

## SENATE

Minutes of the 355<sup>th</sup> meeting of Senate held on 10 November 2021 (by Teams)

### Present:

Professor Alec Cameron (Chair)

Dr Leonidas Anastasakis

Professor Ruth Ayres

Professor Pawan Budhwar

Dr Daniel Cash

Helen Curtis

Paige Dawson

Professor Andrew Devitt

Professor Claire Farrow

Professor George Feiger

Professor Simon Green

Saskia Hansen

Professor Anthony Hilton

Saira Hussain

Hamzah Iqbal

Alison Levey

Dr Robbie Love

Dr Jörg Mathias

Professor Phil Mizen

Balraj Purewal

Dr Lucy Rackliff

Professor Edik Rafailov

Gurpal Singh Rai

Neil Scott

Yesmeen Singh

Professor Paul Topham

Dr Jens-Uwe Wunderlich

### Apologies:

Dr Raj Singh Badhan

Dr Luciano Batista

Professor Lauren Devine

Dr Panos Doss

Dr Ruth Edwards

Dr Raquel Gil-Cazorla

Dr Joanne Gough

Professor Sarah Hainsworth

Dr Peter Lewis

Professor Francisco Leyva-Leon

Professor Gill Nicholls

Dr Goudarz Poursharif

Dr Johan Rewilak

Mark Smith

Professor Nicholas Theodorakopoulos

Dr Eirini Theodosiou

Dr Sylvia Wong

Professor Ivan Wall

Dr Stephen Worrall

Professor Yuchun Xu

### In attendance:

Richard Billingham

Becky Case (M21/28)

Gary Hughes

Liam Nevin

Julie Ottley (secretary)

Leigh Stork (M21/27)

## Governance matters

### Senate Effectiveness Review update

- 21/01 NOTED:  
Paper SEN-21-4311 being a Senate Effectiveness Review update.

### Senate's role, guiding principles and role of representatives

- 21/02 NOTED:  
Paper SEN-21-4324 being a reminder of Senate's role, its guiding principles and the role of representatives.

### Update on VC recruitment

- 21/03 RECEIVED:  
An oral update from the Executive Dean HLS, Senate representative on the VC Search Committee, on the VC recruitment process, noting:
- 114 applications were received of which 37% were female and 14% had protected characteristics
  - A long list of 13 candidates had been identified of which three were female, four were BAME and three were based overseas
  - The consultants would talk to each candidate and then suggest a shortlist of candidates to be considered by the University.

### Senate membership 2021/22

- 21/04 CONFIRMED:  
Paper SEN-21-4312 being Senate membership for 2021/22.

### Schedule of business 2021/22

- 21/05 CONFIRMED:  
Paper SEN-21-4313 being Senate's schedule of business for 2021/22.

## Minutes

- 21/06 CONFIRMED:  
The minutes of the 354<sup>th</sup> meeting of Senate held on 2 June 2021.

## Matters arising

- 21/07 RECEIVED:  
Paper SEN-21-4314 being a summary of actions taken in response to matters arising from the previous meeting.

## Disciplinary Board membership 2021/22

- 21/08 CONFIRMED:  
Paper SEN-21-4315 being updated Disciplinary Board membership 2021/22.

## Nominations for award of Honorary Degree in 2022

- 21/09 CONSIDERED:  
Paper SEN-21-4323 being nominees for the award of an Honorary Degree in 2022.
- 21/10 NOTED:
- The Awards and Honours Committee had considered 18 nominations
  - 12 candidates were recommended to Senate for approval for the award of an Honorary Degree
  - Senate members were reminded of the opportunity to put forward nominees for consideration.
- 21/11 APPROVED:  
Senate approved the nominees for the award of an Honorary Degree in 2022.

## **University strategy**

### Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive's Report

- 21/12 RECEIVED:  
An oral report from the Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive, noting:
- This was the Vice-Chancellor's last report as Chair of Senate
  - Campus was returning to normality and the recent graduation ceremonies, followed by welcome and enrolment activities and the recommencement of classes had brought a positive feel to campus
  - A blended model of learning was in operation, driven by pedagogy to provide the best experience for students
  - The revenue position was good and funds had been added to College budgets for investment to support additional students that were recruited
  - The new Embedded Academic Centre had also recruited over target and this would provide a pipeline of international students to the University
  - There was still no response from the government to the Augar Review
  - In response to the USS position, UCU had balloted for strike action and, unfortunately, were successful. Of 330 members, 58% had participated in the ballot and 64% voted in favour of strike action. The ballot was quorate as more than 50% had participated. It was not clear what action UCU would be taking but it would be in the next 6 months
  - Deputy Vice-Chancellor Engagement had been appointed as Interim Vice-Chancellor from 3 December 2021
  - PVC Research would take on the role of Chair of Senate until the next Vice-Chancellor was in post
  - An appointment had been made for the PVC and Executive Dean for EPS. Professor Stephen Garrett would join Aston in Spring 2022 from the University of Leicester. Professor Tony Clark had been appointed as Interim Executive Dean until then.
- 21/13 NOTED:  
That any strike action would likely be concentrated in a few areas and the University would work hard to support affected students to mitigate any actions, as had been the case for similar previous situations.

### Report from Students' Union

- 21/14 RECEIVED:  
Paper SEN-20-4316 being the Students' Union report to Senate, noting:
- There had been lots of activities to support the transition back to campus to provide the best possible experience for students
  - 1,000 students per day were using the SU and everyone was working hard to support students
  - VPE had organised workshops for international students
  - VPW had issued a questionnaire to find out from students what support they wanted
  - VPSA was offering SU membership for alumni so that students who missed out over the past 18 months could get involved
  - Disability awareness would be a key theme to ensure all students had the best possible experience.

### Report from Academic Assembly

- 21/15 RECEIVED:  
An oral report from the Chair of Academic Assembly, noting:
- Thank you to the Vice-Chancellor for joining the Academic Assembly's recent meeting
  - Some colleagues located in the South Wing had raised concerns about the redeployment of facilities and accommodation when the South Wing was decommissioned. The Executive Director of HR would be attending a special meeting of Academic Assembly on this matter
  - The future of research at Aston in a post- Covid world had been raised as a topic for a future meeting and the PVC Research would be invited to address a future Academic Assembly meeting on this issue
  - Academic Assembly would welcome the opportunity to discuss with the Interim VC the change of vice-chancellorship and how Academic Assembly could continue to contribute to the longer-term ambition of the University.

### Update on student recruitment

- 21/16 RECEIVED:  
An oral report from the Executive Director of Marketing Recruitment and Communications on student recruitment, noting:
- For 2021 intake Aston had received 21,000 applications, its highest ever number and 8% up on the previous year
  - Increased conversion activity led to a much higher conversion rate which meant that just 140 places were offered at clearing
  - The accolades that Aston had achieved, together with its specialist portfolio, shows Aston in a strong position and provides a powerful platform for the recruitment teams
  - The successful recruitment process had put the University £4.7m ahead of target
  - Recruitment for January 2022 was going very well, with 190 enrolments and the decision had been taken to close applications at the end of this week
  - 2,500 applications had been received for 116 Medical School places in 2022
  - 1,600 prospective students had attended the open day in mid-October and 1,250 had booked for the next one.
- 21/17 NOTED:
- There had been some issues at the October open day
  - This was because graduation ceremonies were the focus at that time and there was also welcome week and enrolment, lots of big activities simultaneously
  - Reassurance was provided that this would not happen for future open days.

### League tables

- 21/18 RECEIVED:  
An oral report from the Executive Director of Marketing Recruitment and Communications on league tables, noting:
- A Working Group had been set up to understand better the methodology and to establish a more agile, nuanced approach for QS. This was a long game, typically a five-year cycle, and Aston was in the very early stages

- NSS 2021 saw significant engagement with a 74% completion rate. League Tables Group and NSS Comms group were working to build on this and would work closely with the Students' Union to agree the approach for the next cycle.

#### HLS strategy update

- 21/19 RECEIVED:  
College of Health and Life Sciences strategy and performance update from the PVC and Executive Dean, noting:
- The strategy remained focussed and relevant, supporting areas of emerging strength to diversify the revenue stream and thus be less reliant on established areas
  - New programmes aligned with market need and being attractive to international students were well developed
  - Increased contribution from research by actively managing the research portfolio and diversity of funder mix
  - Strategic partnerships for collaboration had been developed for education, training and research
  - An advert was currently live for the prestigious Regius Professor role with a closing date of 15 November.

#### In-depth discussion – Dynamic working and agile workplaces

- 21/20 RECEIVED:  
A presentation from Executive Director of HR and Chief Operating Officer, noting:
- The pandemic had demonstrated that staff could work effectively from multiple locations
  - This provided opportunities to rethink and redesign how all staff worked, moving away from office centric to provide space appropriate to the work people were doing
  - Aston was performing well in a competitive HE sector but there were cost pressures
  - Part of the strategic review was to create a smaller estate with a proposal to reduce the size by 20% which would save £5-6m a year
  - Spaces would be co-created with consideration for the activities being undertaken and the type of space needed to meet the needs of staff and students
  - It would be an iterative approach over time, building on experience and learning throughout the process.

- 21/21 NOTED:
- Reassurance was offered that spaces would be co-created and staff would be engaged in the process. Open plan and hot-desking were not the default model
  - The support staff model, such as 7<sup>th</sup> floor, was different to what was envisaged for academic staff
  - Academic staff would be asked to rethink the office model, to consider a different perspective. Sitting in an office, doing everything in one space, was that the best way to work?
  - Lessons would be learnt from areas that had already adopted change
  - Biosciences was an advanced prototype of what works well following its redevelopment 4-5 years ago
  - It was recognised that different disciplines would need different spaces, therefore, equity would be contextual and local
  - The importance of confidentiality was recognised and confidential areas would be incorporated
  - The process was about making the most effective use of space and it was suggested that individual offices did not always represent that, eg if a colleague was working elsewhere, their private office space could not be utilised by someone else
  - There would be a thorough process to consider the needs and requirements of all areas
  - Biosciences was a good example of where consultation and co-creation had been a positive experience and resulted in an area of great success for staff and students
  - The new Students' Union was smaller than the old building but offered far superior facilities
  - The Executive Team had relocated to an office more than 50% smaller than its previous location which had been developed to create a contemporary suite of student learning spaces
  - PGR students must be included in the consultation as there were specific concerns for this group
  - There was an assumption everyone could work from home and this was not the case
  - It was unfortunate that the messaging had not been sequenced in the most appropriate way as rumours and hearsay had been damaging to the process
  - All staff were encouraged to be open to the opportunities for better use of space.

## Report on National Student Survey (NSS) and action plans

- 21/22 RECEIVED:
- An oral report from Deputy Vice Chancellor Engagement and Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education, noting:
- There had been disappointment in the fall in overall satisfaction rate at Aston to 75%, a drop of 8.4% compared to 2020, slightly above the sector average drop of 8%, but a better performance than some of Aston's competitor institutions
  - There was variation between Colleges, with some courses achieving very high satisfaction (90% and above). Examples of best practice from these programmes would be shared
  - The lowest scoring statements were:
    - I feel part of a community of staff and students (51.5% agreed)
    - The Students' Union effectively represents students' academic interests (53.2% agreed)
    - It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted on (54.3% agreed)
  - A unified institutional approach to the review of NSS data had been introduced for the first time through College LTCs reporting into SUEG and ULTC. The data were being considered at three levels: Programme, College and institution
  - Key areas of focus for this academic year were:
    - Student voice and closing the loop
    - Assessment and feedback
    - Learning community
    - Learning resources
  - NSS was a priority in relation to student experience and league table position.

## Update report on student complaints

- 21/23 RECEIVED:
- Paper SEN-21-4318 being an update report on student complaints, noting:
- There had been an increase in complaints and whilst the pandemic had a bearing, this was not the only reason for the increase
  - The complaints process had been identified as a barrier rather than a help to students and thus a review had been undertaken
  - The process had been updated to make it more accessible and more timely so that the complaint could be addressed more promptly for a better outcome.

## Upward reports from Learning and Teaching Committee of 25 June 2021 and 15 October 2021

- 21/24 RECEIVED:
- Paper SEN-21-4325 being a report of key matters from the Learning and Teaching Committee meetings held on 25 June 2021 and 15 October 2021.
- 21/25 NOTED:
- ULTC had approved the 'Education Strategy 2021-2025' at its June meeting and was recommending that Senate be asked to formally approve the strategy
  - The Senate Effectiveness Review had recommended a review of the sub-groups beneath Research Committee and Learning and Teaching Committee to ensure that groups were fit for purpose and able to provide the focussed scrutiny and oversight necessary for core elements of the University's provision.
  - The ULTC sub-structure had been reviewed, updated and rationalised to enable this
  - It had originally been proposed to ULTC that Programme Specific Approval Panels (PSAPs) be removed from the structure, however, there had been opposition to this by several members of ULTC due to the detailed scrutiny currently provided by this group that could not practically be absorbed by the Programme Approval and Development Sub-Committee. As such, ULTC had taken the decision to continue with PSAPs, but keep this arrangement under review.
- 21/26 APPROVED:
- (i) Paper LTC-20-4029 being the Education Strategy 2021-2025
  - (ii) Paper SEN-21-4327 being the revised University Learning and Teaching Committee sub-committee structure.

#### Update to UKRI open access policy

- 21/27 RECEIVED:  
Paper SEN-21-4319 being an update to UKRI open access policy, noting:
- The new policy only applied to authors with UKRI funding for now
  - In-scope outputs must be made freely available immediately on publication
  - All journal outputs acknowledging UKRI funding must include a data access statement
  - It applied to all in-scope journal articles submitted for publication from 1 April 2022
  - It applied to in-scope monographs, book chapters and edited collections from 1 January 2024
  - Funders included were the seven research councils, Innovate UK and Research England
  - The open access team would provide support and guidance.

#### Update on research integrity processes

- 21/28 RECEIVED:  
Paper SEN-21-4320 being an update on research integrity processes, noting:
- A Project Board had been established to develop a new system for research ethics and governance
  - The project plan had been endorsed by Executive Academic Group and agreed by Research Committee
  - Jo Lumsden had been appointed Associate PVC for Research Integrity from 1 December 2021.

#### Upward reports from Research Committee

- 21/29 RECEIVED:  
Paper SEN-21-4321 being a report of key matters from the Research Committee meeting held on 15 July 2021 and 20 October 2021.

#### **Other business**

- 21/30 On behalf of the Senate, PVC Research expressed thanks to the Vice-Chancellor for his leadership of Senate and wished him well for the future.

#### **Reported and noted**

- 21/31 RECEIVED:
- Paper SEN-21-4322 being the schedule of Research Grants and Contracts
  - Paper SEN-21-4326 being student disciplinary and fitness to practice matters
  - Council minutes of 24 March 2021 and 16 June 2021
  - Learning and Teaching Committee minutes of 25 June 2021 and 15 October 2021
  - Research Committee minutes of 15 July 2021 and 20 October 2021

#### **Date of Senate meetings 2021/22**

- 21/32 NOTED:  
Wednesday 9 March 2022 at 14:00  
Thursday 26 May 2022 at 14:00