

**UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE HIGHER EDUCATION CORPORATION****ACADEMIC BOARD**

Minutes of the meeting of the Academic Board held on 19 June 2024.

**PRESENT:** Professor Quintin McKellar (Chair)

Professor Mairi Watson	Oluronke Flora Oluwalere	Amanda Yip
Dr Charmagne Barnes	Hamnah Baig	Dr Joel Carlton
Professor Damian Ward	Pam Lambert	Dr Funlade Sunmola
Professor Daniel McCluskey	Roxanne Garara	Dr Luke Wood
Julie Kelly	Dr Carolyn Devereux	Professor Frank Haddleton
Geri Ward	Associate Prof. Martina Doolan	

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Professor Helen Barefoot	Karen Chater	Linda Goodwin
Rohit Mahadevu	Dan Procter	Helen Davidson
		Bethan Adams

1 **APOLOGIES****Chair's Opening Remarks**

The Chair informed colleagues it was the last meeting of the Academic Board for Academic Registrar, Julie Kelly who would leave the University at the end of the Academic Year.

The Board welcomed the incoming President of the Hertfordshire Students' Union, Rohit Mahadevu, who was in attendance and would join the Academic Board Membership under Category 9 from July 2024.

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Secretary and Registrar, Sharon Harrison-Barker; Dean of the Schools of Law and Education, Professor Penny Carey; Chief Information and Digital Officer, David Gillard, Director of the Doctoral College, Dr Susan Grey, Academic Staff representative, Dr Amy Wells and Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Enterprise, Professor Wendy Wills.

The Board noted that; Bethan Adams was in attendance as alternate for David Gillard; Dan Procter would be in attendance by MS Teams for item 15; and Director of Academic Quality, Professor Frank Haddleton would join the meeting at 3.15 pm.

2 **NEW DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY**

There were no new declarations of interest made.

3 **MEMBERSHIP**

The Board received a report which outlined changes to Academic Board Membership for the next Academic Year 2024/25.

The Board noted that the term of office for the Dean of School of the Hertfordshire Business School would end on 31 August 2024. Deans of School would be asked to nominate to the two vacancies under Category 5 Membership.

The Student Representative Council of the Hertfordshire Students' Union would be asked to nominate one undergraduate student and one postgraduate taught student to Category 10 and Category 11 Memberships respectively.

The Board noted that following notices of election to new Categories 12 and 13 that nominations were received by Chris Cooper and Christopher Nicholas who were automatically appointed to the Academic Board as professional and academic staff representatives, respectively.

It was noted that Jonathan Morris had been nominated by the Chair of the Research Committee to one of the two vacancies of Category 14 Membership, 'Two (2) members of the academic staff appointed on the basis of pedagogic expertise'. The representative appointed by the Educational Student Experience Committee (ESEC) would be confirmed by the Chair of ESEC before the start of the next Academic Year.

**RESOLVED**

(Confidential Agenda Paper 3 refers)

**4 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2024 were agreed and signed as an accurate record of the business conducted.

**RESOLVED**

(Confidential Agenda Paper 4 refers)

**5 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

There were no matters arising from the previous meeting that were not taken elsewhere on the Agenda.

**RESOLVED**

**6 NATIONAL AGENDA FOR HIGHER EDUCATION**

The Committee received a verbal report from the Chair.

Since the last meeting of the Academic Board in March 2024, the new Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education, Luke Hall had been appointed on 26 March 2024, following the resignation of Robert Halfon. There had also been an announcement regarding the general election on 4 July 2024, until which time all business in the House of Commons and House of Lords had temporarily ceased.

Outcomes of the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) assessment of the graduate visa route, undertaken by James Cleverly were positive for the sector and allayed sector concerns for international student recruitment. No abuse had been found with the graduate visa route, which the Report proposed, would be retained. The Report further proposed that providers complied with the Overseas Agents Quality Framework, which the Board acknowledged, was University current practice. However, the recommendation that providers published their expenditure on overseas agents might require further negotiation with the sector considering the competitive international student market. The Committee acknowledged that changes to outcomes of the MAC report were not anticipated considering any future change of government.

The Board noted the Office for National Statistics (ONS) had reported a 10% drop in net migration in the UK, a significant proportion of which was due to student migration as a result of changes imposed by government to visas for dependents and healthcare costs, as well as continued negative government rhetoric.

The Office for Students (OfS) was consulting on the Freedom of Speech Act, which would undoubtedly be incorporated into the Conditions of Registration in the future.

It was noted that an Office for Students sustainability paper had predicted that by 2026/27, 75% of the UK's 202 Higher Education institutions, would be in deficit with 135 (50%) with low liquidity. The Chair assured the Board that the University's financial position remained strong and was positively placed for the recruitment and retention of staff.

The government had raised security concerns regarding overseas Chinese students in relation to data, intellectual property and defence. While no specific requests had been made of the sector in this regard future action was anticipated.

The date for the Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) had been delayed with access to funding moved back to 2026. It was not anticipated that change of government would influence the initiative. The Board noted that Academic Registry would bring a presentation updating on the Lifelong Learning Entitlement to the next meeting of the Academic Board in November 2024.

The Board noted there were 2 manifestos of significant relevance to Higher Education in the general election campaigns, one from each of the Conservative and Labour parties. The Conservatives pledged to crack down on universities who offered 'mickey mouse' courses, a broad definition of which was thought to be, courses from which students graduated and earned less than their non-university counterparts. The Conservatives promised to take 130,000 places away from universities with poor quality courses to fund 100,000 higher level apprenticeships. The greater detail and definitions of courses were not yet known but it was noted in Wonkhe, that this was the first manifesto proposal in 30 years that sought to reduce university numbers. The Labour Party was less forthcoming but had made a commitment in its manifesto to find a sustainable funding model.

### **RESOLVED**

## **7 ANY OTHER MATTERS FOR REPORT BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR**

The Board received an update from the Chair in regard to progress with the development of the University Strategic Plan 2025-2030. It was acknowledged there had been good engagement and broad institutional support for the direction of travel. The Chair encouraged members and colleagues to continue their engagement with the development of the Strategy.

The Board received a report on the Chair and Deputy Vice-Chancellor's visit to Australia, whose seemingly robust funding system gave a positive impression due to its scale and relationships with industry. Like the UK Australia was highly reliant on the international student market with 600,000 students enrolled across 40 universities and a gross impact of \$46b AU Dollars (compared to the UK's 700,000 students enrolled across 140 universities and a gross impact of £41b). However, the Board noted that of the 42 universities in Australia, only 4 would publish a surplus that year. Australia shared the UK's concerns regarding the impact government policy had on international student recruitment.

A recent Ofsted inspection of the University's Degree Apprenticeship provision had found it was 'good', which represented significant improvement on the previous inspection. The provision was close to 'outstanding' on some metrics.

The recent Festival of Ideas which took place on campus last month had been a resounding success. The Chair congratulated and thanked colleagues, participants and everyone involved in the truly collaborative showcase event.

### **RESOLVED**

## **8 ITEMS FOR REPORT FROM THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

The Board received a verbal update report from Dr Joel Carlton on matters considered by the Board of Governors since the last meeting of the Academic Board.

At the meeting of the Board of Governors in March 2024, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Mairi Watson presented an update on the Strategic Plan. Two reports were presented by the Secretary and Registrar, Sharon Harrison-Barker which outlined the complaints received by the University from its students and applicants, and the underlying trends. The Board had noted the number of complaints was proportionally low due to the University's early interventions of dispute resolution practices. The Board had been briefed in relation to a visit of the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester to the St Albans Cathedral where a celebration had been hosted for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the modern Commonwealth of Nations, at which students from the University paraded the Commonwealth Nations flags. Hertfordshire Students' Union President, Manoj Nagireddy had been congratulated for arranging the University's participation in the event.

At the April meeting of the Board of Governors, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Dr Charmagne Barnes, presented on; progress with the Access and Participation Plan which would be submitted in October 2024; and the results of the Educational Gains Survey 2023, which had been identified as a strength in the University's TEF 2023. Pro Vice-Chancellor Jo Stuart had requested approval to proceed with proposals for a professional internship pathway for Postgraduate Taught Students from September 2024 and would revert to a future meeting of the Board with more details. Jo had also briefed the Board on the latest student recruitment position. Director of Business Development, Kate Asante, presented the Apprenticeship Portfolio and University Self-Assessment Report. The Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor reported to the Board on their recent visit to Australia, to universities which formed part of the Australian Technology Network, which was similar to the UK Alliance Group. The Health and Safety Annual Report was received at the April meeting, presented by the Director of Health and Safety and Occupational Health, Damian London.

At the June meeting of the Board of Governors, Chief Information Officer, David Gillard presented on Cybersecurity, Dr Charmagne Barnes brought a report on student non-continuation, and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report 2022-2023 was presented by Head of Equality Diversity and inclusion, Dr Melanie Crofts.

### **RESOLVED**

#### **9 MATTERS FOR REPORT FROM THE PRO VICE-CHANCELLOR RESEARCH AND ENTERPRISE**

The Board received a written report from the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Professor Wendy Wills which updated on key Research and Enterprise Activities.

### **RESOLVED:**

The Board noted the update report on Research and Enterprise activities.

(Confidential Agenda Paper 9 refers)

#### **10 REPORT FROM THE PRO VICE-CHANCELLOR (EDUCATION AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE)**

The Board received a report which provided an update on cross-University interventions designed to improve student retention and reduce non-continuation. The Board acknowledged the risks of non-continuation in relation to Office for Students Condition of Registration B3, the student experience, and impact on key external measures.

The Board noted the University-wide Student Engagement and Success Plan, which underpinned the Education and Student Experience Strand of the University Strategy 2025/2030, would be brought to the November meeting of Academic Board. The Plan mapped the entire student journey and the associated academic and non-academic interventions.

### **RESOLVED**

(Confidential Agenda Paper 10 refers)

#### **11 AWARDED GAP: RACE AND ETHNICITY EQUITY STUDENT SUCCESS**

The Board received a report which updated on progress on the key activities agreed by the Academic Board in March 2024, which refocused efforts on addressing the awarding gap. It was noted that focus on modules with the highest failure rates and staff development were ongoing in each School and looked at key data and initiatives programme by programme.

The Board discussed 'exam creep' which it was acknowledged might be a result of staff concerns regarding the security of assessments. However, the Board was assured that authentic, inclusive and secure assessment was the key message which underpinned staff development activity in Schools. The Board suggested additional measures to monitor 'exam creep' could include; clear and demonstrable evidence for staff of assessments that widened the gap; assessment mapping exercises; and direct interventions which challenged every exam choice. Further, the Board noted that earlier measurement of the awarding gap at

module level would enable timelier intervention, and was pleased to note this practice would be implemented in the coming year.

The Board discussed exams at level 4, which they noted were uncommon in the sector and had a detrimental impact on student retention. It was noted that a report would be brought to the Educational Student Experience Committee the following week which demonstrated percentage increases in exam usage by School. The Board considered a suggestion that the University's position on exams might be made policy, which would prevent exam creep and positively impact student retention.

**ACTION:**

The Board requested the Educational Student Experience Committee fully considered the implications of a policy decision around exams and reverted to the Academic Board with recommendations. ESEC would also consider concerns raised that mandating the removal of exams level 4 would delay the same concerns to level 5.

(Confidential Agenda Paper 11 refers)

12 **REPORT FROM THE DEAN OF STUDENTS**

The Board received a report which summarised the work of the Dean of Students to May 2024.

The Board noted that with the General Election announced for 4 July 2024 the announcement from the Office for Students regarding the Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Condition of Registration had been delayed. There would be a requirement for students to undertake some form of harassment and sexual misconduct training at the start of their studies, and further details were anticipated after 4 July 2024. There were also delays with the Mental Health Taskforce whose final outcomes were postponed from May 2024 to 2025.

The Board discussed concerns regarding the signposting and usage of student wellbeing services and noted the Dean of Students had prepared a proposal to the Board of Governors with recommendations for changes to the Study Needs Agreement (SNA) system which would broaden access and encourage engagement with wellbeing services. The Board acknowledged suggestions for improved communication of wellbeing services at School induction, Module level, and through Canvas notifications.

The Board discussed a concern around the short one-week referral/deferral period which restricted time available for students to access guidance and support. The Board acknowledged the difficulties around the timings of assessments and considered a review of the current system might be appropriate.

**ACTION:**

The Board agreed the Educational Student Experience Committee would revisit the assessment/referral/deferral discussion and revert to the Academic Board with recommendations.

(Confidential Agenda Paper 12 refers)

13 **STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2030**

The Board received a verbal update on progress with the development of the University Strategic Plan 2025-2030 which was currently in the consultation and discussion phase (Phase 2). Feedback on Phase two, had seen good engagement and largely supported the direction of travel. Feedback continued to be gathered and a paper which requested high level approval would be taken to the Board of Governors in September 2024. Following Board of Governors approval, external stakeholder consultation and operational plan working groups would commence. The Board noted that student representation was included within the operational working groups. The formal launch event was scheduled for January 2025.

The Board noted that the University Strategic Plan was a Board level strategy, drawn up in wide consultation with stakeholders. It was therefore not anticipated that a change of Vice-Chancellor would change the strategic direction of the University.

**RESOLVED**

## 14 **MEDICAL SCHOOL UPDATE**

The Board received a verbal update on progress with plans for the development of the Medical School. Board of Governor approval had been given in October 2022, following which, General Medical Council (GMC) approval for delivery of the Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Science (MBBS) was given for the first intake of 70 students from 2027. The Board noted the University had passed the second stage of a total of eight stages, the final of which would be graduation.

Since initial approval in October 2022, the University had been back to the Board and requested expedited progression for an earlier commencement date of 2026/27. Board approval had been given based on 4 key rationale; strong GMC encouragement; the readiness of the University's building programme for 2026; more advantageous timing for the acquisition of NHS funded places; as well as the direct and indirect financial benefits of earlier delivery. Earlier reputational benefit was an additional advantage. The University's plans for a Medical School (MBBS) from 2026 had significant external stakeholder support.

### **RESOLVED**

## 15 **STANDING WORKING PARTY ON UNIVERSITY POLICIES AND REGULATIONS (UPRS)**

The Board received the Annual Report of the Standing Working Party on University Policies and Regulations, the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2024, and items referred for consideration and decision by the Academic Board.

The Board received a verbal report from Deputy Secretary and Registrar, Helen Davidson which gave an overview of the items referred for consideration and decision.

The Board noted that amendments proposed to UPRs HR07 'Readerships/Associate Professorships' and HR08 'Professorships' were a result of wide stakeholder consultation and agreement with the Unions. The Board requested clarification in respect of UPR HR08, where it noted there was no academic link on the professorial conferment panel membership for International Marketing and Communications.

### **ACTION:**

The Board agreed Helen Davidson would liaise with Professor Wendy Wills regarding why there was an academic link for the department of International Marketing and Communications on the professorial conferment panel membership.

### **New UPR TL05 'Inclusive Assessment Design'**

The Board considered the draft of a new UPR for Inclusive Assessment Design which supported the University's compliance with the Equality Act 2010.

The Board referred to page 38 of the agenda pack which summarised the outcome of the appeals lodged by the parents of Natasha Abrhart and the University of Bristol following the County Court judgement in May 2022 where the Court found the University of Bristol had breached its duties to make reasonable adjustments to the way it assessed student Natasha Abrhart. The report summarised action being taken by the University, which included the introduction and publication of a formal policy on flexible learning and assessment for students for the start of the 2024/25 Academic Year. The Board noted the draft UPR had been considered by the Educational Student Experience Committee (ESEC) in May 2024 and would go back to ESEC for final approval next week following feedback from the Academic Board.

The Board received an overview from Director of Learning and Teaching, Professor Helen Barefoot, which summarised the context, considerations and approach taken for the development of the UPR. It was noted that flexible learning and inclusive assessment guidance had been in place at the University for 2 years however, the new policy sought to clarify key points around; competence standards and assessment methods, processes for disability support, definition of a Study Needs Agreement and requirements for accessible and inclusive assessment design. The Board noted the operational challenges in relation to

policy implementation regarding the identification and definition of competence standards at Module level, and staff development. It was acknowledged that implementation would be transitional, but that policy was a legal requirement.

The Board noted the extension time limits for digital quizzes and tests had been defined as 50% more than the standard time which was longer than the current time given for students with SNA's.

**ACTION:**

The Board agreed that a consistent approach to time extensions for SNA's (section 4.3) would be considered and approved by ESEC.

**RESOLVED:**

The Board approved proposed amendments to UPRs TL05, HR07, HR08, AS12, AS14, AS17 and SA06, subject to the resolution of caveats noted in discussions around UPRs TL05 and HR08.

(Confidential Agenda Paper 15 refers)

**16 UH VALIDATION AND PERIODIC REVIEW PROCESS**

The Committee received a report which outlined a revised process for the validation and reapproval process. The proposed process would eliminate the need for University delivered programmes to undergo periodic review on a cyclical basis but rather, programmes would gain continuous approval upon validation as required through existing 'minor' and 'major' change processes. The Board received an overview of triggers for minor, substantial and major change for programmes under the revised process and noted that Portfolio Review would be a key driver for legacy review. It was noted that implementation would commence in 2024/25 for full implementation in Academic Year 2025/26.

The Board noted that ensuring the currency and coherency of the University's programmes required further consideration to ensure industry, employer and external examiner input. The Board discussed the importance of robust trigger points and suggested further consideration was given to the refinement of triggers in terms of Portfolio Review, the Continuous Enhancement Process, Industry Advisory Boards, External Examiner Boards and failure rates.

**RESOLVED:**

The Board was supportive of the proposed risk-based approach to the approval and re-approval taught provision process subject to the refinement of robust trigger points and further consideration of planning initiatives to avoid unmanageable peaks of activity/workload.

(Confidential Agenda Paper 16 refers)

**17 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2024-2025**

The Board received the draft Calendar of Meetings 2024-2025.

**RESOLVED:**

The Calendar of Meetings 2024/2025 was approved for publication.

(Confidential Agenda Paper 17 refers)

**18 GOVERNANCE REVIEW**

Further to the review of Governance arrangements for the Academic Board and its Committees, the Board received the proposed revised Terms of Reference, Composition and Membership of; Academic Board; Academic Development Committee; Research Committee; the Corporate University Policies and Regulations Advisory Group; the Standing Working Party on University Policies and Regulations; the Research and Enterprise Executive and the Knowledge Exchange Advisory Group.

**RESOLVED:**

The Board approved the revised Terms of Reference, Composition and Membership of the Academic Board and Sub-Committees.

(Confidential Agenda Paper 18 refers)

19 **CLERK'S REPORT**

The Board received and noted the Clerks Report.

**RESOLVED:**

(Confidential Agenda Paper 18 refers)

20 **EMERGENCY BUSINESS**

There were no matters of emergency business.

Approved: ..... Date: .....

(Chair)