Minutes

Meeting of the Senate

Date: 01 October 2014

Present: The Vice-Chancellor, in the Chair
Professor Anderson, Ms Annabel, Mr Ashman, Professor Ayscough, Dr Ballai, Professor Bath, Dr Blake, Professor Brandist, Dr Brecon, Professor Buck, Dr Butler, Professor Campbell, Dr Cotter, Professor Crowther, Dr Cruise, Dr Davies, Mr Diaz De Aguilhar Puiggari, Professor Dobson, Professor Fitzmaurice, Dr Foster, Professor Gillet, Mrs Hart, Professor Harrison, Mr Harrison, Dr Harvey, Dr Hernandez, Professor Hervey, Professor Hitchmough, Professor Hodson, Professor Hounslow, Mr Hudson, Professor Jackson, Mr Jary, Professor Jones, Professor Keefe, Dr Kinsey, Dr Kitchen, Professor Koh, Professor Labbe, Mr Lewis, Dr MacIntosh, Mr Mackenzie, Mrs Marriott, Professor Marsh, Professor Martin, Mr McAuley, Dr McMillan, Ms McKeown, Dr Miller, Ms Miller, Professor Murdoch-Eaton, Professor Nicholl, Dr Nicholson, Dr North, Dr O’Rielly, Professor Overton, Professor Peat, Dr Perraton, Professor Phillips, Dr Pope, Mr Rapier, Professor Ryan, Miss Shafritz, Professor Shoemaker, Miss Shwaikh, Mr Simpson, Dr Snook, Mr Soubes, Mr Stern, Professor Stevenson, Dr Swift, Mr Sykes, Professor Valentine, Dr Vasilaki, Professor Vincent, Professor Walters, Professor Warren, Professor White, Dr Wilson, Professor Williams, Professor Williamson

Secretary: Dr A West

In attendance: Mrs Arnold, Mr Brown, Mr Colley, Mr Croft, Mr Dodman, Ms Green, Mr Hamre, Mr Rabone, Mrs Stephens, Dr Strike, Mr Swinn

Apologies: The Senate received apologies from 13 members.

WELCOME

The Vice-Chancellor welcomed members to the first meeting of the Senate in 2014-15, including new Heads of Departments and the Students Union Sabbatical officers. Also welcomed was Dr West, who was attending for the first time in his capacity as Interim Secretary to Senate.

DEATHS

The Senate noted with regret the following deaths, which had occurred since the last meeting:

Dr Alexander Currie, University Registrar from 1965 to 1978, aged 88.

Dr Frank McDermott, Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy from 1963 to 1988, aged 81

Emeritus Professor Kenneth Murta, Head of Department in the School of Architecture from 1962 to 1994, aged 84
Ms Jane Riberzani, English Language Instructor in the English Language Teaching Centre and a member of staff from 2011 to present, aged 46

Kate Eugenie Hoffman, a postgraduate student in the Department of Human Communication Sciences, aged 34.

Tessa Ven Der Sande, a former postgraduate student in the School of Law, aged 26.

Jake William Cann Shaw, a former undergraduate student in the School of Mathematics and Statistics, aged 21.

Members stood in memory.

1. **VICE-CHANCELLOR’S PRESENTATION AND REPORT**

   The Senate received a presentation from the Vice-Chancellor, in which attention was drawn to the following points:

   (a) **The External Environment (1):** The HE sector continued to expand and, whilst this was positive, the future nature of this expansion and the wider political climate remained uncertain, with the additional, enduring risk of volatility and upheaval in key overseas recruitment markets. There was sustained interest in vocational education, technical degrees and alternative HE pathways, with the AMRC Training Centre having hosted a national summit on Apprenticeships in June. Increasing the diversity of qualifications on offer required striking an appropriate balance between traditional and new and innovative provision. The removal of the SNC from 2015 and the University’s strong student recruitment in 2014 would be key factors in this debate.

   (b) **The External Environment (2):** Questions persisted over HE funding in terms of UG and PG and of teaching and research. Although the University had enjoyed considerable success in income generation and diversification in recent years, matters such as space and capacity would act as constraints on the extent to which this could be sustained. Funded by the HEFCE Catalyst Fund, a University-led consortium of six universities had provided financial support for large numbers of students to undertake PGT courses through the Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme (PSS), with emphasis on access to the professions and WP (see also Minute 1(i), below). The University also intended to increase philanthropic donations as a further means of support for WP. The government was expected to set out its proposed solution to issues around funding in the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement on 3 December. In addition, the recent referendum on Scottish independence had raised questions about the devolution of power to other regions of the UK and it would be important for the University to monitor and contribute to the developing debate.

   (c) **Developing our Strategy (1):** The various issues that were affecting HE were informing the development of the University’s next Strategic Plan, and would continue to do so. The University was in a strong position to respond effectively to these challenges by remaining committed to its values and its sense of collegiality, collaboration and commonality of purpose. The overarching institutional narrative would be underpinned by the plans of Faculties and Departments and the broader University community would be engaged in initial, wide ranging discussions during the remainder of 2014 that were intended to highlight the principal areas upon which to focus.
(d) **Developing our Strategy (2):** Professor Labbe, Chair of the Strategic plan Development Group, provided an outline of planned activity during the first part of 2014-15. A series of open meetings and workshops for staff would consider an appropriate institutional response to five key issues for the HE sector, featuring debates between a member of UEB and an external expert. In addition, there would be presentations and the opportunity for discussion at FEB meetings, with colleagues encouraged to disseminate information throughout departments and to promote the engagement of as wide a range of colleagues as possible.

(e) **Maximising Opportunities:** It was essential that the University continued to lobby effectively on issues of fundamental significance to the institution and the sector by celebrating the full range of economic, social and scientific benefits of HE. There was a significant risk that political restraint and continued real-terms reductions in public expenditure would reduce the UK’s intellectual, industrial and economic capabilities. Maximising the benefits that the University could deliver, in a distinctive and innovative manner, was vital to the future success of the institution. In achieving this aim, the University would be supported by its efforts to enhance philanthropy and alumni relations, staff recruitment and international collaboration.

(f) **Executive Structures:** The current Faculty and UEB structure had been implemented in 2007-08 with the commitment to a future review. Given the increasingly challenging HE environment it was now timely to undertake such a review in order that the University could facilitate enhanced delivery of its objectives across the breadth of its activities. UEB and Council were actively discussing how to increase academic engagement within and between the Faculties and Professional Services, with the focus on recruitment to a number of senior posts. Further updates would be provided to the wider University in due course.

(g) **Overseas trips (Brazil):** The Vice Chancellor had headed a delegation that had attended the third Universia International Vice-Chancellors’ Meeting in Brazil in July 2014, organised by Banco Santander. The focus of the conference had been developing strong global partnerships and the cultural, political and economic challenges facing HEIs around the world. A further visit had been to the Instituto Tecnologico de Aeronautica (ITA) – one of the leading engineering institutions in Brazil – and to the CBMM mining company in Araxa, the world’s largest producer of niobium. This reflected a long-standing partnership between CBMM and the University that went back to work undertaken by Mr Jack Woodhead and his student William Morrison, who in 1962 performed the first academic research illustrating the benefits of niobium additions to steel.

(h) **Overseas trips (USA):** A recent AGM of the University of Sheffield in America Board had demonstrated the University’s growing engagement with US alumni and donors. In August the Vice-Chancellor travelled to Boston, USA, to meet with Jeremy and Hanne Grantham to thank them for their generous £2.6m philanthropic donation to fund the establishment of the Grantham Centre for Sustainable Futures, a partnership between the University and the Grantham Foundation for the Protection of the Environment which will focus on advancing the science of sustainability and connecting it with the policy debate about how humans can live in a more sustainable way. The University, in partnership with MIT had discussed the potential for institutional collaboration on carbon reduction, particularly civil nuclear energy and energy-related manufacture, which would build on existing research strengths in wind power and carbon capture.
Professor White provided an update on the 2014 student recruitment position, in which attention was drawn to the following key points:

(i) 2013-14 Recruitment Cycle: The University was in a strong position overall, with increases in UG, PGT and PGR applications representing a good market share and being balanced across the University. However, there had been a further reduction in numbers of home students applying to PGT courses despite the success of the PSS, reflecting the demographic decline and economic situation. This reflected the position across the sector and posed the question of how severe this reduction would have been without support from the PSS but also what would be the likely effect of any economic recovery. 2015 would be the second year of the two-year PSS Project to support home PGT students and there remained significant uncertainty over future financial support for PGT students. Growth in overseas PGT applications was stronger but significant challenges remained in attracting overseas students to the UK; a further risk was the possibility of a UK referendum on membership of the EU in 2017. In such a challenging recruitment environment, this year’s achievements were testament to the hard work of everyone involved in admissions across Faculties and Professional Services.

(j) 2014-15 Recruitment Cycle: It was noted that the University had recruited close to the maximum permitted number of students in the SNC Category in 2014 and Faculties and Departments should use the removal of SNC for 2015 recruitment as an opportunity to think about what was an appropriately balanced portfolio for their respective discipline. Members were encouraged to contribute to these discussions, including ways in which the lack of SNC could enable the University to reaffirm its commitment to recruitment of WP students.

The percentage of school-leavers gaining top A level grades was likely to continue to decline (3% reduction in AAB attainment between 2013 and 2014) whereas BTEC entries and achievement were expected to continue to increase (16% increase in AAB equivalent between 2013 and 2014). It was noted that the Vice-Chancellor was a member of the board established to advise government on A level reform and the University was monitoring developments with regard to Post-16 qualifications generally.

(k) League tables and the NSS: Members were reminded of the importance of key league tables to student recruitment and the effect of measures connected to NSS results on the University’s position. It was reported that the gap was narrowing between high overall satisfaction rates at the University compared with the national average and this was predominantly due to poorer performance in measures relating to feedback and assessment, which had been the subject of previous discussions by Senate. It was essential to the University’s standing that all teaching staff took steps to ensure that agreed principles of feedback were reflected in practice and HoDs were encouraged to discuss the issue within departments. Members noted that significant benefits could be achieved by explaining to students the type of feedback that they would receive for different kinds of assessments, for example through the use of student handbooks. Enhancing the effectiveness of its communications with students would demonstrate the University’s commitment to engagement with its students and was therefore likely to increase satisfaction in these measures.
2. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 JUNE 2014**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 June, having been circulated, were approved, subject to the addition of clarification at Minute 9(b) that the policy on audio recording of lectures initially only applied to students with a disability.

3. **MATTERS ARISING ON THE MINUTES**

There were no matters arising on the Minutes.

4. **MATTERS REQUIRING APPROVAL**

Senate received and noted a summary of the matters within the Reports from Committees of the Senate and Other Matters sections of the Agenda for which Senate’s formal approval was sought.

**REPORTS FROM STATUTORY BODIES**

5. **REPORT ON THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE COUNCIL**

(Meeting held on 7 July 2014)

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

**REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES OF THE SENATE**

6. **REPORT OF THE LEARNING AND TEACHING COMMITTEE**

(Meeting held on 9 July 2014 and Action taken on behalf of the Committee)

Senate received and approved the Report, including:

(a) **Secure English Language Test Equivalences:** Senate approved the following two principles for the use of English language entry qualifications, which followed a review of the approaches taken across the University in response to recently reported issues with unsound qualifications and testing elsewhere in the sector that had led to the right of three institutions to recruit international students having been suspended:

(i) all departments should, without exception, adhere to the SELT (Secure English Language Test Equivalences) equivalences developed by the English Language Teaching Centre;

(ii) subject to consultation with the Faculties, PGR requirements are managed in the same way as those at UG and PGT with an unambiguous institutional minimum of either 6.5 with 5.5 or 6.0 with 5.5, i.e. that departments are fully transparent in what their requirements are.

It was confirmed that the University had never accepted the qualification that had been discredited and checks had been carried out on the progress of students who had entered with alternative qualifications from the same provider (ETS), which had revealed no problems. As such, the institutional risk had been and remained low. Sheffield International College was also checking the progress of its students and the Committee had recommended that applicants with ETS qualifications were rejected. It was noted that the next Annual Reflection would consider the implementation of standard English language entry qualifications. Clarification was provided that departments with higher English language requirements would not be
required to lower the entry threshold to the institutional minimum set out in point (ii), above.

(b) Proposed Policy on Legible Handwriting for Assessed Work: Senate endorsed a proposal whereby the previously agreed policy on legible handwriting for assessed work would be included as part of the planned review of assessment during 2014/15. This followed liaison by Faculty Directors of Learning and Teaching with colleagues in response to points raised in Senate’s previous discussion, on 18 June.

(c) Amendments to General Regulations: Senate approved a number of minor amendments to the General Regulations, including wording to clarify the regulations for examinations and revisions to the Regulations for Integrated Research Degrees.

(d) Programmes Approved by Faculties between 13 May and 16 September 2014: Senate approved new, discontinued and significantly amended programmes that had been approved by Faculties between 13 May and 16 September.

7. REPORT OF THE SENATE BUDGET COMMITTEE
(Meetings held on 10 July and 18 September 2014)

On behalf of Senate, the Vice-Chancellor welcomed Professor Jackson as the new Chair of SBC, welcoming its efforts to make financial information accessible to Senators and other colleagues. Senate received and approved the Report of the Senate Budget Committee which included:

(a) Membership of Senate Budget Committee: Senate approved an addition to the text of the membership section of the Committee’s (SBC) terms of reference, as follows:

- Senate aims for the membership of Senate Budget Committee to include at least one member from each Faculty

It was important to the effective operation of SBC that it was able to draw on the experiences of as wide a cross-section of the University as possible, although it was confirmed that SBC members were not representatives of their respective department, Faculty or Professional Service.

(b) Priorities for 2014/15: Senate endorsed the activity that SBC proposed to undertake during 2014/15.

8. REPORT OF THE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
(Meeting held on 10 September 2014)

Senate received and approved the Report of the Research Ethics Committee (UREC), including the ongoing roll-out of the online ethics review system with further support for departments where it was not yet in use. UREC was considering ways in which the system could cater for more complex needs and how to fund such enhancements. A Working Group had been established, comprising members of UREC, with the aim of furthering the development of a suite of Digital Research Ethics resources to complement other ethics resources, which had been proposed by departments. It was also reported that the Minor Variant form had been withdrawn due to the very small number of cases in which it was required. This followed consultation with departments, only one of whom had raised significant concerns and with which arrangements would be put in place to transition to new project approval mechanisms.
REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL

9. REPORT OF THE ESTATES COMMITTEE
   (Meeting held on 21 May 2014)

   Senate received and noted the Report of the Estates Committee. Clarification was provided that the DTZ analysis report would inform the development of the Residences Strategy 2015-25, which would include consideration of matters such as accommodation mix and price.

10. REPORTS OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE
    (Meetings held on 9 April, 19 May and 19 June 2014)

    Senate received and noted the Reports of the Finance Committee.

11. REPORT OF THE HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE
    (Meeting held on 27 May 2014)

    Senate received and noted the Report of the Health and Safety Committee.

12. REPORT OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE
    (Meeting held on 23 June 2014)

    Senate received and noted the Report of the Human Resource Management Committee.

OTHER MATTERS

13. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STUDENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT, 2013-14

    Senate received and noted the Annual Report of the Student Services Department.

14. QUARTERLY FINANCIAL RESULTS SUMMARY

    A report summarising the Draft Financial Results for the twelve months ended 31 July 2013 was received and noted.

15. REPORT ON ACTION TAKEN

    A Report on action taken since the last meeting of the Senate was received and noted.

16. 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.

These Minutes were confirmed at a meeting held on 10 December 2014

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