

# IMPERIAL

## SENATE

### Minutes of Meeting held on 10 December 2025

**Present:** Professor Peter Haynes (Chair); Professors Ashby, Bluck, Constantinides, Craig (D), Ferguson, Gandy, Jenkins, Kingsbury, Lupton, Muggeridge, Riley, Spivey, Todd; Wiesemann; Drs Costa-Pereira, Craig, Rutschmann, Tennant, Keeling, Tsiampousi; Ms Hogas, Mr Henry, Ms Bannister, Ms Burrows, Mr Ashton (Secretary), Mr Tucker (Minute Secretary).

**Apologies:** Professors Ashby, Brandon, Craster, Matar; Ms Webster.

**In attendance:** Ms Anna Shierson (for minute 2944)

#### **2964 Minutes**

Received and confirmed: The minutes of the Senate meeting held on 15 October 2025 were confirmed as an accurate record, subject to a minor correction to the attendees list (Paper Senate/2025/07).

#### **2965 Apologies for Absence**

Reported: The Chair welcomed members to the second Senate meeting of the academic year. Apologies for absence were noted as above.

#### **2966 Senate Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership 2025/26**

Noted: Prof Thibault Bertrand had been nominated by the Faculty of Natural Sciences as a new representative to the Senate.

#### **2967 Chair's Action**

Reported: No Chair's actions had been made since the previous meeting of the Senate.

#### **2968 Matters Arising**

Reported: All matters arising were covered on the agenda.

#### **2969 Provost and Deputy President's Report**

Received: A verbal report from the Provost and Deputy President.

Reported: (1) The Chair noted two significant items already included on the agenda, namely the arrangements for TEF and the disruption to teaching. The Chair also reported that admissions had strengthened for the current cycle; although the university had fallen behind

target and budget in the previous academic year, growth in the present cycle had returned performance to the expected level. It was noted that challenges remained, including a decline in demand for part-time online programmes, which appeared to be consistent with sector-wide trends. An increase in the number of overseas students who paid a deposit but did not subsequently enrol was also highlighted. As this was the second year in which this pattern had been observed, members were advised that the relevant teams were taking action to address the issue.

## **2970 Admissions Update**

Received: A presentation from the Director of Admissions and Data providing an update on the 2026 admissions cycle, with a particular focus on PGT applications and an overview of UG applications.

Reported: (1) Total PGT applications as of 5 December stood at 13,037, an increase of 3.6% compared with the same point in the previous cycle. Home PGT numbers remained low, in line with typical early-cycle trends, while overseas performance varied. Sector-wide challenges, including the restrictive perception of UK visa policy and the removal of dependent visas for most postgraduate routes, continued to influence applicant behaviour.

(2) Faculty-level PGT performance was mixed. Engineering reported an overall increase of 8.8%, with most departments ahead year-on-year. Medicine recorded a 7.9% decrease, largely driven by reductions in Public Health applications, though numbers remained low at this stage and targets had been adjusted. Natural Sciences experienced a 5.1% decrease overall, with significant drops in Life Sciences and Physics; however, Home applications had grown by nearly 20%. The Business School reported a 5.5% increase.

(3) Total UG applications reached 28,164 (an 11.1% increase vs 2025), reflecting a strong early-cycle position for the university. The MBBS programme saw a 10.2% decrease, attributed to instability in the applicant pool and the transition to UCAT. Excluding MBBS, UG applications increased by 13%. Members were reminded that the UCAS Equal Consideration Date had been brought forward to 14 January 2026, affecting year-to-date comparisons. Widening Participation applications remained strong at +7.1%.

(4) Strategic markets showed sustained growth at +15.6% for PGT and +11.7% for UG. Members were directed to the Admissions (Management Information) Power BI dashboards for detailed, daily-refreshed data, and were informed that monthly Admissions updates and supporting analyses were available through the Admissions Data and Reporting Teams site.

Considered in discussion: (5) Members discussed the timing of applicants sitting the TMUA and ESAT admissions tests. It was noted that applicants may choose either the October or January window, and that some candidates waited for October results before submitting applications later in the cycle. Despite these variations, the university had received more results than at the same point last year, with the January sitting still to come. The sitting pattern was reported to be consistent with changes introduced when the University of Cambridge moved to pre-application testing.

(6) Concerns were raised about fee levels and the rate of increase in certain areas. It was reported that while some programmes, such as those in Engineering, had seen increased

application numbers, others with small decreases were not currently a cause for concern. MORA was developing coordinated marketing and recruitment plans, including an upcoming UG Medicine plan, and intended to undertake a deeper review of fees next year, supported by the existing fees dashboard and additional work on market-specific price sensitivity.

(7) A question was raised regarding the plateauing of PGT applications in Medicine and whether this indicated that fee levels had reached their limit. It was noted that, particularly for international MBBS applicants, cost could not be ruled out as a barrier. The broader landscape included increasing competition from European institutions offering English-taught programmes, with applicant decisions influenced by multiple factors including price, UCAT requirements, and alternative options. Members also noted that forthcoming increases to the national minimum wage may influence graduate decisions about further study, and agreed that monitoring this impact would be useful.

(8) Members discussed the recent extension of the PGT application fee to MRes programmes, except for current Imperial students. Early indications showed a marginal decrease (approximately 36 applicants), though it was noted that a substantial bursary and application fee waiver scheme was in place and receiving increased uptake. Members welcomed exempting current students from the fee and agreed that MRes data should continue to be monitored, noting that 1+3 programmes remained exempt from application fees. The Senate recognised the challenges of operating in this environment and commended MORA for its work.

## **2971 Regulatory Condition B3 – Summary of Indicator Performance**

Received: A paper from the Director of Planning and Insight providing an update on Imperial's performance against the Office for Students' (OfS) regulatory condition B3, which requires providers to deliver positive outcomes in continuation, completion and progression for both undergraduate and postgraduate students (Paper Senate/2025/08).

Reported: (1) Imperial's overall performance remained strong, with all indicators and split indicators above the OfS numerical thresholds, and therefore minimal risk of breaching condition B3. Out of more than 500 indicators, only 29 showed any statistical uncertainty below threshold, and even in these cases the level was limited.

(2) The OfS considered indicators with 80% or more of their statistical uncertainty below threshold as "probable evidence" of underlying performance falling below the required standard. None of Imperial's indicators met this level of concern.

(3) Considered in discussion: Members discussed the OfS proposal to publish up to fifteen years of sector-wide outcomes data. It was observed that, while publication was mandatory for all providers, long-term trend data could invite interpretation or comparison by stakeholders. Concerns were raised about the potential for such data to be used in ways that encouraged applicants to favour institutions perceived as having "easier" pathways, and about the risk of reductive headlines relating to grade inflation. Members stressed that comparisons of degree classifications between universities lacked the standardisation found in the school sector, and that the concept of "grade inflation" was therefore not directly transferrable. Senate members had no concerns about its long-term performance being made public.

(4) Considered in discussion: Members sought clarity on the format in which the OfS intended to publish the outcomes data. It was reported that the publication would take the form of an online report summarising key findings, including any instances of unexplained grade inflation. Covid-era outcomes were expected to appear as clear outliers due to the operation of “no detriment” policies. Members emphasised the importance of highlighting Imperial’s stringent entry requirements in any response and discussed whether the OfS should further engage with employers regarding how degree classifications are used in recruitment processes.

(5) Considered in discussion: It was suggested that the university’s response should place strong emphasis on graduate outcomes and attributes, which members considered to be valid indicators of educational quality. Members observed that recent government commentary encouraging institutional specialisation sat uneasily alongside a regulatory focus on grade inflation. The Committee noted the short deadline of 5 January 2026 for submitting responses to the TEF proposals and agreed that, regardless of any future changes to TEF, Imperial would continue to uphold its established approach to quality assurance and its focus on absolute performance standards.

(6) It was agreed that any further comments on the institutional response to the OfS Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) proposals should be provided directly to the Planning and Insight Division for incorporation into the formal submission.

## **2972 Office for Students Report – Bachelor’s Degree Classification Algorithms**

Received: A paper from the Director of Academic Quality and Standards that summarised the OfS report on bachelor’s degree classification algorithms, drawing on investigations that had been carried out into three providers’ compliance with Condition B4 (Assessment and Awards) (Paper Senate/2025/09). The paper set out lessons the sector had learned and the regulatory expectations that providers were required to consider.

Reported: (1) The OfS had raised particular concerns about two practices: the use of multiple algorithms at the award stage, with the most favourable outcome selected for each individual student, and the discounting of credit with the lowest marks. Providers intending to continue either practice from September 2026 had been required to notify the OfS by 31 July 2026.

(2) The OfS had introduced additional reporting requirements for providers making changes likely to increase the proportion of first or upper-second classifications, or where either of the two prohibited practices was being adopted. QAEC had considered the report at its meeting on 19 November 2025 and had identified the need to review the position of Year Abroad students, who may complete more credit during their year abroad than was required for the equivalent year Imperial, including how such credit should be reflected in award calculations.

(3) UG academic regulations at Imperial already prevented the use of multiple algorithms or the discounting of lower-scoring credit. For PGT programmes, three algorithms existed to reflect different programme structures, but each programme had been required to select

one algorithm at approval or modification, and this could not be changed for individual students. The paper also highlighted the need for further work on how awards were calculated when students completed more credit than required across their degree, and on other potential inflationary risks associated with assessment and marking processes.

(4) It was recognised that existing practice in some cases might involve selecting the highest-scoring modules from surplus credit when calculating the classification of exit awards, which could conflict with OfS guidance. RPRC had already been scheduled to review this matter.

(5) Members reiterated that the university's regulations did not routinely permit the use of alternative algorithms to assist individual students, nor the discounting of lowest-performing credit. However, it was acknowledged that some local borderline-classification practices, such as requiring students to meet multiple conditions for uplift, varied across departments and could result in inconsistent experiences for students. Members agreed that this required systematic review by RPRC.

(6) Members agreed that RPRC should examine local borderline rules across faculties, review the consistency of practice, and oversee the collection of data on departmental outcomes to understand the impact of differing local approaches.

#### **Action: Director of Academic Quality and Standards**

### **2973 Student Code of Conduct**

Received: A paper that proposed amendments to the Student Code of Conduct to ensure compliance with the Office for Students Regulatory Guidance 24 (Paper Senate/2025/10).

Noted: (1) The revised Code set out expectations for student conduct on and off campus, including online activity, and clarified the relationship with other university regulations and the Freedom of Speech Code of Practice. It also expanded definitions and examples of misconduct relating to respect, honesty and integrity, sexual misconduct, harassment, bullying and other disciplinary breaches.

Considered in discussion: (2) Members asked how the university should address situations not explicitly covered by the Code, such as the wearing of symbolic items, and how consistent practice could be ensured. It was reported that such cases were referred to an advisory group when complaints were submitted under the free speech process, and that the university did not wish to introduce local policies. Members queried whether there should be a formal statement confirming that local conduct policies should not exist. It was confirmed that local variation was not expected and that student behaviour was governed at university level through a single framework.

### **2974 Lifelong Learning**

Received: A presentation from the Chief Lifelong Learning Officer that set out the university's new lifelong learning vision, which aimed to position the university as a global destination for science-led, future-focused education across the learner lifecycle. The strategy described how lifelong learning would translate scientific expertise into practical

capability for individuals, organisations and communities, supported by infrastructure enabling personalised learner pathways and flexible, stackable credentials.

Reported: (1) The briefing summarised the strategic priorities, including building an adaptive learning ecosystem, developing innovative learning experiences, scaling a distinctive lifelong learning portfolio, forming global partnerships, and cultivating engaged learning communities. It also outlined three financial delivery models, each balancing faculty involvement, consultancy arrangements and workload allocation, and explained the governance structures designed to ensure academic quality and strategic agility.

(2) The briefing highlighted progress made to date, including leadership appointments, approval of the new strategy and funding model, development of the learner journey and infrastructure, and the approval of the short course and micro-credentials frameworks. Work was ongoing to refine the product portfolio, financial planning, and implementation plans ahead of a formal launch scheduled for March 2026.

Considered in discussion: (3) Members noted that the name had been changed from the Institute of Extended Learning (IEL) to Imperial Lifelong Learning (ILL) to reflect that lifelong learning was intended to serve the whole university rather than operate as a separate entity. Members explored the ambitious growth targets and sought assurance they had been benchmarked appropriately; it was reported that the university had been underperforming compared with leading institutions such as MIT, Oxford, Cambridge and Harvard, and that given the university's stature, it was reasonable to aspire to similar performance levels.

(4) Members asked about the impact of a successful lifelong learning programme on current students. It was noted that lifelong learning could strengthen the university's brand, maintain strong alumni engagement, and provide a lower-stakes environment in which new pedagogies and technologies could be tested, some of which might later inform degree programmes. Members also reflected on the wider structural implications, including faculty workload and the capacity of central services such as the Registry, particularly in light of trends such as declining online degree demand. It was confirmed that a dedicated lifelong learning role had been created within the Registry.

(5) Members asked how the scale of ambition could be quantified, including the number of academics involved and the volume of time required. It was reported that the lifelong learning function was not yet sufficiently mature to set meaningful benchmarks, and that executive education was expected to form a substantial and variable component of growth. Members also stressed the importance of ensuring that financial benefit flowed directly to departments. It was noted that UMB had approved the consultancy-based model as the starting point, but that other models might be needed as activity scaled, with an intention to phase changes gradually rather than introduce sudden shifts.

## **2975 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee**

Received: A report that summarised the key items considered by QAEC at its meeting on 19 November 2025 (Paper Senate/2025/11).

#### Procedure for the Assessment of Fitness to Practise Medicine

Noted: (1) QAEC considered further updates to the Fitness to Practise Medicine procedure, including proposals to direct referrals from disciplinary cases to the Student Conduct and Capability Group, to incorporate conduct warnings into the process map, and to clarify the relationship between Fitness to Study and Fitness to Practise. QAEC endorsed the revisions in principle, subject to clarification of the role of the Registrar and University Secretary and minor amendments to terminology.

#### Programme Monitoring Task and Finish Group

(2) QAEC received recommendations from the group's review of programme monitoring, which was structured around what should be monitored, how and when evaluation should occur, and who was responsible for oversight. The revised approach emphasised continuous improvement, evidence-based evaluation, and timely student engagement, and QAEC endorsed the recommendations subject to further work to ensure a reduction in administrative burden. Further guidance on implementation would be issued later in the term.

#### Module Evaluation Questionnaire (MEQ) and Elective Module Surveying

(3) QAEC approved updates to the MEQ, including retaining Qualtrics as the platform, introducing revised survey questions, and running the MEQ during set university-wide windows. Only core and compulsory modules would be included in 2025/26, with electives returning in 2026/27 once data issues were resolved. QAEC also approved a template for elective-module feedback to support staff development and promotion.

#### National Student Survey 2026

(4) QAEC approved the university's NSS arrangements for 2026, including an early launch on 7 January and closure on 30 April, along with the inclusion of optional question banks on course delivery and welfare resources and facilities.

#### Collaborative Provision Subcommittee

(5) QAEC approved the reinstatement of the Collaborative Provision Subcommittee to oversee strategic developments in collaborative arrangements, noting the need to update the taxonomy to address emerging models such as validation partnerships, subcontracted provision, and remote PhDs. Membership would include all faculties, with additional representation from Legal Services and a student member.

#### Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

(6) QAEC approved the PRQC report, including updated terms of reference and membership for 2025/26, revised mutual expectations for the supervisor–student relationship, and the updated PGR Periodic Review schedule.

#### Research Student Publications – Affiliation Guidance

(7) QAEC considered guidance on the correct use of university affiliation in publications and conference presentations, particularly for students publishing after completion or on work unrelated to their thesis. QAEC approved the guidance in principle, subject to confirmation from the Library.

#### Natural Sciences Education Committee

(8) QAEC approved the updated terms of reference for the Faculty of Natural Sciences Education Committee for 2025/26.

#### Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) Annual Report

(9) QAEC noted the OIA Annual Report 2024 and the university's own annual statement. It was reported that 34 Completion of Procedures letters had been issued, an increase attributed to improved staffing capacity, and that ten cases progressed to the OIA, none of which were upheld. The university's Risk and Compliance Committee had expressed satisfaction with these trends.

#### Sector Updates

(10) QAEC noted the OfS report on bachelor's degree classification algorithms, which summarised lessons from regulatory investigations into Condition B4, and confirmed that the report would be noted at Senate.

#### Admissions Subcommittee

(11) QAEC approved several admissions-related items, including updated UG entry requirements for 2027, an extension to the English-language exemption for healthcare professionals, and the acceptability of Learning Resource Network A Level qualifications. QAEC also noted the updated Admissions Committee terms of reference and the minutes of the September 2025 meeting.

### **2976 Office for Students Consultation on Quality Assessment**

Received: A paper that reported on the Office for Students consultation on a revised quality framework that proposed integrating baseline regulatory requirements and the Teaching Excellence Framework into a single cyclical model of assessment and risk-based monitoring (Paper Senate/2025/12).

Noted: (1) The draft university response had been developed using feedback gathered from Vice Deans (Education), the Education and Student Experience Committee, QAEC, the ICU Deputy President (Education), and from university contributions to Russell Group discussions coordinated through Public Affairs.

(2) The consultation indicated that future tuition fee uplifts from 2026/27 would be linked to overall TEF ratings and to providers demonstrating strong student outcomes. The university acknowledged the associated financial implications and confirmed that the draft response would be reviewed by the Interim Vice Provost (Education and Student Experience) ahead of submission by 11 December. A further OfS consultation was expected in autumn 2026 to consider detailed metrics, operational methods and proposed changes to conditions of registration.

### **2977 Education, teaching and assessment guidance issued to Heads of Department in the event of Industrial Action**

Received: A paper that summarised updated guidance issued in November 2025 for heads of department on managing the impact of industrial action on education, teaching delivery and assessment (Paper Senate/2025/13).

Noted: (1) The guidance confirmed that the university respected the right of staff to take industrial action while seeking to mitigate disruption to students wherever possible.

(2) The principles set out in the guidance stated that teaching and assessment should be prioritised to ensure programmes were maintained; that alternative staff or methods might be used where appropriate; and that students would not be assessed on material that had not been delivered due to industrial action. The guidance emphasised the university's duty to deliver programme learning outcomes and encouraged continuation of teaching and assessment wherever feasible.

Reported: (3) Heads of department were asked to assess the impact of any industrial action, identify any support required to manage that impact, and maintain a log of teaching, learning and assessment activities that had not taken place. This information would support consistent mitigation across departments and ensure appropriate institutional oversight.

## **2978 Any Other Business**

Noted: Members concluded with a formal vote of thanks to the outgoing Academic Registrar, noting that this was their final meeting of the Senate. On behalf of the membership, the Chair expressed deep appreciation for the Academic Registrar's careful stewardship of academic quality during a period of significant challenge for both the university and the wider sector. Their consistent commitment to placing students at the heart of decision-making was highlighted as a defining hallmark of their leadership.

## **2979 Dates of Next Meetings**

Reported: The following meetings of the Senate would take place in 2025/26:

- Wednesday 25 February 2026 (15:00-17:00)
- Wednesday 22 April 2026 (15:00-17:00)
- Wednesday 24 June 2026 (15:00-17:00)