

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 11th March 2020. The Board of Governors is asked to note the report.

1. The Board noted under Matters Arising: that the University was still awaiting further sector guidance on Student Protection Plan requirements from the Office for Students (OfS), initially due in October 2019; that a number of student-facing policies affecting student progression had been reviewed in light of guidance published by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) and had been approved by Chair's Action; and that the 'You Said, We Did' campaign had launched successfully.
2. The Board received and endorsed an overview report arising from annual course monitoring. The Board was reassured that the health of courses delivered at Harper Adams University and [REDACTED] was good. The Board noted that the action plan for Workforce Development courses remained outstanding and would be presented at the next meeting in June 2020.
3. The Board received the Research and Knowledge Exchange Strategy and noted the monitoring and evaluation of 2018/19 activities. The Board noted that the open 'Director of Research' vacancy was generating a high level of interest, that the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) submission was due in the summer and that the Research Excellence Framework (REF) submission was due in November. It was noted that the 'levelling-up' agenda, signalled in the Chancellor's Budget speech earlier in the day, could have a positive impact on the level of research funding available regionally. It was noted that student responses to the optional NSS question..."modules informed by current research" was sector upper quartile in 2019 and had been 5-10 percentage points higher than the sector mean since 2016 and that it would be a useful metric to include in future reports.
4. The Board received the proposed governance structure for the Harper & Keele Veterinary School (HKVetS). The Board requested that members be circulated with the revised paperwork that was to be considered by the Keele University Senate the following week as reflecting late amendments proposed at the Joint Academic Board a few days previously. The Board agreed that named members of HKVetS committees should be able to send an alternate if they are unable to attend a meeting. The Board noted that it would receive the full minutes of future Joint Academic Board meetings, including the terms of reference of any newly developed committees.
5. The Board received an update on Access and Participation Planning. The Board noted that an internal Access and Participation Plan audit was underway (with investment out of scope) and that auditor feedback would be received and shared in due course.
6. The Board received a progress report on academic components of the Corporate Plan, noting that some minor amendments had been made to bring the Plan in line with the University's new Strategic Plan. The Board was reassured that elements of the Plan were moving on as expected, and that the University's green energy project had been gaining increased visibility both internally and externally.
7. The Board received a progress report on the Risk Analysis and Action Plan (RAAP), which had been refreshed in November and approved by the Board of Governors. The Board noted that the formula for each risk had been included in the paperwork on the recommendation of the internal auditors. The Board noted that specific risks in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic were assigned to the Health and Safety and Audit Committees.
8. The Board received an update on the Honorary Awards to be made at Graduation in September 2020. The Board noted that both of the two approved individuals (who remained confidential at this time) had accepted the offer of an award and that their details would be announced closer to the event
9. The Board received the review of complaints and appeals for 2018/19 and noted that the University continued to record very low volumes of both formal academic appeals and complaints. At the time of writing, the University maintained a clear record with the OIA since 2012, in that, of the small number of complaints referred to it, none had been upheld.
10. The Board approved the draft academic calendar for 2020/21 and the undergraduate term dates up to 2025/26. The Board agreed that the summer Open Day in 2020/21 would be best placed at the end of the examination period, to eliminate disruption to students and examination arrangements.

11. 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 that entry on to the [REDACTED], would be deferred until September 2021.
12. 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 OfS was consulting on a number of areas, including harassment and sexual misconduct, the admissions system, and financial penalties for Universities.
 - An introductory phone call between the Chair and the new Minister for Universities, Michelle Donelan, had taken place, with discussion including: diversity in the sector and the role of specialist universities; perceived value of degrees; the regional 'levelling up' agenda; and students' mental health.
 - The University had placed second in the Employer Reputation measure in the Agriculture and Forestry subject table in the 2020 QS World University Rankings, for the third year in a row.
 - The University had been shortlisted in five of the WhatUni Student Choice Awards 2020 categories (Student Accommodation, Course and Lecturers, Student Support, Job Prospects, University of the Year).
 - The current COVID-19 situation remained uncertain and it was anticipated that the UK government would announce a shift from the 'containment' to 'delay' stage later in the afternoon. The OfS had produced a template which was to be completed for any suspected or confirmed Coronavirus cases amongst staff or students at institutions. A Harper Adams Coronavirus Planning Group (CPG) had been established and was due to meet again on Friday to work on contingency planning.
13. The Board agreed delegated authority to [REDACTED], to make necessary amendments to teaching, research supervision and assessment arrangements in light of the changing Coronavirus situation.

Dr Abigail Hind
Director of Academic Services
March 2020