

IMPERIAL

SENATE

Minutes of Meeting held on 30 April 2025

Present: Professor Ian Walmsley (Chair); Professors Brady, Constantinides, Ferguson, Haynes, Lindstedt, Mestel, Riley, Spivey, Todd; Wiesemann, Xu; Drs Bluck, Costa-Pereira, Craig, Jenkins, , Rutschmann, Tennant; Ms Hogas, Mr Lupton, Mr Tebbutt, Ms Webster, Mr Ashton (Secretary), Mr Tucker (Minute Secretary)

Apologies: Professors, Ces, Craster, Kingsbury, Matar, Peydro; Dr Malhotra; Ms Camille Boutrolle

2928 Minutes

Received and confirmed: The minutes of the Senate meeting held on 26 February 2025 were confirmed as an accurate record (Paper Senate/2024/14).

2929 Apologies for Absence

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

2930 Chair's Action

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

2931 Matters Arising

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

2932 Provost's Report

Received: A verbal report from the Provost.

Reported: (1) A group, including the Chief People Officer and the Head of Legal, was reviewing policies in response to recent OfS decisions and Supreme Court rulings. It was highlighted that the review aimed to maintain the university's commitment to inclusivity and diversity, whilst ensuring policies complied with legislation. The University Management Board (UMB) would consider the outcomes of the review in due course.

Reported: (2) That the university remained in a strong position in the current application cycle. It was noted that there may be a modest increase in overseas applications owing to wider geopolitical factors, including early indications that recent policy developments under the new administration in the United States may be encouraging some prospective students to consider alternative study destinations.

Reported: (3) The Chair announced that they would be leaving the role of Provost at the end of the academic year. In reflecting on seven years of working with the Senate, appreciation was expressed for the contributions of its members, particularly in relation to the university's progress in the National Student Survey (NSS).

2933 Ensuring Compliance with the Regulator

Received: A paper from the Academic Registrar, and Director of Academic Quality and Standards, on the internal and external contexts for consideration of the university's ability to demonstrate compliance with the Office for Students (OfS), and with accrediting bodies for taught programmes (Paper Senate/2024/15).

Reported: (1) At the last meeting of the Senate held on 26 February 2025, the Chair asked that the Academic Registrar, and Director of Academic Quality and Standards, explored options to think differently about navigating compliance with the OfS, and accrediting bodies (minute 2920(5) refers).

Reported (2): Whilst the university had long-established quality assurance procedures and academic policies, it was timely to review these in light of the new Academic Strategy, including the formation of the Institute of Extended Learning (IEL), increasing interdisciplinarity, and rising student numbers. External drivers were also evolving including the OfS' Conditions of Registration and Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), sector reference points from the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), requirements set by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), consumer-protection obligations under Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) guidance, and wider policy developments, such as changes to immigration policy. Concerns remained regarding the workload associated with current university procedures, with departmental autonomy presenting inherent challenges for ensuring the consistent adoption of university policies. It was noted that a more risk-based, data-informed approach to quality assurance, aligned with broader sector practice, may help address these issues by enabling proportionate oversight and targeted enhancements.

Reported (3): There were several university initiatives underway in the academic quality and standards area. Reviews were underway or planned for the annual monitoring process, the mitigating circumstances policy and procedure, programme approval and modification procedures, and a project to reduce the assessment burden for students and staff.

Considered in discussion (4): Four proposals were considered for adoption: 1. reinstating Departmental Teaching Committees (DTCs); 2. re-establishing systematic reporting of PSRB accreditation activities; 3. reviewing the academic calendar; and 4. ensuring that systems and processes are developed in line with approved regulations and policies.

Considered in discussion (5): It was noted that further work was underway to improve processes relating to programme approval and modifications. It was further discussed that clarifying the role of DTCs within the programme approval and modification process would be beneficial. It was agreed that clear expectations should be set at each level of the approval process, including delineating responsibilities between departments, faculties, and the Programmes Committee, and ensuring that the type and scope of due diligence were appropriate to each level.

Concerns were raised about the timeliness of modifications and the need to ensure compliance with CMA guidance relating to consumer law. It was recognised that all institutions faced challenges in managing late modifications and the associated requirement to communicate changes to applicants and students. It was agreed that further consideration was needed to determine appropriate trigger points for such communications, particularly in the context of increasing interest from the OfS in consumer law compliance.

Approved: (6) The Senate agreed that DTCs should be reinstated, or an equivalent committee appropriate to a faculty or school structure, and recommended a review of committees' terms of reference. It was noted that although DTCs were previously removed from the university's formal governance structure, they continue to play a valuable role in some faculties. Making their work more visible would support compliance and enhancement efforts. It was emphasised that this should not introduce additional burden but instead, provide clarity on the division of responsibilities. It was also recommended to review the terms of reference for Faculty Education Committees (FECs), QAEC, and Senate to clarify the levels of scrutiny required across key quality assurance processes. It was agreed that reporting lines should be reviewed for related activities, such as departmental reviews, to ensure outcomes related to academic quality and standards are appropriately considered.

Approved: (7): The Senate agreed to re-establish the systematic reporting of PSRB accreditation outcomes for taught programmes. Redeveloping a PSRB register would also support improved institutional awareness of accreditation activity, promote the sharing of good practice, and help ensure accurate, up-to-date programme information, supporting compliance with consumer protection obligations.

Considered in discussion (8): The Senate considered a proposal to review the academic calendar, which was not consistently followed across the university. It was proposed that a standardised calendar would support student transition and progression, improve planning for staff, facilitate cross-departmental collaboration, and enable better use of university space. Three levels of consideration were identified: reviewing the overarching structure of the academic year, clearly defining student lifecycle milestones, and establishing an operational calendar for internal deadlines. It was noted that the current 39-week, three-term structure had not been reviewed since the transition to modular programmes. The ICU representative felt that an academic calendar would be a useful resource for students as there was a desire to plan out the year to manage workload. However, it was acknowledged that aligning student lifecycle activities across the university would be extremely challenging.

Considered in discussion/Approved (9): The Senate did not endorse a review of the overarching structure of the academic year or the alignment of student lifecycle milestones across the university but agreed that a university operational calendar should be established. Publishing operational dates for key activities would support planning and statutory reporting deadlines.

Agreed: (8): In support of the university's "Science for Humanity" Strategy and associated Enabling Roadmap, the Senate agreed that digital systems and processes be designed based on centrally approved regulations and policies and not local interpretations. This approach would promote consistency, improve usability, and ensure compliance. Designing systems around agreed policy would enhance the staff and student experience, support effective use of resources, and align with the OfS' expectations regarding policy adherence.

2934 Building Developments to Support Education and Student Experience

Received: A paper from the Academic Registrar that provided a summary of ongoing work to develop university campuses (Paper Senate/2024/16).

Reported: (1) That efforts were being made to improve space utilisation across campuses, including manual surveys of room occupancy. These improvements were necessary to improve both the university's current provision for learning and teaching and to accommodate the growth the university is embarking upon over the next five years.

It was noted that the Education Space Committee's remit included the consideration of the impact of space on the academic experience, and agreeing education space priorities. The Education Space Committee reported into the Education and Student Experience Committee.

Reported: (2) The following developments were reported:

- South Kensington: The Great Hall was being repurposed to serve as both a plenary event space and a large teaching space with reconfigurable seating. The intention was to benefit academic departments that were either seeking to grow or have already outgrown their existing space.
- South Kensington: The Sherfield Building was being redeveloped to accommodate new teaching spaces, study spaces and services hubs.
- White City: Significant developments were underway, including new facilities to support educational programmes.
- Charing Cross and Hammersmith: It was reported that Charing Cross had received investment in student amenities within the Reynolds Building over the past two years. It was noted that Hammersmith had not been overlooked, and it was acknowledged that some space provision at the site required modernising.

Noted: (3) That the Early Career Researcher Institute (ECRI), which had significant responsibility for postgraduate students, was supported by UMB in securing space, initially at South Kensington and, in due course, at White City. The importance of ensuring the Institute remained visible within wider discussions about student space provision was emphasised.

2935 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee

Received: A report from the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee held on 12 March 2025 presented by the Academic Registrar (Paper Senate/2024/17).

Noted: (1) Updates on the following items contained within the QAEC report:

- Review of new programme development and modifications
- Review of Mitigating Circumstances Policy and Procedure
- Developing the Module Evaluation Questionnaire (MEQ)
- Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) dates and options (opening date: 24 April 2025, closing date: 15 May 2025)
- Report from the Regulations and Policy Review Committee (RPRC), including approved updates to the Board of Examiners Notes and Conduct of Boards of Examiners (26 February 2025)

- Report from the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC) (26 February 2025)
- Report from Programmes Committee (30 January 2025)

Received: A report from the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee held on 16 April 2025 presented by the Academic Registrar (Paper Senate/2024/18).

Reported: (2) The Senate received a proposal to develop the MEQ for 2025/26. The following changes were proposed:

- That only core/compulsory modules would be eligible for evaluation via the MEQ, in addition to all Horizons modules (even where these were designated as electives). Departments could opt to exclude modules, where appropriate.
- That only staff who had contributed more than 4 hours of teaching on a module would be eligible to be included in the MEQ, up to a maximum of 5 staff members per module, to reduce survey fatigue.
- That a template questionnaire (for use on a platform such as Menti), intended to be used at the end of a series of lectures, would be developed to allow those teaching to survey students studying elective modules to elicit feedback on these modules and individual staff evaluation, to support the academic promotions process.
- That a revised set of survey questions were used.

For the proposal to be implemented effectively, some additional work would need to be undertaken by Registry (questionnaire development, additional data quality checks), Strategic Planning and Insight Team (PowerBI dashboard development) and ICT (update bespoke report using Banner data, free text distribution automation).

Considered in discussion: (3) Concerns had been raised at QAEC, and were echoed by some members of Senate, that excluding electives would limit the comparative data needed by departments with curricula composed largely of elective modules, which was common in years 3 and 4 of some integrated masters programmes. In response, the Vice Provost (Education and Student Experience) confirmed that the interim solution would be evaluated for its usefulness to faculties, and that a full MEQ redesign in 2026/27 would re-integrate electives. Historical data indicated that response rates for electives were lower in the latter years of undergraduate programmes, and limiting the scope of the MEQ in the short term would enable the MEQ Team to utilise accurate core/compulsory enrolment datasets and avoid the issues with accessing unreliable enrolment data for elective modules, which was not always available in time manner to deliver the MEQ. To ensure that the proposed phased approach, starting with a streamlined, deliverable MEQ, would be successfully and rebuild confidence, the Vice Provost (Education and Student Experience) did not recommend that any electives should be included as part of the MEQ in 2025/26, even elective Horizons modules.

The committee acknowledged that reliable, attributable feedback is essential for academic promotions. Where a staff member would not receive MEQ data under the proposed interim model, alternative mechanisms, such as in-class pulse surveys on platforms like Menti, or peer observation, were encouraged. It was emphasised that in-class pulse surveys undertaken during scheduled teaching time could be managed by teaching teams. Further work would be undertaken to develop supporting material to allow staff to develop and set up in-class pulse surveys to capture feedback for electives in 2025/26.

Considered in discussion: (4) The proposed teaching threshold by which teaching staff would be included in the MEQ in 2025/26 was discussed. The requirement to have taught four hours on a module, with a limit of five teaching staff per module, was intended to reduce survey fatigue among students. However, the Senate agreed that, given the variation in the division of teaching across modules, further consideration was required, and a commitment was made to review the proposed figure with departments.

Considered in discussion: (5) The Senate considered the following draft survey questions:

Module Questions:

1. Feedback throughout the module has allowed me to develop and improve my learning.
2. I was able to access the materials for the module to support my learning.
3. I had sufficient access to academic support and learning resources for the module.
4. Overall, I am satisfied with the teaching on this module.

Free Text box (with prompt text).

Please provide any additional constructive feedback on the module, for example on the assessment load, opportunities to interact and collaborate with other students on the module

Staff Questions:

1. The teaching was clear and understandable.
2. The staff member generated interest and enthusiasm.
3. The staff member was approachable.
4. Overall, I am satisfied with this staff member.

Free Text box (with prompt text)

Please provide any additional constructive feedback for this staff member.

The Senate agreed that further consultation would be undertaken with departments before the questions were finalised. It was noted that question 4 of the staff questions should be phrased in a way that ensured that teaching was evaluated.

Considered in discussion: (6) Attention was drawn to the additional technical work required. New survey design and logic, and enhanced data quality checks were required. Support from the Strategic Planning and Insight Team would be required to develop the exiting MEQ PowerBI dashboard, in addition to ICT support to create a bespoke module enrolment report, and exploration into the automation of free-text comments distribution.

Approved: (7) In closing, the Senate agreed that delivering a stable, limited-scope MEQ in 2025/26 would lay a foundation for a more ambitious survey that reinstated electives in subsequent years.

As a result, the following principles were approved:

- That only core/compulsory modules would be eligible for evaluation via the MEQ
- That the threshold by which staff would be eligible for to be evaluation within the MEQ would be considered further
- That a template questionnaire (for use on a platform such as Menti), intended to be used at the end of a series of lectures, would be developed to allow those teaching to survey students studying elective modules to elicit feedback on these modules and individual staff evaluation, to support the academic promotions process.
- That a revised set of questions would be further discussed with departments.

A workshop would be convened to gather further feedback on the interim approach, discuss strategies to raise response rates, and maintain dialogue on long-term MEQ development.

Action: Vice Provost (Education and Student Experience)

Noted: (8) Updates on the following items contained within the QAEC report:

- Approved Student Substance Use Policy
- Approved updates to the Policy on Research Degree Supervision
- Summary of postgraduate taught external examiner reports for 2023-2024
 - 99% (153 of 155) agreed that the degree awarding body maintained threshold academic standards.
 - 98% (152 of 155) agreed that the assessment process measured student achievement rigorously and fairly.
 - 99% (153 of 155) agreed that academic standards and student achievements were comparable with other degree awarding bodies.
- Formation of a Micro-credentials Working Group
- Reports from Programmes Committee (20 March and 27 March 2025)

2936 Received: A Report from the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team on updates from across the higher education sector relating to academic quality and standards (Paper Senate/2024/19).

Reported: The following updates were noted:

- Monitoring Guidance for 2024-25 Capital Funding
- OfS to Resume Assessments in August
- Quality and Standards Assessment Report – National Institute of Teaching
- University of Sussex fined after an investigation found the university's governing documents failed to uphold freedom of speech and academic freedom
- Update to Key Performance Measure 11: Efficient Regulation

2937 Any other business

Reported: The Senate congratulated Emina Hogas on being re-elected as Deputy President (Education), ICU.

2938 Dates of Next Meetings

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

- Wednesday 25 June 2025 (15:00-17:00)