

# Minutes (unrestricted)

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**Meeting title:** Senate

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**Date:** Wednesday, 2 May 2012

**Time:** 2.15 pm

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**Location:** Senate Room, George Thomas Building, Highfield campus

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**Present:** The Vice-Chancellor (*in the Chair*), Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor Wheeler (*in the Chair for part of the meeting*), Pro Vice-Chancellor Humphris, Dr M C Azaola, Mrs M J Baker, Dr S Beers, Dr S Bleeck, Dr J Brown, Dr M L Brown, Dr J Byrne, Professor I T Cameron, Dr M Carravetta, Dr A Channon, Dr T Chown, Professor S Cox, Professor A Curry, Professor D Eccles, Dr H Eres, Mr P Gibbs, Dr M Gobbi, Dr L Green, Mrs T Harrison (*Registrar*), Dr T Irvine, Dr C W Jackson, Dr E James, Dr L Kraaijeveld, Professor N Lee, Dr L Myers, Dr D Nicole, Dr J Parker, Professor J Petts, Professor C Pope, Dr R Primorac, Dr W B Sloan, Dr A Smith, Dr C Smith, Dr P Smith, Professor J Vickers, Mr S Watt, Dr P Whittaker, Dr Y Xiong and Mr E Zaluska (members who did not sign attendance sheet)

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**By invitation** Dr J Anderson, Ms J Arkell and Dr K A Piggott

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**In attendance** The Chief Operating Officer and Ms C J Gamble

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## Welcome

The Vice-Chancellor welcomed everyone to the extraordinary meeting of Senate.

## Obituary

The Vice-Chancellor announced with regret the death of a member of staff:

Mrs Barbara Green, 18 March 2012.

The Vice-Chancellor asked members of Senate to stand as a mark of respect.

## 47 Introduction

The Vice-Chancellor reminded members that as the focus of the meeting was on the preparations for the forthcoming Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Institutional Review of the University, in particular the Self-Evaluation Document, the usual standing items on Senate's agenda would be considered at the next scheduled meeting on 13 June 2012.

## 48 Strategy: Transforming Education and the Student Experience, 2014/15

Pro Vice-Chancellor stated that the planned update on the Education Strategy would be given at the next meeting of Senate.

## 49 QAA Institutional Review

### 49.1 Preparation for Institutional Review

**Received** A briefing note, prepared on behalf of Pro Vice-Chancellor Humphris, on the purpose of, and methods used in, the Institutional Review, the timetable of events and an update on the preparations that were under way.

A copy of the mid-cycle review report, submitted to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), following the Institutional Audit Report in 2008, which had been provided for reference purposes, along with the 2008 review report.

A presentation given by Pro Vice-Chancellor Humphris which summarized the content of the briefing note.

Pro Vice-Chancellor Humphris outlined:

- What the review covered, the possible judgements in each area of the review, and the choice of the thematic element.
- The methodology that would be used and how it differed to the one adopted for the last IR, and the scope of the Student Written Submission (SWS) which was being drawn up by the Students' Union.
- The University's engagement with the QAA from the end of June 2012 until the submission of the action plan, prepared in response to the review visit report.
- The detail of the process of preparing the Self-Evaluation Document (SED), the work of the Senate Reading Group and an external group of 'critical friends', the role all staff should play in the preparations, and the date for signing off the SED at the point it was submitted to the QAA.

Pro Vice-Chancellor underlined that the process of Institutional Review (IR) provided an opportunity for the University to demonstrate how it set, maintained and enhanced its academic standards, educational provision, and the students' learning environment. The thematic element of the review would be agreed when the IR Leadership Group met the QAA Officer in June 2012 at the latest.

**Noted** The detail of the preparations for the Institutional Review, and the role that staff, and in particular Senate, played in the process.

#### 49.2 The Self-Evaluation Document

**Received** A copy of a draft Self-Evaluation Document (SED), together with a briefing note which invited Senators to reflect on five specific questions about the document which would form the basis of the discussion of the SED at the meeting of Senate on 2 May 2012, part of the University's preparations for the Institutional Review.

Pro Vice-Chancellor Humphris drew attention to the introductory remarks in the briefing note about Section 5 and the evidence supporting the SED. Section 5, which related to public information, had not been circulated because its drafting was at an earlier stage owing to the date of issue of the relevant chapter in the QAA Quality Code. The supporting evidence was currently being put together. It would be a large and complex document when complete. Footnotes in the SED indicated what information would be brought together as supporting evidence.

In inviting Senators to start the discussion of the content of the SED, Pro Vice-Chancellor Humphris emphasized that the document was at a relatively early stage in its preparation; it would evolve over the coming months. Comments on the way the University was presented in the document were sought rather than suggestions about the editing, which would be carried out by the Senate Reading Group, on behalf of Senate.

Critical comments were invited on the key questions:

1 *Based on the SED, do you recognize the institution and the quality framework?*

- The description 'research-led teaching' in the document raised a wider point about the workloads of academic staff, and the recognition institutionally of the relative merits of research and education. For some professorial staff the research commitments were such that their availability to undertake undergraduate teaching was limited. The importance of research, particularly

for Russell Group institutions, was underlined by the Research Excellence Framework, and the arrangements the University was making to this end.

In response, the Vice-Chancellor acknowledged that the document should make the aspirations and plans of the University clear. He cited the Academic Reward and Recognition Project, led by the Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, as one way in which the competing demands of teaching and research in an academic's career were being more clearly recognized and supported.

- It was suggested that some of the statements about the mission of the University could be better expressed to distinguish the aspirations of the institution from others in the sector, particularly in respect of the graduate attributes.
- Regarding the quality framework, it was suggested that not all staff fully understood the detail of the arrangements that had been introduced as part of the organizational restructuring. The new academic structure and the revised committee structure had been introduced in 2010/11 and there had been relatively little time to build up a body of experience of the new framework.

It was possible too that the assumptions made by more senior members of staff about the level of knowledge of their colleagues of the processes and procedures might not be completely accurate, and that not everyone was up to date on the detail of the framework.

- During the process of restructuring some members of staff in the former Schools had either moved jobs or had left the University, and consequently the new academic units could no longer call on that expertise and knowledge.

The Vice-Chancellor recognized the challenges arising as a consequence of changes to the structure of the institution and confirmed that this point should be acknowledged in the section of the SED which discussed the restructuring, together with the action that was being taken to address the consequences across the institution, and in response to the different issues in each Faculty. He also commented on some of the ways in which the University was responding to the challenge of communication with staff and students.

Pro Vice-Chancellor Humphris reiterated that in reflecting on the framework in the document there was the opportunity to highlight areas where the University recognized that improvements could be made, and to consider what steps should be taken to bring them into effect. For example, through the operation of the new committee structure, it had been identified that the powers delegated by Senate required clarification. The proposed revisions had been discussed and agreed by the University Programmes Committee and Senate's approval sought for changes to the Statement of Primary Responsibilities.

- 2 *Does the SED appropriately capture the progress we have made in enhancing education and the student experience?*

There was little information on IT systems – for example, Panopto - and iSolutions support in respect of enhancing education and the student experience. Similarly, the sports facilities, and the investment that had been made in them, received little attention. Information about the Student-Centredness Fund and the range of initiatives it had supported should also be included.

- 3 *How can Senate best assure itself that University policies and procedures relating to the student experience are being followed consistently in the Faculties?*

The Vice-Chancellor invited Senators to consider what examples might be given of the way Faculties were able to contextualise the well-structured framework around the student experience within their discipline.

The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Review and Action Plans were the vehicle which Faculties used to disseminate and share good practice. These were considered by the University Programmes Committee which reported directly to Senate. It was

observed that, through the restructuring, academic groups had had the opportunity to learn from other groups' experience in learning and teaching within their Faculties.

The Registrar stated that consideration was being given to the range of information and reports received by Senate to evaluate whether there were areas that should be discussed more regularly or in greater detail, such as the analysis of progression and awards data, and whether or not Senate felt it was appropriately involved in relevant academic decision-making.

4 *Are there sections of the SED that underplay/overplay the quality of our educational provision?*

A number of proposals were made about areas that underplayed the University's educational provision:

- emphasize in the document the physical changes – buildings and landscaping - that had been made to the various campuses, particularly the Highfield campus, and how the appearance of a campus contributed to creating an appropriate environment.
- use examples of initiatives which had been withdrawn because they had been deemed unsuccessful.
- explain the role alumni played in advising students on career issues, and giving examples of professionals who taught on some modules.
- include references to the 'buddy' system, where students helped other students.
- highlight the multidisciplinary nature of the Doctoral Training Centres, and the approach taken by the University to setting them up.
- insert an introductory paragraph to Section 4 (*The quality of students' learning opportunities*) to convey the enthusiasm for teaching. Subsection 4.4 did not give sufficient detail of the IT systems in place for the tracking of the learning experience.
- in terms of building on what was already in place, consider introducing new ways of celebrating good practice in teaching.

The following areas could be strengthened:

- student feedback;
- general student administration;
- provision for part-time students, in particular how best to organize the provision of services to suit their needs and how to engage them more in the University community; and
- flexible learning, such as distance learning.

5 *Are there areas of improvement or examples of good practice that have not been included in the SED?*

The following areas were highlighted:

- The interdisciplinarity of the Curriculum Innovation Programme.
- The research into education which informed the teaching and learning agenda.
- The forms of assessment and the progress made in the area.

The Vice-Chancellor proposed that Senators should forward to Pro Vice-Chancellor Humphris examples of initiatives that had enhanced or transformed the educational provision to illustrate that the University was an institution that encouraged innovation and experimentation.

The Vice-Chancellor invited the Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor to take over the chairing of the meeting as he had to leave.

The Provost invited Senators to offer comments on any other sections of the SED.

It was pointed out that the list of key challenges facing the institution did not include a reference to space management and timetabling issues. The Provost agreed that this particular challenge should not be overlooked.

Pro Vice-Chancellor Humphris stated that a revised and polished version of the SED would be presented to the next scheduled meeting of Senate on 13 June 2012. However, the document would remain subject to further drafting changes until July 2012 when it would be signed off by the Vice-Chancellor and the Registrar. Dr Piggott announced that she would circulate the draft document as a Word version directly to Senators in case they wished to submit any suggested amendments in tracked changes. Comments should be sent to her by 10 May 2012 at the latest.

The Provost thanked everyone for their contributions to the discussion, and thanked those who had been directly involved in drafting the document.

- Resolved**
- (i) That Senators should forward to Pro Vice-Chancellor Humphris examples of initiatives that had enhanced or transformed the University's educational provision by 10 May 2012.
  - (ii) That suggested revisions to the Self-Evaluation Document be submitted directly to Dr Piggott, Quality, Accreditation and Standards Team, by 10 May 2012 at the latest.
  - (iii) That the comments and points raised in discussion, set out above, be taken into account in the drafting process by the Quality, Accreditation and Standards Team.

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The meeting finished at approximately 3.35 pm.

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