



Academic Assembly

Wednesday 27 October 2021 at 13.15

Virtual meeting via TEAMS

Present:

Dr Alan Hayes, Chair and 72 attendees

In attendance:

Pam Chesters, Chair of Council

Secretariat

Dr Caroline Harris, Secretary

Jane Eyles, Minutes

Introductory items

731 - Welcome and Quorum

The Chair welcomed attendees and new members.

The Chair gave thanks to Professor Jane White for her service to the Assembly over the past few years as Chair.

The Chair advised that the TEAMS meeting was being recorded for the purposes of minute taking and that the recording would be deleted once this purpose had been served.

732 - Declarations of Interest

Members were asked to declare any conflict of interests and it was noted that for agenda item 739 (*creation of an Academic Assembly Chair's Advisory Group*), Drs Alan Hayes, Steve Wharton, Rob Branston and Paul Shepherd, and Professor Jane White had a conflict of interest.

733 – Membership and Terms of Reference

It was noted that the Chair had been appointed until 31 July 2024.

Members were reminded that the Terms of Reference for Academic Assembly were available on the web: <http://www.bath.ac.uk/statutory-bodies-committees/academic/index.html>

The Chair encouraged members to contribute fully to meetings and that they could use the email address provided for any Chair's business throughout the year; academic-assembly-chair@bath.ac.uk.

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[734 - Minutes of the Previous Meeting - Paper AA21/22-001](#)

The minutes of the previous meeting of Academic Assembly held on 4 May 2021 were approved.

[735 - Actions and Matters Arising](#)

Minute 728: Pass on any suggestions on prioritisation of review recommendations (All members). *There had been no comments forthcoming from members on prioritising review recommendations, see agenda item 739.* **Complete**

Part I

[736 – Relevant decisions of Senate](#)

It was noted that the minutes of meetings of Senate may be viewed at:

<https://www.bath.ac.au/publications/?f.Type%7CY=Minutes&f.Department+or+group%7CX=Senate>

The Chair indicated that he was happy to receive any comments about the minutes from members but brought their attention in particular to the following:

June 2021:

- Changes to the appointment of academic representatives;
- Revised Code of Ethics recommended, and Council approved; the Chair encouraged members to ethically appraise themselves in line with the values of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership;
- Revised Terms of Reference and timescales for Curriculum Transformation Committee and Faculty/School Learning, Teaching and Quality committees;
- The introduction of regular informal check-ins with Directors of Studies;
- Changes to the specifications for undergraduate exit awards of CertHE and DplHE to make them suitable for aegrotat award;
- A place on the CLT website outlining the success criteria for the curriculum transformation proposals, how they will be judged.

October 2021:

- In relation to the Curriculum Transformation, a new Academic Standards Working Group to be formed, chaired by Dr Fran Laughton, charged with ensuring consistency with the regulatory framework;
- A new Education Board and Education Quality and Standards group (EQS) will be formed as part of the review of educational governance. The EQS will report to Senate and concern itself with quality assurance and academic standards, the Education Board will report to University Executive Board and concern itself with education strategy;
- An approach to mitigating assessment measures for 2021/22;
- Amendments to the Fitness to Study policy, changed from a 3-stage process to 2-stage process and referring to 'support to study';
- There would no longer be an automatic right to defer examinations other than via a formal IM claim. Coursework deadline extensions could be offered;
- The revised appointment procedure for Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Dean/Head of School was queried; it was suggested that this referred to

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formalising the use of outside recruitment agencies to create a clearer structure to the recruitment procedure;

- A member asked for an update on the paper to Senate on moving to a single annual promotion point as opposed to the current two, and it was noted that the current schedule was being retained.

737– Elections – Paper AA21/22 – 002

Academic Assembly noted details of Academic Assembly representatives on University committees.

738 – Council Update

Chair of Council, Pam Chesters, thanked Assembly for the invitation to review the past year and echoed the thanks of the Chair of Assembly to Professor Jane White for her contribution to Council whilst Chair of Academic Assembly.

Mrs Chesters noted that when she had last had the opportunity of speaking to Academic Assembly, the extent of the challenges to be faced had not been fully understood and, on behalf of Council, she wanted to thank staff for their excellent contributions to the work of the University. She paid tribute to the Chief Operating Officer for his team's work in making the campus a safe environment and commented that she felt it was no coincidence that this year's National Student Survey results reflected the student's appreciation of the staff's efforts to support them in their journeys.

Council had held more frequent meetings throughout the year, supporting the Executive, responding to fast moving changes, keeping an eye on finances, and receiving assurances from Senate about the changes they had made to ensure high standards. Minutes of Council meetings were published in full on the web; the only redactions were of personal information and commercially sensitive information.

A revised University Strategy had been approved by Council and Senate, the 4 pillars of which were being monitored and would be taken individually at different meetings for in-depth discussion:

- Driving excellence in education;
- High impact research;
- Fostering an outstanding and inclusive community;
- Enhancing strategic partnerships.

The emphasis was now on longer term planning rather than on in-year planning, and how resources were used effectively. Progress had been made with, for example, the institutional Athena SWAN Silver Award, and progress with Bath Beacons.

At Council's recent Strategy Day, a key speaker was Nicola Dandridge, Chief Executive of the Office for Students, the University's regulatory body. She was in a position to see how universities form working partnerships between Council and Senate. She advised that there are no set rules for this relationship and each organisation shapes its own relationship for firm and effective governance between Council and Senate. Council asked for an update each meeting from the Director of Human Resources on staff concerns. Mrs Chesters felt it would not be appropriate to discuss the current pension situation in detail as it was subject

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to a ballot, but she advised that a small group of lay members of Council had been asked to consider the options being proposed by the University and report back to Council.

In response to questions, Mrs Chesters advised:

- The steps taken to ensure that Council was informed of the facts relating to the USS pension included taking views from the cross section of staff on Council, reading the feedback in the free-text box in the recent pension survey; Council would be happy to receive any concerns directly;
- On introducing a viable professorial salary scheme as there was still a significant pay gap for female professorial staff: this was being worked through and Council was concerned to see all data on diversity issues to ensure they were addressed;
- The Chair commented that he was disappointed that the subject based TEF would not continue; whilst acknowledging that an institution had achieved institutional Gold, students still liked to see the individual course's performance. Mrs Chesters commented that institutions need to understand their own strengths and weaknesses, share best practise, and not necessarily rely on league tables.

The Chair thanked Mrs Chesters for reviewing Council business with Academic Assembly.

739 Academic Assembly Review Update – Paper AA21/22 – 003

The Chair introduced the paper updating on the review actions:

1. Every time Assembly meets, there would be an update on progress against recommendations of the review;
2. Establishment of a Chair's Advisory Group; 3 Senators had volunteered – Drs Rob Branston, Paul Shepherd and Steve Wharton, together with the previous Chair, Professor Jane White. Support had been received for this action and a question as to the diversity of the group was satisfied both in terms of gender and academic subject spread. Encouraging more diverse groups to stand as Senators was discussed. The Assembly approved the setting up of the Group.
3. It was agreed to continue hosting meetings via TEAMS as attendance was greater than in-person meetings.

740 Reflection on Return to In-Person Teaching

It had been intended that one of the interim Pro-Vice-Chancellors (Education) would attend to lead on this discussion, but he was unfortunately unavailable. The external environment for teaching and learning, the thinking behind Blended Learning and the move to in-person teaching were discussed; the Chair set the context and asked for comments about how the first semester was going.

- It was commented that the students seemed to have returned to campus very easily;
- There was widespread dissatisfaction expressed at the performance of Panopto which was a cause for concern. Changes had been introduced to the system, late on and it now performed very differently, and scheduling recordings in advance was no longer possible. A Senator advised that he had raised this at Senate and had been given the explanation that there were technical constraints involved when syncing with Zoom. There may be a solution found by Semester Two, but it would be more likely to be next year before it was resolved.

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- The split between in-person and on-line teaching was queried because some lecturers were being given less in-person time than they would like. It was suggested that individuals speak to their own Heads of Department because this had not been an institutional decision.
- It was noted that the hospitality outlets around the campus were extremely busy, with long queues at peak break times. The University was subject to supply chain and staff issues as other areas and so improving the situation was probably out of our control at the moment.
- The issue of risk assessments was raised because there was a lack of confidence in those that had appeared on the web. Initially, there were no risk assessments available in Week 1 but subsequently some very generic ones had been provided; these were lacking in detail particularly in relation to ventilation. Rooms appeared to be as full as ever despite social distancing requirements and many students were not wearing a mask. Staff had been told that refusing to teach would be regarded as a disciplinary offence. There was discussion surrounding the type of facemask being made available by the University with a preference from some Assembly Members for the adoption of FFP2. It was recognised that the associated risk assessments were a complex picture. An example was given of a lecturer taking face masks with him to lectures to enable students to take one upon entering the room.
- The Covid statistics published by the University were questioned as they seemed disproportionately low. It was also suggested that the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) and/or the Students' Union could be asked to support the message about the wearing of face masks.

ACTION: The Chair to raise these matters with the appropriate people and report back.

Part 2

741 – Programme of Meetings for 2021/22

Academic Assembly noted the programme of meetings:

- Tuesday 3 May 2022 at 12.30pm, by TEAMS, to include the Vice-Chancellor's statutory address.

The meeting closed at 14.30

Please contact the Governance Team if you require any further assistance regarding this meeting.
