

THE SENATE

Minutes of the 343rd meeting of the Senate, held on Wednesday, 21st November 2018

PRESENT:	Professor Helen Higson (in the Chair)	
	Dr Shakil Ahmad	Rabia Ahmed
	Professor Asif Ahmed	Dr Parveen Akhtar
	Professor Sahar Al-Malaika	Salma Amin
	Amna Atteeq	Professor Tony Clark
	Professor Simon Cooper	Professor Ivo De Loo
	Professor Andrew Devitt	Elizabeth Dolan
	Dr Panos Doss	Professor Jun Du
	Professor Frank Eperjesi	Professor George Feiger
	Dr Doina Gherghel	Dr Raquel Gil-Cazorla
	Professor Simon Green	Dr Stuart Greenhill
	Professor Sarah Hainsworth	Saskia Loer Hansen
	Ifti Hussain	Lee Jenkins
	Professor Francisco Leyva-Leon	Alison Levey
	Dr Peter Lewis	Dr Jörg Mathias
	Dr Shehzad Naroo	Professor Helen Pattison
	Dr Mike Peters	Dr Johan Rewilak
	Professor Gertrud Reershemius	Neil Scott
	Professor Corinne Spickett	Professor Kate Sugden
	Jenny Thompson	Professor Jonathan Tritter
	Dr Victoria Uren	Dr Keqing Wang
	Dr Sylvia Wong	
APOLOGIES:	Professor Frank Austermuehl	Karen Caine
	Professor Alec Cameron	Kimberly Tze Yee Chong
	Alice Coombes	Professor Leon Davies
	David Farrow	Andrew Harris
	Professor Chris Hewitt	Stephen Luke
	Professor Stefan Manz	Dr Carol Marley
	Professor George Tadros	Dr Eirini Theodosiou
	Chris Wanley	Professor Ivan Wall
	Dr Uwe Wunderlich	
IN ATTENDANCE:	Sarah Davies(M18/47)	Mark Smith
	John Walter (Secretary)	Robert Welch(M18/47)
	Professor James Wolffsohn(M18/48)	

FOR REPORT AND APPROVAL

Welcome

18/1 RESOLVED:

To welcome the newly elected and re-elected staff members representing their School or Academic Assembly on Senate and the following newly elected/re-elected student members:

- Amna Atteeq (President of the Students' Union),
- Ifti Hussain (Vice-President Education),

- Alice Coombes (Vice-President Welfare)
- Kimberly Tze Yee Chong (Postgraduate Student representative)
- Salma Amin (Undergraduate Student representative).

Constitutional Matters

18/2 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-18-1409-A containing a report on constitutional matters.

Senate Membership

18/3 RECEIVED:

- i) Paper SEN-18-1409-Aa, a list of the Senate Membership for 2018/19.
- ii) A report that the Senate membership currently comprised 46% women and 27% are from ethnic minorities.

Disciplinary Board Membership

18/4 RESOLVED:

To approve the appointment of the Chair and Alternative Chair for the Disciplinary Board for the current academic year; and the Senate nominees and Academic Assembly nominees to the Board, for two years until 31st July 2019, as set out in Paper SEN-18-1409-Ab.

Minutes

18/5 RESOLVED:

To approve the minutes of the 342nd meeting of the Senate, held on Wednesday, 30th May 2018.

Matters Arising

18/6 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-18-1410-A, a summary of actions taken in response to matters arising from the previous meeting and oral reports on the following items:

Appointment of External Examiners (M17/106)

18/7 NOTED:

That the Provost would ensure that the gender balance of External Examiners was considered in the annual review of the External Examiner system.

Appointment of Emeritus Professors (M17/108)

18/8 NOTED:

The Provost had sent letters of appointment to the new Emeritus Professors.

Role of Programme Directors (M17/116)

18/9 NOTED:

1. That CLIPP had organised a Sharing Conference on 25th October, designed to showcase good practice from across the institution and bring staff up-to-date with some exciting new developments.
2. That the Provost in liaison with the Directors of CLIPP and Executive Director of HR and OD had arranged for the launch of the Programme Directors Network and appropriate training, guidance and recognition for Programme Directors.

Draft International Plan (M17/119)

18/10 NOTED:

That The PVC International had presented a paper to Council (21.6.18) outlining the key elements of the new International Plan. A more refined International Recruitment and Marketing Plan was under development based on market segmentation, understanding of the most appropriate channels for different segments, and a marketing mix appropriate for different markets/regions. This would aim to reducing Aston's reliance on China, agents and Postgraduate ABS programmes. Council Members had supported the approach and plans to progress the International Strategy.

Research and Innovation Funding Opportunities (M18/120)

18/11 NOTED:

That the PVC Research and colleagues from RKE are taking forward the recommendations of the Senate Task Group within the context of the development and implementation of the Aston Research 2023 Strategy (also refer to minute 18/44).

Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Developments (M18/121)

18/12 NOTED:

That the Provost, Learning and Teaching Committee, and the Schools were continuing to focus on enhancing the student experience, outcomes and employability, which should assist the University to retain its TEF Gold rating and to optimise Aston's performance in future subject level TEF. This year Aston was taking part in the pilot for TEF Subject Level.

Learner Analytics (M18/122)

18/13 NOTED:

That the Learning and Teaching Committee (21.6.18) had approved a Learner Analytics Intervention Policy (AU-LTC-17-1202-A).

Council

18/14 RECEIVED:

The minutes of the Council meetings of 21st June and 17th October 2018.

International Strategy Committee

18/15 RECEIVED:

The minutes of the International Strategy Committee meeting of 25th October 2018.

18/16 NOTED:

That the PVC International would be presenting an update on the Aston in Europe Strategy to the Executive (26.11.18).

Learning and Teaching Committee

18/17 RECEIVED:

The minutes of the Learning and Teaching Committee meetings of 27th June and 25th October 2018.

Admissions Steering and Strategy Committee

18/18 RECEIVED:

The minutes of the Admissions Steering and Strategy Committee (ASSC) meetings of 12th September and 9th October 2018.

UCAS Admissions Data

18/19 NOTED:

That problems with the automatic production of reports on UCAS admissions data had recently been resolved.

Scholarships

18/20 NOTED:

That the Executive had approved proposals for coordinated cross-University international student scholarships for 2019/20 to drive recruitment across different markets and across different disciplines, and, essentially, to create a competitive fee differential when used as part of a strategic recruitment process

Research Committee

18/21 RECEIVED:

The minutes of the Research Committee (RC) meeting of 10th October 2018.

Revised Terms of Reference for the Research Committee

18/22 RESOLVED:

To approve the revised terms of reference for the Research Committee set out in Paper AU-RC-18-1441-A.

Doctor of Education (EdD) – New Award

18/23 RESOLVED:

To approve the new award of Doctor of Education (EdD) for inclusion in the University Ordinances. This had been endorsed by the Research Committee (following consideration by both GSMC and PASC).

ACTION: Secretary

Schedule of Research Grants and Contracts

18/24 RESOLVED:

1. To approve Paper SEN-18-1412-A, the Schedule of Research Grants and Contracts, and that the following members of staff be congratulated on attracting substantial awards:

Members of Staff	Awarding Body	£
Prof Sergei Turitsyn	EPSRC	2,441,084
Prof Andrew Ellis	EPSRC	902,113
Prof Andrew Devitt	BBSRC	777,973
Prof Sergei Turitsyn	European Commission	772,565
Prof Sergei Turitsyn	European Commission	725,085
Prof Paul Topham	ERDF	700,574
Dr Jin Yang	EPSRC	569,980
Prof Edik Rafailov	European Commission	538,328
Dr Zhengyu Lin	EPSRC	517,364
Dr Mariia Sorokina	Royal Academy of Engineering	481,977
Dr Yordan Raykov	KTP / Row Analytics	283,936
Mr Paul Warrington; Dr Michal Konecny	KTP / Mechatherm International Ltd	253,644
Dr Laura Leslie	KTP / Invibio Ltd	241,014
Dr Antonio Fratini; Dr Manousos Klados; Dr Patrick Geoghegan	KTP / Optimec Ltd	240,023
Prof Andrew Ellis	Huawei Technologies Duesseldorf GmbH	234,500
Prof Paul Topham; Prof Brian Tighe	KTP / M.W.(Polymer Products) Ltd	212,001
Dr Lucian Leustean	The British Academy	175,219
Dr Mark Prince	KTP / Allgood PLC	153,682
Dr Jason Laurie	European Commission	146,237
Dr Tala Kasim	KTP / HLP	144,853
Dr Ed Turner	ESRC	124,744
Prof Edik Rafailov	European Commission	120,071
Prof Michael Coleman	The Humane Research Trust	114,440
Prof Sahar Al-Malaika	Viega Technology GmbH & Co KG	110,000
Prof Sahar Al-Malaika	Uponor Corporation	100,000

2. That in future all Aston grant holders, not just the Principal Investigator, be reported to the Senate.

Action: Secretary/RKE

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

18/25 RESOLVED:

To ratify the action taken on behalf of Senate by the Provost as set out in Paper SEN-18-1413-A.

Senate's Representative on Council

18/26 NOTED:

With pleasure, that Professor Kate Sugden was to be the Senate's representative on Council for a two-year term ending on 31st July 2021.

Annual Report on Student Complaints

18/27 RESOLVED:

To approve the annual report on student complaints for 2017/18 in paper SEN-18-1425-A, noting that relatively few complaints had been received and that the small number of complaints relating to the industrial action by UCU members appeared to have been resolved amicably.

Annual Report on Undergraduate and Postgraduate Degree Outcomes

18/28 RESOLVED:

To approve the annual statistical report on undergraduate and postgraduate degree outcomes, noting that 81.5% of degrees awarded were of 1st and Upper 2nd degree classifications, a slight increase on 2016/17 (80.2%). EAS was the only School with a significant increase in 1st Class Honours awarded, up 4.4%. Senate noted that this was due to improvements made to the School's approach to assessment, feedback, student support and teaching; an increase in entry tariff scores for the graduating cohort; and the outstanding performance of the highly motivated cohort of graduate apprentices

Annual University Prevent Duty Annual Report to Council

18/29 RECEIVED:

The Annual University Prevent Duty Annual Report to Council for 2017/18 (Paper SEN-18-1428-A) which provided an overview of actions taken during the year relating to the University's Prevent duty, including a review and refreshment of the University's Prevent risk assessment and an updated action plan addressing any issues identified. Appended to the report was the annual Prevent data return to OfS.

18/30 RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

That Council endorse the Annual University Prevent Duty Annual Report to Council for 2017/18 and approve the Annual Accountability Statement and the Prevent Data return for submission to OfS.

Honorary Degree Nominations

18/31 RESOLVED:

To approve the nominations for the award of honorary degrees at this year's degree ceremonies as recommended by the Awards and Honours Advisory Committee as set out in paper SEN-18-1414-A.

18/32 NOTED:

That the Awards and Honours Advisory Committee was aware that, although this list of Honorary Graduands was more diverse than in previous years, further effort was needed to ensure that women and ethnic minorities were properly represented. Members of Senate were encouraged to assist this process by nominating candidates from a diversity of backgrounds.

Appointment of Emeritus Professor

18/33 RESOLVED (nem con):

To approve the appointment of Professor Bernard Gilmartin as an Emeritus Professor following his retirement from the University.

Action: Provost

Appointment of External Examiners

18/34 RESOLVED:

To approve the Annual Report on the appointment of External Examiners for Research Degrees (by institution) 2017/18 in paper SEN-18-1415-A, noting that the Provost would ensure that a column showing the diversity characteristics of Examiners was shown in future iterations of the Report.

UNIVERSITY STRATEGY

Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive's Report

18/35 RECEIVED:

Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive's Report in paper SEN-18-1416-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.

University Strategy Review

18/36 RECEIVED:

- i) Paper SEN-18-1418-A, a report detailing progress with the portfolio of strategy implementation projects, which included reviews of taught programmes, research strategy, and business engagement, and a new international strategy. In addition to a high level of activity, some of the earliest projects had completed significant first phases. The first phase of the programme portfolio review led by the Provost in liaison with the Schools, would remove 42 programmes from Aston's current portfolio, which would not be offered for enrolment in 2019. The decision criteria included quality and quantity of student demand, graduate employability, and student satisfaction. Their removal would result in both financial and quality benefits to the University. Major related projects addressed by the Finance and Infrastructure Committee (8.10.18) included the Estates Strategic Plan and the Digital Strategy.
- ii) An oral report that a successful pilot work force planning system had been implemented for LSS which had enabled departmental heads to model their future staffing needs. This information helped to identify the "ideal" staffing position and the current gap in provision to achieve it.

- iii) An oral report that the implementation of the University Strategy was being assisted by My Development Conversation (My DC), which was a new approach to the conduct of performance reviews. My Development Conversation focused on setting individual work priorities for the year which were aligned to the University's Strategy and to School/departmental plans, and underpinned by Aston's values. The new approach involved having positive, future focused conversations throughout the year rather than simply at the beginning and at the end. Individual staff were expected to take more responsibility for their own performance and development in this process.

National Student Survey (NSS) and Action Plans

18/37 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-18-1418-A presented by the Provost which provided a report on Aston's NSS 2018 performance versus the sector, School by School NSS performance, and performance on specific dimensions of the NSS such as Feedback and Assessment. The report recommended that Aston prioritise improvements on several cross-School and overlapping areas of concern which had the biggest impact on student satisfaction.

18/38 NOTED:

- That Aston's Overall Satisfaction was 84.15% (down 3.83% from 2017) and 0.61% above the sector average. Whilst EAS had improved Overall Satisfaction to 81.1%, this had fallen in two Schools: LSS to 78% and LHS to 84.1%.
- That Aston's SU score had fallen by 2.55% from 52.36 to 49.81 and its rank was 122 out of 151 institutions (111th last year).
- That, although Aston's performance in the NSS had been negatively affected by the strike by UCU members, there were other contributory factors that had influenced the result and it was really important for the University to recognise and address them going forward. This was demonstrated by the fact that whilst the average decline in Overall Satisfaction of universities affected by the strike was 1.95%, Aston's score fell by 3.83%. The University and the Students' Union were taking this matter very seriously with a view to impacting positively on the NSS 2019 and the following Sunday Times league table.
- That a Cross-University Taskforce (led by the Provost and the Executive Director of Recruitment and Marketing) had been established and had agreed action plans for Schools and Departments. The SU would be working collaboratively with the Task Force.
- The Council (27.10.18) had endorsed the NSS plan of action and the concept of the SU working as a 'critical friend' to the University, in order rapidly to deliver improvements to student satisfaction in time for the next NSS in January 2019.

Issues raised by Student Representatives and the Students' Union Senate

18/39 RECEIVED:

A report from the SU in paper SEN-18-1419-A, together with oral reports from the President and Vice-President Education (VPE). This provided an update on: student representation; the well-attended SU Senate meeting which had discussed league tables, timetabling, group work, and examination hall rules; SU participation in a postgraduate meet and greet initiative; SU efforts to enhance the SU and Aston NSS results; the President's participation in the CLIPP Learning and Teaching Conference; and the Love Aston Event to be held on 29th November.

18/40 NOTED:

- That Senate members recommended that all subject student societies should be encouraged to register with the SU.

- That Senate emphasised the need to ensure that students were not coerced into providing positive NSS responses.
- That the SU and the University would be taking part in a research project with TSEP to explore barriers to engagement amongst students from Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. The research would focus on the SU's engagement and how it could alter its message to reach more BAME students. The project aimed to demonstrate that SU involvement could have a positive impact on future employment prospects.

Issues raised by Academic Assembly

Future Financial Sustainability of the University

18/41 RECEIVED:

- i) Paper SEN-18-1429-A and an oral report from the Chair of the Academic Assembly, which posed the question: "What is Aston's position looking forward to 2019 and beyond regarding financial viability in the light of the following:
 - a. the recent statement from Sir Michael Barber, Chair of the Office for Students (OfS), that universities which are not financially sustainable will not be bailed out by the new regulator.
 - b. leaks of early proposals from the review of post-18 education funding in England suggesting that it could bring a big threat to university finances, as well as the return of student number controls.
 - c. the increasing global competition for students.
 - d. the recent need to reduce the budgeted Aston University surplus to make up for the projected shortfall in funding?
 - e. the possibility that banks might be less willing to provide finance for HE institutions if their funding was no longer guaranteed by the government."
- ii) An oral response from the Chief Operating Officer, who emphasised that despite not achieving this year's stretch recruitment targets, the University was in a strong financial position and its income this year was higher than for the previous year. The University's strategy to diversify income streams would help to spread the risk of over-reliance on Home-EU undergraduates. The Vice-Chancellor had asked the Council to approve a proposal to preserve the existing expenditure budget allowing the tuition fee income shortfall to drop to the bottom line and the budgeted surplus to reduce from £8.2m to £2.2m. This would allow the planned investment to deliver the Aston Strategy and to support growth in areas such as international, degree apprenticeships, and online, and the planned increase in staff numbers to address the high student:staff ratio and thereby to improve Aston's league table ranking. Aston's challenge going forward would be to achieve the growth in these new areas at a time of increasing competition, including from new providers operating with different business models. The University would need to focus on areas of strength that were likely to deliver the necessary growth in revenue and to prioritise investment accordingly. It was likely that banks would increasingly assess the financial viability of individual HE institutions and make their future lending decisions accordingly.

Finance and Planning Issues

18/42 RECEIVED:

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

- That the budget and planning process was being implemented for 2019/20. The agreement of realistic (but challenging) student number targets was key to the budget/planning process and would be data driven taking into account the volatility of markets. To help focus on the cost base, targets would be issued to the Schools and support departments which reflected the current level of activity. A Strategic Investment Fund (SIF) of c£3-4m would be available to support initiatives for growth and any expenditure requested through SIF would need to have a strong business case.
- Aston was participating in the Subject Level TEF pilot.
- Aston had achieved the Athena SWAN Silver award.
- Aston was participating in two joint applications for Institutes of Technology (IoT) in Logistics and in Manufacturing. These partnerships would help to secure a new pipeline of degree apprenticeships, students and CPD students, and access to state-of-the-art research facilities. The IoT in Manufacturing would provide Aston the benefit of additional space in the form of the new building on campus and a cyber physical manufacturing rig that could be used for teaching and research. The IoT in Logistics would provide an opportunity for Aston to offer its programmes and to undertake applied research in an advanced facility co-located with the logistics industry at Magna Park.

Aston Research 2023 Strategy

18/43 RECEIVED:

Paper SEN-18-1420-A and an oral report from Professor Simon Green, PVC Research, on the development and implementation of the Aston Research 2023 Strategy, which included an increased focus on research impact which was in line with the University Strategy's focus on meeting the needs of its beneficiaries. Aston's approach to research would be highly collaborative across disciplines and schools, involving partnerships with businesses at a local, national and global level and with academic institutions in the UK and across the globe. The University was committed to achieving excellent outcomes for the REF2021. It would be necessary to manage and prioritise resources very carefully to sustain research excellence in key areas.

18/44 NOTED:

That Senate members had highlighted the urgent need for the new University website to present a more positive and clearer research presence.

ACTION: Executive Director of Director of Recruitment and Marketing to expedite enhancement of Aston's research pages

UNIVERSITY STRATEGY THEMES

18/45 RECEIVED:

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

- i) Quality Assurance and Academic Standards: to consider a draft Senate Annual Report to Council (SEN-18-1421-A) and led by the Provost and the Director of Governance.
- ii) Quality Assurance and Academic Standards: to review the Business Information Dashboard (SEN-18-1423-A) and led by Sarah Davies, Director of Quality and Enhancement, and Rob Welch, Senior Analyst.
- iii) Research and Enterprise: To consider "a new approach to research integrity" (SEN-18-1422-A) and led by Professor James Wolffsohn, Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research Integrity.

- iv) Enabling Strategies: To consider the draft Digital Strategy (SEN-18-1424-A) and led by Professor Frank Eperjesi, Dean of CLIPP, and Neil Scott, Chief Operating Officer.

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

Senate's Annual Report to Council 2017/18

18/46 NOTED:

- That the Breakout Group reviewed the Senate's Annual Report to Council on Academic Governance which aimed to support the recommendation to Council that the University has in place effective systems and processes for ensuring:
 - i) the continuous improvement of the student academic experience and student outcomes, including action plans.
 - ii) that the methodologies used as a basis to improve the student academic experience and student outcomes are robust and appropriate
 - iii) that the standards of the University's academic awards have been appropriately set and maintained.
- The Breakout Group had recommended that Council endorse the report and, in so doing, authorise the Vice-Chancellor to sign and submit the OfS Annual Assurance Return for 2018 confirming the above. They based their decision on the comprehensive nature of the report and the work that had been undertaken behind it. They were pleased to see significant external evidence to back up assertions, as well as data driven evidence of impact, and challenging action plans for the coming year to ensure further continuous improvement. They saw clear evidence of a focus which puts students clearly at the centre of all that was being done.
- The Breakout Group made some useful recommendations to improve the format and effectiveness of the Annual Report for next year. They also recommended that it would be desirable for Council to appoint a member with experience of HE who could engage more closely with Senate and be in a position to provide independent assurance to Council on its effectiveness.

ACTION: Provost and the Director of Governance, to take forward the above suggestions for enhancing future iterations of the Annual Report to Council. Senate's Annual Report to be presented to Council

Business Information Dashboard

18/47 NOTED:

- That the introduction of a Business Information Dashboard was warmly received by the Senate break out group.
- That the Project behind this aimed to give staff access to reliable data in a format that they could easily use to inform multiple decision-making processes, including programme and module review, and student number and portfolio planning.
- That the information provided via the Dashboard would help the University meet its obligations (under its registration with the Office for Students) to critically review its performance, especially around standards and student outcomes, and also performance against University KPIs. Better understanding of our data had the potential to improve the student experience and the University's performance in league tables, and help Aston to identify areas in need of greater support, and areas of good practice.
- That there were challenges in reconciling data from different systems and against a background of change in the way we record information in SITS. And that, moving forward, if we are to use the Dashboard to its full extent we will need to invest in additional

software and secure the resources to make the project sustainable: the Breakout group was supportive of this being a project that warranted further investment and for a bid to be made.

- That those present were invited to forward suggestions for next steps to the bip_support@aston.ac.uk email address, and these would be prioritised by the Project Steering Group.'
- If any Senate members want access to the Dashboard, the instructions are available from <https://www2.aston.ac.uk/clipp/quality/a-z/monitoring-and-review/index> under header of 'Data to support Evaluation and Review'.

ACTION: Provost and the Project Steering Group to take forward the development of the Business Information Dashboard.

A New Approach to Research Integrity

18/48 NOTED:

- That historically, research integrity (used generically) had been managed in a somewhat diffuse way at Aston. Research Ethics, Research Integrity, GDPR, Open Science, Open Data, Clinical Trials and Bioethics had all been treated separately. In addition, leadership by academics of this area has been limited, and considerable responsibility had been passed onto professional services staff. This patchwork approach had led to a lack of integration in this vital area, as well as raising the risk of unintended conflicts of interest.
- The new approach included:
 - a) A new Research Integrity Committee (RIC) as a sub-committee of Research Committee. RIC would for the first time bring together all relevant stakeholders from across the institution in one place, and would have oversight over all aspects of Research Integrity. RIC had been approved by Research Committee and by Executive Academic Group and would come into existence on 1 January 2019. The University would also join the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO)
 - b) To increase academic visibility in this area, Professor James Wolffsohn had been appointed as Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research Integrity. He would chair RIC and provide overall leadership of this area.
 - c) All research (including student projects) to be submitted through new in-house research review portal
 - d) Establishment of subject/School level protocol review panel to consider quality of proposals and adherence to the new participant consent form and information sheet template. UREC would delegate authority to subject/School panels to review projects lying within specified blanket protocols.
 - e) The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) would meet regularly (eg monthly) to give an ethical opinion only on projects that did not fit within the approved blanket protocols. Meeting dates would be published on the web for the year ahead to review projects submitted at least one week before the published meeting date. Researchers would be invited to attend in person to aid the UREC's understanding of the project and amendments where necessary would mainly be made by timely Chair's action. Research not conducted at Aston and ethically approved by the NHS or local ethical committees would not be required to go through UREC, but to governance review before submission.
 - f) Governance review would be applied to all research not approved under blanket ethics to ensure:
 - Appropriate sponsorship / insurance cover
 - Scrutiny of reputational risk to Aston
 - Health and safety risks are appropriately managed
 - In most cases this should immediately follow UREC to give a timely approval, but may require referral to legal services, laser safety, MHRA etc.

g) A new website was being set up to include all Aston research processes, including submission process and guidance including project close out requirements.

- Breakout group members commented on: the need to ensure the robustness of the portal given that it would potentially be used by a large number of students; the requirement for blanket ethics approval of certain modules; the particular requirements of research projects carried out overseas; and the need to recognise the different requirements of the five Schools.

ACTION: Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research Integrity to ensure that the feedback from the Senate Breakout Group informs the implementation of the new approach to research integrity

Digital Strategy

18/49 NOTED:

Breakout members provided a good deal of feedback on the Digital Strategy proposals (contained as an appendix to these minutes) which will influence the development and implementation of the Strategy.

WHAT COULD WORK BETTER?

18/50 RECEIVED:

A report from a member of Senate that, just before the start of the current academic year, an upgrade was made to MAP which impacted negatively on its functionality and on the working life of busy academics. This highlighted the need to ensure that implementation of new IT systems, processes and upgrades were properly project managed and to include full user consultation. The University was taking steps to identify and collate information on the large range of projects being undertaken and planned across the institution with a view to ensuring that sufficient capability and capacity was in place to ensure their delivery through a prioritised and managed project plan.

ACTION: Dr Sylvia Wong to be consulted on the review of the implementation of academic IT systems

DATES OF SENATE MEETINGS IN 2017/18

18/51 NOTED:

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

JGW/27.11.18

APPENDIX

FEEDBACK FROM THE SENATE BREAKOUT GROUP ON THE DRAFT DIGITAL STRATEGY

Likes

- The Group thought that this was a good start but the work should not be presented as a strategy. It would be better framed as a working document working towards a strategy.
- It was described by one of the Group as a helicopter view of the current digital technology position; it says the right things.
- The Group commented positively on the integration of IT for professional services.
- The fact that it exists - our systems have been creaking for years and a more up to date approach is needed to survive in the future market.
- Proposal to integrate systems is critical - the patchwork nature of the current systems creates duplication of effort and inconsistencies in data.
- Student experience map and the proposal for the my Aston app. (also SMS alerts - provided no student EVER gets access to either staff phone numbers or those of other students, this proposal does open up a big security vulnerability).

Dislikes

- It read like a very standard report. It didn't embed the culture and needs of Aston. One Group member stated that we shouldn't have to worry about IT it should just be there.
- Merging the Hub with IT was not considered to be a good idea. The required skill set of the people working in these two sections was very different.
- Worse, staff skills and motivation to use IT are belittled in several places. What is the evidence for "Finding 9: Staff willingness to embrace new technology and digital approaches varies considerably? Insulting the people you will need to implement your strategy is not a good start for change management!!!!
- Lots of use of gimmicks & buzzwords - starting with replacing IT with "digital" (yawn) and moving on to AI, VR, AR, blockchain etc. presumably to make us think the consultants were cool guys who know all about this stuff, but no indication of depth of knowledge on the core functions of the Aston processes that IT systems support. Overall, tech advice seems generic and ill-informed e.g. Office 365 is mentioned repeatedly, even though Office is probably not the system that most contributes to the university's productivity - are these guys sales agents for Microsoft?!
- The idea we should just create a lake of data then work out how to exploit it later! This is absolutely not the way to get the best from analytics. We need to have a careful data strategy that identifies the key data types that are important to the university - why is this not linked to the discussion of the Business Information Portal?

Missing

- The scope of the project isn't clear. Was it meant to cover specialised research IT and learning and teaching and professional services?
- There is no mention of specialised computers connected, for example, to engineering equipment. One member commented outside of the break-out that specialist computing for research and teaching is something of the highest importance -- it is central to what large parts of the university does -- but is missing from the document. This is an opportunity to really engage with the challenge of what a digital strategy should look like for a university, especially one strong in science and engineering activity. It is not appropriate for IT here to be viewed in the same way as it is in the corporate world: at the heart of how we use computing are the ideas of experimentation, innovation, and agility. I would like to see the strategy identify areas of activity where these principles are appropriate, and then engage with how to support work of this type to be the best it can be. I think this goes beyond simply 'exceptions for those who are doing slightly unusual things' and is about how, as an institution, we foster this culture and provide technology and specialist support to do it well.

- Also, colleagues in Computer Science are frequently frustrated and disappointed when we are not given a role in helping to shape policy and make key decisions in the digital infrastructure of the university, and I think there is a history of decisions in this area that could have been made better. There is a lot of internal expertise that could be used, and I know that colleagues would be very happy to offer it. Could some expectation of this also be included into a future strategy?
- A member of the Group commented that the project was meant to be all-encompassing. A more detailed analysis of research IT needs is required. A more detailed analysis of specialised teaching IT is required. These can be other work streams. It is difficult to capture the subtle nuances of specialised research IT needs. We need a system where we can make a case for some special IT. We need to invest in specialised IT support. We need to identify the need.
- What about high-performance computing? What about streaming speakers who are off-campus?
- There should be more about engaging with off-campus students.
- Many students bring devices on to campus especially those on degree apprenticeships and charging points were very limited. Note, many students at Coventry University have access to secure lockers with charging points built in.
- Bring your own device (BYOD). With Aston's widening participation initiative some students would suffer from digital poverty. They would not be able to afford the cost of a device and would be prevented from engaging with in-class polls and other activities where a device was required. There would be a need for a loan system that prevented other students from knowing who could not afford a device.
- Some off-campus Aston students living in emerging countries may not be able to afford devices. Some areas have no or very poor internet services.
- Student access to the Virtual Private Network through MyAston app would be helpful.
- Wider consultation for the digital technology working documents and not just with senior academics and managers.
- We need a balance between broad freedom and supportability.
- Do we have a data policy?
- There is no understanding of other initiatives - notably the Business Information Portal and to a lesser extent the research ethics portal being reviewed by other breakout groups. It's not clear there are joined up communications about these things.
- Data strategy - to target integration in the right places and underpin everything.
- Support for recruitment - how do we tie in systems for assessing strengths and capabilities mentioned in the L&T committee notes with other systems like SITS.
- Support for accreditation, QAA reporting HEFCE reporting, New Office for Students reporting etc. Currently these consume considerable effort in part because the systems aren't joined up and analytics capability is missing. NOTE some of this is in the Business Information Portal report but there is not up between the two.
- Support for teaching - there is no discussion of the kinds of tools that would take away the burdens of teaching and allow staff to provide the human element that students need. A strategy that addressed at least some of the major pain points (marking, feedback, detection of essay outsourcing, e.g. by continuous style monitoring). This will only become more important if we move to accelerated programme with the ever greater stress on teaching staff that will come with an 11 month teaching year.
- Vision for enhancing support for teaching in the areas where the university wants to expand: our digital teaching offerings (e.g. Aston online & degree apprenticeships), international teaching.
- How we use the digital strategy to reduce our dependence on Aston's limited physical estate.
- The strategic need for systems to address business & the professions and community engagement are mentioned, but beyond general need for CRM how these would actually be addressed is not considered.

Barriers

- A continued lack of investment in IT in general.
- A continued lack of investment in specialised research computers.

- A lack of SLAs (service level agreements) between the different sections of IT.
- Not aligning IT services with governance and strategy.
- Making decisions that don't last. We adopt something new, then it's not supported, then it's dropped and we start again.
- Not getting the operational IT level working. Getting the basics right for students and staff.
- We have to be good at what we do.
- Using not fit-for-purpose software, such as Collaborate for webinars.
- Lack of support for the straightforward.
- There is an assumption in the working document that we all use suppliers who are market leaders and no other providers.
- If we don't get the basics right we can't hope to deal with the specialised.
- Not building high capacity to undertake big data research.
- Should not underestimate the complexity of building integrated information systems. Just joining a couple would be hard but this calls for a well thought through integration of the arrow soup in Appendix B (p.72/263).
- Cost will be very significant - my gut says way beyond the estimates given here to get properly integrated systems rather than just another gimmicky overlay over the same unintegrated systems from mixed vendors. The university is also building more buildings, and recruiting more staff. Do we have the funds?
- If staff see this version of the strategy with the repeated insults to their skills and motivations then there will be a lack of motivation to get behind the change.