

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHER EDUCATION CORPORATION**ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND AUDIT COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting of the Academic Standards and Audit Committee held on 2 May 2023.

PRESENT: Frank Haddleton (Chair)

Jannette Bowyer
Veronica Earle
Marjolein Groefsema
Jacqueline Hulse
Jenny Lorimer
Tony Rosella
Mairi Watson

Jo Cahill
Sarah Flynn
Barbara Henry
Scott Isaacs
Alison McLauchlin
Stefanie Schmeer
Sherael Webley

Michaela Cottee
Liz Gormley-Fleming
Cheryl Holman
Mariana Lilley
Catherine Rendell
Aman Tripathi

IN ATTENDANCE:

Lisa Uttley
Earle Abrahamson

Faith Goligher

Joanna Rawska

1 APOLOGIES

The Committee received apologies from Dr Susan Grey, Julie Kelly and Mel Golder.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (IF ANY)

There were no declarations of interest by members, Officers in Attendance or others present in any of the matters to be considered during the meeting.

3 MINUTES - 14 MARCH 2023

The minutes were confirmed as accurate.

4 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

The Committee noted the detailed information concerning the actions agreed by the Committee given in the associated Minutes and the summary of actions agreed by the Committee held on 24 January 2023 in relation to Minute 69.2 Audit of Office for Students Ongoing Condition of Registration B5: Changes to UPR IM 11 to be reported once complete.

AGREED that the Summary of Actions as detailed in the report be noted and Minute 69.2 from the meeting of the Committee held on 24 January 2023 be retained until completed.

5 CHAIR'S OVERVIEW

The Committee received an update from the Chair.

The Chair explained how that the proposed industrial action may impact on the examinations and assessments and the decisions taken by the University to put plans in place to mitigate against and reduce such impact on students. The scale of the industrial action was not particularly large at the institution. Further discussions would take place with the Deans of School and Associate Deans to ensure the plans were developed and implemented.

6 A RESPONSE TO SCHOOL NON-CONTINUATION RATE REPORTS

The Committee received the Summary of the School Reports on Non-Continuation, with likely causes of high non-continuation identified, whether any student characteristics were particularly affected or noticeable student skills deficits apparent, and Schools' actions in response.

The report set out the recommendations that the University needed to address, referenced any University-level strategies and structures which should be reviewed, together with the areas that should be prioritised going forward.

The Pro Vice Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) explained that the new Student Community Committee (SCC), commencing in September 2023 would report directly into the Chief Executive Group (CEG) and would complement the business of the Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC). The increased involvement of the Strategic Business Units (SBUs), rather than the Schools, would provide a joined up approach which would lead to increased efficiencies and targeting of resources.

It was agreed that;

1. The key themes identified in the review and the necessary actions required to address non-continuation be noted; and
2. The following steps be taken to ensure that:
 - i. In advance of registration, all students understand the financial implications of coming to university and, once here, that there are mechanisms in place, including well-targeted hardship funding, to provide a swift response when students get into financial difficulty;
 - ii. Excellent well-signposted Health and Wellbeing support and guidance is in place;
 - iii. There be equitable and effective Academic Skills Support so that students have the confidence to continue; and
 - iv. Timely academic support to give students the confidence to get back on track if they fall behind and supportive assessment processes which enables them to do so.

7 **STUDENT PERFORMANCE MONITORING GROUP (SPMG) FINAL REPORT 2022/23**

The Deputy Director of Academic Quality Assurance, Catherine Rendell, introduced the final report of the Student Performance Monitoring Group (SMPG) for 2022/23 on data from 2021/22.

The Committee noted that in order to allow for more responsive actions, the SPMG had produced two interim reports containing data as it became available. Interim report 1 had been presented to this Committee 6th December 2022 to focus on non-continuation, whilst interim report 2 had been presented to the Education and Student Experience Committee (ESEC) on 17th January 2023 to focus on data according to student characteristics and APP targets.

The final report included the data in interim reports 1 and 2 and, in addition, the public data on undergraduate awards, academic misconduct data and academic appeals/complaints data.

All Schools were about to receive a visit from SPMG members and there would be an opportunity to discuss the report in detail.

It was agreed that;

That the report be noted.

8 **EXTERNAL EXAMINERS REPORTS 2021-2022**

The Committee received a summary of External Examiners reports for the academic year 2021-22 from the Chair, showing where they had;

- i Disagreed with the questions asked of them;
- ii Disagreed or partly agreed with the questions asked of them.

The analysis was mostly positive, with the proportion of externals disagreeing being small. Only 4 reports were red-rated out of 326 in total. This RAG rating is based on the seriousness of the concerns raised in the report. The relevant Schools are required to report to the PVC(ESE) on how they are responding to these red-rated reports.

Non-attendance of externals at Boards has increased to 44 compared to 35 the year before. The reasons for this increase are being investigated, and Schools are requested to encourage all

School-specific summaries that made up these University-wide summaries were sent to Schools in April, with a request to take them to School Academic Committees for discussion.

It was agreed that;

That the updated summary of Examiner's Annual Reports, 2021/22 be noted.

9 SUMMARY OF AUDIT PROGRESS, 2020/21 AND 2021/22

The Deputy Director of Academic Quality Assurance, Catherine Rendell, introduced the report which detailed the progress on actions arising out of Academic Standards and Audit Committee audits 2020-2023.

It was agreed that;

That the actions arising out of Academic Standards and Audit Committee audits 2020-2023 be noted.

10 AUDIT OF UKSCQA EXTERNAL EXAMINING PRINCIPLES

The Associate Director of Academic Quality Assurance, Jan Bowyer and Associate Dean (Academic Quality Assurance) in the School of Physics, Engineering and Maths, Dr Mariana Lilley, co-presented the report on the Audit of UKSCQA External Examining Principles. The purpose of the audit which was to satisfy the University that its processes for External Examining were in alignment with the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) External Examining Principles, recommending changes where required to bring the University's processes in alignment with the Principles and to identify any enhancements that it may be desirable for the University to incorporate into its processes.

It was agreed that;

Substantial Assurance had been provided, that there were generally sound systems of control in place, which were being consistently applied, but with some weaknesses in control and/or evidence of non-compliance be noted.

That actions had been agreed in response to the recommendations, and responses would be monitored by ASAC.

ACTION: Monitoring by the Academic Standards and Audit Committee (ASAC)

11 AUDIT OF OFFICE FOR STUDENTS ONGOING CONDITION OF REGISTRATION B1: ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

The Associate Director of Academic Quality Assurance, Jo Cahill presented the report. The aim of the review was to assess the extent to which the University of Hertfordshire's regulations, procedures and guidance took account of all the requirements of the Office for Students (OfS) ongoing Condition of Registration B1: Academic Experience (OfS, 2022).

The Committee noted that whilst no essential recommendations were made, a range of enhancement recommendations were proposed. The enhancement recommendations were essentially suggesting a documentary review was needed in order that the language used in UH Policy, Regulation, Processes and Guidance was aligned to that of B1 and that it was transparent that the requirements of B1 were being considered. For ease of tracking the specific documentary change recommendations were itemised in the report.

It was agreed that;

Substantial Assurance had been provided, that there were generally sound systems of control in place, which were being consistently applied, but with some weaknesses in control and/or evidence of non-compliance be noted.

That actions had been agreed in response to the recommendations, and responses would be monitored by ASAC.

ACTION: Monitoring by the Academic Standards and Audit Committee (ASAC)

12 ASSESSMENT REGULATIONS (UPR AS12 VERSION 15.0)

In 2021/22 OfS developed a revised approach to the regulation of Quality and Standards, to strengthen their own risk-based oversight. In 2022 they published a revised Condition B4 on Assessment and Awards, along with associated guidance. A subsequent review of the University's UPRs and processes against the revised Condition B4 by ASAC led to some recommendations, including:

- i the inclusion of OfS definitions such as 'assessed effectively' in the UPRs;
- ii additional requirements for staff reviewing work prior to being handed out to students;
- iii changes to satisfy OfS requirements on retention of student work.

Amendments have also been made to UPR AS12 to accommodate digital assessments which

It was agreed that;

That the proposed changes be agreed.

13 APPEALS PROCESS FOR STUDENTS AT PARTNER INSTITUTIONS (UPR AS13, APPENDIX I)

In 2020/21, the University amended UPR AS13, Appendix I, to clarify that all formal appeals against the decision of examination boards should be made to the Dean of the appropriate School for investigation. However, following discussions with Schools, it was clear that the University could place confidence in the ability of some partners to undertake appeals investigations on its behalf.

It was therefore proposed that, following approval by the Director of Academic Quality Assurance (or nominee), identified partners should be given delegated responsibility to undertake such investigations.

It was agreed that;

Following approval by the Director of Academic Quality Assurance (or nominee), identified partners should be given delegated responsibility to undertake such investigations.

That the proposed amendments to UPR AS13, Appendix I (Assessments and Examinations - Regulations for students (including requests for the review of examination decisions (appeals procedure)) (partner organisation-delivered provision)) be agreed.

14 UPDATE TO EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES UPRS - EXCEPTIONS TO THE 'FIT-TO-SIT' PROCESS (UPR AS14 C38) STRUCTURE AND ASSESSMENT REGULATIONS - UNDERGRADUATE AND TAUGHT POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES)

One of the exceptions to the 'fit-to-sit' rule refers to a student becoming unwell during an examination or in-class test but was focussed on invigilated examinations and tests. A process had therefore also been clarified for un-invigilated circumstances. The proposed amendments to UPR AS14 (Structure and Assessment Regulations – Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes) would provide clarification.

It was agreed that;

That the proposed amendments to UPR AS14 (Structure and Assessment Regulations – Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes) be agreed.

15 **DEFERRAL FOR SUSPENDED STUDENTS (UPR AS14, SECTION D5.1 (STRUCTURE AND ASSESSMENT REGULATIONS - UNDERGRADUATE AND TAUGHT POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES))**

UPR SA17 (Student Suspension Regulations) states that ‘Students who suspend their studies go dormant with outstanding assessments would normally be granted a deferral by the Module Board’. However, this was not widely known amongst Chairs and Clerks of examination boards.

It was therefore proposed that a similar/same statement was made in UPR AS14. The amendment to UPR AS14, section D5.1 (Structure and Assessment Regulations – Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes) was detailed in the report.

It was agreed that;

That the proposed amendments to UPR AS14, section D5.1 (Structure and Assessment Regulations – Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes) be agreed.

16 **UPDATE TO ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT UPRS (UPR AS14, APPENDIX III)**

The University’s regulations on academic integrity and academic misconduct were being updated for the following reasons:

- a) to explain the University’s position on the use of AI tools in producing assessed work;
- b) to ensure that, where appropriate, English language can be tested in assessments as required by Condition B4 of the OfS’s ongoing conditions of registration;
- c) to clarify a number of academic misconduct offences in the light of (i) new AI tools and (ii) online rather than face-to-face assessments;
- d) to make clear to Schools that Stage 1 proceedings are non-disciplinary and, as such, the process for handling academic misconduct at Stage 1 should reflect this.

It was agreed that;

That the amendments to UPR AS14, Appendix III (Academic Integrity and Academic Misconduct) as set out in the report be approved, subject to the correction of several typographical errors.

17 **ACADEMIC REGISTRY UPDATE**

The Assistant Registrar (Academic Services), Lisa Uttley, presented the report which provided an update on the core activities of Academic Registry “AR” during April 2023, namely, the various teams are busy supporting critical student and academic processes.

The report highlighted a number of specific risks:

1. A number of teams had been called upon to prioritise development work for Skilled which was impacting on business-as-usual activities.
2. The timeliness and/or quality of information from some Schools had caused issues.
3. The level of student debt and impact of student contact regarding their fees continued to have a significant impact on the work of the team.

It was agreed that;

That the activities being undertaken to deliver both student and academic administration by the Academic Registrar teams be noted.

18 DEGREE APPRENTICESHIPS UPDATE

The Committee received a verbal update from the Associate Director of Academic Quality Assurance, Liz Gormley-Fleming on the Degree Apprenticeships at the University.

It was agreed that;

That the verbal update from the Associate Director (Academic Quality), Liz Gormley-Fleming on the Degree Apprenticeships at the University be noted.

19 PEOPLE DEVELOPMENTS

There were no people development needs identified as requiring referral to the Manager of People Development, Department of Planning, Development and Change.

20 RISK

There were no further matters concerning risk which had not already been considered during the meeting.

21 EMERGENCY BUSINESS - NEW EDUCATION AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs) FROM 2022/23

The University's KPIs, which monitored the performance of the University in delivering its strategic objectives against the Strategic Plan 2020-25, had been approved by the Board of Governors at its meeting on 25 April 2023. Two of the three KPIs, which related to Education and the Student Experience, had been amended and were presented to the Committee, along with targets for the next three years in the report.

The three KPIs were:

KPI1: Reduce the BAME awarding gap by 50% by July 2025

KPI2: Student Experience

1. % of UH UG subject areas with NSS performance in the top quartile for all institutions
2. % of UH PGT subject areas with PTES performance in the top quartile for all institutions

KPI3: Student Outcomes

1. 100% of UH UG subjects areas with student outcomes performance (continuation, completion, progression (to employment)) at TEF Benchmark
2. At University level, to exceed benchmarks in TEF measures of continuation, completion, and progression

It was agreed that;

That new Key Performance Indicators be noted.

22 CLERK'S REPORT

Indications that Members wished to comment on any item in the Clerk's report had been received and therefore the report was taken as noted and approved.

ACADEMIC SERVICES

It was agreed that;

That the amendments/revisions to the Academic Services publications be noted.

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND DEADLINES 2022/23 - at 09.30 hours in the Central Committee Room/Hybrid

It was agreed that;

That the schedule of meetings and deadlines for the remainder of Academic Year publications be noted.

- 23 **THE NEXT MEETING OF THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND AUDIT COMMITTEE WILL BE HELD ON TUESDAY, 20 JUNE 2023 FROM 09:30 HOURS IN THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE ROOM, MACLAURIN BUILDING OR VIA MS TEAMS**

Chair Date.....