



Keele
University

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF COUNCIL

Held on Thursday 10th November 2016

The Chair welcomed Dr Helen Galbraith (Director of Planning & Academic Administration and Academic Registrar) to the meeting as an observer as part of her induction to Keele. He also welcomed Professor Alison Brammer (Head of School of Law) and Dr Tim Lustig (Head of School of Humanities) to the meeting as observers.

For a record of attendance, apologies and absences, see attached list.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Mr Harris declared an interest as (i) KPMG are his personal accountants and (ii) the law firm in which he is a partner provides legal advice to the University following a successful tender process and (iii) the law firm in which he is a partner acts for USS.

2. MINUTES AND ACTIONS

(a) Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th September 2016 were approved and signed. It was noted that the minutes circulated were incorrectly dated 7th July 2016.

(b) Actions List

Council received and noted the actions list. It was reported that the external report on employability had not yet been received but it was envisaged that it would be ready to be presented to Council early in the New Year. The Director of Finance & IT reported that rather than assigning an individual to each objective in the Financial Strategy as proposed at the previous meeting, that she would ask the Budget & Resources Group to review the actions each year and report to Council by exception, which was agreed.

PART 1 – THEMED DISCUSSION ITEMS

1A. REVISED APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Council received a presentation from the Director of Planning & Academic Administration on the revised operating model for quality assessment that was launched by HEFCE in March 2016. The new approach includes a role for Council in providing assurances about the quality of the University's higher education provision and as part of which, Council will be asked to submit a set of assurances to HEFCE as part of the Annual Accountability Return on 1st December each year.

The new assurance statements, which relate to the 2015-2016 academic year are that:

- (i) 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.
- (ii) 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.
- (iii) The standards of awards for which we are responsible have been appropriately set and maintained.

The paper provided (i) an overview of the new assurance statements and the role they will play in HEFCE's revised model for quality assessment; (ii) a summary of the key mechanisms used by the University to assure itself and Council in relation to its quality assessment processes; and (iii) the Learning & Teaching Strategy Action Plan for 2016-2017, which sets out the University's approach to improvement of the student academic experience.

It was reported that the assurances will be considered by HEFCE as part of its new Annual Provider Review, the results of which will be communicated to institutions in April/May 2017 as part of HEFCE's annual letter on institutional risk. The assurances will be tested during the next round of periodic assurance visits, known as HEFCE Assurance Reviews, which occur on a five year cycle. Keele is one of a small number of institutions receiving their visit in the period between January and July 2017 (date to be confirmed) and will, therefore, be among the first institutions for which HEFCE will test the new assurances against available evidence.

The HEFCE guidance states that it is not the intention that governing bodies are drawn into quality management activities, but instead that Council's role is to receive regular reports and challenge assurances from elsewhere in the institution. The first and most important source at Keele is from the reports of the work of Senate and its sub-committees. In addition, Council has already seen and approved the University's new Learning & Teaching Strategy. Progress against the Strategy and other related strategies (e.g. the Internationalisation Strategy) will provide a further source of assurance. Finally, Council monitors relevant risks through Risk Register update reports and receives and monitors academic-related key performance indicators on student satisfaction, proportion of good degrees, OFFA measures, employability, average tariff score, recruitment, retention and attainment.

It was reported that, over the next few months, further work will be undertaken by the Secretaries to Senate and Council to explore ways in which we might further increase Council's understanding of academic governance matters and to ensure that Council members feel confident in questioning and challenging the information around academic quality and standards presented to them. In parallel to this, a review of approval routes and information flows across and between Senate and Council committees will take place to identify opportunities for improvement.

Professor Ulph, as a Council member with considerable senior management experience in the higher education sector, reflected on practices at Keele in comparison to those elsewhere in the sector. He noted that the roles of Senate and Council are distinct and that Council's role is not to intervene in matters of academic judgement but to establish whether the processes are appropriate and effective. Professor Ulph further noted that he had discussed the issues with Dr Galbraith in preparing this paper and was aware that the University had benchmarked its

approach against others in the sector. On this basis, he indicated that he believed Keele's processes are proportionate and effective.

As part of further Council discussion, it was noted that Council could also take assurance from the professional accreditation the University receives from various external bodies, such as the General Medical Council.

Further Council discussion took place to consider how Keele could strengthen Council's oversight of this area going forward. It was agreed that it would be helpful to develop closer links between Senate and Council. In addition, it was suggested that Council could receive information about Internal Quality Audits and Exam Boards. The experience of both international and transnational students could also usefully be reviewed. Finally, consideration should be given to assessing where challenges to our academic standards may arise, for example, the intake in 2017 will be the first cohort to have been affected by the recent major reform to A'levels.

On the basis of the paper and the discussion, Council confirmed that it recommended that full assurance should be provided in relation to the statements set out above.

Council welcomed the thorough presentation and found it extremely useful and informative.

Council **resolved**:

That full assurance be provided to HEFCE.

PART 2 – REPORTS

2A. COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

2B. COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

2C. SECRETARY'S REPORT

Council received a report from the Secretary to Council, which included the following:

- HEFCE's Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability requires the Audit Committee to submit an annual report to Council, the Vice-Chancellor and HEFCE. The report records the Committee's opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the University's arrangements for risk management, control, governance, value for money and the management and quality assurance of data. The report covers the financial year August 2015 to July 2016.

The report noted that, having reviewed the various assurance reports it received during the year, including those from the external and internal auditors, the Audit Committee was satisfied that all recommendations were either in process of being resolved, or had been complied with, otherwise resolved, and acted upon accordingly and there were no significant issues up to the date of preparation of the Audit Committee Annual Report.

In its review of the annual internal audit opinion, various assurance work and reports provided and requested by the Committee for the year (as detailed in this annual report), the Committee was able to confirm its opinion that reasonable reliance can be placed on the adequacy and effectiveness of the University's arrangements for the following: (i) risk management, control and governance (the risk management element includes the accuracy

of the statement of internal control included within the annual statement of accounts); (ii) economy, efficiency and effectiveness (value for money); and (iii) management control and quality assurance of data submitted to HEFCE, HESA, the Student Loans Company and other public bodies.

Council **resolved:**

That the Annual Report of the Audit Committee be approved for submission to HEFCE.

- The Annual Assurance Return is required to be submitted to HEFCE by 1st December each year following Council approval. To enable Council to do this, a short commentary about the assurance process behind the return was presented. This included asking Council to note a statement on the University's actions in relation to compliance with the Universities UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity, which had been considered by the Research Governance Committee and the Chair of the Research Committee.

Council **resolved:**

That the Annual Assurance Return be approved for submission to HEFCE.

- An update on the actions taken by the University to meet its obligations under the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 was presented. The University is required to submit an annual report to HEFCE by 1st December 2016 and the Chair of Council is required to provide a number of assurances as part of this report. It was agreed that Mr Harris and Mr Barnes would review the submission on behalf of Council and, if approved, recommend to the Chair that the declaration be made and the annual report submitted.

Council **resolved:**

That authority be delegated to Mr Harris and Mr Barnes to review the submission on behalf of Council and to recommend that the report be approved by the Chair of Council for submission to HEFCE.

- Council was asked to consider two amendments to the schedule of delegation. Firstly, to reflect recent changes in authority for excluding students from campus or permanently excluding them from the University. Secondly, to increase the level of bad debt that can be written-off by the University Executive Committee (without approval from the Business Review Committee) from £500 to £100k. Council acknowledged the need to increase the approval threshold but also expressed concern at the scale of the increase. It was agreed that, as an interim measure, the limit should be increased to £50k and that the Director of Finance & IT should come back to Council at the next meeting with a revised proposal, which would also provide a profile of the University's bad debts.

Council **resolved:**

That the proposed amendment to the schedule of delegation regarding student exclusions be approved and that, as an interim measure, the level of bad debt written-off by the University Executive Committee be increased to £50k.

- **Council resolved:**

That the amendments to Regulations, appointments, external examiners and honorary titles presented be approved.

- To note that four documents were signed under seal since the previous meeting.

PART 3 – SUB COMMITTEE REPORTS

3A. KEY OUTCOMES OF THE MEETINGS OF THE BUSINESS REVIEW COMMITTEE AND THE NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

Council received a report of the meetings of the Business Review Committee and Nominations Committee held on 17th October 2016.

The full minutes were available online.

PART 4 – STRATEGIC OVERVIEW REPORTS

4A. COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

4B. COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

COUNCIL ATTENDANCE – 10th November 2016

| | | |
|---|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| A | Ralph Findlay | Pro-Chancellor |
| | Eileen Manley | Deputy Pro-Chancellor |
| | Professor Alistair Ulph | Deputy Pro-Chancellor |
| | Richard Barnes | Deputy Pro-Chancellor |
| | Tony Crouch | Honorary Treasurer |
| | Professor Trevor McMillan | Vice-Chancellor |
| | Professor Mark Ormerod | Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost |

MEMBERS OF UNIVERSITY STAFF

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Professor Nicholas Forsyth | Senate Member |
| Dr Helen Parr | Senate Member |
| Professor Graham Rogerson | Senate Member |
| Vanessa Hooper | Appointed by the Non-academic Staff |

LAY MEMBERS APPOINTED BY THE COUNCIL

| | |
|---|------------------|
| | Sally Bucknell |
| | Richard Callaway |
| | Paul Clark |
| | Andrew Harris |
| A | Sajid Hashmi |
| | Manali Lukha |
| A | Simon Ramery |
| | Sherree Schaefer |
| | Dame Jo Williams |

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES

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| Emily Horsfall | Union Development & Democracy Officer, KeeleSU |
| Rob Meredith | President, Keele Postgraduate Association |

SECRETARY TO COUNCIL

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| Gemma Lowe | Secretary to Council |
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IN ATTENDANCE

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| Karen Clarke | Director of Finance and IT |
| Dr Mark Bacon | Director of Engagement & Partnerships (item 4B(i)) |
| Professor Kurt Allman | Director of Keele Management School (item 4B(i)) |
| Dr Helen Galbraith | Director of Planning & Academic Administration (item 1A) |
| Ed McCauley | Quality Assurance Manager (item 1A) |

SECRETARIAT

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| Fiona Dumbelton | Governance Manager |
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Key

A = Absent