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## Joint Senate- Council

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### Open Minutes

Date of meeting: **Monday, 20 November 2017**

Duration of meeting: **4.00 PM to 5.30PM**

Location: **The Room, High Wycombe Campus**

### Attendance

<b>Name</b>	<b>Senate/Council</b>
<b>Gulen Addis</b>	Senate
<b>Jo Boardman</b>	Council
<b>Nick Braisby</b>	Senate/Council
<b>Lyndon Buck</b>	Senate
<b>Karen Buckwell-Nutt</b>	Senate
<b>Rebecca Bunting</b>	Senate/Council
<b>Tim Coole</b>	Senate
<b>Anna Crabtree</b>	Council
<b>Lee Curtis</b>	Senate
<b>Baljit Dhillon</b>	Council
<b>Lois Drawmer</b>	Senate
<b>Penny Farrelly</b>	Senate
<b>Karen Harrison-White</b>	Senate
<b>John Hathaway</b>	Senate
<b>Michael Hipkins</b>	Council
<b>Florin Ioras</b>	Senate
<b>Julie Irwin</b>	Senate
<b>Irene Kirkman</b>	Council
<b>Carlo Lusuardi</b>	Senate
<b>Ken McCrea</b>	Council
<b>Frazer Mackenzie</b>	Senate
<b>Sean Mackney</b>	Senate/Council
<b>Tim Marshall</b>	Council
<b>Colin Martin</b>	Senate
<b>Rod Mercer</b>	Council
<b>Paul Morgan</b>	Senate
<b>Anthony Murphy</b>	Council

<b>Jenny Newton</b>	Council
<b>Ciaran O’Keeffe</b>	Senate
<b>Lauren O’Shea</b>	Senate
<b>Ben Parmar</b>	Senate/Council
<b>Susan Rosser</b>	Council
<b>Ellie Smith</b>	Senate/ Secretary Council
<b>John Smith</b>	Council
<b>Phil Wood</b>	Senate
<b>Sue West</b>	Senate/Council

## University Officers

<b>Name</b>	<b>Faculty / Directorate</b>
<b>Miriam Moir</b>	Senate
<b>Marcus Wood</b>	Council

## Welcome

17.01 The Chair of Council welcomed members to the annual joint meeting of Senate and Council.

## Minutes of the last meeting

17.02 The Chair of Senate noted that the Minutes of the last joint Senate/Council meeting held on 21 November 2016 had been circulated. The Minutes were agreed as a true record.

## Update on QSED 2016-17 Recommendations

17.03 A paper recording actions undertaken in response to the recommendations from the joint Quality & Standards and Education Committee Report from 2015-16 had been circulated. Initiatives had been introduced against each recommendation, and actions taken with the aim of improving and enhancing quality and standards. The Chair of Senate thanked those who had been involved in taking the actions forward.

## Context for meeting

17.04 The Chair of Senate set the context for the meeting, as outlined in the Annual Monitoring Policy which had been circulated in advance. Changes had been made to the way in which the University undertook annual monitoring of its provision and related quality and standards with the focus being on:

- Monitoring of module performance at Module Boards
- Subject level monitoring of programmes at Subject Annual Monitoring Meetings, resulting in Reports and Action Plans reviewed by Education Committee alongside University-wide quality and standards reports from Academic Registry. This resulted in the production of the overview reports to Senate and Council.

17.05 The purpose of the joint Senate/Council meeting was to consider the overview reports presented in advance, to make observations, to discuss in groups issues

arising from them, and for members to challenge the University over academic quality and standards through questions to a Panel.

### **Student Academic Experience and Student Outcomes 2016-17**

17.06 The following papers had been made available in advance of the meeting:

- a) Education Committee Report to Senate and Council on the outcome of Annual Monitoring for 2016-17
- b) Student Achievement Annual Summary Report 2016-17
- c) Annual Summary Reports 2016-17 for:
  - External Examiners
  - Application of Standards
  - Research Degrees
- d) Compliance with “The Concordat to Support Research Integrity” Annual assurance statement to HEFCE

17.07 To place the papers in context, introductions were given on Academic Quality & Standards and on Research Degrees by the DVC and PVC respectively, and the following points made:

#### Academic Quality & Standards

- The Annual Monitoring process identifies areas for improvement and sets actions plans which will be monitored by Education Committee
- The process also identifies areas of good practice to be disseminated and sets actions for continuous improvement
- Areas identified for targeted action in 2017-18 included the level of student achievement (particularly good honours), performance levels at specific educational partners, the proportion of “good honours”, and support for the University’s WP students.
- Education Committee concluded that standards had been upheld and that robust processes were in place to assure quality. Issues identified were ones common to the sector overall.

#### Research Degrees

- Quality assurance of research degrees takes place through the individual annual monitoring interviews with students
- The outcomes of the annual monitoring process is considered by the Research and Enterprise Committee, whose membership includes representatives of the research degree validating bodies (Brunel University, Coventry University and Staffordshire University)
- Further formal quality checking takes place at the transfer point of progression from MPhil to PhD, and at the final examination involving external examiners
- Research degree students represent a small proportion of the University’s students overall
- Areas identified for further investigation and improvement is the proportion of re-submissions of theses required at final examination, and the number of withdrawals.
- The annual assurance statement to HEFCE regarding compliance with “The Concordat to Support Research Integrity” outlined the University’s

commitment to upholding its principles, and noted the policies and procedures in place to support research integrity.

17.08 Following the introductions all members were invited to hold discussions in groups and to formulate questions arising from the papers received.

### **Panel Question & Answer Session**

17.09 A Panel constituted of the following University representatives then received questions from the members:

- Rebecca Bunting - Vice-Chancellor
- Nick Braisby - Deputy Vice-Chancellor
- Sean Mackney - Pro Vice-Chancellor

#### ***Question 1: How did the level of withdrawals at Level 4 at Bucks compare with the sector and was the University aware of the reasons for withdrawal?***

It was explained that while a benchmark for withdrawal was not available, the University benchmarked its continuation rate, which was within the tolerance band.

Reasons for withdrawal are recorded, and are most often related to personal circumstances including finances, levels of debt and illness. A number of initiatives are in place to improve retention, in relation to the new Attendance and Engagement Policy, where students who are noted as causing concern will be actively supported. Although there are key points in the student journey which retention initiatives should target, it is also down to general good practice and providing ongoing support for those learners who require additional encouragement.

It was again noted that one of the most effective means of retaining students was to improve their educational environment to create a sense of “belonging”.

#### ***Question 2: What initiatives should be prioritised for maximum impact and how should good practice be disseminated?***

It was suggested that the University should focus on its core messages around enhancement, and on recruiting, retaining and providing a satisfactory experience for successful students. Good practice can be disseminated in a number of ways including celebrating successes and through peer observation.

#### ***Question 3: How are student expectations being managed, particularly around cancelled classes?***

The Panel confirmed that data was available detailing where scheduled teaching was cancelled, which showed that the number of cancellations was small. The University was encouraging transparency about reasons for cancellations and actions being taken for re-scheduling.

#### ***Question 4: What are the causes of the decline in student achievement, and are actions being taken to reverse the trend?***

It was explained that the reasons for the decline was not fully understood, and that further triangulation of the data was required to drill down into the profiles in order to detect any trends. Work is being undertaken to establish whether students are being over-assessed,

and to help new students (many of whom have a BTEC rather than A 'level background) to adapt to HE. Achievement at some educational partners is also low, and measures being taken to address this.

External examiners have noted that the University does not always use the full range of marks above 70% - work is being undertaken with the academic community to encourage the use of the full range in recognition of student achievement. However, there is a need to be aware of grade inflation, an area currently under review in the sector.

***Question 5: How can the University increase the number of “quality” applicants?***

The panel expressed the view that all applicants were important to the University. To increase recruitment the University needed to expand its portfolio and ensure the curriculum is of high quality. Celebrating successes will raise the profile, and ensuring the message about the University's sense of community is promoted will encourage students who find that attractive.

***Question 6: How well prepared are applicants for the reality of research degrees?***

It was noted that many of the research students were part time, and had many pressures from their work and personal lives competing with their studies. It was felt important to build a sense of community within the research environment.

## **Agreement of Assurance Statements**

17.10 Following consideration of the evidence provided, the discussions held and the recommendations from the Education Committee, and separately from the Research and Enterprise Committee, Senate and Council agreed that academic standards had been maintained by the University.

17.11 Council members further considered the assurances required by HEFCE for the Accountability Return and confirmed its agreement with the following:

- “The governing body has received and discussed a report and accompanying action plan relating to the continuous improvement of the student academic experience and student outcomes. This included evidence from the provider's own periodic review processes, which fully involve students and include embedded external peer or professional review”
- “The methodologies used as a basis to improve the student academic experience and student outcomes are, to the best of our knowledge, robust and appropriate.”
- “The standards of awards for which we are responsible have been appropriately set and maintained.”

## **Date of next meeting**

17.12 The date of the joint Senate/Council meeting for 2018 will be confirmed.