



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

University  
Secretary's  
Office.

## Minutes Meeting of the Senate

**Date:** 16 December 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 A Bingham, Dr L Bingle, Professor C Buck, Mrs A Cantrell, Mrs A Clements, Revd Dr J Clines, Professor P Crowther, Professor J Derrick, Professor N Dibben, Ms B Eyre, Professor J Flint, Dr D Forrest, Professor S Foster, 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 S Hartley, Professor J Haycock, Mrs A Higaldo-Kingston, Professor R Horn, Professor M Hounslow, Professor N Hughes, Dr J Jones, Ms N Jones, Dr Simon Keegan-Phipps, Professor J Kirby, Dr W Kitchen, Ms S M Konstantinidou, Professor G Leggett, Ms E Lynas, Dr C Majewski, Professor S McIntosh, Professor N Monk, Professor T Moore, Dr N Murgatroyd, Professor C Newman, Dr S D North, Professor A Pacey, Ms K Pears, Professor D Petley, Dr E Poku, Dr S Pukallus, Dr L Robson, Dr S Rushton, Mr R Simpson, Dr S Staniland, Mr R Sykes, Professor C H Tan, Professor G Valentine, Dr D Vessey, Professor M T Vincent, Professor L Wilson, Mr S Zuddas.

**Secretary:** Dr T Strike

**In attendance:** Professor K Ayscough, Mr M Borland, Ms S Bridgeford, Mrs K Clements, Ms J Jones, Ms L Knowles, Mr D Swinn, Ms S Whitby, Mr L Wild, Professor M Williamson.

**Apologies:** The Senate received apologies from 10 members.

### WELCOME

The President & Vice-Chancellor (P&VC) welcomed members to the virtual meeting of the Senate.

### 1. President & Vice-Chancellor's Report

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

- (a) Mass testing and Christmas: The University had worked swiftly to set up a mass testing facility in order to facilitate student testing before the beginning of the student travel window on 3-9 December. The Octagon Centre had been successfully converted into the testing centre, with tests starting on 30 November. This was a collective effort from a range of services, including

Estates & Facilities Management and Health & Safety. 6,258 tests had been undertaken to date.

In response to a written question regarding the procedure for students returning after Christmas, the P&VC outlined that the University would be following government guidance and there was planned to be a staggered return of students over five weeks. In response to a written question regarding whether students would be required to be tested, the P&VC noted that the University could not insist an individual student took a test, but the government guidance was clear and the University recommended each student take two tests upon their return to Sheffield.

- (b) Future blended learning: Research suggested that many institutions had gained experience and expertise regarding blended learning. It was likely that elements of the model would be retained into the future and Senate's view on which elements to retain would be sought at the appropriate time.
- (c) Admissions: Senate was updated on the admissions position for home and overseas admissions for UG, PGT and PGR.
- (d) REF: Preparatory work for the REF continued. The delayed submission deadline was March 2021 and work continued to be overseen by a REF Steering Group, reporting to UEB.

During discussion, it was clarified that following a positive lateral flow test a student would then be asked to take a PCR test.

## **2. Declaration of Conflict of Interests**

No conflicts of interest were declared.

## **3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 October 2020**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 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. Adaptation and Renewal:**

### **6.1 Curriculum Development**

Senate received and noted a presentation on planning for the next semester and reflections for the future. The current situation was challenging and the student experience was different to that of previous years. There was a desire to increase the volume of face-to-face teaching in Semester 2 and to improve the campus experience. It had been reported that students were missing the opportunities for peer-to-peer support and thought was being given to how facilities and spaces could safely be used to enable students to interact. All departments were committed to providing as good an educational experience as possible. There had been significant gains regarding assessment and examinations, with a simplification of assessment, which had been welcomed by students. This was linked to the aspirations of the Programme Led Approach (PLA).

## **6.2 Mental Health and Wellbeing**

Senate received and noted a presentation. The University's current Student Mental Health Strategy 2017-20 was being revised in the light of two new sector documents: the UUK Mentally-Healthy Universities framework; and the Student Minds University Mental Health Charter. A whole university approach would be taken. Current service priorities and performance indicator data, including student feedback were provided. Future steps included a draft University Mental Health being brought to Senate.

It was clarified during discussion that the intention was for the Strategy to cover both students and staff. The information in the presentation included Student Access to Mental Health Support (SAMHS) and counselling services, but did not include the Wellbeing Service.

## **6.3 Student Perspectives**

Senate received and noted a presentation based on student feedback. It was outlined that students wanted to see the following: quick and substantial solutions to digital poverty; improved access to physical study space; more peer support; support to reduce anxiety about the loss of skills; the freedom to learn in whichever place was the safest; and clear and forward thinking communications. The positive developments that should be taken forward were highlighted.

Discussion focused on the lack of fast broadband for students, which was partly as a consequence of not controlling broadband contracts in private sector accommodation, and it was also believed to be an issue in the city.

The presentation would be circulated to all members of Senate to enable the details of the student perspective to be heard more widely.

## **7. City College:**

### **7.1 Teach-out Planning for City College**

Senate considered a paper which set out arrangements following the University decision, made in 2019, to withdraw from the validation relationship with City College (the International Faculty) by the end of 2023/24. The University of York had signed an agreement with City College whereby it will validate City College programmes for admission from Autumn 2021.

Senate noted the controls in place (and planned) to ensure the quality of teach-out for University of Sheffield students at City College until the end of the contract in 2023/24.

## **7.2 A proposal to amend Regulation X: the Faculties - the International Faculty**

Senate considered proposals to amend Regulation X: The Faculties, which lists City College, Thessaloniki, as an International Faculty of the University and confers various delegated powers on City College similar to a Faculty of the University. Following City College and the University of York making a public announcement of a new validation arrangement for future intakes at City College it was necessary to amend the Regulations of the University of Sheffield.

Senate approved recommending to Council the following:

- (a) Council should amend Regulation X from 1 July 2021 to remove mention of City College, Thessaloniki, as an International Faculty of the University,
- (b) Council should revoke the associated delegated powers from 1 July 2021, as set out in Regulation X, paragraphs 3.1.5 to 3.1.8, as they are now governed by a contractual validation arrangement through the period University of Sheffield students are taught out.

## **8. Reconfiguration of Departments in the Faculty of Science to create a new School of Bioscience**

Senate received a presentation on the Biologies Review and considered a proposal to reconfigure the three departments of Animal and Plant Sciences, Biomedical Science, and Molecular Biology and Biotechnology to create a single new School of Bioscience from September 2021. The review had included input from external members. The University had strength in depth in multiple areas of the Biologies, however this was not always evident externally. The potential benefits included: a simplified organisational and leadership structure that can maximise collaboration across the sub-disciplines in a coherent way; an integrated approach that would enhance teaching and research excellence; better and clearer communication of the areas of excellence, both internally in the University and externally to the wider community, for example in recruitment.

During discussion, it was clarified that the proposed department would aim to have a similar number of programmes to competitor institutions, with broad programmes that had wider options for students within them. The Review Group was not prescriptive regarding the organisation of research and teaching and it would be for the three departments to design that together. Students, including

PGR students, had been involved in the consultation and would continue to be involved in the development of a new School of Biosciences. Actions to evolve the Science estate can be undertaken, where possible, in advance of the Science Estates Development Framework. Regarding students' current sense of belonging, care would be taken to build on this success. The proposal aimed to reduce the teaching of similar material in different departments and the offer to students could be enhanced by enabling access to other courses. It was noted that the Vice-Presidents for Research and for Education supported the proposal.

Senate approved recommending to Council the following:

- (a) The creation of the School of Bioscience.
- (b) The amendment of Regulation IX (2.1.6.) relating to the composition of Senate, to reflect the merger and the establishment of a new School of Bioscience.

## **9. Financial Results 2019-20**

Senate received and noted a presentation on the 2019/20 financial results which were expected to be published on the University website shortly. Senate was also updated on the latest financial position, including the Covid assumptions regarding student recruitment, catering and residences, and expenditure savings targets. A summary of in year resource allocation, the impact on University surplus and cash position, risks, and financial planning going forward was provided. The Annual Report and Financial Statements 2019–20 would be circulated to members of Senate following publication.

## **10. Standing Orders**

Senate considered and approved Standing Orders for the Senate. To date the University of Sheffield had operated without Standing Orders. The new CUC Code of Governance for Higher Education, published in September 2020, assumed the existence of Standing Orders. The proposed Standing Orders reflected the unwritten practice at the University as currently understood.

## **REPORTS FROM STATUTORY BODIES**

### **11. Report on the Proceedings of the Council**

(Meeting held on 19 October 2020)

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

## **REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES OF THE SENATE**

### **12. Report of the Research Ethics Committee**

(Meeting held on 11 November 2020)

Senate received and approved the Report, including proposed updates to section 3.1.11 of the 'Research Ethics Approval Procedure' section of the Ethics Policy, Governing Research Involving Human Participants, Personal Data and Human Tissue

to ensure that this reflected current practice. It was highlighted that the decline in numbers of ethics applications, against the trends in previous years, was thought to be a result of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. New guidance had been produced by the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) and Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA). Further work would be undertaken to develop an appropriate process for enabling prospective ethical approval for clinical case studies. Updates on a number of cases of potential breach of the Ethics Policy were provided.

In response to a written question, it was suggested that the relatively large proportion of cases involving PGT students reflected the large number of PGT students at the University, and the larger proportion of ethics applications submitted by PGT students, in comparison with PGR students. Furthermore, many cases considered involved international PGT students who had either misunderstood or simply not engaged with the ethics requirements, despite having received training and information. It was the responsibility of each academic department to ensure that appropriate arrangements were in place to prepare students, including the ethics requirements.

In response to a written question, it was outlined that the mechanism for each Faculty to maintain oversight of its ethics cases was via the regular report provided at Committee meetings, with the Faculty representatives in attendance. The change to the policy was proposed to reflect the practice that where a clear precedent for a case existed the Committee would not necessarily involve the relevant Faculty representative in every case. Where there was no precedent or a case was more complex a wider sub-group would be involved.

In response to a written question regarding the process and student appeals, for the vast majority of cases clear evidence confirmed ethics approval had not been obtained, and this was acknowledged by the student. The Committee will consider whether the appropriate procedures were in place for students to appeal decisions.

During discussion, it was noted that the Committee periodically looked at ethical approval of questionnaire-based studies/surveys that requested less sensitive data. Currently supervisors undertook ethics review for low risk or less sensitive work.

### **13. Report of the Senate Academic Assurance Committee**

(Meeting held on 17 November 2020)

Senate received and approved the Report, including the Committee's considerations of the 2020/21 Approach to COVID-19, National Student Survey 2020 results, and the Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Award Gap.

### **14. Report of the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee**

(Meeting held on 8 October 2020)

Senate received the Report and approved the following:

- (a) Withdrawal of unrestricted module choice permanently from 2021-22 and replacement by guided module choice from a selection of optional modules determined by the department
- (b) A revised Recognition of Prior Learning Policy
- (c) A new Student Sports Participation Policy
- (d) A revised Safeguarding Policy
- (e) New, Significantly Amended, Discontinued and Suspended Programmes approved by Faculties
- (f) New, Discontinued and Suspended Programmes recommended to Senate under Chair's action

In response to a written question, it was clarified that in selecting optional modules departments worked within the PLA framework and guided module choice allowed departments to consider other factors, such as student employability and sustainability. During discussion, it was clarified that it would be possible for an individual student to make a request for a module not on their departmental list, however, it would not always be possible to meet the request. The student would need to meet the prerequisites and there would need to be space available. The process to ensure departments enable relevant guided module choice would be the same structures as this year and the guidance could be strengthened where appropriate.

It was the intention that the approach to sports participation on Wednesday afternoons would apply to UG and PGT students, with the recognition that there were constraints on particular programmes due to factors such as the estate, timetabling, or the requirements of clinical placements. Religion and belief would be relevant to some students for other days of the week and there would be a benefit in beginning to consider this for the medium and long term.

Regarding the revised Safeguarding Policy, further consideration would be given to referencing the Risk Assessment Panel in the policy.

## **15. Report of the Senate Research and Innovation Committee**

(Meeting held on 5 November 2020)

Senate received and approved the Report, including:

- (a) Proposed Amendment to the General Regulations for Higher Degrees by Research
- (b) Adoption of Charters for Early Career Research staff and for the Development of Research Staff by their Line Manager and the University
- (c) A statement that the University will not act as research governance sponsor for devices which come under the requirements of the Medical Devices Regulations

## **OTHER MATTERS**

### **16. Returning Officer's Report**

A report on the outcome of an election for a Senate member on Council and the outcome of the call for nominations for two members of the Senate to serve on the Senate Academic Assurance Committee was received and noted.

**17. Annual Report of the Military Education Committee**

Senate received and noted the Annual Report.

**18. 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.

**19. Any Other Business**

The President & Vice-Chancellor thanked all members of Senate for their hard work during a challenging year.