



**Minutes of the meeting of the Academic Board
held at 2.00 pm on Wednesday, 17 June 2020
MS Teams**

Present

Pat Bailey (Chair)
Ian Albery
Asa Hilton Barber
Craig Barker
Gilberto Buzzi
Alessio Corso
Geoff Cox
Kate Ellis
Nadia Gaoua
Marc Griffith
Sajjad Hossain
Steve Hunter
Paul Ivey
Deborah Johnston
Janet Jones
Nelly Kibirige
Nicki Martin
Sarah Moore-Williams
George Ofori
Jenny Owen
Carrie Rutherford
Warren Turner
Helen Young
Shushma Patel

Apologies

Patrick Callaghan
Steve Faulkner
Gary Francis
Luke Murray
Tony Roberts

In attendance

Dominique Phipp
John Cole
Sally Skillett-Moore

1. **Welcome and apologies**

The Chair welcomed the members to the meeting. The above apologies were noted.

2. **Declarations of interest**

No member declared any conflict of interest in any item on the agenda.

3. **Minutes of previous meeting**

The Board approved the minutes of three previous meetings on 26 February 2020, an emergency meeting on 22 May 2020, and an additional meeting held via email on 5 June 2020.

4. **Matters arising**

January course starts - the Chair noted that he is now in a position to form the Task and Finish group agreed upon at the last meeting. So far two members have volunteered to join this group and the Chair will be asking two further members to participate. He noted that this group is important, as any knock-on complications resulting from alteration of the January-starting courses must be carefully reviewed.

Temporary changes to Academic Regulations - The Chair noted that the final version of the COVID-19 Addendum to the Academic Regulations has been circulated to the Board for this meeting. It collates feedback from colleagues in academic groups and on this Board.

5. **Provost report**

The Chair noted that his report will focus initially on the coronavirus pandemic related issues before moving on to other updates.

The Chair began by listing the key groups responsible for future decision making. He explained that these are:

1. Weekly meetings chaired by the PVC for Education. Members include the DESEs and the Director for Academic Quality Development. This group's initial purpose was to review resources needed by students this academic year. It has now moved on to consider challenges for delivery of courses in semester 1.
2. This Board. The QSC, RES, and STEX Committees will be fielding recommendations for any regulation changes to this Board and we will act as the formal sign off for the university.
3. Weekly Gold Command Meetings. This group was formed to respond to the immediate impact of the coronavirus pandemic and initially met daily. It led our emergency response and had broad representation across the

university from IT to students and estates. This daily group has now disbanded, but a weekly group still meets to ensure that key activities across campus are operating adequately or actions are being implemented for improvement. This group is also responsible for scrutinising communications on the changing situation to staff and students.

4. University Management Committee. In the past this group met monthly to consider key drivers for the university including recruitment, apprenticeships, international students etc. Now its meetings focus on normal business for half, with the other half spent on issues related to the coronavirus pandemic. An additional meeting of this group is held every fortnight also to focus only on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.
1. An extra slot before weekly Executive Meetings. The focus of this meeting is issues related to the coronavirus pandemic, such as resourcing, income sources, and investment decisions. Its remit covers the entire LSBU Group, including SBC and SBA.

The Chair explained that, going forward, the Academic Board will focus on issues affecting academic delivery in the next academic year. For example, the reopening of campus and format and delivery of courses in semester 1.

Teaching

The Chair provided an update on plans for course delivery in semester 1.

- The intention is that all core curriculum material, which would traditionally have been delivered through face-to-face lectures, will be delivered remotely. This could be either by lecture capture or in another format of course providers' choosing.
- We expect campus to be open, with social distancing, for academic staff and students. This will include all specialist facilities. Courses requiring specialist facilities will therefore be able to hold onsite face-to-face teaching as normal.
- The intention is that some face-to-face teaching will be available every week for every student. Therefore, online teaching of core curriculum material will be supplemented by additional activities, some of which will be onsite.

The Chair explained that delivery of these plans will be heavily influenced upon social distancing policy set by the Government. Our facilities on campus can accommodate roughly four times more students if we are permitted to remain only one metre apart, rather than two metres.

For international or vulnerable students who cannot travel to campus, we will be seeking to deliver all aspects of our courses online. This will mean students will be able to complete their courses entirely from home. We cannot

guarantee that this will be achievable for all subjects, as certain courses require practical work to achieve course learning outcomes.

Estates

- The detail of course delivery will be determined by availability of on campus space, which we hope to finalise within the next couple of weeks. We are seeking to be as compliant as possible with Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) guidelines, despite the challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic.
- We expect campus to begin reopening from early July. By the end of July we hope to have opened the whole campus, but the plans are not yet finalised. Reopening will require everybody to follow health and safety procedures.
- We intend for the library to reopen from 6 July. We are prioritising early reopening of the library, as it will provide space for students who are unable to study properly at home. Student surveys have shown us that a significant number of students do not have adequate space, technology or internet connection to study at home. Our research students will also benefit from the library opening as early as possible.

Applicant numbers and income

- The Chair explained that our applicant numbers were much higher this year than last year (around 25% up on last year). At present, our year-on-year offer acceptances are the same as last year. However, applicant responses are still coming in as UCAS has extended its deadline for students to accept their university places this year in light of the coronavirus pandemic.
- We expect to lose a large number of international students and accommodation fees due to travel restrictions. We forecast that this will result in a £12m shortfall against our original 20/21 budget. This is not as bad as it sounds as we had anticipated a record year for 20/21 with around £10-15m more in income than this year. As a result of this shortfall, our income is anticipated to be similar to that generated last year.
- We are in a much better position financially than the majority of other universities as we do not forecast a deficit.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor updated the Board on progress to the London Road Building development project. He explained that refurbishment has begun, but the date for completion has been delayed due to the impact on supply chains of the coronavirus pandemic. The original target opening date of May 2021 has therefore been pushed back to June 2021. He noted that the project has financial pressures, as the building is in a worse state than we anticipated. The project's budget has not yet been exceeded.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor added that our perception of a 'learning hub' has also radically changed in the past few months of lockdown. He felt that we have a unique opportunity now to redefine how we plan to use the building, how academics across the university can maximise its use, and to determine how we will take learning forward. He noted that the site will be a 365-day and 24/7 space, and proposed that it could also be a significant digital space, as well as a physical space. He suggested, for example, that the former Elephant Studios could be used to develop more audio and film recordings of our teaching for students.

The PVC for Education updated the Board on work to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. She noted that a key theme for semester 1 is to plan how we can progress in a positive way, in line with our new corporate strategy, rather than reacting defensively to the pandemic. She suggested, for example, that we could consider partnering with another provider to pilot delivery of some of our courses. She added that we hope to build a community for best practice course delivery on virtual platforms, and develop our resources to deliver teaching in a future-proof way.

The Dean for the School of Arts and Creative Industries agreed, commenting that it will be a long and enterprising journey. She noted that we need to consider how to curate content online and deliver pedagogies differently.

The Dean for the School of Engineering shared his concern around timelines for course delivery and the disruption caused by the pandemic. He explained that, as financial plans are dependent on student recruitment and the UCAS deadline for course applicants is tomorrow, we are challenged to communicate our guarantees for course delivery whilst also developing revolutionary content and practices. He felt that this will become easier to communicate in the longer term.

The Chair responded that staff have been working around the clock to adjust to the new circumstances, prioritising decisions in front of us, and delaying long-term decisions until the situation became clearer. He praised staff, who knew not to try tackling all the developing challenges at once, but noted that there are now key decisions about 2020/21 to be made. He acknowledged that this will be challenging, as we are trying to provide clarity against a backdrop of change, but felt that students are understanding of the difficult circumstances.

The Chair suggested that we ought to err on side of confidence regarding our course delivery, rather than cautiously sharing only vague statements with students. He noted that current information online about LSBU's course delivery for the next academic year is misleading, and stated that we do need to give returning and new students a clearer steer. The Chair was confident that LSBU is up to the challenge as we have a lot of inhouse talent for developing innovative teaching materials, as shown during the Staff Conference.

6. Issues from the Student Union

The Board thanked the Student Union representatives for their hard work as members of the Board for the past year and wished them well in their future endeavours.

The Student Union President thanked the Board, and in particular the Chair for always being available to respond to student queries.

The Board noted that the most recent issue causing students anxiety is plagiarism. The Student Union President explained that students want to understand how the University will identify, measure and manage plagiarism, particularly in the School of HSC.

7. Student Experience Committee revised Terms of Reference

The Board received the revised terms of reference. It noted that the changes are intended to improve the speed by which the University can respond to issues raised by students, as well as enhance oversight of key metrics and other performance data.

The Student Union President commented that she is very supportive of the changes and glad to see more student voices on the committee.

The Chair was also supportive of the changes, noting that the committee's role in monitoring and responding to key issues of performance, attainment, etc. is now more explicit. He hoped that the revised terms of reference should help the committee to avoid becoming stalled by specific student issues.

The PVC for Education was pleased that the revised terms of reference will bring a closer alignment between academic and non-academic aspects of the student experience. She explained that the changes are the result of a collaborative piece of work with other areas of the University, such as student welfare and facilities.

She also noted the importance of understanding our performance in-year, so that we can engage with students on issues before they graduate. At present, performance data is only analysed upon receipt of awarding gap and progression data at year end.

The Board approved the revised terms of reference.

8. Academic KPIs Performance

The committee deferred discussion of next year's targets until the next meeting as full performance data (e.g. NSS Scores) for 19/20 is not yet available.

9. **Academic planning and course development update**

The Director of Academic Quality Development noted that there is mounting pressure to validate courses faster. He recommended reinstating the Academic Planning Panel (APP) to scrutinise new courses in development to ensure that the course validations process allows sufficient time for decision-making about student applicant dates. He noted that the proposal to reinstate the APP has been reviewed by the Competitions and Markets Authority group and received approval from the Quality and Standards Committee.

The Chair commented that the APP is a very large committee and asked whether its membership could be reduced for more manageable timetabling and easier strategic decision-making. He noted that APP committee meetings could follow the University Management Committee, as most APP members are also part of that group. The Director of Academic Quality Development supported broad membership for the APP, including Executives, to ensure all areas of the University are made aware of courses in development as early as possible.

The Board was concerned that it takes the best part of three years to launch a new course, including 20 months marketing within the UCAS recruitment cycle. It was noted that the process can be accelerated in special circumstances.

The Board discussed the balance between ensuring new courses are CMA compliant and agile in the face of challenging circumstances, such as possible further lockdowns due to COVID-19. It agreed that the process does not provide enough flexibility, particularly as entry of new courses to UCAS happens at a specific time of year (November) which could easily be missed if our courses are not ready for delivery.

The Dean for the BUS School suggested that, in lieu of shortening the timeframe for course development, new course programs must be written differently or more loosely to ensure that they are adaptive to new circumstances.

The PVC for Education noted that a rigorous validation process must be maintained to ensure we invest in the right courses. She explained that developing new courses is not cost-free, though it may use existing staff and facilities, as use of those resources for one course prevents other courses from doing so. She agreed that the process needs to be quicker, however, and in place for the coming academic year.

The Board noted that course development is currently very siloed between differing disciplines. It was suggested that a solution to this could be for key staff, employers, and students to assemble once or twice a year for strategic sessions to review interdisciplinary new courses in development. The Chair was supportive of this suggestion, noting that a similar process has worked well for review of new partnerships. He added that it could also deliver other benefits, such as a forum to share better guidance, receive training, and

ensure that initial document produced is of a higher quality to streamline the course validations process.

It was agreed that it must be clear from the outset which School will deliver and “own” the course, as cross-subsidised courses will otherwise be challenging to manage.

The Board noted that the length of the course validations process remains the same as in previous academic years.

The Chair asked the Director of Academic Quality Development to review the mechanisms for shortening the course validations timeline, including the possibility of interdisciplinary strategy sessions. He summarised that the Board was supportive of the process outlined, but agreed that it must be faster.

10. **Final version of the COVID-19 Addendum**

The Board received the final version of the COVID-19 Addendum. It noted the key change made since the Board gave its approval on 5 June is:

- Exceptional compensation is now available to students in line with exceptional condonement. For COVID-19 affected modules, Awards and Progression Boards will be empowered to progress students after the first sit of an assessment by awarding exceptional compensation, provided that the student has met the course learning outcomes.

The Chair was supportive of the change, noting it gives exam boards much more flexibility than ever in the past. He added that we also now have a chance to explore if more flexible progression opportunities might be suitable for academic regulations beyond the pandemic.

The PVC for Education noted that the change will ensure students are not forced to complete four sits of an assessment this academic year before condonement or compensation can be applied. She commented that in a normal year our policy on resits does guarantee a very high rate of non-progression. Students may want the opportunity to progress, even if with condoned or compensated lower marks, rather than not progressing at all.

The Board discussed how the process will apply to students with extenuating circumstances who do want to resit their assessments. It was noted that students' result letters will include an offer to redo assessments for which students' have been given a compensated or condoned pass. This opportunity will be particularly important for courses that are highly regulated by external providers. It was recommended that students are advised to discuss this decision with their course directors beforehand, as resitting may not change their overall grade.

11. OIA Annual Statement 2019

The Chair was disconcerted by the high number of cases referred to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). He suggested that these figures might be attributed to the number of stage 1 referrals now reported. Previously stage 1 referrals would not have been included in this data.

The Board noted the number of referrals to the OIA has reduced significantly in the last five years as LSBU has improved its internal complaints resolutions process.

The Chair stated that he would provide an update on the report at the next meeting, following discussion with the Student Case Officer.

12. Reports from sub-committees

The Chair praised the reports from sub-committees. There were no other comments.

13. Any other business

The Chair stated that an extraordinary meeting of the Board may be needed over the summer to review core performance data and consider the OfS's requirements for registration. It might be possible for the Board to respond to any business via email. The Chair asked the Board to consider the data it would like to review in the core performance data report, and asked that any other issues requiring discussion also come to this summer meeting.

**Date of next meeting
2.00 pm, on Wednesday, 28 October 2020**

Confirmed as a true record

..... (Chair)