

# HARPER ADAMS UNIVERSITY

## Board of Governors

### Summary Report on the Business of Academic Board

This report provides a summary of the meeting of the Academic Board held on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2019. The Board of Governors is asked to note the report.

1. The Board noted under Matters Arising: that work continued to ensure that outcomes of the National Student Survey (NSS) and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) data would be used to inform change in time for the start of the autumn term in 2019; that useful discussions around the impact of rurality on Office for Students (OfS) data had taken place during Chris Millward's recent visit to the University; and that amendments would be made to the Academic Calendar to reflect the change in date of the early May bank holiday (VE Day anniversary) in 2020, announced five days ago. The Board noted the Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy paper that had been approved by prior-circulation.
2. The Board received and endorsed an evaluation of progress with the International Strategy, noting that the document would soon require review and update once greater clarity on Brexit was available and the institutional strategy for 2020-2025 had been completed. The Board noted the rise in the number of international students and their home countries, and that an increased cohort of [REDACTED] students was expected in 2019/20. The expanding international alumni community (around 1500 alumni in 59 countries) presented opportunities.
3. The Board noted an update on the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategy. The document had been streamlined to improve readability and the strategy, due for renewal, would be updated over the summer months, informed by NSS and PTES data available in early July. Most elements of the strategy were now 'green' but 'assessment and feedback', in particular 'timely feedback', remained areas of focus. The Board expressed concern that, in some cases, feedback was still not being returned as per policy, and agreed to direct the University Executive to oversee work to enforce policy to improve the situation.
4. The Board noted and endorsed revisions to the Community Charter, which had been developed in conjunction with the Student Academic Group. It was suggested that 'integrity' could be extended to the wording of the University's commitments, in addition to those of students, with regard to Assessment.
5. In relation to the University's conditions of continued registration to the OfS, the Academic Board:
  - Noted that the Access and Participation Plan for the period up to 2024/25, which had been contributed to by a number of staff and students, had been submitted in late May 2019. Dr Hind was in the process of responding to minor content-style questions asked by the OfS in relation to the submission, prior to its formal assessment. The Board noted the concern of several members in relation to the outreach initiative that encouraged Year 6 children to work towards a GCSE in Agriculture, and the potential impact this might have on the perceived value of Agriculture as an academic discipline. Accordingly, it agreed a minor revision to the Plan when resubmitted as part of the response to the OfS's initial queries.
  - Endorsed the work to ensure the University was compliant with consumer protection legislation. It was noted that, following a recent internal audit, only one minor recommendation was received, and that work was in hand to ensure online training was undertaken by all who needed it, including the requirement for refresher training.
  - Approved a number of minor amendments to the University's Complaints Procedure and noted the OIA's annual statement of complaints from our students made in 2018 (at zero).
  - Noted that since September 2018, the OfS had expressed dissatisfaction on the quality of Student Protection Plans across the sector (not that of the University) and was due to release further guidance in late summer 2019, to which the University would respond at that time.
  - Noted that the University would be required to return and publish, by the end of August 2019, 'Transparency Information' to highlight gaps, at provider-level, to access and success performance for students with particular characteristics. Advice indicates that this initial information will include application rates, offer rates, acceptance rates and registration rates as well as degree attainment rates, broken down into characteristic groups for ethnicity, socio-economic background and gender. Starting from April 2020, continuation rates will also be included in the information set and the OfS had consulted on extending the student characteristics to include age on entry and disability status.
  - Endorsed the Transfer Policy, which had been developed in Autumn 2018 and had been approved by the University Executive.
6. The Board approved the proposed minor revisions to the Academic Appeals Policy. The Board noted that Chair's Action would be sought over the summer to approve any required amendments to the Disciplinary,

Academic Misconduct, Placement Panel and Fitness to Practice arrangements, in response to guidance released by the Office for the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

7. The Board approved the proposed revisions to the Admissions Policy. The Board agreed that the wording in relation to acceptance of a unconditional offer should be revisited in order to make clear that these offers were not time-limited and that they would not impose undue pressure on applicants to accept, as doing so would be contrary to consumer protection regulation.
8. The Board approved a paper that outlined actions taken in response to the revised Quality Code in the 'Admissions, Recruitment and Widening Access' context. The Board noted that interview forms had been amended giving more guidance to staff, that text regarding the making of unconditional offers had been incorporated into the Admissions Policy, and that contextual offer making principles had been set.
9. The Board received and endorsed minor updates to the Terms of Reference for the interim Harper and Keele Veterinary School Joint Academic Board, which would meet for the first time in July 2019. The Board agreed that the interim arrangements were to continue for a little longer than initially anticipated, until permanent Vet School staff were in place and students enrolled. It was suggested that the Academic Board would have sight of the proposed governance structure at its meeting in March 2020 for review and approval.
10. The Board received and endorsed a paper outlining the new course developments and suspensions as approved by the Programme Approvals Committee and University Executive. The Board noted: [REDACTED]; that development approval had been granted for programmes to be run in conjunction with [REDACTED]; that two [REDACTED] were to be withdrawn; and that two [REDACTED] were to be suspended until the 2020/21 entry year because of low levels of applicant interest.
11. The Board received and endorsed the draft Corporate Planning Statements (CPS) for 2018/19 and 2019/20, the former of which had shown good progress versus targets. The Board noted that the 2019/20 CPS would be revisited once the institutional strategy had been developed.
12. The Board received and endorsed the Risk Analysis and Action Plan and noted that a Prevent Duty meeting with the OfS was to take place in the following week.
13. The Board noted the guidelines for the appointment of Visiting Professors of Practice. It was noted that underrepresented groups would be encouraged to apply.
14. The Board received an oral update about the Research Excellence Framework (REF) Code of Practice. A larger number of staff would be assessed as part of the 2021 round of the REF as compared to 2014 because, by default, every academic would be submitted unless it can be demonstrated by a provider that individual staff members have a significantly teaching / student facing work profile. The University was in the process of identifying which staff should be included in the REF submission, based on the criteria included in the proposed Code of Practice submitted to Research England. Around 50 staff members were forecast to be submitted into REF 2021, compared with 17 in the 2014 exercise. The Board was reassured that inclusion or exclusion from REF 2021 conferred no advantage or disadvantage in terms of career progression on individual staff members.
15. The Board received an oral report from the Vice-Chancellor, covering strategic matters of relevance to the Academic Board. The Vice-Chancellor noted that:
  - The Augar Review contained recommendations that would lead to significant change if adopted, but that with the current instability in the political climate it was not clear whether the intentions outlined in the paper would go ahead. It was clear that a joined-up approach would be required by the sector to push back on some unhelpful elements. In the meantime, the possibility of a freeze on the unit of resource was a concern across the sector.
  - The Secretary of State for Education, had written to the OfS with additional guidance to express concern over degree standards, essay mills and unconditional offer making, alongside commenting on the possible need for the sector to look again at admissions practices for undergraduates and approaches to apprenticeships.
  - Access and Participation Plans and access into Higher Education for disadvantaged groups remained a priority for the OfS.
  - The Brexit delay had imposed constraints on policy developments, including postponement of the Agriculture Bill and decisions on any future farming support system.
  - The development of the institutional Strategic Plan for 2020-25 would begin now, and would likely focus on major issues and transitions including carbon emissions / climate change, the impact of data and information science across the University's course portfolio and collaborations necessary to achieve the University's ambitions.

- The institution continued to gain positive press in relation to our Agri-Tech work, including recent positive results for Agriculture and Engineering in the Guardian league tables, and coverage of the Hands Free Hectare and Hands Free Farm on Twitter and at Cereals 2019.

Dr Abigail Hind  
Director of Academic Services  
June 2019