

# ASTON UNIVERSITY

## INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY COMMITTEE MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting of the International Strategy Committee meeting held on Thursday 25th October 2018.

**PRESENT:** Saskia Loer Hansen (Chair), Kate Sugden, Bhavisha Koner, Patrycja Rozbicka, Frank Eperjesi, Paul Knobbs, Carolina Salinas, Christina Matthews, Wendy Yip, Fiona Lacey

**APOLOGIES:** Geoff Parkes, Odette Hutchinson, Pawan Budhwar, Matthew Dean, Marc Hornby, Amna Atteeq, Fiona Kilker

**SECRETARY:** Jessica Rigby

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Matthew Hall

### 1. MINUTES

18/01 CONFIRMED:

The Minutes of the International Strategy Committee held on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2018 (Blackboard).

### 2. PPCI Updates

18/02 RECEIVED:

- I. An update on the International plan, noting the plan presentation had been circulated in the International Newsletter circulated internally on 10<sup>th</sup> October.

18/03 ACTION:

All members of Committee to be added to newsletter circulation.

(Secretary)

18/04 RECEIVED:

- II. An oral report on international recruitment with a particular focus on Postgraduate Aston Business School. Noted Aston was significantly down in terms of international students and therefore also revenue particularly for Aston Business School. Reasons cited include:
  - a. Spring 2017 restructure of the International Office. This removed a dedicated focus on UK International market and agent management. Dedicated responsibilities for these areas have since been reinstated including a new appointment in October 2018, but too late for the 2018/19 cycle.
  - b. Issues on agent management (such as payments of commission), as well as increased competition. Aston has been more aligned with the Russell group than less, and cannot compete with Russell group going forward. Changes will be made to PGT entry requirements, recognising professional experience and introducing greater flex on IELTS bands, to benchmark against other non-Russell Group institutions.
  - c. Rankings have a huge impact, particularly in China. Aston has been in top 50 previously in the Sunday Times Good University Guide but now

are ranked 57th and therefore outside of top 50 that many agents prioritise.

d. Website offerings need developing particularly to highlight graduate outcomes to prospective students.

III. A number of areas of improvement have been identified, however noted it takes time to implement the changes. Some are systems and process updates, and these take more time, and changes to product, entry requirements etc. can only be done in advance of a new recruitment cycle. Another area of priority is getting robust management information including data cross the whole pipeline from enquiries from different channels (a CRM system) through to enrolments. It was also noted that the number of enrolments were down, but acceptances were up on previous year. Consequently, more refined data is required to better support ongoing monitoring of the pipeline. The work with QS Enrolment solution will provide better data with time, but this will not be the complete solution to better understanding our pipeline. Greater internal data integration including visa information will be required moving forward.

18/05 NOTED:

The challenging situation Aston is facing regarding international recruitment and that Aston needs to modify its competitive positioning to regain market share. It was also noted that changes to entry requirements have to be coupled with greater in-session support to contribute to student success.

18/06 NOTED:

China is the market where the biggest demand exists and where we can get short-medium term impact. An updated report on the number of students who have come from a UK degree system or those who studied UG in China would be useful.

18/07 ACTION:

Report on the routes Chinese students have taken to get to study at Aston will be produced in advance of the next meeting.

(Market Research)

18/08 NOTED:

A dedicated support for Postgraduate students is being brought into Careers+Placements which should contribute to better graduate outcomes for our PGT students.

18/09 RECEIVED:

IV. An update on the Aston in India engagement plan: Aston is testing some key ideas around research topics where it can focus on for India. Aston in India Applied Research Workshop takes places on 8 November at 10 am in MB708A.

V. An update on internationalisation in the context of the new research strategy.

### 3. **Aston in Europe**

18/10 RECEIVED:

I. A summary report on Aston's priorities and focus within Europe regardless of outcome post March-2019. Report included comparative data and summary

presentation (Blackboard).

- II. A discussion on how to utilise high profile partners, such as Kedge, and leverage their support to access new markets/products. Noted Kedge have offered facilities in Paris, Bordeaux, and Toulouse for teaching.
- III. Concerns raised around Postgraduate recruitment in Languages and Social Sciences. 80% students coming from French and German projects therefore potential fee changes will have a large impact on recruitment. Noted discussions are taking place with partners around scholarship opportunities for their students. However, as partner students at present have access to the UK loan scheme, everyone recognised that it might be challenging to retain students from these partners in the future if loans cease to be available for non-UK EU students. LSS are using Erasmus+ funding to send staff abroad to meet with partners as numbers already dropped by 30% this year due to a number of factors, including Brexit uncertainty.
- IV. A discussion around whether Aston can set EU student fees or whether they must be benchmarked against international tuition fees.

Noted it is unknown at this stage whether universities will have full autonomy to determine fee levels for EU students. However it is difficult to envisage that EU students would retain access to a UK tax payer funded loan system post Brexit and this change in itself will make it significantly more expensive 'up front' for European students to come to the UK and study.

#### **4. Partnership review and global pathway providers**

18/11 RECEIVED

- I. An oral report on two partnership data sheets (BlackBoard):
  - e. Aston's global providers include Kaplan, INTO, StudyGroup, NCUK. Students begin 1<sup>st</sup> year UG at a global provider centre, where support network and outcomes are quite strong. Agreements are in place for Bellerbys, INTO and Kaplan currently.
  - f. Final figures for enrolments for 2018/19 are not yet confirmed however they are expected in next couple of weeks.

18/11 ACTION:

Enrolment figures for global providers to be shared before the next meeting.

(WY)

- g. Success rate is quite high with progression students. Noted support from departments/schools is important.
- h. Numbers for Masters Progression are quite small but need academic departments to help raise awareness and manage these.
- i. The International Year Abroad has been popular and a useful stepping stone particularly for the Business School Masters programme

#### **5. Summer School**

18/12 RECEIVED:

- I. An update on Summer School activity over the last couple of years working with CELCA. Noted this has now been brought into International Office. Feedback report now available from last intake and planning for 2019 will begin in October 2018.

18/13 ACTION: An update to be shared in the next Committee meeting

(WY)

## 6. Innovation: Global Citizenship

18/14 RECEIVED:

- I. An update on innovative mobility opportunities on how to ensure mobility isn't the only focus for internationalisation.
  - a) Noted RMIT University to be presenting to Careers+Placements and other interested parties from across the University on 19<sup>th</sup> November to discuss the types of 'Global Challenges' that RMIT have introduced, i.e. a challenge that students from across different programmes and national backgrounds will work on with staff mentors and local companies, public sector institutions and NGOs to both provide solutions to the challenge and to increase international and intercultural awareness.

18/15 ACTION:

EAIE Presentation on virtual mobility from EAIE to be circulated.

(WY)

- II. Raised concern Academic Schools are not engaging with study abroad due to lack of financial output, although UUKi research showing benefits of mobility. Noted 40% EAS students go on placement compared to 60% school average. 186 EAS students expressed an interest in going abroad initially, however this translated into 52 students only being able to go. This discussion to be taken forward with colleagues from EAS to unpack demand and supply, and whether there is scope to do more to support outbound student mobility through how we manage our inbound flows.

18/16 ACTION:

Meeting to be arranged with Academic Schools and Careers+Placements to discuss promotion and resources to support with exchanges.

(CS)

## 7. Workshop: Muscat University, An Aston Hub in the Middle East

Led by International Office (though running short of time, so a new workshop to be organised).

18/17 NOTED

- I. Noted colleagues need more information on what is currently happening with Aston and Muscat, and also the landscape of Oman. There is little awareness of what the Muscat University partnership is actually about and the opportunities that the partnership offers to Aston in terms of using Muscat University as a hub for the region.

18/18 ACTION:

Town hall meeting to be scheduled in New Year to disseminate Oman agenda.

(WY, FL)

- II. Noted there is a lot of potential opportunity: Oman is a rapidly growing country who want to develop quickly into a private industry focus. Oman is focussing on reviewing graduate outcomes and employability. There is currently a 45% youth unemployment rate with a large number of graduates due to return.
- III. Noted that Hilary Price, Careers Consultant, will visit Muscat 3<sup>rd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> February 2019 to discuss employability within Engineering as part of delivery of programme.

**8. OTHER BUSINESS**

17/29 NOTED:

No other business was reported.

**9. DATE OF MEETINGS**

17/30 NOTED

Meetings for the academic year 2018/19 are as follows:

- Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2018 11:00-12:00pm, Council Room
- Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2019: 12:00-13:30pm, Council Room
- Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2019: 10:00-11:30am, Council Room