

## Senate

### Minutes

**date:** 11 December 2013  
**time:** 1.30 p.m.  
**location:** G5.05, High Wycombe Campus

**13.39 Welcome / Apologies for absence**

The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of the academic year. In particular, the Chair welcomed Barbara Dexter, Piers Worth and Jo Rixon who were new members of Senate.

It was noted that the main item of business at the meeting would be consideration of the University SURE and related processes to reach a judgement as to whether academic standards had been maintained during 2012-2013. The Committee would also receive updates on the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 and ongoing actions arising from the NSS, PRES and PTES.

Apologies were received from 8 members and were noted separately.

**13.40 Minutes of the last meeting – 5 June 2013**

The minutes were approved as a true record and signed.

**13.41 Matters Arising**  
(Action Sheet)

Actions were noted as per the status column on the Action Sheet. There were no further matters arising.

**13.42 Chair's Business**

[a] Chair's Actions  
(Chair's Actions list)

Chair's Actions were noted and endorsed as per the list provided.

[b] Senate Terms of Reference  
(Terms of Reference and Membership List)

The Minute Secretary noted that a new version of the University Committees document had been approved by Chair's Action and published earlier in the term. All Chairs and Secretaries had been asked to review their terms of reference at their next meeting and to identify any changes required.

It was noted that the document formalised the new Learning and Teaching Committee which had been previously agreed and which now reported to Senate. In addition, the Director of Learning and Teaching had been added to the membership of Senate in an ex-officio capacity while other titles and nomenclature had also been updated.

[c] Vice-Chancellor's Report to Senate  
(Paper SEN13.54)

The report was noted. In addition, the Vice Chancellor drew attention to the following:

- Variations in the recruitment of full time undergraduate students had been noted across HEIs presenting a mixed picture although overall the sector had seen an increase compared with 2012 entry. There did not seem to be any pattern in the recruitment variations.
- Applications to Bucks for 2014-2015 were still at an early stage in the recruitment cycle where recruitment tends to be focused in the latter stages. In comparison to the same stage last year, however, UCAS applications were up. This was due to high levels of applications to nursing programmes and other NHS contracted programmes in S&H. Applications to DMM and other S&H programmes are currently down on last year.
- Following an announcement in the recent Autumn Statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Student Number Control cap on full-time undergraduate entrants would be removed with effect from 2015-2016. It was considered that this would lead to an additional 60,000 places in Higher Education. For 2014-2015 it was noted that the current cap would be increased to allow an additional 30,000 places to smooth this transition. The Chair noted that this decision helped support the sector focus on Widening Participation; however, the SNC has helped protect a number of HEIs especially those that did not attract students with higher grades. Further details on how the Chancellor's decision would be implemented were awaited from HEFCE. In the meantime, the University would continue to pursue its strategy of developing areas of excellence and a variety of delivery modes and regimes.

Senate noted that resourcing was a critical consideration to the development of different delivery options and such implications would need to be referred to the Senior Management Team. The Chair drew attention to the report which identified how the fees increase would be used which would help to address concerns that we were not getting some of the basics right.

**13.43 Strategic University Review & Evaluation Reports (2012-2013)**

The Chair noted that, in reaching an opinion on whether academic standards had been maintained (item [e]) it was necessary to consider the University's full range of programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate level including research degrees.

It was noted that QEC has considered reports from Directorates and both Faculties. RDC has considered the annual report on research degrees.

[a] QEC Overview Report of SURE 2012-2013  
(Paper SEN13.58)

The Chair of QEC introduced the report. It was noted that QEC was recommending to Senate that standards had been upheld following consideration of a number of reports received. QEC considered that there was a sense of honesty in reports and clear evidence that risks were being managed carefully. A number of recommendations had been identified in the report, while there were commendations over the complete nature of reports and how these were firmly based on evidence.

QEC had identified a concern with one report received from Amersham & Wycombe College which it considered had not properly covered a quality and standards issue previously raised to Senate in connection with two of its programmes offered and validated by the University (see Senate minute 13.28). QEC had returned this report to the College and had requested that the report be suitably revised.

Senate reviewed the set of recommendations outlined and considered these to be productive and useful.

[b] Achievement of Actions from 2012-2013

i. *S&H Achievement Report*  
(Paper QEC13.71)

The Academic Dean highlighted the following aspects of the report:

- Data monitoring remains an issue. Overall, however, there was an improvement in levels of student achievement
- Following the strategic review of timetabling undertaken in the previous year, processes had been put in place for the 2013-2014 intake. The process was already underway for 2014-2015.
- FSEC had reported that e-submission was now almost fully implemented across the Faculty and there was 99% compliance regarding e-marking and moderation. This will be reviewed internally within the Faculty to identify any further improvements that can be made
- PTES scores were low. The Faculty needs to look at how the postgraduate experience as a whole can be improved

ii. *DMM Achievement Report*  
(Paper QEC13.72)

The Academic Dean highlighted the following aspects of the report:

- The one Red and one Amber reports from the previous year had become Green this year. This year the Faculty had received one Red and two Amber reports which would be carefully monitored
- An improvement in overall Student Satisfaction scores in the Faculty had been noted with some notable increases in some areas. This would continue to remain a target
- There had been a reduction in UG progression rates from Level 4 to Level 5 which needed to be addressed
- The proportion of 1st and 2.1 classifications had increased by 4%
- DLHE results had also seen improvement but results were not concentrated in any particular areas.

In relation to the 2011-2012 themes it was noted:

- Timetabling has improved
- Some progress has been made in relation to the provision of data including monitoring by age / ethnicity but further work remains
- Feedback on the introduction of electronic paper as a feedback mechanism had been positive.

iii. *Quality and Standards Action Plan*  
(Paper SEN13.47)

The Director of AQD highlighted the following aspects from the AQD Achievement Report which had been developed from 13 underlying reports:

- In relation to the total 85 actions identified for action during 2012-13, 68 had been achieved in full or in part representing significant progress by the Directorate, while 12 were ongoing and 5 were obsolete,
- Numerous achievements were identified across the full range of reports with the following areas identified for discussion by QEC:
  - Training for curriculum development
  - How to reflect currency / externality of staff scholarship in the curriculum
  - Monitoring / learning from OIA actions in relation to Appeals
  - Communication issues in relation to processes such as Mitigating Circumstances, Appeals etc.
  - Numbers of Chair's Actions from Assessment Boards – largely inaccurate or unavailable marks
  - Appropriateness of risk / mitigation for Partnership work
  - Increase in awareness of ERASMUS following the recent reapproval of the University's Charter by the EU.

Responsibilities for the actions identified were clear and identified in the individual reports.

A further issue was noted in relation to the Student Portal. Senate was apprised that delays in developing the Portal were impacting on and preventing actions being taken forward. This had been raised by AQD with IT and at various committees.

*iv. Other issues*

The Director of Academic Quality noted that Partner reports generally had improved this year (barring the one exception previously identified) and these had been submitted on time. All partners had attended the QEC SURE meeting and engaged fully in the debate. Further improvements were anticipated in future exercises.

In relation to the issue of data monitoring identified by Faculties, Senate noted that a group was constituted to look at the data provided for PRE and SURE exercises. Data provision had improved this year but there remain longer-term actions to be taken forward. In particular, data improvement was one of the recommendations identified in the QEC Overview Report (above). The Pro Vice Chancellor Learning and Teaching reported on a current project to scope out an integrated University wide approach to the provision of data for all purposes including the PRE and SURE exercises.

[c] External Examiner Annual Reports  
(Paper SEN13.42)

The report was noted and the following headlines identified by the Director of Academic Quality:

- A revised external examiner process had been agreed in 2011-2012 to align with the publication of a revised section of the UK Quality Code. 2012-2013 was the first application of this process in full. Some issues had been identified that would be taken forward by AQD
- External examiners continued to be appointed in a timely manner with a year on year improvement. Some variation in the appointment mechanism was noted; one Faculty was confirming nominations by Chair's Action of its FQEC which raised a question of consistency in the ways in which nominations were considered by the Faculties. This would be further explored with them.
- A new report template had been produced which enabled course team responses to be embedded in the report alongside the external examiner's comment. There were some areas that continued to use a separate process (e.g. letter) and a consequent need to ensure responses were embedded in the reports themselves
- Using the University's RAG rating, there were 2 Red (one per Faculty) and 3 Amber reports overall. All will feed into the QEC meeting in February where action plans will be reviewed and the initial RAG rating reconsidered
- A Heat Map had been developed for individual sections of reports which had identified emerging themes in the following areas:
  - 1e Marking of assessments
  - 1g Feedback on students' work
  - 2 Decision making on progression / achievement
  - 3 Faculty support and organisation

These were felt to mirror issues identified in the NSS

Overall, external examiners confirmed that threshold standards were being met across the University's range of provision. Further, programmes were comparable with the sector with a number of examples of good practice identified.

The following items were flagged for Senate's attention:

1. Variations in the appointment mechanism
2. Embedding of responses in reports
3. Networking events to encourage University staff to become external examiners

Senate noted that the number of red reports had risen slightly, but that a report rated as Red in the previous year was now Green. It was further noted that one of the Red reports related to provision at Amersham & Wycombe College.

The Chair noted that of the three items flagged, 1 and 2 related to process which could be taken forward by AQD. Item 3 was a broader issue and the Committee supported academic colleagues becoming external examiners as a CPD opportunity. It was noted that the University has extended the use of the FindExaminers website to support the identification of such opportunities.

Senate also noted comments on feedback which reflected reports elsewhere and actions already agreed by the University.

[d] Report on Research Degrees  
(Paper SEN13.43)

It was noted that the report had been considered by the University's Research Degrees Committee. It had since been submitted and accepted by Coventry University as the research degree awarding body.

It was noted that the report contained a number of positive comments in relation to postgraduate achievement. There were less positive notes following the PRES results which were down this year (see also 13.46 c below). This had led to actions to improve the overall postgraduate research student experience.

Senate noted the two unsuccessful PhD outcomes this year. It was noted that at least one related to an theme already identified and being acted upon. RDC carefully monitors all such outcomes through Reserved Business of the Committee, and Senate was assured that appropriate action was being taken.

[e] Maintenance of academic standards for 2012-2013: Senate's opinion

Having reviewed the evidence carefully and in detail, Senate endorsed the recommendation from QEC and RDC that academic standards have been maintained by the University with some university-level actions articulated within the relevant reports.

Senate discussed separately issues in relation to Amersham & Wycombe College. A verbal update was given by the Academic Dean, DMM in relation to actions taken and processes in place since the previous meeting. In particular:

- The External Examiner and Link Tutor visited the College together and discussed the issues with the College. A report has been prepared and a response is awaited from the College
- Both reports will be presented to the Chair of QEC for approval in time for the deadline set of 31 January 2014. Should the actions not be deemed satisfactory it was noted that the College had been warned that programmes would be withdrawn
- The SURE Action Plan received had been sent back due to a lack of transparency by the College in relation to the issues identified. This would be required by any future audit.

Further action would be confirmed following receipt of the relevant reports and the overall decision would be formally reported to the next meeting of Senate.

**Action: Academic Dean, DMM/Chair QEC**

**13.44 Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014**  
(Paper SEN13.44)

It was reported that the University has successfully submitted in the following four units of assessment under the REF2014 exercise:

- Unit 3: Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy
- Unit 19: Business and Management Studies
- Unit 26: Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism
- Unit 34: Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory

It was noted that this was the first time HEIs had been asked to submit impact case studies which had been a further challenge for all universities.

Overall, 135 HEIs had made submissions to REF2014. Outcomes were now awaited and would be published in late 2014.

It was noted that it was highly unlikely that the University would receive any income following the exercise as it had been indicated that funding would be directed to research intensive universities. Nevertheless, submission to REF2014 represented an important platform for developing a future application for Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP) and for the University's esteem.

Senate formally thanked Anne Evans and Miriam Moir in AQD for successfully managing the University's submission as a whole.

**13.45 Academic Year Planning Group**  
(Paper SEN13.45)

The Executive Summary was noted and the following headlines reported:

- Annual calendars agreed (A and B calendars)
- Move to a single week numbering system
- Incorporation of events such as the Bucks Welcome, Activities Week and Development Days into the calendar

**13.46 Actions following student surveys**

The Chair noted that these surveys represented priority areas for the University for the current academic year.

[a] National Student Survey (NSS)

- Targets have been set for the year including a 75% target for completion (+10%)
- Specific groups targeted who had low response rates because of students on placements – including aviation and nursing
- Improvement in the student experience targeted including in particular promptness of feedback for which a campaign would be launched in early 2014

Regular reports would be fed in to the Learning and Teaching Committee.

Senate noted that the University and Students' Union were looking at incentives for students completing survey forms. Module feedback questionnaires using Evasys had also been tailored around the NSS areas to identify improvements.

[b] Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES)

- Need to improve the overall response rate (17% in relation to sector average of 26%). Particular areas with a low response have been identified
- Aggregated results show very low satisfaction with learning resources (also reflected in PRES). Preliminary discussions had been undertaken at SEC
- Overall satisfaction stands at 82% but this has fallen from 88% in the previous year. There is significant variation between areas with some areas reporting 90%+ levels of satisfaction but other scores are less encouraging

Senate discussed issues in relation to the low response rate. It was noted that this was a very different system to the NSS and the survey has to be completed at course level. There are also no reminders to complete the survey, unlike the NSS. It was agreed to expand the NSS Campaign Group to include PTES to help address the response rate. SU representatives would also help raise the PTES profile with postgraduate students.

**Action: Director of Student Services / SU Representatives**

[c] Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)

- Response rate 44% compared to a sector rate of 42%
- Areas of concern identified as follows
  - Research culture
  - Resources
  - Supervision

- Specific points listed in the research action plan but there is a need for broader activities as part of a wider university research culture
- It was noted that a conference was being planned for spring to review the REF2014 submission and plan ahead for REF2020 which could also look specifically at the research culture as part of a wider University research strategy.

**13.47 Policies and Regulations for Approval**

- [a] Student Disciplinary Policy  
(Paper SEN13.46)

Senate noted the extensive consultation that had taken place across the University.

A minor amendment was noted to expand the number of examples on page 7 to include social media usage.

**Action: Director of Student Services**

Subject to this amendment the policy was approved.

- [b] Procedure for the consideration of applicants and students with criminal convictions  
(Paper SEN13.47)

The extensive consultation was noted. It was noted that this updates an existing policy and was based on best practice and conforms to sector practice.

The policy was approved.

**13.48 Approval of amended title: LLM Law (Part-time)**  
(Paper SEN13.59)

The paper was noted. The Minute Secretary explained that the amendment was being recommended by the DMM Faculty Course Amendment Sub-Committee which had considered paperwork in full. AQD had also reviewed documentation in formulating the Chair's Action to approve the additional title of LLM Law.

The proposal was approved.

**13.49 External Examiner Nominations and Extensions to Term/Remit**  
(Papers SEN13.52 and SEN13.56)

Senate endorsed Chair's Actions undertaken since the previous meeting to approve nominations and extensions to remit and term as outlined in the Paper provided.

In addition, Senate was asked to agree a new nomination and an extension to term

- [a] External Examiner Nomination: Francesca Wiggins  
(Paper SEN13.56A)

Senate approved the nomination of Francesca Wiggins as external examiner for the BSc (Hons) Osteopathic Principles (non-practising) course to be run at the Instituto Superiore di Osteopatia (ISO), Milan, Italy for a period of four years from 1 January 2014 to 1 January 2018.

- [b] External Examiner Extension to Term: John Langmead  
(Paper SEN13.56B)

Senate approved the extension to term from 1 October 2013 to 30 September 2014 for John Langmead as external examiner for programmes initially delivered at American Intercontinental University, London (AIUL), which is now part of Regents University, London. This extension provides cover for students at the Regents University for whom Bucks retains responsibility under its previous partnership agreement with AIUL.

**13.50 External Examiner Coverage**  
(Paper SEN13.53)

Senate reviewed external examiner coverage across its range of provision and noted appointments which had recently come to the end of their respective terms and appointments which were due to complete up to September 2014.

Attention was drawn to three nominations highlighted in the report as outstanding. Academic Deans confirmed to Senate that nominations were in the process of being prepared and finalised in all three instances and Chair's Action would be requested accordingly.

**Action: Academic Deans**

Senate noted that a number of other appointments had already been extended. Faculties were reminded that appointments could only be extended for one additional year. Accordingly, new nominations would be required in those areas.

**13.51 Validation: Recommendation for awards for approval**  
(Paper SEN13.55)

Senate endorsed the outcomes of QEC Validation Sub-groups as detailed in the paper. Overall there were 12 outcomes for programmes as follows:

- Approve x2 (note one course and a suite of professional modules)
- Approve with Conditions x9
- Resubmission x1

In relation to the 9 programmes for which Conditions had been set it was noted that Chair's Action would be taken once Conditions had been signed off by Chairs of Sub-groups as having been met.

It was noted that for the programme where resubmission had been required a further sub-group date had been set for 19 December 2013 to enable the Faculty to meet the target entry date.

Accordingly Senate approved the following course for delivery which had been recommended for approval without conditions:

- DP2ODP1 DipHE Operating Department Practice

**13.52 Committee Reports**  
(Papers SEN13.48, SEN13.49, SEN13.50 and SEN13.51)

Senate noted the Executive Summaries from QEC, SEC, the University Research Committees, and Equality & Diversity Committee.

There was no Executive Summary from Learning and Teaching Committee as this had met for its inaugural meeting very recently. An Executive Summary would be presented to the next meeting of Senate.

**Action: Chair, Learning and Teaching Committee**

**13.53 Date of next meeting**

The date of next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 19 March 2014 at 1.30pm in G5.05, High Wycombe.

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Professor Ruth Farwell  
Vice-Chancellor and Chair of Senate