

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 10th June 2020, as well as the exceptional joint meeting with the Quality & Standards Committee on 22nd April 2020, which was convened to consider and approve 'safety net' arrangements for considering student mitigating circumstances, progression and award rules. The Board of Governors is asked to note the report.

1. The Board noted under Matters Arising: that the anticipated sector guidance on Student Protection Plan requirements from the Office for Students (OfS), initially due in October 2019, had been superseded by the alternative Coronavirus-related guidance released on 9th June; that the Harper & Keele Veterinary School governance structure had been finalised and was appended to the meeting papers; and that the actions arising from the exceptional meeting of the Academic Board with the Quality and Standards Committee, which took place in April to endorse the University's COVID-19 'safety-net' approach to assessment, had been completed.
2. The Board received and endorsed an overview of progress with the International Strategy. The Board noted that good progress had been made prior to the start of the Coronavirus pandemic, but that significant international recruitment challenges lay ahead for Harper Adams and the wider sector. It remained to be seen as to the level of confidence that the international community would place in the UK, but in the meantime the University continued to maintain positive relationships with both international partner institutions and the local community.
3. The Board received an update on the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategy. The Board agreed an extension for the strategy's redevelopment until November 2020, noting that the revisions to learning and teaching arrangements, which had been necessary as a consequence of the lockdown, had accelerated engagement with digital learning and would need to be reflected in the revised strategy. The Board noted that the Students' Union had commissioned a survey of current students' perspectives on the University's handling of the pandemic, and its outcomes would help inform the direction of the strategy. The Board noted that the issue of access to reliable broadband in rural communities, and the associated impact on rural students' ability to effectively complete their university studies remotely, had been raised by GuildHE to the Universities Minister, who had agreed to pursue the matter with the relevant government department. The Board noted that the plans for learning and teaching in the autumn term were to be considered by exceptional meetings of the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee (LTSEC) in the coming week.
4. The Board received and endorsed the annual course monitoring 2018/19 report and action plan for Workforce Development partners.
5. The Board received an oral update on the Community Charter and noted that no revisions were required at the present time.
6. The Board received an update on progress with the Office for Students' (OfS) conditions of registration.
 - Condition A1 (Access and Participation Plan 2020/25): the Board noted and endorsed a paper which noted broadly positive progress in relation to Access and Participation targets. The Board noted that the areas in which less satisfactory progress had been made were under consideration by the Success and Retention Committee. The Board received an oral update from the Director of Marketing and Communications regarding the changes that had been made to the schedule of outreach activity, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Board noted that there had been significant local and national interest from schools in the curriculum-aligned packs which had been prepared in-house and which would be launched at the end of the month.
 - Conditions B4 and B5 (Degree Outcomes Statement 2020): the Board noted and endorsed the statement, which was a new OfS registration requirement. The statement would be published on the University's website once approved by the Board of Governors.
 - Condition C1 (Consumer Protection): the Board noted and endorsed the arrangements. The Board was reassured that the University would comply with guidance that had been published on 9th June 2020, which set out the OfS's expectations of providers in terms of the communication of their plans for the student experience in the autumn term and beyond. The University planned to send an update to applicants on 16th June, immediately following approval of outline plans by the LTSEC.
 - Condition C2 (Complaints Procedure): the Board approved the modest updates to the procedure, for immediate implementation, and agreed that Chair's Action could be sought for the proposed changes to writing style as time permits.

- Condition C3 (Student Protection Plan): the Board noted the OfS was no longer seeking to provide sector-wide recommendations on Student Protection Plans, but would instead target individual institutions where they had concerns. The University was not anticipating any intervention.
 - Condition E6 (Sector integrity and stability): the Board noted that the consultation on this proposed new condition had concluded at the end of May. The condition sought to prohibit the use of unconditional offers and other incentives to sway applicant decision-making. At the time of the meeting (and preparation of this summary), no announcement has been made on the implementation of the proposed new condition. [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] The University had challenged UCAS on its new paid-for marketing offer, which seemingly aimed to fuel competition, contradicting the OfS measures looking to achieve stability and the opposite effect.
- Condition F1 (Transparency Information): the board noted that the OfS would not require providers to publish this data for the time being, but would instead take responsibility for the publication of sector data until further notice.
 - Condition F2 (Transfer Policy): the Board noted and endorsed the extant Policy.
7. The Board received and approved revisions to the Academic Appeals Policy. The Board agreed that Chair's Action could be sought for the proposed changes to writing style as time permits.
 8. The Board received and approved revisions to the Admissions Policy. [REDACTED]
 9. The Board received and endorsed a paper outlining the new course developments, suspensions and withdrawals as approved by the Programme Approvals Committee and University Executive.
 10. The Board received and endorsed the draft Corporate Planning Statements for 2019/20 and 2020/21. The Board noted that, although many items in the 2019/20 Statement were making good progress or had been completed, a number of activities had been disrupted by the Coronavirus pandemic. The 2020/21 Statements would be discussed by the Finance and General Purposes Committee this week and would be presented to the Board of Governors in July for endorsement.
 11. The Board received and endorsed an update on Risk Analysis and Action Plan. The Board noted that work was in hand to address the challenges presented by COVID-19, including the plan for staff and students to return to campus.
 12. The Board received and approved a proposal to revise the terms of reference of the Success and Retention Committee to incorporate membership by a Harper & Keele Veterinary School representative.
 13. The Board received and approved the proposed revisions to Course Committee membership in 2020/21. The proposed addition of formal Students' Union representation was welcomed by the Board.
 14. The Board received an oral report from the Vice-Chancellor, covering strategic matters of relevance to the Academic Board. The Vice-Chancellor noted that:
 - Thanks were due to all the staff working in extraordinary circumstances.
 - The Vice-Chancellor had been delivering online updates to departments across the University to elaborate on work that has been completed to date and what is to come, in the context of the pandemic.
 - A lot of work would have to be done over the summer to ensure that the University is prepared for the new term, both in terms of learning and teaching and social distancing on campus. A timetable of asynchronous online lectures and small-scale face-to-face tutorials was to be delivered during the autumn term and maybe beyond, depending on the course of the pandemic.
 - The virtual Open Day, which would take place on 17th June, represented an opportunity to reach those interested in 2021 entry but also to convert those applicants due to commence in 2020, who must make their firm and insurance reply decisions in UCAS by 18th June. The success of the 2020 recruitment campaign would have implications for the financial health of the institution.
 - Representative bodies for the HE sector were making efforts to work on Coronavirus-related draft documentation, in collaboration with the government, in advance of publication.