
Minutes of the 331st COUNCIL meeting, Wednesday, 25th May 2022 in Conference Room 1B/C, Conference Aston and by videoconference

PRESENT:	Dame Yve Buckland (Chair)	
	Dr Hannah Bartlett*	Saskia Loer Hansen
	Dr Melanie Gibbs*	Dr Jason Wouhra*
	Professor Gill Nicholls*	Neil Scott
	Dr Sue Noffke*	Dr Mike Wright
	Dr Vij Randeniya	
	Professor Paul Topham	
	Balraj Purewal	
APOLOGIES:	Dr Rob Perrins	Dr Matthew Crummack
	Ranjit Dhindsa	
IN ATTENDANCE:		
	Kathy Cooper	Professor George Feiger
	Professor Ruth Ayres	Richard Billingham
	Professor Anthony Hilton	Mark Smith
	Professor Stephen Garrett	Gary Hughes
	Ravteg Dhesi	Rachel McIntosh
	Atul Rana	Yesmeen Singh

*Indicates member of Council present on Teams

APOLOGIES FROM ATTENDEES: Professor Simon Green

Governance Matters

21/114 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Dr Rob Perrins, Dr Matthew Crummack and Ranjit Dhindsa

21/115 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received

Introductions

21/116 The Pro-Chancellor advised that the agenda for the meeting focussed on progress with the Education Strategy, and student experience and employability, and that a panel of students had been invited to contribute to these discussions drawing on their personal experience. The members of the student panel were introduced and welcomed to the meeting:

- Eleanor Barton – Integrated Masters (EPS)
- Ryan Narewal Placement Student (BSS)
- Jawad Ahmad Final Year (BSS)
- Michael Pritchard – PhD Research Student (EPS)
- Ann Bennett – Final Year (BSS)

21/117 **Introduction to the Student Focussed Session**

The Vice-Chancellor delivered a presentation setting out the context of student experience by reference to specific local and national challenges and developments in the regulatory environment.

21/118 **Education Strategy in Practice**

Professor Ruth Ayres summarised the Education Strategy, the work being done on implementation and qualitative and quantitative feedback received from students. Yesmeen Singh then summarised the outcomes of the survey work done by the Students Union to assess student opinions following the return to campus, and with regard to wellbeing, accessibility, and academic provision and support.

21/119 The student panel were invited to comment on their personal experiences with respect to the preceding presentations and the following comments were made:

- Although some lecturers used the chat function when delivering on-line lectures this was not uniform.
- That there had been significant improvement in the structure and quality of information provided to students with blended learning since the practice was introduced
- That the quality of practical workshops had been enhanced (EPS)
- The clarity of modules had improved and there was a stronger focus on employability and the application of learning to employer needs (BSS)
- The timing of webinars was effective in reinforcing learning
- On-line examinations had provided an opportunity for students to demonstrate a deeper knowledge of subject matter, rather than a focus on memory and recall. It also enhanced accessibility for those with physical or cognitive challenges.
- That in person contact time with lecturers had reduced and that this was detrimental for some subject areas, like social sciences.
- Consideration needed to be given to the workload required for individual modules. It was perceived that the credits awarded sometimes did not reflect the time investment required.
- The regular staff briefing should also be sent to students as this provided information that would increase the sense of engagement for students.
- It was important that the University always adhered to the adjustments made for students with disabilities or who were neurodivergent.
- That consideration should be given to awarding individual marks in group projects as group marking did not differentiate between varying individual contributions.
- High quality closed captioning should be provided for on-line lectures to better accommodate those with hearing difficulties or neurodivergence.
- Improved communications between modular leaders to ensure a more even distribution of deadlines would improve the quality of student work.

21/120 **Student Experience and Employability**

Alison Levey introduced the session and advised that the focus would be on the student experience with regard to mental health and well-being, and employability.

21/121 **Student Welfare**

Ravteg Dhesi provided an overview of the student welfare provision provided by the University, the growth in demand for these services, the measures being implemented, and those that were planned to better meet this demand. It was noted that the team was currently under-resourced and that steps were being taken to address this.

Student panel members made the following points, reflecting their personal experiences:

- Approaching the welfare service could be emotionally challenging and students may be deterred if they felt the service was under-resourced and unlikely to be able to provide the full support needed.

- That further efforts needed to be made to remove any stigma associated with the welfare service
- That a personal introductory email from a member of the team to students would be helpful
- That the University needed to consider the support provided to students before they were formally diagnosed as this might only happen later in the student's course, prior to which they would continue to experience difficulties if unsupported.

It was further noted that the University and the Students Union were working closely on the development of welfare co-ordinator support within the Student Union.

21/122 **Employability**

Rachel McIntosh delivered a presentation on Employability and summarised the steps being taken to develop work experience opportunities, further develop the post-graduate offer and ensure optimum use of face to face and virtual appointments.

Student panel members made the following points, reflecting their personal experiences:

- Aston Futures was utilised as a source of information but for law students it was necessary to review the websites of potential employer law firms (BSS).
- There was a lack of opportunities during COVID but experience this year had been positive with lecturers advising students when to begin their search and an on-line session to help find placements.
- The support provided at the beginning of the academic year included careers and placements information as part of a student engagement presentation. A useful checklist had been produced as part of that session.
- It was encouraging to see the added focus on post-graduate student needs as the journey of a post-graduate research student was very different to an undergraduate student.
- The Aston Students interface was not as effective as it could be.

21/123 **Summary and Close of Session**

The Pro-Chancellor thanked the student panel for their attendance and contribution to the discussion and stressed the importance of Council members hearing directly from students about their personal experience, which would be drawn on by Council in discussion on future agenda items. It was agreed that further reflection on the session with Council members would be undertaken in the next scheduled meeting of Council.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

21/124 Date of Council's Next Meeting: Wednesday 6th July 2022 at 1.30pm.