
Meeting: ACADEMIC ASSEMBLY – EXTRAORDINARY MEETING

Date and time: Monday 15 September 2020 at 10am

Venue: Via MS Teams

Present: Dr J White (Chair)
and 41 members

In attendance: Dr C Harris, Secretary to Academic Assembly
Mrs L Weeks, Administrator

ACTION

706 WELCOME

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and noted that, as there were more than 25 members present, the meeting was quorate. She explained that the Extraordinary Meeting had been requested by 76 members, asking for the meeting in August or September. She thanked the Secretary for setting the meeting up.

707 MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Academic Assembly noted membership and terms of reference as set out on the web page: <http://www.bath.ac.uk/statutory-bodies-committees/academic/index.html> and that the Chair could be contacted on: academic-assembly-chair@bath.ac.uk.

708 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2020 (Paper AA20/21-001 refers) were approved and would be signed later by the Chair.

709 ELECTIONS

The Academic Assembly noted the election of representatives to serve on Council, Senate and Awards Committee, as set out in Paper AA20/21-002. The Chair welcomed new representatives.

710 REVIEW OF ACADEMIC ASSEMBLY

The Chair provided the background to the review of Academic Assembly. It had been mooted in October 2019, with the consensus view that a review was a good idea as the governance structures across the University were under review, and that an independent chair was preferable. The Chair had since developed proposed

terms of reference (ToR) focusing on the operational effectiveness (provided in Paper AA20/21-003). She had circulated the proposed ToR asking for comments by the end of July. Three members had commented and were thanked. The comments covered a broader University Assembly and the Chair commented that this could emerge from the review. There was also a wish to increase attendance at meetings, given that the membership was around 1,450.

The Chair had received two further suggested amendments to the proposed ToR prior to the meeting, which were shown to members, as follows:

From Professor Robert Kelsh: Under section '*Proposed Approach*'
Replace '...in autumn 2020 with recommendations to be considered...'
with '...in autumn 2020, subject to agreement to ToR by Academic Assembly, with recommendations to be considered...'

From Dr Sabina Gheduzzi: Under heading 'Proposed Approach' text
'To engage an independent reviewer to undertake the review in autumn 2020 [...]' to be replaced by 'To conduct a review under an independent Chair, to be appointed by the Assembly, in autumn 2020 [...]'

The Chair commented that she had a couple of people to approach as possible independent chair, but that she would be grateful for any further suggestions, and that there was no funding available.

Professor Kelsh explained his suggested amendment, following comparison with the Senate Effectiveness Review process. He was in favour of a review but felt that the ToR did not fully justify the review, explain how it would be peopled, whether it would be entirely external/partially internal, whether the Academic Assembly would be consulted, what would happen to the review outcome, nor did it provide a detailed timeline, and that it felt rushed.

Dr Gheduzzi stated that she felt that the ToR were open for interpretation and an independent chair could read them differently, hence she felt it was sensible to rephrase them to direct the chair to address the problems perceived by the Assembly.

The Chair responded that there had been an opportunity to suggest amendments to the proposed ToR during July and for this meeting. She made the case for the review as the Assembly had not been reviewed for at least 9 years and it was good governance to review bodies. She explained that as an independent review the reviewers would work out how to engage with the University. She agreed that the Assembly should be involved in approving the reviewer and hoped to be able to propose a name at the October meeting of the Assembly. Any recommendations would revert to the Assembly for agreement or dismissal.

During further discussion the following views were expressed:

- Giving the chair the ToR and allowing them to engage with the Academic Assembly to understand the issues would be preferable to a small group seeking to determine the issues;
- The proposed ToR were loose and had not been discussed properly by the Assembly;
- The proposed ToR made it sound as though the independent chair was working alone; it was imperative to ensure the review contained feedback;
- The Chair commented that she had tried to provide opportunity for all members to input; that she was happy to add the reason for the review, that the ToR should not be overly restrictive and that the proposed ToR already stated that the recommendations were to be considered by the Assembly;
- An historical overview as a separate part of the review would be useful.

The Chair agreed to redraft the ToR for circulation before the next meeting in October, and to bring the revised ToR and a proposal for the independent chair to the October meeting for approval. The Chair expressed her hope that it would be the final version. The Chair advised that the independent chair could be from within the University but was more likely to be from outside, maybe someone with historical links and previous knowledge of the Assembly.

CHAIR

A vote, using MS Teams Polly, was taken on the first amendment proposed by Professor Robert Kelsh and seconded by Professor David Bird. The outcome was 18 for, 1 against and 3 abstentions. The first amendment was passed. (It was noted that the vote of those who had joined the meeting as 'guest' were not recorded).

Professor Lynn Prince Cooke proposed an alternative second amendment as follows:

'To engage an independent reviewer to chair and undertake the review in autumn in 2020, with support of a small group (about 6) representative of academic assembly. Recommendations from this task and finish group to be considered by AA in early 2021'.

Dr Gheduzzi withdrew her second amendment and seconded that of Professor Prince Cook. The outcome on the vote on this was 20 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions. The second amendment was passed.

711 ACADEMIC ASSEMBLY ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY WORKING GROUP

The Academic Assembly received the motion in relation to the Working Group, contained in the 2nd Report from the Working Group to AA (02/06/2020), Paper AA20/21-004. Professor Kelsh stated that due to the Covid-19 pandemic the date in the motion should be revised to October 2020. He explained that accountability and transparency were a key concern and that the Assembly needed a

Group to pay attention to these issues. Three of the original members had left hence the new election process proposed in the motion. A vote was taken on the motion with the outcome 19 for, 1 against and 1 abstention. The motion was passed.

The Assembly noted the two further reports from the Working Group, Papers AA20/21-005 and 006.

712 DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

The dates of further meetings in 2020/21 were noted as:

Wednesday 28 October 2020 at 1.15pm, an online meeting when the Chair of Council will give an update;
Tuesday 4 May 2021 at 12.30pm.

The meeting concluded at 11.05am
