

THE SENATE

Minutes of the 348th meeting of the Senate, held on Wednesday, 3rd June 2020 (by Teleconference)

PRESENT:	Professor Alec Cameron (Chair)	
	Dr Shakil Ahmad	Professor Ruth Ayres
	Professor Sahar Al-Malaika	Professor Frank Austermuehl
	Karen Caine	Eleanor Chambers
	Professor Tony Clark	Helen Curtis
	Professor Leon Davies	Professor Andrew Devitt
	Professor Jun Du	Professor George Feiger
	Dr Doina Gherghel	Dr Raquel Gil-Cazorla
	Professor Simon Green	Dr Stuart Greenhill
	Professor Sarah Hainsworth	Saskia Loer Hansen
	Professor Helen Higson	Professor Anthony Hilton
	Lee Jenkins	Alison Levey
	Dr Peter Lewis	Stephen Luke
	Professor Stefan Manz	Dr Jörg Mathias
	Dr Shehzad Naroo	Pawan Kumar Neglur
	Dr Johan Rewilak	Neil Scott
	Professor Corinne Spickett	Professor Kate Sugden
	Dr Eirini Theodosiou	Dr Victoria Uren
	Professor Ivan Wall	Dr Keqing Wang
	Dr Sylvia Wong	Dr Uwe Wunderlich
Marwin Zimmerman		
APOLOGIES:	Itisha Adukia Rabia Ahmed	Dr Parveen Akhtar
	Professor Simon Cooper	Professor Ivo De Loo
	Elizabeth Dolan	Dr Panos Doss
	Professor Francisco Leyva-Leon	Danielle Gallagher
	Andrew Harris	Dr Mike Peters
	Professor Gertrud Reershemius	Dr Andrew Schofield
	Professor George Tadros	Jenny Thompson
IN ATTENDANCE:	Jawad Amad	Dr Fiona Lacey
	Professor Gill Nicholls	Harry Sheppard
	Mark Smith	John Walter (Secretary)

WELCOME

19/66 **RESOLVED:**

To join the Vice-Chancellor in welcoming to the Senate: Professor Gill Nicholls, independent HE Advisor to Council; Helen Curtis, Director of Library Services as a member of Senate appointed by the Senate; and Harry Sheppard, SU President elect and Jawad Amad, SU Vice-President elect.

CHANGE OF FORMAT AND AGENDA FOR THE SENATE MEETING

19/67 RECEIVED:

A report from the Vice-Chancellor that it had been decided in the light of the Government's latest advice, which aimed to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, to change the format and agenda for the Senate meeting. As the meeting was being led by videoconference, it would not be feasible to break out into smaller groups to discuss strategy items in depth. Instead, these strategy items would be discussed by the full Senate membership.

FOR REPORT AND APPROVAL

Constitutional Matters

19/68 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-19-2786-A, a report on constitutional matters.

Reconstitution of the Senate

19/69 RECEIVED

A report that nominations were shortly to sought for staff representatives to the Senate now that the new College structures and location of staff had been determined to provide the various constituencies. If more nominations were received than vacancies, on-line elections would be held using Blackboard, as had been the practice in recent years.

Disciplinary Board Membership 2020/21

19/70 RESOLVED:

To approve the nomination and appointment of the Chair and Alternative Chair of the Disciplinary Board for 2020/21, and the Senate nominees and Academic Assembly nominees to the Board, for two years until July 2022, as proposed in Paper SEN-19-2786-A.

Effectiveness Review of Senate: Proposed Scope and Methodology

19/71 RECEIVED:

- i) Paper SEN-19-2787-A setting out the proposed scope, methodology and timescale for an independently chaired effectiveness review of Senate and its sub-committees to be undertaken in the first half of the Autumn Term 2020. Professor Gill Nicholls, the independent HE Advisor to Council, had been consulted on the scoping document.
- ii) An oral report from the Provost, that as one of its conditions of registration as an HE Provider, the University must have in place adequate and effective management and governance arrangements. Accordingly, the Office for Students (OfS) expected the University to "regularly review the adequacy and effectiveness of its own governance arrangements, with external input, particularly with regard to the public interest governance principles, and to course delivery and compliance with its conditions of registration and takes appropriate action". The University Council had commissioned an external review of its effectiveness, which was conducted by MartineauShakespeare. The report of the review recommended *inter alia* that "Council should continue to review and seek improved reporting on academic governance in order to enable it to discharge its functions effectively, with particular emphasis on benchmarking academic outcomes against similar institutions. Senate should be asked to give an explicit assurance that standards and quality are acceptable, together with a statement of the basis by which it has reached that view". Subsequently, the Nominations and Remuneration Committee (NRC)

had recommended to Council that the Provost should arrange an independently chaired review of the effectiveness of Senate, and make recommendations on how engagement between Council and Senate could be enhanced. Professor Nicholls had advised that the review should consider a number of key principles: whether the current large size of the Senate was consistent with operational efficiency and effectiveness; the effectiveness of the Senate's operational structure, processes and remit of sub-committees; and communication to stakeholders. The review would also consider how the Senate and its Committees could most effectively provide reassurance to Council that the University was meeting its conditions of registration as an HE provider which related to academic governance, quality and standards, and to the continued improvement of the student experience.

19/72 RESOLVED:

To recommend to Council that it approve the proposed scope, methodology and timescale for an effectiveness review of Senate and its sub-committees as set out in Paper SEN-19-2787-A.

Minutes

19/73 RESOLVED:

To approve the minutes of the 347th meeting of the Senate, held on Wednesday, 11th March 2020.

Council

19/74 RECEIVED:

The minutes of the Council meetings of 22nd January and 18th March 2020.

International Strategy Committee

19/75 RECEIVED:

The minutes of the International Strategy Committee meeting of 26th May 2020.

Learning and Teaching Committee

19/76 RECEIVED:

The minutes of the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) meetings of 26th February and 7th May 2020.

Annual Report to Senate from the LTC

19/77 RECEIVED:

- i) the Annual Report to Senate from the LTC for 2019/20, which included action taken by LTC under delegated authority from the Senate.
- ii) An oral report from the Provost summarising the considerable volume of work undertaken by LTC this year, which had focused particularly on equality and inclusion, including:
 - a revised Student Protection Plan. This was a student-facing plan setting out what the University would do in the event of programme or University closure, and part of the requirement of the University's registration with the Office for Students.
 - a more Inclusive Marking Policy for implementation in the 2020-21 academic year.

- revisions to the way in which the University considered students with exceptional circumstances that impacted on their study; to distinguish between students needing a short extension to assessment deadlines due to a one-off event and students experiencing very serious and unexpected events.
- initiated by the Students' Union, the committee continued to explore best practice in the use of student group work, how it could be designed to make it more inclusive of all students, on the support to students before they commence group work and guidance to staff and students on managing dysfunctional groups. A draft policy had been considered by all School Learning and Teaching Committees and the comments incorporated in a new proposal.
- the committee was also considering proposals around minimum contact hours for students on taught programmes, with revised proposals due to be circulated for consultation. A revised Student Charter was also with LTC members for comment.
- a draft Degree Outcomes Statement had been prepared. All HE providers were required to publish a degree outcomes statement analysing their institutional degree classification profile and articulating the results of an internal institutional review. This review should help assure providers that they meet the Expectations of the Quality Code for Higher Education that relate to protecting the value of qualifications and the Office for Students' ongoing conditions of registration on academic standards (B4 and B5). Aston's Degree Outcomes Statement was due for publication by the end of the calendar year and would be submitted for approval by Senate prior to this. The internal auditors were reviewing the process by which this statement had been prepared. Professor Gill Nicholls strongly advised the University to seek independent external advice and assurance that the relevant expectations were being met.
- more recently, the committee had received communications on action being taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and approved measures to strengthen the advice to students around academic integrity. Linked to academic integrity, LTC was also to receive proposals at its next meeting to allow students access to Turnitin Similarity Scores for some of their formative assessments.

The Provost thanked Pawan Kumar Neglur, VP Education, for his positive engagement and contribution to the work of the LTC over the course of the academic year.

Admissions Steering and Strategy Committee

19/78 RECEIVED:

The minutes of the Admissions Steering and Strategy Committee (ASSC) meeting of 31st March 2020.

Research Committee

19/79 RECEIVED:

The minutes of the Research Committee (RC) meeting of 20th May 2020.

Annual Report to Senate from the Research Committee

19/80 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-19-2790-A, the Annual Report to Senate from the Research Committee for 2019/20, which included action taken by RC under delegated authority from the Senate.

Schedule of Research Grants and Contracts

19/81 RESOLVED:

To approve Paper SEN-19-2563-A, the Schedule of Research Grants and Contracts, and that the following members of staff be congratulated on attracting substantial awards:

Applicant(s)	School	Sponsor	Award Value £
Prof. Ivan Wall	LHS	EPSRC	1,254,201
Dr Shehzad Naroo, Dr Mark Dunne, Prof Sunil Shah, Dr Raquel Gil-Cazorla	LHS	KTP / Cathedral Eye Clinic Limited	290,497
Prof. Sergei Turitsyn	EAS	European Commission	187,445
Prof. Lin Zhang	EAS	European Commission	187,445
Dr Rebecca Knibb	LHS	Food Standards Agency	162,096
Prof Monder Ram	ABS	ESRC	149,261
Dr Mirjam Roeder	EAS	Innovate UK - Technology Strategy Board	147,333
Dr Balazs Szent-Ivanyi	LSS	ESRC	146,789

Report on Action taken on behalf of Senate by the Chair and Vice-Chair

19/82 RESOLVED:

To ratify the action taken on behalf of Senate by the Provost as set out in paper SEN-19-2792-A which included approval of the appointment of a member of a Disciplinary Board.

Appointment of Emeritus Professors

19/83 RESOLVED (nem con):

To approve the appointment of Professor Urszula Clark and Professor John Gaffney as Emeritus Professors following their retirement from the University.

Report on the Appointment of External Examiners for Taught Programmes

19/84 RESOLVED:

To ratify the action taken by the Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor on behalf of Senate in approving the External Examiner appointments for 2019/20 as set out in Paper SEN-19-2793-A, noting that the gender and ethnicity balance of External Examiners appointments was being monitored.

UNIVERSITY STRATEGY

Impact of Covid-19

Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive's Report

19/85 RECEIVED:

A report from the Vice-Chancellor summarising the main focus of the University's response to the COVID-19 crisis to-date:

- i) The University's first priority continued to be to protect the health and well-being of students, staff and visitors to the campus at all times. The phased opening up of the campus would therefore strictly follow public health advice and government guidelines.
- ii) Another high priority had been to fulfil the commitment to existing students to enable them to progress or to complete their programme this year, including the implementation of alternative student assessments during the current term, as traditional examinations could not be conducted on campus, whilst ensuring that the University continued to follow the advice of the OfS and the QAA. Unfortunately, it had been necessary to postpone the July 2020 Degree Ceremonies, but the University was tentatively planning to reschedule them on 25/26 November subject to government advice. The Vice-Chancellor was immensely proud of the way in which Aston's staff and students had positively responded to these challenges to-date. Going forward a priority would be to maintain the quality and standards of the students' academic programmes and the teaching and support they received. The University would need to build trust and provide assurance to potential and current students that their educational experience would be safe and of high quality.
- iii) Aston was contributing regionally and nationally both to the immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to the longer-term recovery from it.
- iv) Responding to the financial impact of the pandemic and planning actions to safeguard the University's sustainability going forward. The HE Sector was facing a significant reduction in revenue, mainly as a consequence of an anticipated shortfall in the number of international students and to a reduction in income from various commercial activities, including student accommodation. Aston was fortunate in that it did not currently operate any student residences and would therefore not incur any loss of related rental income. Unite, who currently operated the residences on campus, had quickly agreed to waive the rents for the third term and would therefore incur a significant loss of revenue. The proposed approach to the preparation of next year's budget and financial forecasts was underpinned by the following principles:
 - Preserving and supporting Aston's sources of revenue.
 - Flexible "students first" delivery (the product offer).
 - Resourcing marketing and recruitment (and conversion and retention).
 - Preserving cash.
 - Managing operational expenditure.
 - Delivering quality education and experience for Aston's students.
 - Preserving jobs, which would probably entail asking staff to do more teaching, repeating classes (owing to reduced class sizes), and to use different and more flexible delivery and assessment modes next year.
 - Job retention proposals.

The proposed challenging budget assumed a medium case revenue scenario to achieve a zero surplus in 2020/21 and 2021/22. This scenario assumed a major impact to 2020/21 international student cycle, and to degree apprenticeship programmes, and then a return to plan for 2021/22. This scenario predicted a c£20 million income reduction in 2020/21 and a c£18 million reduction in 2021/22 compared to the original pre-Covid plan for growth. The recruitment of new staff would be restricted to essential posts and the University would seek payroll savings through natural attrition next year. It assumed the deferral of major capital projects by 24 months with infrastructure spending limited to actions required for legal and health and safety compliance. Digital, research and teaching capital would remain unchanged as they were essential to support the University strategy. The budget position would, however, need to be reviewed in the light of the student recruitment and associated revenue position in the autumn term.

19/86 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-19-2788-A presented by the Provost, DVC Engagement and the PVC Education, which provided an overview of the purpose, focus and work of the Aston Students First initiative. This aimed:

- to provide a holistic life-cycle approach to encourage students to come to Aston, to thrive and to transform their lives.
- to maximise the number of new and returning students enrolled as Aston in 2020/21.
- to be proactive in providing a high-quality student learning and support experience which was fit for the new future in the next academic year and beyond, taking account of the requirements of different groups of students, in different disciplines. The adoption of more consistent processes and systems across the University would enable this to be achieved more effectively and efficiently.

Most immediately, it was necessary to attempt to bring some certainty in an uncertain world via a framework to roll out learning and teaching for 2020/21 and to manage expectations of staff and students that a full return to campus in the same way as previously would not be possible for some time to come. Accordingly, the University would be informing new and returning students that it was looking forward to welcoming them from September 2020, and that Aston would deliver a high-quality learning experience in ways that best supported the health, wellbeing and safety of all students and staff.

The need for a more flexible approach to meet the needs of different student groups was demonstrated by the current market environment and ongoing monitoring of market research, surveys (including by UCAS and the British Council), feedback from applicants and agents. Many new and returning overseas and European students, not already in the UK, might be subject to travel restrictions and quarantine and not be able to attend campus for a longer period of time, and might prefer a January or later start. There would also be vulnerable students who for health reasons might be advised not to attend campus-based teaching. UCAS surveys indicated that UK applicants might be thinking of deferring HE studies for a year, over concern about their qualifying examination results or worry about missing out on the full 'university experience' if their studies were to be impacted by social distancing measures and/or learning on-line. It was anticipated that the UCAS Confirmation and Clearing processes would be particularly busy this year.

To enable access for all types of student, Aston needed to prepare for high-quality dual mode delivery (on campus and online):

- the Aston First Delivery Group, Chaired by Professor Ruth Ayres and with representatives from across the University, was developing coordinated, flexible and cross-University operational protocols to support teaching and learning in a variety of modes. This included more flexible timetable proposals.
- the Digital Aston strategy was supporting the Aston Students First initiative, and recognised the need to work with agility and flexibility in relation to digital capabilities to be ready in September 2020 to meet the challenges and opportunities ahead.
- work had started with Estates to audit and implement the social distancing, cleaning and hygiene measures required across the campus. A review of laboratory spaces was ongoing; it would be necessary to reduce the capacity in order to meet the social distancing requirements. It was anticipated that activity would restart in laboratories from first or second week in June. The University was working alongside the Unions in relation to the risk assessment and the guidance that was going to be provided. Senate members were reassured that staff would be issued full guidance about when they would be able to return

to campus and about the various rules in place to maintain hygiene and health, and for navigating their way around the campus safely.

- Communications were being tailored and issued regularly to meet the specific needs of particular groups of applicants and returning students.
- Senate members highlighted the fact that some staff might not be able to return to campus as they were at higher risk (underlying conditions, older, BAME, etc), lived with people who were at higher risk, or had childcare responsibilities. The Vice-Chancellor reported that the University would always seek to protect the health and welfare of its staff and their families as its highest priority, and would strictly follow current public health guidelines. The University would not require staff to put themselves or their families at risk by having to travel to campus on public transport and/or to teach face-to-face classes.

Proposed Regulatory and Assessment Changes

19/87 RESOLVED:

To approve proposed regulatory and assessment changes set out in paper SEN-19-2800-A, which were necessary because the University had had to significantly alter its approach to the teaching and assessment of students at all stages since March 2020, with some students being unable to complete all their assessments or to have experienced circumstances that significantly impacted their level of achievement.

The proposals included Guidance for Boards of Examiners – Summer 2020, which were intended to define the University's approach to the progression and award of students during the upcoming assessment period, providing Boards of Examiners with the guidance needed to ensure the fair and equitable treatment of students in all situations during this unprecedented period. Key aspects of the proposed guidance included

- No detriment policy for students whose study has been impacted by the pandemic.
- Rules around the progression and award of students either with incomplete assessment profiles, or with profiles adversely effected by the pandemic.
- The right of students to a deferred attempt at no additional increment in the referred assessment period, who had been unable to engage with assessments during the pandemic.

The proposals included a number of temporary waivers of the University's General Regulations to enable the proposed guidance to take effect. For the upcoming period, the following regulations have been waived via Chairs Action by the Regulation Sub-Committee:
General Regulations for the Conduct of Boards of Examiners

2.5.2 & 2.5.3 – The requirement for External Examiners to attend a minimum of one Board per year 'in person'.

6.1.3. – The requirement that no changes be made to assessments mid-Stage without consultation with any students affected.

All General Regulations

6.1.1 (UG, Grad Dip, Fd, MBChB) 7.1.1 (PG) – Stating that students cannot be reassessed in any module for which they have already been awarded credit.

7.2 (UG, Grad Dip, Fd, MBChB) 8.2 (PG) – Puts the responsibility on students to apply for exceptional circumstances.

7.6 (UG, Grad Dip, Fd, MBChB) 8.6 (PG) – Stating that exceptional circumstances will not be addressed via condonement.

Postgraduate Taught only

1.10 – The requirement for the dissertation stage to be the final programme component.

19/88 NOTED:

That the proposals set out above had been submitted to External Examiners for comment and approval, and a positive response had been received from them all, with some minor comments and suggestions for improvement. Students had also been widely consulted. The Senate thanked the Provost, Professor Chris Langley and the Assessment Team for their efforts in preparing the changes to the assessment guidance and regulations.

Research

19/89 RECEIVED:

An oral report from Professor Simon Green, PVC Research, noting the following points:

- the University was on track to achieving the highest ever level of research grants and awards, although this might be impacted by the Covid 19 restrictions slowing the finalisation of contracts. Of particular note was the University's success in winning the highest ever level of UKRI funding, and in increasing the number of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP). There were now KTPs in all Colleges which would help to cement links with business. The Senate thanked the RKE team for the excellence of the support and advice given to Aston researchers in preparing bids.
- It was anticipated that the REF submission deadline would be deferred to 31st March 2021. Preparation of a very strong REF submission was on track.
- The Research Committee had approved a series of measures to support the sustainability of the research portfolio, with the research contribution rate being critical to ensure that activity was viable going forward. The measures included no longer submitting to some schemes, capping bid numbers to other schemes and setting minimum expectations for allocated time and overhead levels. There was a need to focus in future on securing a higher proportion of funding from UKRI/research councils and industry.

Issues raised by Student Representatives/SU Senate

19/90 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-19-2798-A and an oral report from the VP Education summarising recent news of the work of the Students' Union in supporting students, noting that the following points:

- The COVID-19 situation was affecting Aston students in many different ways. In addition to coping with concerns regarding the virus itself, they were also having to complete their academic studies and examinations, whilst struggling with finances, accommodation, and concerns about their future employment prospects. A number of students were suffering financially due to losing their part-time jobs, struggling to pay for accommodation they were not using, and having placement year or graduate job opportunities taken away. Students were also feeling disappointed, as many of the normal student events had sadly been cancelled or postponed (including Sports Varsity, Award Ceremonies, Graduation Ball, Graduation Ceremonies and many more), and aggrieved that their experience as a student had been so badly impacted.
- The Students' Union was providing a range of services to students, largely virtually. 700 students had engaged with the Aston Virtual Campus created on Facebook, to help maintain a sense of an Aston community during the lockdown. This included a program of daily events such as cooking and baking tutorials, crafting workshops, dance classes, cheerleading flexibility classes, Welfare Wednesday and a weekly online Quiz. Academic Awards were held virtually via Instagram live, to celebrate academic and support staff achievements this year.
- Union Officers had been lobbying, in liaison with other local Students' Unions, with student accommodation providers and MPs for Term 3 rents to be waived for students. This

campaign had been largely successful, with nearly all of the providers offering refunds or waived rents for Term 3. The SU and the University would continue to work together to help students to obtain a fair deal with their accommodation.

- during Mental Health Awareness Week, the SU partnered with the University Counselling Service to increase their profile on campus. During lockdown the Vice President Welfare, received a significant increase in emails from distressed students. The Union had assisted the University with the implementation of new Apps which aimed to support students with their mental health and wellbeing.
- the SU Awards took place despite the Covid-19 lockdown. It was really important for the SU to celebrate the success of students, and their contribution to clubs and societies.
- the Guinness World Record for the longest line of sanitary pads of 1,888.9 m (6,197 ft 2.14 in) was achieved by Aston Panthers Netball Club on 12th March 2020. The attempt took place after a week long campaign to raise awareness over period poverty entitled "Never Ovary Acting". The sanitary pads were collected through donations from students and the general public. Afterwards, the 20,320 pads were distributed between Aston University's campus, where they were placed in all bathroom facilities, and Birmingham and Solihull Women's aid charity.
- the SU building was being used as a food distribution centre to provide practical help to the local Aston community during the Covid-19 pandemic. The service, coordinated by The Active Wellbeing Society (TAWS), along with The Real Junk Food Project and supported by food charity FareShare and Birmingham City Council, was until recently operating from Ladywood Community Centre, but organisers found that they had outgrown the space, both because of the demand for the service and the supply of goods being received. The initiative was part of #Brum Together, a network of more than 60 partners working together to provide those most in need with essential support and services. This included coordinating deliveries of food parcels, hot meals, hygiene products, baby supplies and children's activity packs to families. SU Officers expressed concern and disappointment that the University PR around this initiative had not effectively engaged them or properly recognised their active involvement in the project.

ACTION: the Vice-Chancellor and SU Officers to review the PR and communication issues arising from the food distribution centre campaign

Issues Raised by the Academic Assembly

19/91 RECEIVED:

A report from the acting Chair of the Academic Assembly, noting:

- the Academic Assembly had nominated members to the Disciplinary Board.
- the Academic Assembly had discussed the implications of the Aston Student First initiative and the shift in work patterns for next academic year. The AA generally supported the principle of adopting a diversified pattern of teaching and delivery, and using different delivery formats to meet the needs of different types of students. There was a need to pay close attention to the workload of individual members of staff and to agree their priorities, noting that the amount of teaching required was likely to increase. Members suggested that individual staff KPIs would need to be adjusted to reflect the changing pattern of priorities for the use of their time in relation to research, teaching and administration.
- Colleagues were invited to note the forthcoming elections to the Academic Standing Committee, and encouraged to nominate candidates from all areas Departments and Colleges.

University Restructuring

19/92 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-19-2804-AA and an oral report from the Provost outlining progress with the academic restructuring into three Colleges, which was proceeding well and remained on track to be in place for the start of the next academic year. Appointments had been/were being made to the senior posts in the colleges and the development of professional service structures and processes was well-advanced. The Provost thanked the Academic Assembly for its continuing contribution and support for the restructuring of the professional services across the University.

Website Development Project

19/93 RECEIVED:

SEN-19-2805-A and an oral report from the DVC Engagement on progress with the website development project, which included significant investment, noting that the project was on track and on budget to be in place for the Clearing 2020 exercise, including the implementation of new and attractive course pages. Good progress was also being made with the development of research pages and the editing of research-related content.

Muscat University – Partnership Agreement Change (CONFIDENTIAL)

19/94 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-19-2802-A and oral reports from the DVC Engagement and the Provost on proposals to change the partnership agreement with Muscat University (MU). Aston had worked in partnership with MU over the last four years from its foundation and over the collaborative delivery of three Aston undergraduate awards delivered. MU had found it challenging to recruit international students to a brand-new university and had needed to rely instead on Omani Government sponsored students. It would be at least another 4-5 years before Muscat achieved all of the required accreditations that would make it more attractive to international students. Consequently, through mutual discussion, it had been agreed that the partnership would change. Senate was asked to approve a proposal that the 2020/21 intake should be the last intake into the Aston programmes at MU and with the Aston award taught out over the next four years. MU would continue to deliver and make its own awards and Aston would retain the opportunity to start dual awards when it was possible to recruit international students. Indeed, it was anticipated that there would be other collaborative initiatives with Muscat University in the years ahead. This change would be reported to the Office for Student after approval of the proposals. The Vice-Chancellor thanked staff who had participated in the project to-date for all their hard work and the excellence of their contribution. In response to a question from a Senate member, he confirmed that the University would continue to keep opportunities for international collaboration with high quality partners under review, although this would probably not be a high priority in the short term given the consequences of Covid-19.

19/95 RESOLVED:

To recommend to Council that the proposed changes to the partnership agreement with MU and the cessation from 2020/21 of intakes to the three collaborative taught programmes as set out in Paper SEN-19-2802-A be approved.

WHAT COULD WORK BETTER

Support for Postgraduate Taught Students during the Covid-19 Pandemic

19/96 NOTED:

That a Senate member highlighted the need to ensure that all PGR students were properly informed about the support, advice and options that were available to them in the face of Covid-19 restrictions (eg funding, extension of completion dates, undertaking research etc). If this was not effectively addressed it might impact on Aston's results in the forthcoming PRES survey. The PVC Research reported that the position of each PGR student needed to be considered on a case-by-case basis, as the source of funding, the nature of the research, and the stage of their programme would impact on the options available. Key to this was the need for supervisors proactively to engage with their students to discuss the options available to them. The Graduate School had been providing support to PGR students and the acting Dean of the Graduate School and the PVC Research had conducted a virtual townhall meeting with PGR students to discuss their concerns and the available support.

ACTION: PVC Research to discuss concerns about support for and communication with PGR students with Professor Corinne Spickett.

Support for Staff Working at Home

19/97 NOTED:

That a Senate member asked about the plans to ensure that staff working from home would have appropriate and consistent IT equipment and software, technical support and training in the preparation of high quality on-line materials and delivery.

The Chief Operating Officer reported that the University had moved to on-line provision and the majority of staff working from home within a 48-hour period. The IT support for this rapid operational change had been delivered effectively and efficiently via the Digital Services team and "Solve", the new self-service portal for staff and students. A large number of new laptops had already been issued to key staff whilst at home efficiently and cost-effectively and this methodology could be used for the next planned phase of laptop distribution which would focus on those staff with laptops still operating Windows 7.

The PVC Education reported that the Education Team (formerly CLIPP) had recently launched ALTO (Active Learning and Teaching On-line): a series of professional development sessions and training events designed to help staff to develop and deliver high-quality, flexible online and blended learning to students.

OTHER BUSINESS

Black Lives Matter Campaign

19/98 NOTED:

- That a Senate member highlighted the fact that some HEIs had issued public statements in support of the Black Lives Matter Campaign following the recent killing of George Floyd in the USA and asked if Aston should consider following suit particularly in view of the diversity of the Aston community. Senate was informed that the University had received requests from a small number of students and staff for Aston to issue such a supporting statement.
- The Vice-Chancellor reported that, as a charitable body, the University was restricted from engaging in political activity, although Aston fully acknowledged that its students and staff would actively engage in politics, and was committed to providing a safe forum for political debate for its very broad constituency, whose members could be expected to hold a

diversity of views on most matters. Therefore, the University would not normally issue a public statement on an issue of this nature. However, Aston was keen to support its large BAME community. Accordingly, in responding to this issue, Aston should not seek to pass comment on the actions of others, but rather by communicating a positive message regarding the University's support for its BAME students and staff, its commitment to human rights and racial equality and to real action to improve in this regard, including working towards the Race Equality Charter.

DATE OF NEXT SENATE MEETING

19/99 NOTED:

That Senate would next meet at 2:00 pm on Wednesday, 11th November 2020.

Retiring Members

19/100 **Student Representatives**

Senate thanked the following retiring student representatives for their contribution to the work of the Senate and the University: Danielle Gallagher (President), Pawan Kumar Neglur (Vice President Education), Ellie Chambers (Vice President Welfare), Marwin Zimmerman (Postgraduate Student Representative) and Itisha Adukia (Undergraduate Student Representative).

Elected Staff Members

19/101 The Vice-Chancellor, on behalf of Senate, also thanked all retiring staff members for their contribution to the work of the Senate and the University.

JGW/10.6.20