

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF ACADEMIC COUNCIL HELD ON WEDNESDAY 4 DECEMBER 2024 IN CHILTERN HALL, MARYLEBONE BUILDING

PRESENT:	Professor Peter Bonfield (Chair) Divanshu Airan Professor Dibyesh Anand Dr Lucy Bond ¹ David Burt (Clerk) Professor Catherine Dormor Amber Ella Dr Felicity Hardley Dr Sal Jarvis (Deputy Chair) Professor Christos Kalantaridis Dr Paul Kendall	Frantzeska Kolyda Professor Andrew Linn Jeanette Nicholas Dr Pinar Uysal Onganer Dr Andy Pitchford Henryetta Simpson Dr Margherita Sprio Emma Standen Ben Stringer Dr Natasha Whiteman Ian Wilmot
IN ATTENDANCE:	Isobel Bates (Observer) Mandy Chan (Secretary) Debs Harris (Observer) Anastasia Lydaki (from Minute 24.19)	Charlotte Morgan (Observer) Ann Simpson (Minute 24.17) Daphne Vallas (Observer)
APOLOGIES:	Caroline Lloyd	Kaushika Patel

24.15 ANNOUNCEMENTS

- 24.15.1 The Chair welcomed all members and attendees.
- 24.15.2 All members and attendees introduced themselves.
- 24.15.3 Members noted apologies as detailed above.
- 24.15.4 The Chair reminded all participants of the terms of reference of Academic Council and the expected behaviour at the meeting.
- 24.15.5 The Chair gave a brief overview of the discussion items, highlighting that some items originated from previous Council discussions, underscoring the importance of ongoing reflection on the items discussed.
- 24.15.6 Members did not declare any conflicts of interest for the business on the agenda.
- 24.15.7 The Chair confirmed there were no requests to discuss starred agenda items or raise other matters not on the agenda.

Chair's report

- 24.15.8 The Chair briefed members on sector and institutional issues and developments since the last meeting, including:
- Government policies on higher education.
 - Impact of the recent increase in tuition fees and the employers' National Insurance Contribution rate.

¹ Attended on behalf of the Head of College, Liberal Arts and Sciences

- Job cuts across the sector.
- Professional support provided to the Office for Students (OfS) and the Universities UK (UUK).
- Meetings with regulators on quality transnational education delivery and partnerships.

24.16 NEW ACADEMIC CALENDAR MODEL

- 24.16.1 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) for Education commended the efforts of the Academic Calendar Review Group, highlighting that the proposal effectively addresses the University community's concerns and outlines the anticipated benefits for the University.
- 24.16.2 The Academic Registrar presented the proposal (Document AC 241204A), which had been developed over two years through multiple iterations by the Review Group.
- 24.16.3 Members thanked the Review Group for their dedicated efforts in developing and refining various models, as evidenced by the designation and the alphabetical title of the current Model M.
- 24.16.4 Members welcomed the key proposed changes, including bringing the re-assessment closer to the failure point, addressing international students' visa issues and enabling students to graduate with their cohort after re-assessment.
- 24.16.5 In response to concerns about additional teaching in Semester 3, the DVC (Education) assured members that the proposal regularises current practices without adding extra teaching load. The Academic Registrar confirmed that Semester 3 is already a term time for full-time postgraduate students as approved by the Teaching Committee in May 2023, ensuring compliance with the UK Visa and Immigration requirements.
- 24.16.6 Addressing a member's query on alignment with school holidays, the Academic Registrar explained that Academic Council had previously, and on at least two occasions, agreed that the Spring vacation should be fixed at the end of Semester 2, and the recommendation, following comprehensive consideration of all the issues, is for no change to current practice. The Academic Registrar also noted that a movable Spring break would negatively impact student success and could not accommodate diverse childcare schedules of students and colleagues across different Local Authority areas. A member commented that while no calendar can meet everyone's needs, the consistent approach of the new Calendar model is beneficial.
- 24.16.7 Members raised concerns about balancing research commitments and holiday time, especially for research active colleagues teaching postgraduate Masters courses during the summer period. The Academic Registrar noted the reduced marking load in July due to the early re-assessment arrangement and a six-week period between the end of examination and before the start of the new academic year. Nonetheless, a member queried the feasibility of taking a continuous six-week holiday given the preparation required for semester starts.
- 24.16.8 To address the workload and annual leave issues pragmatically, the DVC (Education) advised that colleagues have the right to work with their line manager on leave arrangements to support their wellbeing.
- 24.16.9 Responding to a query on transitional arrangements, the Academic Registrar noted that an Implementation Group will be established to oversee the rollout, particularly the early re-assessment. The DVC (Education) stressed the importance of careful communications with students and colleagues.
- 24.16.10 Regarding international students' summer work, the Academic Registrar noted the proposal allows an additional three weeks for summer employment.
- 24.16.11 Some members suggested delaying approval, citing feedback and statistics from a University and College Union (UCU) consultation survey, to clarify various concerns, such as Semester 3

arrangements, refer and defer in summer, research and annual leave, the feasibility of taking a six-week continuous annual leave.

- 24.16.12 The DVC (Education) emphasised the urgency of approval to meet the 2025/26 timeline, noting that consideration of the proposal had been delayed from the October 2024 meeting, the extensive consultation conducted and the need for effective implementation.
- 24.16.13 Members noted that the early re-assessment for Semester 1 modules will commence in 2026/27 due to the significant redevelopment work for the Student Record System (SITS:Vision).
- 24.16.14 The Chair thanked members for their thoughtful contributions and commended the DVC (Education), the Academic Registrar and the team for the well-thought through proposal.
- 24.16.15 The Chair reminded members that the terms of reference of Academic Council are strictly about academic endeavours and do not extend to employment matters such as workload.
- 24.16.16 The Chair concluded the discussion noting that members broadly supported the proposal from an academic perspective, with some members also expressing broader concerns which are important views and inputs but should be addressed through other channels.
- 24.16.17 On the request for delaying approval (Minute 24.16.11), the Chair cautioned against risking student interests, citing a prior international student case.
- 24.16.18 The Chair invited members to approve the proposal; two members raised concerns, particularly regarding colleagues' annual leave arrangements. The DVC (Education) advised that these issues to be addressed more effectively with the line managers (Minute 24.16.8).
- 24.16.19 To address these concerns and to ensure effective implementation, the Chair emphasised the need for a cautious approach and recommended regular updates to Academic Council, including a progress review report from the team after one year.
- 24.16.19.1 **ACTION DVC (Education) and Academic Registrar** to submit an implementation update on the new Academic Calendar model to Academic Council in December 2025.
- 24.16.20 **APPROVED** Members unanimously approved the new Academic Calendar model and the implementation timelines for 2025/26 and 2026/27.

24.17 ACADEMIC CITIZENSHIP

- 24.17.1 Ann Simpson, Employee Relations Project Manager, introduced herself to the Committee and explained the purpose of her attendance.
- 24.17.2 The Head of the Centre for Education and Teaching Innovation (CETI) introduced the concept of academic citizenship (Document AC241204B) and invited members to engage in small group discussions addressing the questions: *What starts it? What stops it? What three things could we do to help flourish?*
- 24.17.3 Members identified that academic citizenship starts with colleagues' positive attitudes, willingness to drive changes within the organisation, opportunities to participate, managerial support and the valuable learning experiences gained beyond core duties.
- 24.17.4 Members also highlighted some barriers including lack of time, transactional languages, perceived lack of organisational values, unfairness, gender disparities in career progression and low confidence in taking on additional responsibilities.
- 24.17.5 To promote academic citizenship, members suggested:

- clarifying expectations, especially regarding professional duties, within the Performance Development Review (PDR)
- rotating roles
- recognising citizenship through rewards and career progression
- linking citizenship to specific roles
- improving visibility of the roles and participation
- embedding it into the University culture for all members of the University community
- providing management support
- establishing an agency to facilitate engagement
- ensuring inclusivity and transparency in the system
- encouraging peer observation and learning
- highlighting the value of internal citizenship as compared to external citizenship

24.17.6 The Head of CETI summarised the discussions, noting consensus on key themes: career pathways, rewards and transparency, which will inform further reflections and future actions.

24.17.7 The Chair thanked the Head of CETI and other members for their contributions, emphasising that academic citizenship is a vital and inclusive part of organisational citizenship, underpinning all areas of University work.

24.18 APPRENTICESHIP OUTCOMES AND APPRENTICESHIP ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

24.18.1 The DVC (Education) presented the apprenticeship outcomes and the Apprenticeship Accountability Framework (Document AC 241204C).

24.18.2 The DVC (Education) assured members that apprenticeships are progressing well, with significant improvements in quality achievements rates for 2023/24, exceeding the Department for Education's threshold.

24.18.3 The Chair updated members on the recent inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), expressed gratitude to the team led by the DVC (Education), the Director of Business Engagement and the Deputy Registrar (Quality and Standards) for their tireless work, and noted that the report is expected in January 2025.

24.19 EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

24.19.1 The Head of CETI and Anastasia Lydaki, Sustainable Development Advisor, presented the progress of the Education for Sustainable Development Action Plan (Document AC 241204D).

24.19.2 The Head of CETI informed members that the Sustainability Fund, established in 2021/22 as a Quintin Hogg Trust project to support student-led sustainability projects, will continue for another three years with sponsorship from a Westminster alumnus.

24.19.3 Members praised CETI and the Sustainability Team for their outstanding work in embedding sustainability across the curriculum of various educational levels.

24.19.4 The Chair shared positive experience of a Level 4 architecture sustainability session, delivered in a role-play format through collaboration among the School, CETI and the Sustainability Team.

24.20 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

24.20.1 **AGREED** Members confirmed the minutes of Academic Council meeting held on 16 October 2024 (Document AC 241204E) were an accurate record of the meeting.

24.20.2 Members noted there are no outstanding actions or matter arising from previous meetings.

24.21 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

24.21.1 Members did not raise any other matters for discussion.

24.22 MEETING EVALUATION

24.22.1 A member expressed appreciation for witnessing significant academic decisions and noted that the breakout sessions provided an opportunity for all participants to contribute equally, although one discussion item slightly exceeded its allocated time.

24.22.2 An observer commended the collegiality of the discussions and the Chair's effective leadership.

24.22.3 Another observer noted a more positive vibe in the discussion compared to the same meeting last year, acknowledging the extensive preparation behind each agenda item and suggesting greater emphasis on equipping students for the external world.

24.23 REFRESHED ADMISSIONS POLICY

24.23.1 **APPROVED** Refreshed Admissions Policy (Document AC 241204F) to be implemented with immediate effect.

24.24 TERMS OF REFERENCE OF SUBCOMMITTEES

24.24.1 **APPROVED** Terms of reference of the Student Voice Forum (Document 241204G) and the Research and Knowledge Exchange Steering Committee (Document AC 241204H) to be implemented from 5 December 2024.

24.25 DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT

24.25.1 **AGREED** Members recommend the Degree Outcomes Statement (Document AC 241204I) to the Court of Governors.

24.26 UPDATED ACADEMIC COUNCIL STANDING ORDERS 2024-27

24.26.1 **AGREED** Members recommend the updated Academic Council Standing Orders 2024-27 (Document AC 241204J) to the Court of Governors.

24.27 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

All meetings start at 1.45pm and take place onsite (rooms to be confirmed).

Wednesday 19 February 2025

Wednesday 2 April 2025

Wednesday 25 June 2025