

## SENATE

### Minutes of Meeting held on 2 October 2024

- Present:** Professor Ian Walmsley (Chair); Professors Allen, Buluwela, Ces, Craster, Evans, Green, Hanna, Haynes, Kingsbury, Lindstedt, Matar, Mestel, Riley; Rutschmann, Spivey, Todd; Wiesemann, Xu; Drs Bluck, Costa-Pereira, Craig, Jenkins, Malhotra, Tennant; Ms Bannister, Ms Boutrolle, Ms Hogas, Mr Lupton, Mr Tebbutt, Ms Webster, Mr Ashton (Secretary), Mr Tucker (Minute Secretary).
- Apologies:** Professors Ashby, Brady, Brandon, Constantinides, Ferguson, Peydro, Wiesemann.
- With:** Lizzie Burrows (minute 2907)

#### 2901 Minutes

Received and confirmed: The minutes of the Senate meeting held on 26 June 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record (Paper Senate/2024/01).

#### 2902 Apologies for Absence

Reported: (1) The Chair welcomed members to the first Senate meeting of the academic year. Apologies for absence were noted as above.

(2) The Chair welcomed the following new members to the Senate:

- Professor George Constantinidis, Director of the Early Career Researcher Institute.
- Professor Neil Ferguson, Head of Department representative, Faculty of Medicine.
- Emina Hogas, Deputy President (Education), Imperial College Union.
- Professor Peter Todd, Faculty Dean representative, Business School.

(3) The Chair welcomed and congratulated Camille Boutrolle, ICU President, for a second academic year in office.

#### 2903 Senate Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership

Received and approved: *Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership of the Senate 2024-25* (Paper Senate/2024/02).

Reported: That the document was updated to reflect that the powers and functions of the Senate reside in the *College Ordinances*, but that the constitution of the Senate now resides in the new *College Regulations*. The Ordinances and Regulations support the implementation of the Charter and Statutes, and contain details on the way in which the university is governed.

## **2904 Chair's Action**

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

## **2905 Matters Arising**

Reported: That the approved academic regulations for the 2024-25 academic year were published in August. In addition, a summary of updates was published to provide clarity for stakeholders.

## **2906 Provost's Report**

Received: A verbal report from the Vice Provost (Education and Student Experience).

Reported: (1) That, following the establishment of a new Labour Government, the new Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson, had pledged to reset relationships across education, both at home and overseas. The Secretary had been clear that international students were welcome in the UK, and that their contribution to universities, communities, the economy, and the country overall would be welcomed.

(2) That the Secretary of State for Education had appointed a new interim Chair of the OfS, Sir David Behan, and planned to refocus the OfS' role on prioritising the financial stability of the sector and to deliver better quality and outcomes for students. The Secretary also stopped commencement of the *Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023* due to widespread concern that the legislation was disproportionate, burdensome, and damaging to the welfare of students, whilst not addressing hate speech on campuses.

(3) That Universities UK had published a blueprint for the new Government, setting out an agenda for the sector as it worked with the Government across this parliament. It was noted that the aim was to establish a new compact between universities and Government that align with the Government's policy agenda, and made the case for the funding and regulatory settlement that would underpin that work. The review was conducted by multiple organisations and, under the five 'big shifts' set out below, contributors were tasked with developing a line of thinking and recommendations:

- Opportunity: a new target for England of 70% of the population having studied at Level 4 or above by 2040.
- Tertiary collaboration: improving collaboration between schools, colleges, and universities to improve the flexibility and responsiveness of tertiary education.
- Local growth: through partnership between universities, business, and policymakers.
- Research: strengthening research through addressing financial sustainability, international competitiveness, and effective knowledge exchange.
- Global reach: a new global strategy for higher education including a compact for stable and sustainable international recruitment.

(4) That the five shifts would be in return for: universities being put on a firmer financial footing, initially through an injection of funds and then through a transformation programme focussed on longer term sustainability; better regulation through streamlining and reduction of bureaucracy; and improvements to the assessment of the impact of universities to give a

more comprehensive account of the non-economic and societal benefits as well as the economic returns.

(5) That the Government is considering increasing tuition fees in England in line with inflation. *(Post-meeting note: On 4 November 2024, the Government confirmed that the maximum tuition fees in England would rise by 3.1% to £9,535. This would take effect from the 2025/26 academic year).*

## **2907 Admissions Update**

Received: A presentation from the Director of Marketing, Recruitment and Admissions (MRA).

Reported: (1) That, as of 1 October 2024, the undergraduate position was as follows:

- At the end of 'confirmation' the university had confirmed 3,288 Unconditional Firm (UF) applicants, with a target of 3,157 enrolled students in December. Attrition was expected until the end of December.
- As expected, there were higher rates of attrition among the university's Overseas cohort. A higher number of Overseas applicants were confirmed to offset the higher forecast attrition.

(2) That, as of 1 October 2024, the postgraduate taught position was as follows:

- The university had 42,231 applications, a 9% increase versus 2023. Much of the growth had been achieved in Overseas.
- The university had 9,695 accepts, a 16.6% increase on 2023.
- The university had 6,485 UFs, an 8.7% increase versus 2023.

(3) That MRA, Registry and the Education Office were closely monitoring conversion to enrolment. It was noted that a full demographic analysis would be available following the close of the cycle in November.

Considered in discussion: (4) The Senate discussed the university's tuition fees strategy. It was highlighted that there had recently been extensive analysis on tuition fees and that a fee dashboard was available where the university could compare fees across the UK sector. It was reported that MRA would look to expand analysis across the US and other countries to establish a pricing model. It was noted that fees in the US were high, but that a multitude of scholarships were available, which were effectively marketed and delivered at scale.

(5) Some i360 CAS issues were identified for PGT students in June. The MRA team recruited a significant number of temporary staff to mitigate against the challenges; manually producing a CAS where required and ensuring that integrations were working. The i360 issue may have disproportionately affected the Business School due to earlier programme start dates but has now been resolved.

Reported: (6) The Chair reported that the OfS had approved the university's *Access and Participation Plan 2025/26 to 2028/29* and congratulated colleagues for their efforts in ensuring that the university sets out effective provisions in promoting equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups.

Received: A presentation from the Associate Director of Strategic Planning (Paper Senate/2024/03).

Reported: (1) That the university's "overall satisfaction" decreased slightly, placing the university in the third quartile among higher education providers. Despite this, the university maintained a strong overall position, ranking second among London's Russell Group universities and seventh within the Russell Group. It was noted that this was the first year the university had undertaken statistical significance testing on the results.

(2) That the university performed well in several areas, maintaining a top quartile position in "learning resources" and "communication about mental wellbeing support." It also remained in the top two quartiles for "teaching on my course" and "learning opportunities," despite slight score decreases.

(3) That significant declines in satisfaction were noted in "student voice," particularly regarding opportunities for feedback. "Academic support" also dropped to the third quartile, while "assessment and feedback" remained in the bottom quartile, with further declines in satisfaction regarding fairness and effectiveness of assessments.

(4) That "teaching" and "course content" remained the most common positive themes in student comments, while "assessment and feedback," "organisation and management," and "workload" were recurring common negative themes.

(5) That the NSS data was analysed by split metrics (disability, sex, ethnicity, TUNDRA, POLAR, IMD, and domicile). Statistical tests showed that students with a reported disability were significantly less satisfied than those without for "assessment and feedback" and "academic support." Regarding domicile, international students (exc. EU) consistently scored lower on areas such as intellectual stimulation, skill development, and IT support compared to UK and EU peers. The most significant variation in satisfaction was seen in the Students' Union's representation, with white, female, and students with "multiple or other impairments" or from the "rest of the world" reporting lower satisfaction than their peers.

Considered in discussion: (6) Senate members agreed that one of the priority areas for improvement was assessment and feedback. It was reported that there were new faculty assessment and feedback review coordinators in place, funded by the Learning and Teaching Strategy, who would support enhancement activities in this area. The Vice Provost (Education and Student Experience) asked for the support of Senate members to encourage their departmental colleagues to engage with the new staff to drive positive change. In addition, it was noted that the Deputy President (Education), ICU, was working with university staff and student shapers to further develop policies and procedures that aimed to improve the student experience of assessment and feedback.

(7) Senate members discussed other institutions that had demonstrated significant improvements in NSS scores and that learning from best practice was essential, particularly from competitor institutions. It was acknowledged that improvements may require a cultural shift at university level in addition to implementing practical solutions such as the use of feedback software, which had proven to be effective in CLCC, or rationalising assessment

through the modification process. Transition arrangements also needed to be enhanced as students moved into higher education. It was highlighted that improvements the university had already made may also take time to be reflected in more favourable survey results.

(8) In addition to addressing issues of feedback quality and assessment design, it was reported that the scheduling of feedback can have a significant effect on the usefulness and perceived quality, and that development of an assessment calendar would be a pragmatic step towards addressing issues with timing. It was noted that this would form part of the work that QAEC had attempted to initiate previously, which was met with some concern from departments on how a calendar would sufficiently accommodate and support the range of provision across faculties.

## **2909 OfS Condition of Registration B3 – Update on Indicator Performance**

Received: A presentation from the Associate Director of Strategic Planning (Paper Senate/2024/04).

Reported: (1) That as part of their regulation of condition B3, the OfS had set minimum thresholds which they expected providers to deliver for HE student outcomes in terms of continuation, completion, and progression. To meet the condition, a provider's outcome data for each of the indicators and split indicators should be at or above the relevant numerical thresholds. The OfS updated their public B3 data dashboard in July 2024 showing all providers' most recent data in this regard.

(2) That the university's performance was positive, with every indicator and split indicator above the minimum threshold. There was therefore minimal risk of the university breaching condition of registration B3.

(3) That out of over 500 indicators, there were just 30 with any spread of statistical uncertainty below the threshold. Of these 30 indicators, the highest spread of uncertainty below the threshold was 35.9%. The OfS considered indicators with 80% or more of their spread of statistical uncertainty below threshold as providing probable evidence that the underlying performance was below threshold.

## **2910 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee**

Received: A report from the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee held on 18 September 2024 presented by the Academic Registrar (Paper Senate/2024/05).

*Proposal to remove postgraduate taught borderline regulations in the Academic Regulations*

Considered in discussion: (1) Following discussion over several RPRC meetings, findings from an internal consultation, and consideration of data (including academic appeals and feedback from the Imperial College Union Advice Service), QAEC recommended to Senate a change to the *Regulations for Taught Programme of Study* to remove the borderline regulations for postgraduate taught programmes, except in cases where a student had accepted, 'unspent' mitigating circumstances. It was clarified that automatic uplifts based on Programme Overall Weighted Average (POWA) would remain, and that the proposed change would take effect for new students from 2025-26.

(2) At previous RPRCs, the Faculty of Medicine representative reported that a number of medicine departments were opposed to the proposed change, but that the Committee agreed a removal of the borderline must apply to all postgraduate taught programmes to ensure consistency, fairness, and transparency. At the Senate, the Chair of the Faculty of Medicine Education Committee confirmed that, despite departmental concerns, the faculty would support the proposal given the positive responses from other Faculties, and the need to have a consistent approach in applying this regulation.

(3) The Senior University Consul raised concern that the proposed change may not be well received by the Department of Mathematics, where approved criteria for the application to borderline students was in place, and that reducing flexibility could be perceived as one-dimensional, and undermining academic freedom and judgement. The Vice Dean (Education) in the Faculty of Natural Sciences confirmed that the proposal had been discussed with programme directors, who did not raise concerns for postgraduate taught provision. The Vice Provost (Education and Student Experience) also reiterated that there was now a choice of one of three algorithms that could be adopted for postgraduate taught programmes to reflect the design, delivery, and structure of the programme without unduly over emphasising particular aspects.

(4) The Faculty of Engineering and the Imperial College Business School supported the proposal.

(5) Concern was raised by the Senior University Consul that the same approach could be adopted for undergraduate programmes. Senate members agreed that any proposed changes to undergraduate borderline regulations would be the result of significant student and staff consultation across the university and informed by reliable university and sector data sets.

**Approved:** (5) Given that the majority of university departments supported the proposal, the Senate approved the removal of the postgraduate taught borderline regulations in the *Regulations for Taught Programmes of Study*.

#### *QAEC Terms of reference and Membership*

**Approved:** (1) The Senate approved the proposed updates to the QAEC terms of reference and membership.

**Reported:** (1) The Senate noted the following QAEC business:

- Arrangements for the wind down and provision for trailing students on the NTU-Imperial joint MBBS programme delivered at LKC Medicine, as well as the quality assurance and governance arrangements that would be in place.
- A high level analysis of academic appeal and academic misconduct cases managed by the Student Casework Team for 2022-23, and a summary of the current position for 2023-24. QAEC members reported that academic appeal and academic misconduct cases were being resolved in reduced timescales.
- Annual monitoring reports for postgraduate taught provision 2023-24 (reporting on 2022-23) and a summary of areas requiring further enhancement.

- Survey outcomes from the 2024 Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES). The overall satisfaction of the university's students was 79%, compared to the sector average of 84%. Quantitative results at department and programme level would be available through a new PTES dashboard, accessible to all university staff with an Imperial email account.

## 2911 Sector Updates

Received: A Report from the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team (Paper Senate/2024/06).

Reported: The following updates from across the higher education sector were noted:

- That the new *Quality Code 2024* had been published.
- That the document *QAA Achieving credit transfer at scale: An analysis of UK university policies* had been published.
- That OfS case reports on student outcomes (B3) had been published.
- That OfS Quality Assessment Reports (B1, B2, B4, B5) had been published.
- That an Independent Review of the Office for Students Fit for the Future: Higher Education Regulation towards 2035 had been published.
- That the new OfS condition to address harassment and sexual misconduct would come into.
- That the new Government has stopped commencement of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023.
- That UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) had undertaken a review of the standard terms and conditions of training grants, with an expectation that any agreed changes would come into effect from April 2025.

## 2912 Any other business

*Review of Mitigating Circumstances*

Reported: That a Working Group chaired by the Academic Registrar had been set up to review the university's *Mitigating Circumstances Policy and Procedure*

Considered in discussion: Some members of the Senate raised the following concerns: the current provision for student self-certification; the requirement for academics to write multiple examinations to accommodate in-year re-sits, and the subsequent workload implications; and the current university regulation whereby an undergraduate student must have passed all modules in the current level of study, either at first attempt, at re-sit, or by a compensated pass, to continue to the next academic year. The Academic Registrar confirmed that these issues had been, and would continue to be, discussed by the Working Group, which would next meet on 15 October.

## 2913 Dates of Next Meetings

Reported: That the following meetings of the Senate would take place in 2024/25:

- Wednesday 18 December 2024
- Wednesday 26 February 2025

- Wednesday 30 April 2025
- Wednesday 25 June 2025

All meetings start at 15.00.