

SENATE

Minutes of the 361st meeting of Senate held on 24 May 2023 (by Teams)

Present:

Professor Aleks Subic (Chair)	Professor Anthony Hilton	Shaid Parveen
Dr Maana Aujla	Paul Jones	Professor Joel Talcott
Professor Ruth Ayres	Alison Levey	Dr Tahmineh Tayebi
Helen Curtis	Dr Jörg Mathias	Professor Nicholas Theodorakopoulos
Thomas Davenport	Professor Igor Meglinsky	Dr Jason Thomas
Professor Andrew Devitt	Professor Phil Mizen	Dr Eliseo Vilalta-Perdomo
Dr Panos Doss	Professor Zoe Radnor	Dr Stephen Worrall
Professor Stephen Garrett	Atul Rana (SUP)	Dr Jens-Uwe Wunderlich
Professor Simon Green	Dr Valia Rodriguez-Rodriguez	
Dr Daniel Hill		

In attendance:

Richard Billingham	Liam Nevin	Mark Smith
Gary Hughes	Julie Ottley (secretary)	

Apologies:

Sana Azhat (SUVPW)	Dr Claire Stocker	Kwan Yuet Adora Wong (SUVPE)
Richard Billingham	Professor Paul Topham	

Absent:

Dr Raquel Gil Cazorla

Matters for Notification

22/67 RECEIVED:

A verbal update from the Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive, noting:

- Development of the University strategy 2030 was progressing well. The Senior Management Group (SMG), which included the top 100 leaders from across the University, had identified three project areas for key focus: (i) Measures of success (KPIs), (ii) Our Promise to Students, (iii) Building capacity for sustained excellence in research, (iv) People and Place, (v) Digital enterprise, (vi) International development. Large groups from Business, Government, City and alumni community had also been given the opportunity to input to the development of the strategy.
- A draft of the 2030 strategy would be discussed with SMG and Advisory Boards ahead of presentation to Council in June.
- The draft would be posted on the new staff intranet in June for all staff to review and comment before it was finalised for launch in September. This will be supported by engagement with all functional units during July, August.
- The University together with Birmingham City Council and Bruntwood SciTech had launched a blueprint for the Birmingham Innovation Quarter (B-IQ). Aston would be integral to, and a catalyst for, socio economic transformation of the City through science and technology innovation driven out of the B-IQ that aims to attract significant investment.
- An external agency is undertaking a review of the University's governance and this would ensure that Aston is aligned with best practice in the sector and that it has the structures that are fit for purpose to support the new strategy.
- New Vice-Chancellor's awards are being introduced and would be presented annually to recognise excellence and contributions of academic and professional staff in core areas of university business and purpose.
- Following an extensive and rigorous search process, Professor Osama Khan had been appointed as Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic). Professor Khan would be joining from the University of Surrey in October 2023.

- 22/68 RECEIVED:
- Report from Students' Union (AU-SEN-22-5422-A)
 - Report from Academic Assembly (AU-SEN-22-5423-A)
 - Serious Student Disciplinary and Fitness to Practice Report (AU-SEN-22-5424-A)
 - Schedule of Research Grants and Contracts (AU-SEN-22-5425-A)

Matters arising from Academic Assembly minutes

13 March 2023 – 4.1 University Strategy 2030

“Apparently 100 senior members of staff were consulted regarding the 2030 Strategy, but the question was raised as to how this group of people represented the view all University staff”.

- 22/69 NOTED:
- The 100 leaders (SMG) had been sharing and seeking input to the strategy during a comprehensive process involving 3 away days to date, and were acknowledged for their work in this regard.
 - It was reiterated (M22/67) that consultation and engagement would continue throughout the summer with all staff having the opportunity to input, including also our partners and alumni.

17 April 2023 – 8.1 Promotions

“Chair to discuss the University presenting the results of promotions – statistics regarding the division of women to men and minorities – and to determine a timeline for this information to be available - at the Senate meeting”

- 22/70 NOTED:
- The University Promotions Committee had only recently taken place and thus the process is not yet completed and information was not yet available.
 - Promotions data would be consolidated and going forward would form part of the annual reporting. A review of promotion scheme will occur in second part of this year ahead of the 2024 promotion round.

Matters for Ratification

- 22/71 CONFIRMED:
The minutes of the 360th meeting of Senate held on 16 March 2023.

- 22/72 CONFIRMED:
Paper AU-SEN-22-5426-A being the Disciplinary Board membership 2023/24.

- 22/73 RECEIVED:
Paper AU-SEN-22-5427-A being the upward report from Learning and Teaching Committee meeting of 20 April 2023.

- 22/74 NOTED:
- Amendments to the Student Declaration of Integrity, as part of the Student Assessment Submission Declaration Statements, had been approved, one for postgraduate projects/dissertations, and one for all other assessment, in response to the recent release of AI ChatGPT.
 - A guide for staff on 'The Principles of engagement with AI in teaching' had been approved.
 - Actions taken by each College and the Education Department in response to the 2022 NSS outcomes were closed off and outstanding actions carried forward.
 - NSS 2023 plans were in place and the participation target had been met.
 - PTES 2023 would close on 16 June 2023.

- A programme approach to the migration to Blackboard Ultra for institution-wide implementation from September 2024 had been agreed, following consideration of sector practice, feedback from early adopters at Aston and detailed discussions at College Learning & Teaching Committees and ULTC.

22/75 RECEIVED:
Paper AU-SEN-22-5428-A being the upward report from Research Committee meeting of 5 May 2023.

22/76 NOTED:

- Five minor shortfalls were highlighted as part of a site visit related to Aston Medical School's application for a Human Tissue Authority Anatomy Licence.
- From March 2025, it would no longer be possible to use the UKRI Block Grant to fund Transformative Deals and this would impact on Aston's current funding model.
- The reduction in the UKRI block grant allocation for 2023-24 meant that the current Open Research Assistant's contract could not be renewed. This exposed Aston to some risk in terms of capacity to complete open-access compliance work.
- College Research Ethics Committees were finding recruitment of members/reviewers challenging. This delay was causing backlogs, particularly in BSS. In addition, a lack of adequate workload allocation for the work of reviewers, Chairs and Deputy Chairs compounded the issue of recruiting reviewers.
- There was a lack of engagement and/or completion of Epigeium Ethics Training which URC had agreed should be mandatory for anyone involved in research.

22/77 DISCUSSED:

- There needed to be a mechanism to track if staff were adhering to the mandatory ethics training, however, behaviours were also important.
- A broader issue, particularly in BSS, was staff recognising the importance of ethics.
- Basic research ethics training would benefit all academic staff for understanding and awareness and developing their skill set. It was also relevant to all at some point, eg supervision of undergraduate placement and research projects.

22/78 AGREED:
That University Research Committee reconsider that Epigeium Ethics Training be mandatory for all academic staff, noting this had strong endorsement from Senate. **Action: PVCR**

Matters for Discussion

Degree Apprenticeships overview (AU-SEN-22-5432-A)

22/79 RECEIVED:
A presentation from Pro Vice Chancellor Education and Executive Director of Business Engagement.

22/80 NOTED:

- Aston was the original University for degree apprenticeships, providing 11 at Level 6 and 6 at Level 7 and with a total of 1640 apprentices currently.
- Delivery generated average £450,000 per month, equating to circa £5,500,000 per annum.
- Each course was delivered to an agreed specification against a proscribed funding band and therefore each had a variable contribution to the University and the variations could be quite high.
- Oversight of provision was regulated by ESFA and Ofsted and internal governance was provided by Degree Apprenticeships Sub-Committee.
- In response to the outcome of the Ofsted New Provider Monitoring Visit, an action plan was in place with the following key areas of focus:

- End Point Assessment: Timely completion through consistent support from programme outset.
- Consistent, high quality L&T and coaching informed by Aston's QA mechanisms and employer feedback.
- Consistent adoption of Safeguarding & signposting of British Values.
- Supporting individuals to achieve their full potential through personalised feedback – appropriate stretch and challenge.
- Maintain effective data records to enable timely monitoring of DA progress and achievement (including data migration to Aptem system).
- Ensure accurate work-related records (training plans to portfolio incl tripartite reports)

22/81 DISCUSSED:

- What were the barriers to completion?
 - An apprenticeship was a journey and not only a degree. Students needed to be supported to understand they had to complete the full programme beyond the academic component.
 - End point assessment was an area where support was to be provided to colleagues to give them a better understanding.
- Were student outcomes improving?
 - There was work to do to improve the whole student experience so that it was as good as any other learner.

Update on Research and Aston's new Research Strategy (AU-SEN-22-5429A)

22/82 RECEIVED:

A presentation from the Pro Vice Chancellor Research.

22/83 NOTED:

- Recent research successes demonstrated a stronger, quicker rebound from COVID than forecast.
- REF 2021 had demonstrated a need for continued growth in volume to regain ground on competitors in respect of quality across the board.
- To achieve this, increased investment, improved processes, and provision of data was needed. Also change culture: too often research (including PGR students) were at best an afterthought from UG teaching, and at worst ignored altogether.
- If Aston was to be 'dual intensive', it had to be recognised that research and teaching were both central to Aston's mission and profile as a University.
- This would need to be understood and owned by the entire University, including T-only staff, professional service staff and the Students' Union.

22/84 DISCUSSED:

- Changing culture would require inclusivity. Colleagues need to feel valued to get them on board. Communication should be broadened with less hierarchical distribution.
- The awards target was ambitious, were there any other UK institutions whose growth had been at this magnitude as this would provide reassurance that it was possible.
 - A number of institutions had grown in this way and Birmingham University was a good example where research had kept pace with overall volume.
- An aggressive growth strategy for academic staff would require the right balance of quality v quantity. Bringing in talent was important but retaining good staff would be critical for success.
- The structure of next REF was not known but, at this moment, it was expected that Aston would submit to the same number of UoA to remain focussed.

Assessment of performance and risk against UKVI conditions (AU-SEN-22-5430-A)

22/85 RECEIVED:
A presentation from the Pro Vice Chancellor Education, Executive Director of Marketing, Recruitment and Communications, and Associate Pro Vice Chancellor (Students).

22/86 NOTED:

- The University has a legal requirement to comply with UKVI visa requirements in order to have overseas students.
- There are 29 core requirements that the University has to report on.
- The University was currently operating within the following set boundaries:
 - Visa refusal rate less than 10%
 - Enrolment rate no less than 90%
 - Course completion rate higher than 85%
- International student engagement had to be monitored to ensure compliance with UKVI licence conditions and a new data monitoring system was being implemented.

Dates of meetings 2023/24

22/87 NOTED:
Dates of meetings for 2023/24 would be advised.

Background papers for information

22/88 RECEIVED:
Council minutes of 23 November 2022
Learning and Teaching Committee minutes of 25 January 2023 and 20 April 2023
Research Committee minutes of 5 May 2023