of mandatory training.
- A new system was being put in place and this would ensure more accurate monitoring of completion of the training.

23/06 RECEIVED:

Paper AU-SEN-23-5882-A being the Senate membership 2023/24.

23/07 RECEIVED:

Paper AU-SEN-23-5883-A being the Senate schedule of business 2023/24.

23/08 CONFIRMED:

Paper AU-SEN-23-5884-A being membership of University Academic Misconduct Boards 2023/24.

23/09 RECEIVED:

Paper AU-SEN-23-5885-A being the upward reports from Learning and Teaching Committee of 21 June 2023 and 25 October 2023.

23/10 NOTED:

- The impact of UCU strike action had been relatively minor, with the exception of Psychology, and the majority of students were able to graduate on time.
- The Academic Appeals report for 2021/22 indicated a continued year on year increase in appeals received, however, there had been a proportionately lower increase in the number of appeals upheld.
- A project was underway to ensure external regulatory requirements (OfS and Ofsted) for the archiving of student assessments could be effectively met.
- A new strategic project on learning analytics and student engagement to align with the Aston 2030 strategy would replace MyEngagement.
- Blackboard Ultra template and implementation plans had been approved.
- Post Exam decision letters had been amended and updated for ease of understanding.
- DVCA would convene a group to undertake a planned review of MEQ question set.

Student Charter 2023/24

23/11 APPROVED:

Paper AU-LTC-23-5886-A being the Student Charter 2023/24.

Annual Report on Student Complaints 2022/23

23/12 RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL BY COUNCIL:

Paper AU-LTC-23-5887-A being the Annual Report on Student Complaints 2022/23.

23/13 RECEIVED:

Paper AU-SEN-23-5888-A being the upward report from Research Committee of 11 October 2023.

23/14 NOTED:

- There had been delays in Colleges completing REF output reviews, with two Colleges now significantly behind schedule, and this was a potential risk in preparations for REF 2028.
- Aston was behind its trajectory for FTE staff employed on T&R contracts and for PhD students and this could jeopardise the Research Strategy.
- Research KPIs showed a positive trajectory in bids and awards, research contribution and KTPs.
- A review of research centres and groups in BSS had been commissioned with the aim of securing a significant reduction from the current portfolio by September 2024.
- REF Management Group would constitute a People, Culture and Environment Working Group to bring focus to the proposed changes to that element of REF.

Responsible use of Metrics Policy

23/15 APPROVED:

Paper AU-RC-23-5838-A being the Responsible use of metrics policy.

PGR student experience and PRES

23/16 NOTED:

Paper AU-GSMC-23-5747-A being PRES results and proposals which had identified a significant drop in student satisfaction.

Research Ethics support

23/17 NOTED:

The demand for support from the Research Ethics Team was greater than the capacity of staff resources and was unsustainable. This was mainly because of submission of poor-quality ethics applications which required considerable input. There would be greater expectation for researchers to engage with online training materials before seeking support from the Ethics Team.

23/18 DISCUSSED:

- Compulsory ethics training for all academic staff was a step in the right direction as this was a legal obligation, however, culture change around the approach to research integrity and ethics was needed.
- The ambitious growth plan for doctorates could be impacted by the PRES results. Aston recognised its weaknesses and these would be addressed systematically through the strategic plan.

23/19 RECEIVED:

Paper AU-SEN-23-5889-A being:

- Senate summary of business 2022/23
- University Research Committee annual report to Senate
- University Learning and Teaching Committee annual report to Senate

23/20 NOTED:

URC

- The Biomedical Facility had formally failed an inspection by the Home Office due to two minor failings. These had been rectified and the next inspection would be in three years.
- Aston Medical School (AMS) had applied for a Human Tissue Licence in the Anatomy sector licence. This was issued in July 2023 and provided safeguards for AMS teaching activity.

ULTC

- Thanks were expressed to Director of Planning, Performance and Student Statutory Returns for his significant contribution to the report.
- A new Access and Participation Plan (APP) was to be submitted in Summer 2024 following a different approach to previous such plans. Outcomes from a sector pilot would inform development of Aston's 'New APP'.
- RAG-rated NSS action plans had been introduced last year and these had been successful in improving NSS outcomes. This practice would continue this year and also be introduced for PTES.
- Thanks were expressed to all colleagues who inputted to TEF for the University's success in achieving Triple Gold.

Matters for Discussion

College of Business and Social Sciences update (AU-SEN-23-5890-A)

23/21 RECEIVED:
A presentation from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean of College of Business and Social Sciences, supported by the Director of Operations.

23/22 NOTED:
To support Aston 2030 Strategy academic targets, BSS priorities would be:

- A review of programme portfolio and curriculum to provide students with a flexible portfolio that would support all stages of their lifelong learning journey.
- Developing new PGT portfolio especially in SSH and Law.
- Building the PGR (PhD and DBA) community.
- Building on industry and applied knowledge within the flexible portfolio, via multiple platforms, to prepare students for work and life.
- Ensuring BSS Units of Assessment were in the top quartile of REF submissions.
- Developing an inclusive research community with active research centres that were attractive to researchers at all levels.

23/23 DISCUSSED:

- The priorities for focus in the next 12 months would be: PGT portfolio, consolidate and review Business School, digital media, all to support Aston 2030 Strategy, build on industry links to bring in big business as well as small business, improve international student experience so as to get the Business School back to the top of the rankings.
- A CEO Academy was being established for September 2024.
- Utilising additional skills and expertise (outside of their Aston role) of staff was suggested.
- A Business School in the top 100 world ranking was an important accolade for reputational enhancement and ranking was increasingly important in China. ABS had slipped out of the top 100 in the last two years and it was crucial to reverse the decline. Work was ongoing to understand in detail the formulas for rankings so that activities could be focussed in the right areas to improve ranking position.

Academic Work Allocation Model (AU-SEN-23-5891-A)

23/24 RECEIVED:
A presentation from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic.

23/25 NOTED:

- The work allocation project seeks to define principles that align work allocation activities consistent to the Aston 2030 Strategy.
- The approach to workload would also foster staff performance, wellbeing and career progression, whilst maintaining the financial viability of the University.

- The work allocation framework would achieve a high-performance workforce culture based on SMART value-creation principles to ensure academic talent and capacity were utilised for the core mission, vision and strategy of the University.
- Workload activities would focus on three academic domains: Education and Student Experience; Research, Innovation and Impact; Citizenship, Engagement and Services.
- The system would start operating in September 2024 but with the drive for continuous improvement.

23/26 DISCUSSED:

- Was there scope within the dual intensive role for ECRs to be included as they transition to an academic career? This was a commitment of the HR Excellence in Research Award and would be monitored. A standard probation system, to enable transition over time through whichever pathway they chose, would guide ECRs so they could thrive at Aston and build their academic career.
- Data collected on performance should be transparently available to individuals so that they were clear where they stand in relation to measures of success.
- There would be a process for staff to move between pathways for career development and this would be part of academic career planning, interconnecting with MyDC and academic promotions process.
- Line managers would monitor adherence of academic staff to the workload allocation, with moderation by College SMG. Appropriate training in this would be crucial for consistency and equity. Workload was managed by working within budget envelopes.
- Citizenship and engagement should be included as this linked to research and impact.

Academic Workforce Strategy (AU-SEN-23-5892-A)

23/27 RECEIVED:

A presentation from the Chief People Officer.

23/28 NOTED:

The key focus of the academic workforce strategy to align with the Aston 2030 Strategy were:

- Increasing teaching and research roles with clearly articulated career pathways based on new academic workload model and refreshed promotion scheme.
- Increasing research intensive roles through co-investment with industry and business.
- Diversifying the workforce by growing industry fellows, clinical fellows, Professors of Practice.
- Establishing an innovation and impact career pathway for innovation fellows and entrepreneurs with support for spinouts and start-ups.

23/29 DISCUSSED:

- It was important to have good data on the reasons for staff leaving. Areas where there was good practice should be drawn from to inform improvements in other areas.
- Research staff were often on funded projects with 3 or 4 year contracts. It would help if there was a pathway for them to stay at Aston beyond the end of contract.
- Staff profile indicated a decrease in research only staff but this was driven by the response to Covid when the focus had to be on teaching.
- Research only staff moving to T&R contracts were counted as turnover in the figures and this should be distinguished from leavers.
- An increase in the number of T&R staff was important as currently the balance was more towards Teaching only and this trend was not conducive to being a dual intensive University.
- Estates strategy was important for recruitment and retention, ensuring that appropriate space and facilities were available for staff.
- There were good people at Aston and creating an environment for a great lived experience would motivate staff to stay.

Dates of Senate meetings 2023/24

23/30 NOTED:
Wednesday 6 March 2024, 14:00-16:30
Wednesday 5 June 2024, 14:00-16:30

Background papers for information

23/31 RECEIVED:
Council minutes of 29 March 2023
Learning and Teaching Committee minutes of 21 June 2023
Research Committee minutes of 19 July 2023 and 11 October 2023