

Meeting: Academic Assembly Accountability and Transparency Working Group

Date and Time: Monday 4th February 2019, 14.15-17.10

Venue: Claverton Rooms

Chair: Robert Kelsh

Present: Sabina Gheduzzi (SG)
Hartmut Logemann (HL)
Elke Pawlowski (EP)

Apologies: Theo Papadopoulos (TP)

Secretary: Sarah White (SW)

1.	OPENING	ACTION
	<p>The purpose of the meeting was to decide the key priorities for the group. We worked from a number of documents, but particularly the motion passed by Academic Assembly on 25.6.18.</p> <p>We agreed that initially RK should be the chair and SW the secretary</p>	
2.	MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING	
	<p>These were accepted with no amendments</p>	
3.	MATTERS ARISING	
	<p>None</p>	
4	OUR PROCESS AND COMMUNICATIONS	
	<p>We agreed that we are responsible, and answerable, to our fellow members of Academic Assembly</p> <p>Our work will require us to interact primarily with: Academic Assembly; Council Effectiveness Steering Group (CESG); Senior Management</p>	
5.	PRIORITY 1: RESPONSE TO HALPIN	
	<p>We note that the CESG has been in place and active for many months. Our first priority will be to review what it has done already and get to know what it is planning to do, with a view to the implications for A&T. This will involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing the documentation on CESG meetings/actions • Meeting with the CESG <p>At present, we have four particular concerns.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. The transparency of the CESG process. At present it is at least perceived to be working 'behind closed doors'. Given the thrust of critique in the Halpin report, it seems much more emphasis should be placed on openness in the process. Provision of minutes of meetings, giving full details of discussions and decisions made, would be a good first step. ii. The future of Court. We recognise that there is a need for change to strengthen engagement with stakeholders and welcome such changes in principle. However, Court has played a pivotal role in holding Senior Management to account in the events of 2017/18, and we are concerned that no such change should remove the layer of scrutiny provided by Court or reduce the level of A&T that currently exists. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii. The post of Director of Strategic Governance. We seek clarity as to the content of this role, and its relation to that of the University Secretary. iv. Transparency of processes, particularly regarding the nomination and appointment of members of key committees, with detailed and transparent reporting, e.g. from Sub-committees to Council and full disclosure of relevant past interests of Council members. 	
6.	<p><u>PRIORITY 2: TRUST</u></p> <p>There is a need for trust to be re-built. This is two-way. First, members of the University need to regain trust in the Senior Management, central administration and Council. In particular, they need to be confident the Senior Management and ‘Academic support services’ are there for support and well-being of all members, not just Students. Mental health issues are just as significant for staff (who are exposed to thousands of students over decades), as for students so that there is a very significant duty-of-care to both.</p> <p>Second, members of the University need to feel that they are trusted as professionals and experts in their fields. Greater subsidiarity in decision-making (point 3 below) will help to build this sense.</p> <p>In addition, trust is a key issue in any re-structuring. With a new VC, it is likely that some re-structuring will take place. As stated in point 4, we believe this should result in de-centralisation and greater subsidiarity in decision-making. In addition, we recognise that the way in which past re-structuring has been implemented has been extremely damaging to the staff members involved – both those who lost their jobs through the process, and those who retained or regained them. A priority for future re-structuring must thus be that it is done in a way that demonstrates and inspires trust, with respect for the people involved, and with as much prior and meaningful consultation as possible.</p>	
7.	<p><u>PRIORITY 3: ACCOUNTABILITY OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND COUNCIL TO THE WIDER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY</u></p> <p>There needs to be much greater transparency regarding budgeting and decision-making. This will be helped by de-centralisation as in point 4.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. We welcome the initiative of the Chair of Academic Assembly to work with the Director of Finance to make the position of the University finances known to staff. ii. In addition, we welcome the fact that it is established practice for the VC and Chair of Council to present annually to Academic Assembly. However, we would like to look at ways that these events could be democratised, viewed as an opportunity to work transparently with the community, actively seeking constructive critique of events/plans in order to create trust and to generate support/buy-in. There should be written materials available in advance so all can participate in an informed way. Thus, a conversation, not a lecture, about future issues, plans and options as well as evaluating the previous year’s events. iii. Develop links between council members and academic departments, professional services and technical/operations teams, so council members are aware of concerns across the university community and the wider community can feed into council deliberations. 	
8	<p><u>PRIORITY 4: DE-CENTRALISATION AND SUBSIDIARITY IN DECISION-MAKING AND BUDGETS</u></p> <p>There is widespread concern in the University about excessive centralisation and top-down decision-making. In Richard Brooks’ focus groups this is expressed as ‘control’. A more devolved structure would be more agile and more efficient, able to respond better to opportunities as they arise. This is a major issue, with many implications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Communications. We wish to encourage the democratisation of UoB communications, moving the website from its current highly controlled, corporatist form, and restoring scope to those at the level of department, centre, institute or professional services unit to present their work as they feel will appeal more effectively to their key audiences ii. Explore ways to re-centre ownership at the level of service delivery, with joint academic/administrative/ technical/operational teams, managing their own budgets 	
9.	<p><u>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</u></p> <p>TBC</p>	

