

THE SENATE

Minutes of the 342nd meeting of the Senate, held on Wednesday, 30th May 2018

PRESENT:	Professor Alec Cameron (Chair) Professor Sahar Al-Malaika Dr Shakil Ahmad Professor Frank Austermühl Professor Leon Davies Professor Frank Eperjesi Professor Sarah Hainsworth Professor Helen Higson Dr Sarah Junaid Professor Chris Langley Dr Shehzad Naroo Dr Mike Peters Neil Scott Professor Edward Sweeney Jenny Thompson Dr Sylvia Wong	Professor Asif Ahmed Amna Atteeq Karen Caine Dr Philip Davies Dr Doina Gherghel Saskia Loer Hansen Professor Christos Ioannidis Dr Fiona Lacey Alison Levey Professor Helen Pattison Reema Quessou Professor Corinne Spickett Dr Eirini Theodosiou Professor Jonathan Tritter
APOLOGIES:	Rabia Ahmed Alan Charters Professor George Feiger Professor Chris Hewitt Professor Julia Kotlarsky Professor Paul Maropoulos Tristan Ripke Professor Ute Stephan Dr Keqing Wang Dr Uwe Wunderlich	Dr Michael Butler Alice Coombes Professor Simon Green Dr Anne Jenichen Dr Carol Marley Professor Gertrud Reershemius Julia Shipley Professor Paul Topham Professor James Wolffsohn
IN ATTENDANCE:	Amanda Allen Lance Doughty Ifti Hussain Professor Surinder Sharma Chris Wanley Dr Mike Wright	Dame Yve Buckland Professor Alison Hodge, Paul Knobbs (for 17/120) John Walter (Secretary) Chris Wilson (for 17/122)

FOR REPORT AND APPROVAL

Welcome

17/92 RESOLVED:

To welcome i) the following members of the Council who were attending to observe the Senate in operation in overseeing the academic strategy and governance of the University: Amanda Allen, Dame Yve Buckland (Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Council), Lance Doughty, Professor Alison Hodge, Professor Surinder Sharma and Dr Mike Wright; and ii) Ifti Hussain, Vice-President Education (elect) who was attending his first meeting following the recent Students' Union elections.

Senate Membership 2018/19

17/93 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-17-1247-A setting out the Senate Membership 2018/19 following the recent elections, noting the efforts being made to fill the remaining vacancies for elected members.

Minutes

17/94 RESOLVED:

To approve the minutes of the 341st meeting of the Senate, held on Wednesday, 14th March 2018.

Matters Arising

17/95 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-17-1248-A, a summary of actions taken in response to matters arising from the previous meeting, noting:

Self-Assessment against the OfS Guidance on Consumer Protection Law – Information to Students (M17/87) and Student Protection Plan (M17/88)

17/96 NOTED:

That the draft Self-Assessment against the OfS Guidance on Consumer Protection Law and Student Protection Plan were revised in the light of the comments from the Senate, and, following approval by the Executive and the Pro-Chancellor on behalf of Council, the final versions were submitted to the Office for Students (OfS) prior to the deadline of 30th April.

Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2017 Outcomes and Action Plans (M17/89)

17/97 NOTED:

That the comments and suggestions of the Senate Breakout Group concerning the outcomes and actions from PRES 2017 and to improve the experience of research students were being taken forward and monitored by the Graduate School Management Committee and the Research Committee.

Attendance Monitoring (M17/90)

17/98 NOTED:

That the Provost had reminded members of the Attendance Monitoring Group of the need to be more proactive in sharing information about the work of the group with their School colleagues.

Staff Induction Process (M17/90)

17/99 RECEIVED:

A report from the Provost that the Director of CLIPP and the Director of HROD had undertaken a review of the staff induction process and a number of enhancements would be adopted in future. The next staff induction session would be held in September 2018. The Academic

Assembly and other members of Senate were invited to submit any further comments or suggestions for improvement of the induction process to the Directors of HROD and CLIPP.

International Strategy Committee

17/100 RECEIVED:

The minutes of the International Strategy Committee meeting of 15th May 2018.

Learning and Teaching Committee

17/101 RECEIVED:

The minutes of the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) meeting of 14th May 2018.

Annual Report of the LTC to Senate for 2017/18

17/102 RECEIVED:

Paper LTC-17-1233-A comprising the Annual Report of the LTC to Senate for 2017/18, including actions taken under delegated authority to approve on behalf of Senate:

- the introduction of new taught programmes of study and programme modification and withdrawal.
- the policies for Monitoring and Review of taught programmes.
- the policies for Periodic Review of taught programmes.
- the academic regulatory framework for taught students.
- the policy for collaborative activity
- the University admissions policy for taught programmes.

The Committee had continued to support initiatives to promote the sharing of good practice, including the first CLIPP-facilitated Sharing Conference held on 25 October 2017, which was attended by over 50 delegates, and plans were being made for a second conference in October 2018.

A review of the reviews of student-facing professional areas would be completed by the Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement in advance of the autumn 2018 Senate meeting, with a view to ensuring that the process was fit for purpose and to identify any emerging themes.

17/103 NOTED:

That LTC was considering a range of proposals around student attendance: a student attendance recording policy for timetabled events; a learning analytics policy and a learning analytics interventions policy, with further drafts to be considered at the June meeting. The initial focus had been on addressing any technical issues (eg with recording attendance) and ensuring that the data was accurate and up-to-date before releasing it to a wider range of appropriate staff, which could include module tutors. Data on attendance would be one part of the dashboard of information available to monitor the engagement of students and to identify those potentially at risk and in need of support.

Annual Report of the Research Committee to Senate 2017/18

17/104 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-17-1311-A being the Annual Report of the Research Committee (RC) for 2017/18 which included action taken by RC under delegated authority from the Senate such as:

- the introduction of new research degree programmes and programme modification and withdrawal;
- the University admissions policy for research degree programmes;
- the policies for Monitoring and Review of research degree programmes;
- the policies for Periodic Review of research degree programmes;
- the academic regulatory framework for research students;
- the policy for collaborative activity in relation to research degree programmes.

Key activities undertaken by RC included:

- A Task Group was formed to look at the recommendations arising from the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). The report recommended a University-wide postgraduate conference and language bursaries for research students, both of which were being taken forward by the Graduate School Management Committee.
- Aston's Second Research Excellence Framework (REF) review was received, and reported to University Executive. The report noted a good level of preparation. In particular peer review of outputs was taking place across the Schools, in line with the assessment process adopted by REF panels. We also have a strong impact case study pipeline. The next Aston REF review would report in September 2018.
- An external review of Research Ethics had been commissioned in January 2018 and reported to Executive in May 2018. The review considered Human Tissue Act compliance, Health Research Authority Approval and Ethical approval processes.
- Working with the Director of Information Resources in Library Services, the RC had been monitoring closely Aston's compliance with the REF's Open Access publishing requirements, under which publications must be made open access to be eligible for REF. Aston had a good level of compliance (93%), and the library was working closely with Associate Deans for Research and Executive Deans to improve this further.

Schedule of Research Grants and Contracts

17/105 RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

That paper SEN-17-1249-A, being the Schedule of Research Grants and Contracts, be approved and that the following members of staff be congratulated on attracting substantial awards:

Dr Anton Popov	European Commission	918,267
Prof Sergei Turitsyn	The Leverhulme Trust	419,311
Prof Sergei Turitsyn	ESIF / ERDF	324,328
Prof David Saad	The Leverhulme Trust	190,876
Dr Presanta Dey	European Commission	173,347
Prof Lin Zhang	European Commission	173,347
Dr Yulan He	European Commission	173,347
Dr Alex Rozhin	European Commission	173,347
Dr Sonia Boscolo	European Commission	173,347
Prof Sergei Turitsyn	European Commission	173,347
Dr Lucian Leustean	European Commission	173,347

Dr Nicola Logan	National Institute of Health Research	170,297
Prof Andrew Ellis, Prof Lin Zhang	EPSRC CASE / Microsoft Research Ltd	119,149

Appointment of External Examiners

17/106 RESOLVED:

To ratify the action taken by the Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor on behalf of Senate in approving the External Examiner appointments for 2017/18 as set out in paper SEN-17-1250-A, noting that the gender balance of External Examiners appointments was being monitored and would be considered as part of the annual review of the External Examiner system.

ACTION: The Provost to ensure gender balance of External Examiners is considered in the annual review of the External Examiner system

Report on Action taken on behalf of Senate by the Chair and Vice-Chair

17/107 RESOLVED:

To ratify the action taken on behalf of Senate by the Provost as set out in Paper SEN-17-1251-A, which included approval of the appointment of an alternative Chair for the Disciplinary Board.

Appointment of Emeritus Professors

17/108 RESOLVED (nem con):

To approve the appointment of the following Emeritus Professors following their retirement from the University: Professor Robert Berry and Professor Alison Hodge, both from EAS.

ACTION: The Provost to provide letters of appointment to the new Emeritus Professors.

Nomination for an Honorary Degree

17/109 RESOLVED (nem con):

To approve a nomination for the award of an honorary DSc at the July 2018 degree ceremonies to Alan Charters, Chief of Operations and Estates, on the unanimous recommendation of the Committee for Awards and Honours, for his excellent contribution to the University, including the development of the Aston campus and the enhancement of a range of professional support services.

UNIVERSITY STRATEGY

Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive's Report

17/110 RECEIVED:

The Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive's Report in paper SEN-17-1252-A, which summarised progress being made with high-level institutional strategic objectives, as well as current University news for the information of members of Senate and Council. The following points were noted:

- The industrial dispute over USS pensions, while not resolved, has entered a "truce" phase, with the cessation of strike action as UUK and UCU sought to test and build shared confidence in a valuation of the size of the deficit to be addressed in the USS. It was too early yet to say how the matter would be resolved, and it might be necessary to increase

employer and employee contributions next year, as advised by the USS, pending agreement on how the deficit would otherwise be addressed.

- The Government's review of post-18 education and funding was underway. Aston had made a submission to the review and met with a member of the independent panel.
- The level of applications received for 2018/19 entry had been below plan, however significant efforts by the recruitment and admissions teams had resulted in much of the under-application being offset by a higher level of conversion. Current confirmed offers were now much in line with plans, notwithstanding a decline in the general market of 3%. The University would remain focussed on converting applications into enrolments and having a strong campaign through the UCAS Clearing process. The University had decided not to expand Home-EU undergraduate student intakes and to diversify sources of students including degree apprenticeships, on-line, in-company, taught postgraduate and international. It was likely that Aston would remain a mid-tariff institution, which provided opportunities for students from a variety of backgrounds to achieve positive outcomes and to secure graduate level employment. The University would focus on enhancing the student experience and the academic support provided to them, which should help to enhance satisfaction levels and outcomes.
- A strategic review of the Aston estates plan and campus masterplan was in train. The intention was to take a medium- to long-term view of Aston's space requirements, alongside the condition and future life of key buildings, and the investment envelope available via the annual surplus and borrowing capacity. Agreement of the estates plan was considered as a necessary precursor to proceeding with major estates projects on campus. Consequently, it has been decided not to proceed with the proposed development of the AMS building in the (former) BIAD building at this stage. While AMS remained a key estates priority, the decision on the long-term location for AMS would be addressed within the scope of the estates review. Council members had emphasised the importance of identifying an appropriate and attractive location for AMS given its potential strategic value to the University and its international reputation. It was anticipated that the estates plan would be presented to October 2018 meetings of the Finance and Infrastructure Committee and Council.
- Professor Paul Maropoulos had been granted a period of six months of sabbatical leave from his position as PVC Research and Knowledge Exchange (RKE). Professor Simon Green had accepted appointment as Acting PVC RKE to cover Paul's sabbatical. Professor Jonathan Tritter has accepted appointment as Acting Executive Dean of the SLSS to backfill for Simon.
- Alan Charters would be stepping down on 31st July 2018 as Chief of Operations and Estates after eight-and-a-half years of outstanding service at Aston, having played a central role in the campus redevelopment over that period. Consultations were in train regarding the subsequent reporting lines for groups within Alan's portfolio.
- A HEFCE Assurance Consultant visited the University on 24th May as part of Aston's five-yearly HEFCE Assurance Review (HAR). This was closing out a HEFCE process, which would be replaced in the future by an OfS process, which had yet to be determined. The Assurance Consultant had met with several members of Council and of the Executive to test and validate the processes which inform and assure Aston's formal annual submissions to HEFCE. The Vice-Chancellor had received oral feedback from the Assurance Consultant at the end of the HAR visit. Aston was given a completely clean bill of health with no conditions or recommendations and there would be no need for submission of further information or visits.

University Strategy Review

17/111 RECEIVED:

An oral report from the Vice-Chancellor that the implementation of the new Aston Strategy was being progressed in the form of several projects, including a review of the portfolio of taught

programmes, a review of research strategy, a review of business engagement, and a new international strategy. The ongoing development of the 2018/19 Budget was designed to provide capacity for investment in priority areas aligned with the new Strategy. A communication strategy was being developed to ensure that the Aston Community was informed about the progress being made with the implementation of the Strategy and the genuine changes from “business as usual” that would ensue.

17/112 NOTED:

- That the University was engaged in working with feeder schools and colleges to provide appropriate progression routes at Aston, including degree apprenticeships, for students taking T Level qualifications (which were new technical qualifications on a par with A levels).
- That the Senate would continue to receive regular progress updates on the Strategy implementation and would be invited to contribute to the review and development of the supporting strategies.

Issues raised by Student Representatives and the Students’ Union (SU) Senate

17/113 RECEIVED:

A report from the SU in paper SEN-17-1303-A, together with an oral report from the SU President summarising the achievements of the Union over the current academic year. Implementation of the new SU Strategic Framework to 2020 was progressing well. One of the key strands within the Framework was for the Union better to represent the academic interests of Aston students. Work towards this strand had included the establishment of a Student Voice department, strengthened support for societies and wider support for Student Representatives. Construction of the new SU building was on track for completion in February 2019. Student engagement in the Union’s democratic processes had improved, with more candidates standing and more votes being cast in elections. A total of 182 nominations were received across the 10 categories for Academic Awards (run in partnership with CLIPP) with 64 for student representatives and 118 for academics. The SU’s Advice and Representation Centre (ARC) has been rated by students in the University’s student survey as the best service on campus.

17/114 RECEIVED:

An oral report from the Provost that the University had agreed to fund the following services to students from the strike pay accumulated during the USS Pensions dispute: free food and drink for students in the Library during the examination period, extra copies of key texts in the Library, 48 additional laptops in the Library, and mental health support for students

Issues raised by the Academic Assembly: Role of Programme Directors

17/115 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-17-1304-A from the Chair of the Academic Assembly which emphasised the growing importance and complexity of the role of Programme Directors who make a major contribution to the smooth and efficient running of programmes across the University, and the need for this to be recognised formally by the University.

17/116 NOTED:

- That Senate members emphasised that the role of Programme Director was particularly important in relation to Postgraduate Taught Programmes.

- That CLIPP and HROD planned to launch a Programme Directors Network that would enable colleagues in this role to share best practice and to seek advice and support from their peers.
- That consideration would be given to the provision of appropriate training to Programme Directors, given the importance of the role.
- That Honoria and recognition of roles, including Programme Directors, were currently under review by the University.
- That a dash board of metrics on students' academic performance and engagement would shortly be made available, which would assist Programme Directors to perform their role more effectively.
- That an extensive handbook had already been developed for Programme Directors of Collaborative Programmes, much of which would be of value to all Programme Directors.
- That some Programme Directors had highlighted the difficulty of carrying out the role when they felt they had no line management responsibility for colleagues teaching on their programmes. This was felt to be particularly difficult for Programme Directors for Joint Programmes involving two Schools. The Provost emphasised that Programme Directors should have authority over colleagues responsible for delivering their programmes and should seek the assistance of Executive Deans in dealing with issues.

ACTION: The Provost in liaison with the Directors of CLIPP and HROD to arrange for the launch of Programme Directors Network and appropriate training, guidance and recognition for Programme Directors.

Finance and Planning Issues

17/117 RECEIVED:

Oral reports from the Chief Financial Officer and the Provost on finance and planning issues, noting:

- That the University was in a strong financial position, with a forecast operating surplus for the year predicted to be £3 million higher than the budget. Lower than forecast tuition fee income of £5.9m had been more than offset by forecast expenditure savings of £8.8 million, principally through underspends on pay arising from vacancies and delayed recruitment (currently 109 vacancies). The University's cash position had improved to £15 million owing to a number of capital projects being deferred pending the outcome of the review of estates.
- That in its March 2018 report on the financial health of the sector, for the year ended July 2017, HEFCE highlighted the need for HEIs to review their financial strategies and future financial prospects in the light of outcome of the government's review of post-18 education and funding announced in February 2018. Uncertainties within the sector were likely to lead to greater focus from investors on the financial strength of individual HEIs, with any fall in confidence likely to restrict funding or increase costs. HEIs' forecasts indicated a trend of reducing surpluses and cash levels and a rise in borrowing which signalled a general weakening of financial performance.
- That as part of its registration with the OFS as an HE Provider within the Approved (Fee Cap) category the University had submitted the following documents: an access and participation plan, a self-assessment against guidance on consumer protection law, a student protection plan, and a self-assessment of management and governance arrangements. As Aston's Medical Degree programme needed to use the early UCAS deadline of October 2018, the OfS would undertake to provide a decision on the University's registration by July 2018.
- That the University's recent rankings had improved, with the Guardian ranking rising from 51 to 43 and the Complete University Guide ranking rising from 49 to 45. Improved NSS scores had helped these improvements, but the high Student:Staff Ratio (SSR) continued to impact negatively on the rankings. Efforts were being made to recruit additional academic

staff to reduce the SSR. The University would need to continue to focus strongly on enhancing the student experience and graduate prospects.

UNIVERSITY STRATEGY THEMES

17/118 RECEIVED:

An oral report from the Vice-Chancellor that in line with the operating methodology agreed by the Senate, the membership would next split into three Breakout Groups to discuss the following strategic themes:

- i) To consider the draft International Plan (paper SEN-17-1305-A) – led by Saskia Loer Hansen, PVC International.
- ii) To consider International Research and Innovation Funding Opportunities (SEN-17-1306-A) – led by Paul Knobbs, EU and Large Projects Partner, RKE.
- iii) To consider Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) developments – led by the Provost
- iv) To consider the Learning Analytics Project (SEN-17-1309-A) – led by Chris Wilson, Lecturer in Learning Innovation & Professional Practice, CLIPP

At the end of the breakout discussions the four groups made the following reports to the reconvened Senate:

Draft International Plan

17/119 NOTED:

The focus group welcomed the fact that an International Plan had been produced and was supportive of the high level intent and direction of the Plan. In terms of more detailed feedback, the group discussed the proposed vision statement and provided suggested changes regarding: reference to 'region', moving away from reference to West Midlands as this was unlikely to be understood by an international audience to a broader statement such as 'heart of England'; inclusion of 'society' and emphasis on social benefits in the beneficiary section; and lastly the focus group proposed to remove the specific reference to Oman. It was felt that the geographic reach of the University was much broader and that the specific interest the University might have in relation to the partnership with Muscat University should be picked up elsewhere in the International Plan, but not in the vision statement.

On KPIs, the group discussed the importance of using KPIs that matter to Aston's external audiences, rather than simply thinking about KPIs that University colleagues believe to be useful. So the key question asked was: to what extent Aston would know if the University had really made a difference in connecting business in the region with Aston's international partners? While no specific suggestions were offered up, the group proposed that it would be useful to unpack in more detail how best to measure whether Aston was making a difference to all of our three beneficiary groups. Finally, the focus group emphasised the importance not just of the internationalisation of the student experience, but of Aston making the most of its very diverse and international staffing and to celebrate this an important component of the fabric of the University.

ACTION: Saskia Loer Hansen to take forward the recommendations of the Group.

Research and Innovation Funding Opportunities

17/120 NOTED:

That the Group had agreed that international research and innovation funding had never been so well funded and diverse; particularly if the UK retained access to Horizon Europe (FP9). There

was enormous potential for Aston to build on its already strong portfolio of international research and innovation across all schools of study. The Group considered the various levels of international engagement employed across Aston and their effectiveness at leveraging funding. There was considerable engagement by individual colleagues with peers in international organisations, which was felt to be useful and to help enhance Aston's international reputation and publications, and in securing smaller scale external funding and grants. The experience of colleagues of Memoranda of Understanding at an institutional level was that, whilst they could stimulate and provide a framework for collaborative activity, they tended not to result in successful major external funding bids. The Group agreed that strong Research Institutes where research and innovation strengths were concentrated, with professional support from RKE colleagues, were most likely to develop international strategic partnerships with the potential to secure major external funding.

ACTION: PVCR and Paul Knobbs to take forward the recommendations of the Group.

Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Developments

17/121 NOTED:

That the Provost had provided an oral report on the ongoing pilot of TEF at a subject level. In 2017-18 the pilot had tested how two models produced TEF subject ratings. The results, and the DfE consultation would inform the second year of subject pilots in 2018/19. Model A was a 'by exception' model offering a provider-level rating and giving subjects the same rating as the provider where metrics performance was similar, with fuller assessment (and potentially different ratings) where metrics performance differed. Model B was a 'bottom-up' model fully assessing each subject to give subject-level ratings, feeding into the provider-level assessment and rating; subjects were grouped for submissions, but ratings were still awarded at subject-level. There were 35 subjects classified by Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS) codes. The metrics on teaching quality, learning environment, and student outcomes and learning gain were derived from the NSS, HESA and DLHE – NSS metrics would be half-weighted. Supplementary metrics were included for grade inflation, Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO), and teaching intensity (ie contact hours and class/group sizes, and student survey on satisfaction with contact hours). The Breakout Group considered the subject level metrics for a range of subjects in LHS and noted the likely TEF subject ratings that might ensue, which were largely likely to be rated gold, with a minority rated at least initially at silver or bronze – the University's accompanying contextual narrative could attempt to improve these ratings. The Group agreed that the University's focus on improving the student experience, outcomes and employability would help to optimize Aston's subject TEF ratings. The review of the portfolio of programmes should also help to strengthen the University's position in this regard.

ACTION: Provost, LTC and Schools to continue to focus on enhancing the student experience, outcomes and employability

Learning Analytics

17/122 NOTED:

That Chris Wilson had provided the Breakout Group with an overview of the Learning Analytics project, which aimed to capture a variety of student data for use by both students and staff in reflecting on their learning practice and identifying areas which could be enhanced. The learning analytics system would also enable the University to identify students who were potentially at risk of early withdrawal or academic difficulties to offer support and an opportunity to work in partnership to reduce this risk. The aim was for the system to be operational by September 2018 and implementation would follow a phased release over three years. Detailed arrangements were being made for the governance and management of learning analytics to ensure that legal and regulatory requirements relating to data protection were being met. Controlled access to the data would be reviewed on a regular basis and extended where

appropriate to meet the support needs of students. A delegated person in each School would have the authority to provide access to appropriate colleagues (eg module tutors). The Group had welcomed the adoption of learning analytics which should help to improve teaching and learning practice across the University.

Review of the Format of Senate Meetings

17/123 NOTED:

That members welcomed the adoption of break out groups in Senate meetings as a means to provide the opportunity for all members to contribute and to allow more time to explore strategic issues in depth.

Retiring Members

17/124 **Student Representatives**

Senate thanked the following retiring student representatives for their contribution to the work of the Senate and the University: Reema Quessou (President), Julia Shipley (postgraduate student representative) and Tristan Ripke (undergraduate student representative).

Elected Staff Members

17/125 The Vice-Chancellor, on behalf of Senate, thanked all retiring staff members for their contribution to the work of the Senate and the University.

Mr Alan Charters

17/126 RESOLVED:

To join the Vice-Chancellor in thanking Alan Charters for his excellent contribution to the University, including the development of the Aston campus and the enhancement of a range of professional support services.

MEETINGS IN 2018/19

17/127 NOTED:

Senate would meet at 2:00 pm on the following Wednesdays: 21st November 2018, 13th March and 29th May 2019.

JGW/5.06.18