



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Office UEB/2020/1802/02
Of
The President &
Vice-Chancellor.

Minutes University Executive Board

- Date:** 21 January 2020
- Present:** Professor K Lamberts (KL) (in the Chair),
Professor J Derrick (JD), Professor S Fitzmaurice (SF),
Professor M J Hounslow (MJH),
Professor W Morgan (WM), Professor C Newman (CN),
Professor D Petley (DP), Mr R Sykes (RS), Professor C Watkins (CW)
- In attendance:** Ms D McClean (DM) (Items 1 and 2), Mrs S Grocutt (SG) (Item 3)
- Apologies:** Dr T Strike (TS), Professor G Valentine (GV)
- Minute Secretary:** Dr E Smith (ES), Mr D Swinn (DTS)

1. Closed Minute and Paper

2. Update on University-Funded PGR Payments During Medical Leave (Deborah McClean in attendance for this item)

- 2.1 UEB considered two proposals on the University's Leave of Absence (LoA) procedures in respect of Postgraduate Research (PGR) students: (i.) the continuation of maintenance payments for University-funded PGR students during periods of LoA on medical grounds, and (ii.) the introduction of a minimum period of leave of 4 weeks, which would be applicable to all types of LoA. In both cases, it was proposed that the changes would be rolled out for the start of the 2020/21 academic year, with a review of the first proposal to take place after 12 months. Attention was drawn to the fact that the first proposal would align with the new UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) guidance on studentship payments during a period of medical absence; the second proposal would move the University closer in line with the practice of peer universities. However, it was important to recognise that the two proposals were not directly connected and should be considered separately.

- 2.2 During discussion, UEB noted the following points:

Continuation of Maintenance Payments During Medical Leave:

- The proposal had been costed over 3.5 years.
- University-funded PGR students, together with UKRI-funded PGR students, amounted to c. 40% of the University's PGR population, meaning that the change would not be applicable to the majority of PGR students.
- Differences in funder rules meant that externally funded PGR students were affected differently when taking a LOA.

Minimum Period of LoA:

- Analysis of the University's data on PGR LoAs suggested that students tended to take LOAs towards the end of their degrees.

2.3 UEB approved:

- The continuation of maintenance payments for University-funded PGR students during periods of LoA on medical grounds, subject to a review of the procedure after 12 months.
- The introduction of a minimum period of leave of 4 weeks, which would be applicable to all types of LoA.
- The implementation of both process changes from the start of the 2020/21 academic year.

2.4 **Actions:**

- (a) A broader piece of work should be undertaken and considered at UEB to help UEB understand the differential benefits to PGR students of funding from the full range of sources, including where different disciplines were subject to different rules.
- (b) Further thought would need to be given to operationalising a minimum period of LoA, e.g. for students with relapsing-remitting medical conditions, in order to ensure that certain students were not disadvantaged.
- (c) A communications plan would need to be developed to ensure that PGR students, supervisors and support staff were updated about both process changes in advance of their introduction.

3. **Closed Minute and Paper**

4. **Round Table**

- (a) Professor Richard Jones: KL informed UEB that Professor Jones was leaving the University to take up a position at The University of Manchester.
- (b) Investment in North: KL reported that he had attended a meeting with the Education Secretary (Gavin Williamson MP) and Universities Minister (Chris Skidmore MP) about the UK Government's commitment to invest in the North.
- (c) Race Equality Champions: KL updated UEB about recent media coverage and a parliamentary written question about the University's recruitment of Race Equality Champions. The University would issue a factual statement to all outlets which had misrepresented the University, and which would be shared with the Minister.
- (d) AMRC: DNP informed UEB that Steve Foxley had started in his role as Executive Director of the AMRC on 20 January 2020. Introductory meetings with UEB members would be arranged in due course.
- (e) USS: WM informed UEB that Dame Kate Barker had been confirmed as the new Chair of the USS.
- (f) Australian HE Sector: MJH updated UEB on current difficulties in the Australian HE sector regarding international student recruitment.