

IMPERIAL

SENATE

Minutes of Meeting held on 26 February 2025

Present: Professor Ian Walmsley (Chair); Professors Allen, Buluwela, Ces, Evans, Green, Hanna, Haynes, Kingsbury, Mestel, Riley, Rutschmann, Spivey, Todd; Wiesemann, Xu; Drs Bluck, Costa-Pereira, Jenkins, Malhotra, Tennant; Ms Bannister, Ms Boutrolle, Ms Hogas, Mr Lupton, Mr Tebbutt, Ms Webster, Mr Ashton (Secretary), Mr Tucker (Minute Secretary).

Apologies: Professors Constantinidis, Craster, Lindstedt, Matar, Peydro; Dr Lorraine Craig; Ms Camille Boutrolle.

With: Louise Hanger and Ella Lui (minute 2921)

2914 Minutes

Received and confirmed: The minutes of the Senate meeting held on 2 October 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record (Paper Senate/2024/07).

2915 Apologies for Absence

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

2916 Chair's Action

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

2917 Matters Arising

Reported: That no matters were reported that were not otherwise covered on the agenda.

2918 Provost's Report

Received: A verbal report from the Provost.

Reported: (1) That the university remained in a strong position in the current application cycle, despite the myriad of challenges faced by the higher education sector.

(2) That Heather Haseley had been appointed Managing Director for the Institute of Extended Learning (IEL) and would join the university on 23 April 2025.

(3) That the next 'In Conversation with the Provost' would take place on 27 February 2025, where an update on the university's participation in the International Year of Quantum 2025 and developments with the Pears Cumbria School of Medicine would be provided.

2919 Assessment and Feedback

Received: A verbal update from the Vice-Provost (Education and Student Experience) on the Assessment and Feedback Project.

Reported: (1) The Vice-Provost (Education and Student Experience) highlighted the ongoing challenges with assessment and feedback. Assessment and feedback were consistently the lowest scoring themes in both the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES).

(2) That through the Assessment and Feedback Project, the university had made a broad commitment to reduce assessment load on all taught degree programmes. Funded through the Learning and Teaching Strategy, each faculty had been resourced with the equivalent of 1.0FTE to appoint Faculty Review Coordinators. The coordinators had been tasked with supporting programme teams in delivering the action plan on assessment and feedback agreed by a dedicated working group. The Vice-Provost (Education and Student Experience) expressed gratitude for the leadership from faculties in supporting the project and giving agency to Faculty Review Coordinators.

(3) That any proposed changes to assessment would be considered within the existing provisions of the university's Programme and Module Modification Procedure. It was envisaged that the majority of proposed modifications to assessment would be submitted in the 2025-26 academic year.

(4) That Faculty Review Coordinators were now in place and active in their roles, facilitating workshops and running focus groups to address assessment and feedback workload issues, and sharing best practices. Constructive conversations between staff and students have led to a better understanding of the challenges each group faces, particularly regarding the impact of flexible deadlines on marking consistency. The importance of promoting feedback literacy among students was evident, as well as the need for clear communication about the purpose and form of feedback for each assessment.

(5) That student shapers had been recruited across three faculties. The Business School was finalising recruitment arrangements. Student shapers would ensure that the proposed initiatives were driven by constructive conversations between staff and students. It was noted that testimonials from Faculty Review Coordinators and student shapers could be provided in a future student newsletter to highlight the progress made.

(6) That the Digital Innovation Fund (DIF) had funded several projects exploring the potential use of generative AI for aiding marking and feedback.

Considered in discussion: (7) That challenges existed in accessing data on programme- and module-level assessment in Banner due to the absence of a module catalogue. This made it difficult to holistically analyse assessment workload and deadlines. The Vice-Provost (Education

and Student Experience) confirmed that collecting this data has been prioritised through the Area Build initiative, which would enhance the accuracy of all programme-to-module connections.

(8) The Academic Registrar confirmed that assessment data was being collected in the first instance, but it was acknowledged that recording more granular level information in Banner, such as learning outcomes, could enable departments to be more creative when developing new programmes. It would also allow any overlapping curricula to be identified, which could help engender the development of interdisciplinary programmes and culture.

(9) Members discussed work being undertaken across the sector and whether there were good practices that the university could draw from. The Director of CHERS commented that the university's assessment requirements were broadly in line with providers that offer STEM education. However, the providers that excelled in assessment and feedback practices tended to empower students in the assessment design and feedback conversation, and ensured that students developed a greater knowledge of the language of assessment.

2920 Reviewing Academic Regulations

Received: A paper from the Academic Registrar that set out the work the Regulations and Policy Review Committee (RPRC) planned to undertake over the current academic year (Paper Senate/2024/08).

Reported: (1) That following recent discussions between the Vice-Provost (Education and Student Experience) and the Vice Deans (Education), Senate was presented with a list of priorities for the review and development of the university's academic regulations. The proposed areas for development had been based on an ongoing plan of work driven by department queries, external examiner comments, student casework outcomes, and sector developments. The Academic Registrar discussed the need to review the university's academic regulations to ensure they remained effective, proportionate and defensible when challenged. Members noted the importance of considering the impact of changes on students and staff, whilst ensuring academic standards were maintained.

(2) The Academic Registrar highlighted the interconnected nature of academic regulations and the links to associated policies and procedures. This made any review challenging as changes to a specific area had implications for others. It was also noted that when the Regulations for Taught Programmes of Study were implemented, there was a need to compromise to accommodate local requirements. As a result, the university may have built in some complexities through those compromises that have subsequently made the regulations challenging to navigate.

Considered in discussion: (3) Members discussed the challenges associated with re-assessment, both resits and retakes, and the university's progression requirements. Given that the university did not permit 'trailing credit', the impact on students who failed modules was discussed, as well as the associated workload for staff in setting and marking resits. In addition, the Academic Registrar highlighted that the provision of in-session resits was common in competitor institutions. Members agreed that coming to a university position of in-session resits was essential to ensure clarity and consistency for students. It was acknowledged that the university's quality and standards must always be maintained but that any proposed changes to re-assessment regulations should take into account departmental resources and student workload.

(4) It was agreed that the prioritisation of planned activity on the development of academic regulations must address the evolving interdisciplinary initiatives across the university, including provision delivered by the Institute of Extended Learning (IEL). Members agreed that the university's regulations should not restrict innovation, and that coming to a consensus on key regulations would provide a framework in which more collaborative ventures could embed.

(5) The Senate supported the business of RPRC and endorsed a radical approach to regulation and policy development. It was agreed that any major review of the university's regulatory landscape would take considerable time due to the interconnections identified. As a result, it was felt that RPRC should continue to address the prioritised items, including re-assessment, and that any further proposals would be submitted to the Senate for further consideration.

2921 Differential Outcomes Report

Received: A paper from the Associate Director of Strategic Planning, prepared by the Senior Education Evaluation Officers, that summarised updates to the Continuation and Degree Attainment reports in the Differential Outcomes App for all undergraduate students following the submission of the university's 2023/24 HESA Data Futures Engagement entity (Paper Senate/2024/09).

Reported: (1) That the following differences in performance between continuation rates and degree attainment based on ethnicity, domicile, and gender were noted:

- Mature students had higher rates of continuation and attainment than their younger counterparts. This difference was significant for UK domiciled students, and for the attainment of non-EU domiciled students.
- Overall, students with other disabilities had lower good and first class degree rates than those with no declared disabilities. This could also be seen for UK domiciled students.
- Non-EU domiciled students had lower good and first class degree attainment rates than UK and EU domiciled students.
- Students from more deprived areas (EIMD Q1/Q2) had lower continuation and attainment rates than those from the least deprived areas. There was potentially some impact of the COVID-19 pandemic evident.
- Overall, Black students had lower continuation and first class degree rates than any other ethnicity. Within the UK domicile, Black students had lower continuation than those of mixed, other or White ethnicities, and lower first class degree rates than any other ethnicities. Overall, Chinese students had lower good degree rates than any other ethnicities, with the exception of Black students whose rates were lower than rates for White or 'other' ethnicities. Chinese students also had the second lowest first class degree rate of any other ethnicity groups.
- Students from POLAR4 Q3 had lower continuation rates than those from Q5 (the least deprived quintile). Additionally, students in Q1 had lower first class degree rates than those in Q5 and Q2.
- Females had higher good degree rates than males overall, although the opposite was the case in the Faculty of Natural Sciences. The higher good degree rate for females was also seen for UK domiciled students. Additionally, EU and non-EU domiciled females had higher first class degree rates than males.

(2) That it was important to identify and address any gaps in performance between different student groups to support equitable outcomes for all students and meet regulatory requirements set by the OfS (e.g. Access and Participation Plan [APP] targets, the Teaching Excellence Framework [TEF] metrics and condition of registration B3 [student outcomes]).

(3) It was confirmed that the report included a statistical analysis of undergraduate students' continuation and degree attainment, with 95% confidence intervals (CIs). When CIs did not overlap it suggested potential statistically significant differences between groups. As well as a five-year time series, five-year aggregate data had been prepared to form a large base population and ensure robust sample sizes for all demographic splits. Further hypothesis tests had been carried out on the five-year aggregate data to confirm the statistical significance of differences between groups. This meant any statistical differences presented for an individual academic year could only ever be considered likely rather than certain. It was noted that, as these data inform prioritisation, that a multivariable analysis would be useful; this was being explored by the Strategic Planning and Insight Team.

(4) That members were encouraged to look at the PowerBI dashboards, which allowed data to be interrogated at department and programme level. The university did not yet have sufficient data in Banner for the dashboards to display differential outcomes at module level. It was noted that access to the dashboards could be granted by contacting education.evaluation@imperial.ac.uk.

Considered in discussion: (5) That supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds through continued targeted initiatives and financial assistance to support student success was essential. It was acknowledged that there could be a greater impact of certain teaching styles and approaches on certain groups, particularly overseas students. For example, active learning is more prevalent in some departments, which may pose a greater challenge to overseas students compared to areas where didactic learning is more common. Improved pre-enrolment support for students would assist in the transition to new teaching styles and could improve outcomes.

(6) Members agreed that work must continue to close the attainment gaps and noted that the university's Access and Participation Plan (APP) set out intervention strategies that the university adopted to improve equality of opportunity for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. It was noted that, at a more local level, the introduction of pre-enrolment workshops for WP students in the Faculty of Engineering had been successful, and would be rolled out across the university.

(7) That the importance of department engagement with the Careers Service during programme design was emphasised to ensure that placement activity was embedded and resourced effectively across programmes. Members also agreed that students from disadvantaged backgrounds might need additional support in gaining placements and internships, and should be encouraged to liaise with the Careers Service at the earliest opportunity.

2922 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee

Received: A report from the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) held on 5 February 2025 presented by the Academic Registrar (Paper Senate/2024/10).

Approved: (1) That the Regulations for Taught Programmes of Study were updated to include the following text, which set out the university's current position pertaining to conferment dates:

Part 5: Conferment of Awards

Undergraduate Awards

The date of the award will be 1 August subject to successful completion of the programme requirements and prior recommendation of the award of the degree by the Board of Examiners. Where programme requirements are successfully completed after the 1 August, the date of the award will be the 1st of the month following recommendation by the Board of Examiners.

Postgraduate Taught Awards

The date of the award for postgraduate taught programmes that conclude on 30 September will be the 1 November, subject to successful completion of all programme requirements and prior recommendation of the award of the degree by the Board of Examiners.

The date of the award for all other postgraduate taught programmes will be the 1st of the month following successful completion of all programme requirements and recommendation of the award of the degree by the Board of Examiners.

Noted: (2) Updates on the following items contained within the QAEC report:

- Sustainable student travel
- Study Abroad Task and Finish Group – updates on objectives
- Student exchange partnerships
- Programme development – ‘From Idea to Imperial 360’ – Outcomes from workshop
- Report from the RPRC meeting held on 20 June 2024
- Consideration of re-assessment principles and regulation
- Proposal to change the requirement to optional for external examiners to be allocated a mentor
- Review of implementation of *Policy of Posthumous and Aegrotat Postgraduate Research Degrees*
- Undergraduate entry requirements 2026/27
- Draft university response to OfS consultation
- Updates from across the higher education sector
- Guidelines regarding the access and retention of assessment for students on taught programmes

2923 Dates of Terms

Received: A paper from the Academic Registrar setting out proposed university term dates from 2026-26 to 2034-35 (Paper Senate/2024/11).

Confirmed: (1) The term dates for the 2025-2026 session, which had previously been approved by the Senate in February 2024. The variations to term dates for the 2025-26 session, showing placement arrangements (study abroad and industrial/research) were also confirmed.

Approved: (2) The proposed dates for the 2027-2028 session.

Noted: (3) That for future planning purposes, the Senate noted provisional term dates for sessions 2028-2029 to 2034-2035. It was also noted that the Spring Term 2035 would end on 23 March, which was Good Friday that year.

2924 Office for Students: Consultation on OfS Strategy for 2025-2030

Received: The university's response to the consultation on the OfS Strategy, which was submitted to the OfS on 20 February 2025 (Paper Senate/2024/12).

Reported: That the OfS had proposed a new strategy for 2025-30 that prioritised quality, student interest, and sector resilience in higher education. It was noted that the draft strategy aimed to ensure that students from all backgrounds received a high-quality education, delivered by a diverse and sustainable sector. It also included transforming the OfS' approach to regulating quality and strengthening its role as a champion of the student interest.

2925 Office for Students: Consultation on reforms to OfS Registration Requirements

Received: A summary of the OfS' proposals to change entry tests for registration relating to consumer protection and governance (Paper Senate/2024/13).

Reported: That the OfS had published proposals to change their entry tests for registration relating to consumer protection and governance, and amendments to the registration process. It was noted that the registration process is currently paused. While it was proposed that the new conditions would initially only apply to new entrants to the OfS Register, it should be expected that the OfS might determine that these should be applied to all providers in due course.

2926 Any other business

Noted: That no other business was reported.

2927 Dates of Next Meetings

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

- Wednesday 26 February 2025 (15:00-17:00)
- Wednesday 30 April 2025 (15:00-17:00)
- Wednesday 25 June 2025 (15:00-17:00)