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Joint Senate- Council

Open Minutes

Date of meeting: **Monday, 21 November 2016**

Duration of meeting: **4.00 PM to 5.30PM**

Location: **The Room, High Wycombe Campus**

Attendance

Name	Senate/Council
Jo Boardman	Council
Christine Brooks	Senate
Rebecca Bunting	Senate/Council
Gurdeep Chadha	Council
Joe Collins	Senate/Council
Tim Coole	Senate
Lois Drawmer	Senate
Nic Fryer	Senate
Ruth Gunstone	Senate
Michael Hipkins	Council
Julie Irwin	Senate
Maggie James	Council
Jake Kaner	Senate
Irene Kirkman	Council
Lise Llewellyn	Council
Carlo Lusuardi	Senate
Ken McCrea	Council
Frazer Mackenzie	Senate
Sean Mackney	Senate
Tim Marshall	Council
Colin Martin	Senate
Tim Middleton	Senate
Paul Morgan	Senate
Hilary Mullen	Council
Jenny Newton	Council
Ciaran O'Keeffe	Senate

Steven Pearce	Senate
Ian Plover	Senate
Carol Pook	Senate
Tracey Price	Council (in attendance)
Roland Radaelli	Senate
Bob Shennan	Council
Ellie Smith	Senate/ Secretary Council
John Smith	Council
Allen Stroud	Senate
Terri Teasdale	Council
Jenny Wade	Senate
Lorraine Watkins-Mathys	Senate
Phil Wood	Senate
Sue West	Senate/Council

University Officers

Name	Faculty / Directorate
Miriam Moir	Senate
Marcus Wood	Council

Apologies

Name	Faculty / Directorate
Nasreen Akhtar	Senate
Steve Dewhurst	Council
Baljit Dhillon	Council
Karen Harrison-White	Senate
Anthony Murphy	Council
Jo Rixon	Senate
Susan Rosser	Council

Welcome / Apologies for absence

- 16.01 The Chair of Council welcomed members to the annual joint meeting of Senate and Council.
- 16.02 Apologies for absence were noted.

Context for meeting

- 16.03 The Chair of Senate referred to the context paper circulated in advance. It was noted that for the HEFCE Accountability Return (1 December 2016) Council had to confirm additional assurances related to the University's management of its quality and standards. In order to enable Council to make that assurance, the joint meeting had been convened to present the relevant information and to give the opportunity for members to questions and challenge the University over academic quality and standards.

16.04 It was explained that the annual monitoring of quality (continuous improvement) and standards (requirements for student academic achievement) was considered through the Programme Review & Enhancement (PRE) and the Strategic University Review & Evaluation (SURE) processes. Through an auditing process the University is assured that PRE and SURE are conducted effectively and thoroughly, culminating in a joint meeting of the Quality & Standards and Education Committees, dedicated to discussion of the auditors' findings, and resulting in the production of the overview Report to Senate and Council.

Student Academic Experience and Student Outcomes

16.05 The following papers had been made available in advance of the meeting:

- a) Quality & Standards and Education Committees' Report to Senate and Council on the outcomes of the Strategic University Review & Evaluation process 2015-16
- b) Student Achievement Annual Summary Report 2015-16
- c) Annual Summary Reports 2015-16 for:
 - External Examiners
 - Boards of Examiners
 - Research Degrees
- d) Transforming our National Student Survey Performance- An Agenda for Improvement

16.06 To place the papers in context, presentations on Academic Quality & Standards and on Research Degrees were given by the PVC Education and the PVC Research & Enterprise, and the following points made:

Academic Quality & Standards

- PRE constitutes a detailed examination of issues around the student learning experience using a range of data
- PRE identifies areas for improvement and sets actions plans
- SURE constitutes Faculty overview reports and University wide thematic reports, identifying areas of good practice to be disseminated and setting actions for continuous improvement
- The joint Quality & Standards and Education Committee concluded that standards had been upheld and that robust processes were in place to assure quality.
- Areas identified for targeted action in 2016-17 included student retention, BME achievement, and the student learning experience.

Research Degrees

- Quality assurance of research degrees takes place through the individual annual monitoring interviews with students
- The outcomes of the annual monitoring process is considered by the Research Degrees Committee, whose membership includes representatives of the research degree validating bodies (Brunel University, Coventry University and Staffordshire University)
- Further formal quality checking takes place at the transfer point of progression from MPhil to PhD, and at the final examination involving external examiners

- Research degree students represent a small proportion of the University's students overall
- An area identified for further investigation and improvement is the proportion of re-submissions of theses required at final examination

16.07 Following the presentations all members were invited to hold discussions in groups and to formulate questions arising from the presentations and/or the papers received.

Panel Question & Answer Session

16.08 A Panel constituted of the following University representatives then received questions from the members:

- Rebecca Bunting - Vice-Chancellor
- Sean Mackney - Pro Vice-Chancellor Education
- Tim Middleton - Pro Vice-Chancellor Research & Enterprise
- Ellie Smith - Academic Registrar & Secretary
- Sue West - Dean, Faculty Society & Health
- Lorraine Watkins-Mathys - Dean, Faculty Design, Media & Management

Question 1: What initiatives were being put in place to stem the increase in the number of withdrawals and the increase in students being unable to progress between levels?

It was explained that one of the most effective means of retaining students was to improve their educational environment to create a sense of "belonging". Work was being undertaken to ascertain reasons for withdrawal through a retention audit, and improvements in attendance monitoring procedures would assist with highlighting potential engagement issues.

While new Academic Assessment Regulations had been introduced in 2015-16 for Level 4 students, requiring them to pass all modules and not trail a failed module into the following year, initial investigations suggest that the impact of the change has been minimal. The University is considering a review of assessment levels, as it needs assurance that students are not being over-assessed.

Question 2: Is there an explanation for the low attainment of BME students?

The response centred on the need to work in partnership with relevant students to understand their prior learning experiences and devise the best means of support for them at University level. The issue is a national one, but has been identified as an area which the University needs to address quickly.

Question 3: Is there a plan for the University to award its own research degrees?

It was explained that the University was actively working towards achieving Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP), and was in the process of collecting the required information from staff. In order to be confident in an application for RDAP, the University needs to be assured that it meets the criteria, particularly around staff research activity.

Question 4: As a full review of PRE and SURE is due to take place in 2016-17, could Council have confidence in the process that took place in 2015-16?

The Panel confirmed that the PRE and SURE processes were robust, and that, along with other University processes, were regularly reviewed to identify efficiencies and

improvements. The 2015-16 exercise was based on external benchmarks, and a range of data sets and performance measures. The external examiner process was an important mechanism in ensuring the University is benchmarked against the sector. The review of the PRE and SURE processes to take place this academic year is an example of continuous improvement.

Question 5: How can learning analytics be used effectively?

It was explained that data surrounding learning analytics could be used to manage future interventions to ensure students are provided with the best choices which are consistent with their individual aims. An example was given of using such data to analyse engagement with use of the library and eventual academic outcomes.

Question 6: Are there any KPIs apart from the NSS outcomes which could have an impact on the University's position in the league tables?

The Panel noted that work was underway to improve the University's DLHE results in terms of students employed in graduate-level jobs. Changes to the curriculum to introduce work placements were being explored, and discussions about employability were being planned at the earliest point of contact with students. Going forward the key drivers for comparison in the league tables will be TEF and REF, and the University will therefore focus on areas of teaching quality in which it can be confident of excellence.

Question 7: To what extent are students involved in discussing NSS outcomes?

The Panel confirmed that students are seen as partners in implementing an improvement agenda. Extensive use is made of student representatives across a number of quality processes and within the committee structure.

Agreement of Assurance Statements

16.09 Following consideration of the evidence provided, the discussions held and the recommendations from the Joint Committee of Quality & Standards and Education, and separately from the Research Degrees Committee, Senate and Council agreed that academic standards had been maintained by the University.

16.10 Council members further considered the assurances required by HEFCE for the Accountability Return and confirmed its agreement with the following:

- “The governing body has received and discussed a report and accompanying action plan relating to the continuous improvement of the student academic experience and student outcomes. This included evidence from the provider's own periodic review processes, which fully involve students and include embedded external peer or professional review”
- “The methodologies used as a basis to improve the student academic experience and student outcomes are, to the best of our knowledge, robust and appropriate.”
- “The standards of awards for which we are responsible have been appropriately set and maintained.”

Date of next meeting

16.11 The date of the joint Senate/Council meeting for 2017 will be confirmed.