



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

University
Secretary's
Office.

Minutes Meeting of the Senate

Date: 14 October 2020

Present: The President & Vice-Chancellor in the Chair
Dr P Ali, Professor H Askes, Professor W Baird, Professor P Bath, Professor S Beck, Dr R Bellaby, Professor S Bhaumik, Professor A Bingham, Dr L Bingle, Professor J Brazier, Professor G Brown, Professor C Buck, Mrs A Cantrell, Professor T Chico, Mrs A Clements, Revd Dr J Clines, Professor P Crowther, Professor C Deery, Professor J Derrick, Ms B Eyre, Professor S Fitzmaurice, Professor J Flint, Dr D Forrest, Mr S Foxley, Professor R Freckleton, Professor G Gee, Professor V Gillet, Professor J Grasby, Professor K Hadjri, Dr S Hale, Miss L Hall, Dr V Halliday, Professor R Hand, Professor J Harrison, Professor J Haycock, Mrs A Higaldo-Kingston, Professor R Horn, Professor M Hounslow, Professor N Hughes, Ms S Hussain, Dr J Jones, Ms N Jones, Professor J Kirby, Dr W Kitchen, Ms S M Konstantinidou, Ms E Lynas, Dr C Majewski, Professor S McIntosh, Professor N Monk, Professor T Moore, Professor K Morris, Dr N Murgatroyd, Professor C Newman, Dr S D North, Professor A Pacey, Professor G Panoutsos, Ms K Pears, Professor D Petley, Dr E Poku, Dr S Pukallus, Dr L Robson, Dr S Rushton, Mr R Simpson, Dr S Staniland, Professor C Stokes, Mr R Sykes, Professor C H Tan, Professor G Valentine, Dr D Vessey, Professor M T Vincent, Dr T Walther, Professor C Watkins, Professor L Wilson, Mr S Zuddas.

Secretary: Dr T Strike

In attendance: Mr M Borland, Mrs K Clements, Miss A Davison, Dr E Smith, Ms K Sullivan, Mr D Swinn, Ms S Whitby, Mr L Wild, Mr I D Wright.

Apologies: The Senate received apologies from five members.

WELCOME

The President & Vice-Chancellor (P&VC) welcomed members, including the newly elected and appointed members, to the virtual meeting of the Senate. The new student representatives, including Beth Eyre, Students' Union President, and Ellie Lynas, Students' Union Education Officer were welcomed and introduced.

1. President & Vice-Chancellor's Report

The President & Vice-Chancellor (P&VC) presented the report and provided updates:

- (a) Covid-19: DfE had published updated guidance regarding the reopening of higher education buildings and campuses. It included the need for continuing and prospective students to receive clear, accurate and timely information; institutions needed to have plans in place to control and manage local

outbreaks; testing of all staff and students was not required; and it outlined four 'tiers of restriction' in relation to teaching provision.

In response to a submitted written question, the P&VC stated that there were currently 3,531 students self-isolating, with the split between those self-isolating students living in University accommodation and those living in private accommodation being approximately 50:50.

- (b) Brexit: It increasingly appeared that an agreement between the UK and the EU on the future relationship would not be reached, or that any agreement and trade deal would be so narrow as to be of limited benefit to the higher education sector. The focus of the University's work was now largely internally facing, and on ensuring that the University was as best prepared as possible for the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020.
- (c) Student recruitment: The University's overall undergraduate recruitment position remained strong, despite the uncertainty of return to campus and the disruption created by changes to A Level grades. As of 2 October, figures for Home UG and Overseas UG enrolment were in line with expectations following the Confirmation, Adjustment and Clearing process. Significant uncertainty remained, however, with the overseas PGT cohort. While applications have held up, the delay in the commencement of teaching meant that PGT figures would only become available in November as those students begin to arrive and enrol.
- (d) Success and achievement: Recent examples included the Nuclear AMRC had secured government funding to establish a new advanced manufacturing research centre in Derby; the Students' Union being the Whatuni Student Choice Award for Best Students' Union for the fourth consecutive year; the *Off the Shelf* festival and *Festival of the Mind*; participating in a major UK study into the long-term health impacts of Covid-19; and collaborating with refugees in Syria to develop sustainable PPE.

During discussion, it was clarified that the temporary pause in teaching for one week applied to all teaching as the increasing number of students self-isolating meant that all departments were experiencing a smaller number of students attending face-to-face teaching.

2. Declaration of Conflict of Interests

No conflicts of interest were declared.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 June 2020

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2020, having been circulated, were approved as an accurate record.

4. Matters Arising on the Minutes

There were no other matters arising on the Minutes that were not covered elsewhere on the Agenda.

5. Matters Requiring Approval

Senate received and noted a summary of the matters for which Senate's formal approval was sought.

6. Annual Academic Assurance Report

Senate considered the Annual Academic Assurance Report, produced by the Senate Academic Assurance Committee (SAAC), and approved its submission for consideration and approval at Council's meeting, subject to minor rewording of the section 2.6.1 regarding A levels. Attention was drawn to the traffic light summary of the level of assurance for each of the seven themes the Committee had examined in the previous academic year.

During discussion, it was suggested, in relation to section 2.6.1, regarding A levels, that in order to provide greater clarity, the text should refer to the correlation between entry grade and degree classification not entry grades per se. In relation to the Unfair Means theme, it was clarified that any implications for resourcing the actions considered necessary resulting from its assurance findings were beyond SAAC's remit. A proposal was made that the scope for potential next steps in relation to this theme be explored by SAAC. This would need to be undertaken in the context that SAAC's practice is not to directly commission new work itself but to comment on the level of assurance that can be given based on evidence of existing practice as it is found.

7. Student Return to Campus

Senate considered the paper and noted the information provided to students on what the University is committing to deliver, including on-line and on-campus learning. Senate was assured that the requirements set by the DfE in relation to reopening buildings and campuses were being met. It was highlighted that the paper was intended to inform and assure the Senate of the work undertaken over the summer regarding the students' return to campus, which had followed DfE guidance, Health & Safety guidance and the University's legal obligations. All staff were thanked for their work at speed and under pressure.

An update on more recent developments was provided by the P&VC. The Prime Minister had announced a national 3 tier 'Local Covid Alert Level' framework. The announcement was clear that schools, colleges and universities would remain open, even in Tier 3. Sheffield was at the time in Tier 2. Alongside this, the DfE had 4- 'tiers of restriction' relating to the provision of face-to-face education, which had some flexibilities within each tier but which did not correlate to the national 3 tiers. It was anticipated that different universities would move between the DfE tiers at different times. After discussions with Sheffield City Council and the local public health team, having assessed the local situation, they agreed that it would be appropriate for the University to resume teaching at a level commensurate with the DfE Tier 2. DfE Tier 2 involved providing a blended learning experience but with a reduction in the amount of face-to-face teaching and increased risk mitigation. It was expected that all programmes would retain some level of face-to-face provision. Departments had been asked, with oversight and support from faculties, to make decisions around the learning provision that would be in place from Monday 19 October for their individual courses, taking the following factors into consideration:

- i) The safety of staff and students
- ii) The wellbeing of students
- iii) The pedagogical benefits and student experience
- iv) Learning outcomes

The University's priority has been the health, safety and wellbeing of students and staff. In consultation with local public health teams and the University's own academic experts, the University had been assured by the local public health team that based on the information available there was a very low risk of student to staff transmission within teaching spaces. Not all risk could be eliminated but the temporary suspension of face-to-face teaching had been used to put in place additional risk mitigation measures. The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) made a recommendation to the Government, before students returned to campuses, that university and college teaching should be online for the Autumn term. It was important to note that, despite this recommendation, the guidance from the DfE to universities (updated on 30 September) maintained that students should return to universities. There was demand from students for blended learning and the approach being taken would allow Departments to develop plans with Faculties to deliver an educational experience that students sought and which followed the DfE guidance and public health advice.

The following issues were discussed and clarifications were provided:

- (a) Testing and tracing
 - (i) The University had followed the advice of the Director of Public Health (DPH) to rely on the testing capacity within the city, rather than set up its own testing scheme.
 - (ii) The tracing system on campus was believed to be as targeted and effective as it could be.
- (b) Mitigations
 - (i) The University's Health & Safety guidance was being kept under review, was not fixed, and any mitigations deemed necessary would be put in place, and any concerns should be fed in.
 - (ii) Communication regarding the capacity of rooms following re-assessment would be enhanced.
 - (iii) Rooms could be well ventilated without necessarily having mechanical ventilation.
 - (iv) The University had checked the social distancing arrangements and other safety measures on campus with the Director of Public Health who was comfortable that the measures were appropriate.
 - (v) Clarification was given regarding the roll-out of training referred to in section 4.1 of the Report.
- (c) Face-to-face teaching
 - (i) Departments had been asked explicitly to consider the interest of students. All programmes were expected to have an element of face-to-face teaching at all levels with the proportion to be determined by departments in collaboration with Faculties.
 - (ii) There would be variations in face-to-face teaching depending upon disciplinary considerations, the nature of the programme, and if Departments and Faculties were to choose to prioritise different cohorts, for example first year students at the beginning of the academic year and then finalists later in the academic year.
- (d) Staff

- (i) Heads of Department had guidance regarding the return to campus of staff not involved in face-to-face teaching and this was being managed locally.
 - (ii) The additional demands on staff were recognised and work was taking place to examine how the University's internal processes could be amended to reduce burdens placed on staff.
- (e) Student arrival/departure
- (i) The arrival of PGT students was expected to be different to the arrival of UG students as the arrival window was longer. Many international PGT students would be coming from places with lower rates of infection than the UK and international students would be expected to quarantine upon arrival in the UK.
 - (ii) Arrangements for students returning home before Christmas and guidance in relation to reading weeks would be considered by the On-Campus Activity Monitoring Group.
- (f) Student support
- (i) Student welfare and academic support had driven decision-making, recognising the highly constrained circumstances. Student engagement could also be achieved through other activity on campus, for example the library, as well as through on-campus learning and teaching.
- (g) Technology
- (i) It was acknowledged that the technological infrastructure, for example, reliable broadband in student accommodation was not perfect but significant work had been undertaken by IT Services. Work was being undertaken on how students could be supported in relation to broadband issues, if they did not qualify for hardship funds.

Senate commended colleagues who were working to support those students who were either unwell or self-isolating.

REPORTS FROM STATUTORY BODIES

8. Report on the Proceedings of the Council

(Meeting held on 13 July 2020)

Senate received and noted the Report on the Proceedings of the Council.

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES OF THE SENATE

9. Report from the Chair of the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee

Senate received and approved the following:

- (a) New, Significantly Amended, Discontinued and Suspended Programmes approved by Faculties between 7 May 2020 and 28 September 2020
- (b) An updated University of Sheffield Graduate Attributes Framework

Attention was drawn to the fact that the Committee had not met since the previous meeting of Senate and recommendations were brought to Senate under Chair's Action taken by the Chair of the Committee.

10. Report from the Chair of the Senate Research and Innovation Committee

Senate received and approved the establishment of a University Early Career Researcher Committee (UECRC).

Attention was drawn to the fact that the Committee had not met since the previous meeting of Senate and the recommendation was brought to Senate under Chair's Action taken by the Chair of the Committee. Updates were provided on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on research activity, and on preparations for REF 2021. It was clarified that UECRC would not have devoted resources and resource implications related to implementation of work from the Committee would be considered in the normal manner.

11. Report of the Research Ethics Committee

(Meeting held on 9 September 2020)

Senate received and approved the Report, including the impact of Covid-19 on research ethics, the Committee had commented on and endorsed a new draft 'Preventing Harm in Research and Innovation (Safeguarding) Policy', the Committee had endorsed new guidance developed in response to the findings of an internal audit of the University's ethics arrangements, the Committee had endorsed a proposal for UREC guidance to recommend that Data Management Plans are included in ethics applications as supporting documents, the Committee had considered a number of cases of potential breach of the Ethics Policy, and a complaint case.

During discussion, it was clarified the Committee had not decided whether it needed to formulate a formal position on the Hong Kong national security law.

12. Report of the Senate Academic Assurance Committee

(Meeting held on 22 September 2020)

Senate received and approved the Report. Senate considered the topic of student employability and concluded that it was relevant to the Committee's remit of providing assurance on (i.) the University's maintenance of academic quality and standards in learning and teaching and in research, and (ii.) the enhancement of the quality of the student experience.

13. Report of the Senate Budget Committee

(Meeting held on 9 July 2020)

Senate received and approved the Report, including noting that the Committee had received verbal briefings on the Financial Forecast and budget 2020/21, and on the Planning Round.

OTHER MATTERS

14. Returning Officer's Report

A report on the outcome of elections to Senate and from Senate to Council was received and noted.

15. Report on Action Taken

A Report on action taken since the last meeting of the Senate was received and noted.

16. Major Research Grants and Contracts

A Report listing major research grants and contracts awarded since the last meeting of the Senate was received and noted.

17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.