

Summary Report on the Business of Academic Board

This report provides a summary of the meeting of the Academic Board held on 18th November 2020. The Board of Governors is asked to note the report.

1. The Board noted, under Matters Arising, that the Degree Outcomes Statement had been published on the University's website and that changes to the Academic Appeals and Complaints Procedures would be completed within the current academic year, as part of a wider planned review of student-facing policies to ensure they are written in an accessible way and remain fit for purpose.
2. The Board noted that a review of the effectiveness of Academic Board and its sub-committees was overdue. The Board agreed that a proposal for methodology of the review should be presented to its next meeting in March 2021 by the new Secretary.

Vice Chancellor's Report

3. The Board received a verbal report from the Vice-Chancellor, covering strategic matters of relevance to the Academic Board. The Vice-Chancellor noted that:
 - A number of external reviews were underway.
 - The Office for Students (OfS) had launched a consultation on the subject of academic quality and standards. The University was preparing its response and Guild HE was likely to also respond.
 - The issue of post-qualification admissions was gaining momentum, backed by Universities UK, UCAS and Gavin Williamson, who announced a review by the DfE on 13th November 2020. We will engage with any consultation and identify the internal operational consequences of such a move, which may apply to the UCAS cycle for 2023/24 entry.
 - Comprehensive Spending Review is due and is likely to apply for one year initially.
 - A review of the National Student Survey (NSS) is underway.
 - We continue to manage the impact of COVID-19, responding to government advice and requirements. There is limited scope for prior consultation, with new arrangements communicated to universities via the media. We are finalising plans for the 'student travel window', to enable students to return home safely for the Christmas vacation. We are in discussion with the Health Protection Hub about the possibility of the on-site testing centre being used to support delivery of the national initiative for asymptomatic testing of students before they leave. Arrangements are being scoped for students' return to the area in January 2021, although guidance from government has not been received.
 - Kreseda Smith has been shortlisted in the 'Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community' category of the THE Awards for her work on rural crime. The awards will be presented virtually on 26th November 2020.

Students' Union Report

4. The Board received a verbal report from the President of the Students' Union, detailing the wide-ranging work undertaken by the team to support the operation of COVID-19 secure arrangements, enhancing student representation and feedback mechanisms and enhancing course identity and a sense of belonging. Work has included:
 - A Student Voice Report, which had looked to gauge student opinion on online teaching in the final term of 2019/20, and had informed plans for both the University's blended model in 2020/21 and e-learning training for staff. A second phase of the survey was launched in early November and publication of the results is due before the end of term.
 - Videos had been created and widely shared with staff and students to demonstrate COVID-secure arrangements for the use of classrooms and the Library.

- Online training and a handbook have been developed to aid Course Representatives to undertake their role effectively. All Course Committees are being attended by an SU representative.

Policy and Strategic Matters for Formal Approval

5. The Board received an update on progress with the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategy. The Board approved the request to delay the planned strategy review until 2021, so that new opportunities for technology-driven pedagogy, which had been accelerated as a consequence of the pandemic, could be properly evaluated and incorporated, as appropriate, within the revised Strategy.
6. The Board received an annual report of Academic Quality, Standards and Student Access & Achievement in 2019/20. The Board noted that pleasing feedback had been received by External Examiners, and approved the suggested priorities outlined in the paper for inclusion in the Annual Quality Enhancement Plan.
7. The Board received an update on recently announced substantial changes to the UK's student visa sponsorship arrangements, which will need to be reflected in our Visa Sponsorship Policy. Academic Board delegated authority to the Chair to approve the revised Policy.
8. The Board received a paper outlining the proposed adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of Antisemitism. The Board noted that a letter from the Secretary of State for Education to the Vice-Chancellor had requested that the University adopt the statement by no later than Christmas, and had threatened regulatory penalties for those institutions that do not. The Board noted that Universities UK, representing the concerns of a number of HEIs, was in discussion with the Secretary of State in relation to freedom of speech and the potential for antisemitism to be treated above other forms of racism.

Pending the outcome of these discussions, The Board agreed that:

- a) Should UUK find agreement in its discussions with the Secretary of State, the Chair will circulate suggested next steps and request agreement with the final actions required to address this matter;
 - b) Should UUK fail to secure any changes and the Secretary of State confirms his intention to take action against HEIs who do not adopt the working draft definition, the University will adopt the IHRA Working Definition on Antisemitism, with the incorporation of the 'clarifications' provided by the Home Affairs Committee set out in paragraph 17 of the GuildHE briefing, as well as an additional 'clarification' regarding guaranteed freedom of speech in the context of this, or similar, statements. This approach had been considered by the Senior Management Team and by the University's Equality and Diversity Committee, and both agreed with the recommendation therein;
 - c) Whatever the outcome of the UUK/Secretary of State discussions, during 2021 the University will review its Single Equality Scheme and Equality and Diversity Policy to ensure that it remains up to date and inclusive of all aspects of its role in pro-actively tackling discrimination and opening up opportunities for all to benefit from higher education.
9. The Board received and approved a proposal to become signatory to the Concordat on Openness on Animal Research in the UK. The Board agreed that discussion should take place with Keele University to ensure that both institutions were aligned in the interests of the Harper and Keele Veterinary School.
 - 10 The Board received and approved a progress report relating to our delivery of both the Access and Participation Plan for 2019/20 and the development work undertaken in 2019/20 onwards in relation to the Plan for 2020-2025. The Board noted the progress made in relation to access and progression. The Board approved use of the new HARDI metric, a rural indicator of deprivation developed by Harper Adams in response to an OfS enhanced monitoring condition, and also endorsed the proposal to launch a monthly APP working group to monitor progress with the 2020-25 Plan.

- 11 The Board received and endorsed an update on Risk Analysis and Action Plan, which had been approved by the Audit and Risk Management Committee.

Report Items

- 12 The Board received reports from its sub-committees and key documentation concerning decision making in relation to:
- Annual Review of the Register of Collaborative Partners;
 - Guidance relating to procedures and documentation for students postponing their studies, adjusted to provide flexibility and clarity to address some complex personal circumstances relating to COVID-19.

The Board also received a report from the Careers Service and the Annual report on the University's Tier 4 Visa sponsorship status, noting that our Tier 4 License has recently been renewed.

- 13 The Board noted that approval had been granted by Chair's Action, since the previous meeting of the Board, of:
- Academic Staff for submission in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) submission on the recommendation of the REF Steering Group;
 - Temporarily removing the requirement for taught postgraduate applicants to supply references in support of their application on the basis that this creating a barrier for applicants because of COVID-19 and because these were not material for admissions decision-making. The Board discussed this decision taken for new entrants in 2020/21 and agreed it should be permanently adopted.
- 14 The Board thanked the Director of Learning, Teaching and International for the significant contributions he has made because this was his last meeting of Academic Board before his retirement in January 2021.

Dr Simone Clarke
Director of Academic Services and Academic Registrar
November 2020