

the Academic Council

Minutes of the first meeting of the Academic Council in the 2023-2024 academic session, held on 27 September 2023 at 3 pm in Room 039, Queen Anne Court, Greenwich campus and via Microsoft Teams.

Present:

Jane Harrington, Vice-Chancellor (Chair)

Peter Garrod, University Secretary
(Executive Secretary)

- Rachel Ashton, Executive Director, Student and Academic Services
- Karen Brickman, GBS Member
- Andy Frost, Interim Director, GRE
- Peter Griffiths, PVC Engineering & Science
- Dave Hockham, FLAS Member
- Aminul Islam, GSU Officer
- Sodi Lawal, GSU Officer
- Jennifer Marie, PVC Education
- Derek Moore, PVC FEHHS
- Zoe Pettit, Deputy Dean, FLAS
- Mohammed Sakikholes, FES Member
- Peter Taylor, Chief Operating Officer
- Andrew Westby, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Knowledge Exchange)
- Anuj Baral, Elected Student Member
- Leigh Doster, PVC Business
- Myrtle Emmanuel, Associate Professor in HRM & Organisation, GBS/EDI Adviser
- Sheryl Hendriks, Director of NRI
- Petros Ieromonachou, Associate Dean (R&KE), GBS
- Heidi King, Executive Director, Marketing & External Relations
- Vanessa Lemm, PVC FLAS
- Mary-Clare Martin, FEHHS Member
- Louise Owusu-Kwarteng, Associate Dean (Student Success), FLAS
- Jane Roscoe, Deputy Vice-Chancellor & Provost
- Sofia Stathi, Chair, UREB
- Laziz Tokhirov, GSU Officer

In attendance:

Trudy Brighton, Governance Support Manager (minutes)

Simon Lewis, Executive Director of Strategic Planning (items 23/08-09)

Apologies:

Paul Butler, Executive Director and Chief Information Officer

AC 23/01 WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Dr Karen Brickman, GBS representative, and Dr Myrtle Emmanuel (who had been appointed to the Council in light of her University-wide role as EDI Race Adviser) to their first meeting. Anuj Baral, in his capacity as GSU President, and the new GSU Officer team, Aminul Fahad, Laziz Tokhirov and Sodi Lawal, were similarly welcomed.

The Chair noted that Zoe Pettit, Louise Owusu-Kwarteng and Petros Ieromonachou had been re-appointed to the Council as the Deputy Dean and Associate Dean members respectively for 2023/24 in order to provide continuity given the relatively new governance arrangements.

AC 23/02 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were made.

AC 23/03 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING AND ACTIONS LIST (AC 23/P01)

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 April 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

The actions list was received. It was noted that all actions were ongoing or completed or addressed on the meeting agenda.

AC 23/04 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES NOT COVERED ELSEWHERE

4.1 Harassment and Sexual Misconduct (AC 23/P02)

The University Secretary updated the Council on actions to address harassment and sexual misconduct. The OfS's response to its consultation on a new registration condition (E6) on student harassment and sexual misconduct was expected later in the autumn.

Since the last meeting, work had focussed on student training. A Moodle course to promote healthy sex and relationships and combat sexual and intimate partner vigilance had been launched in the January 2023 Welcome Week. Arising out of user feedback, a revised Health Sex and Relationships Moodle course had been launched for the September 2023 Welcome period. In addition, a one-hour workshop had been delivered as part of GREFest and short online interactive sessions had been offered by the Report + Support team.

The Council noted that take-up of the training had been mixed, with good take-up of the GREFest workshop but not of the Moodle course or the standalone sessions offered by the Report + Support team. There were plans to publicise the training more widely and to explore the possibility of embedding it in academic skills training. Further updates would be provided to the Council in due course.

4.2 Student Success KPIs (AC 23/P03)

The PVC Education reported that, reflecting the sector trend, the University's continuation and BAME awarding gap metrics had been worsening over the past two years. Some, but not all, of the causes were known, and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor & Provost was leading targeted action to understand these and implement interventions to address them.

The report outlined the theory of change developed to provide structure to the interventions and the assumptions around factors impacting on performance. The Council received a detailed account of current progress with the workstreams for improving Continuation and the BAME Awarding Gap.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- The work on the BAME Awarding Gap would focus on the 100 modules (25 modules per Faculty had been identified) that would have the biggest impact by using the Inclusive Curriculum Evaluation Tool (ICET), working with the Inclusivity Consultants, reviewing assessment, decolonising curricula and undertaking training.
- As part of the Continuation work, the different pinch points along a student's journey were being analysed so that appropriate interventions would be applied at appropriate times in order to

- prevent students withdrawing.
- Student induction was a key factor in Continuation. The importance of managing student expectations, creating a sense of belonging and encouraging students to come to campus were all essential for success.
- The sharing of good practice from better performing programmes was imperative to this work.

The Chair stated that time was not on the University's side and some projects had been earmarked for acceleration to gain momentum to get impact in 6-12 months' time. The Council would receive a further update on progress later in the year.

AC 23/05 REPORT FROM THE VICE-CHANCELLOR (AC 23/P04)

The Vice-Chancellor reported on recent developments and highlighted the following:

- [REDACTED]
- **PABs** – As the result of improvements to the Progression and Award Boards processes, there were no on campus students with missing marks. This was a real achievement and would benefit students transitioning into their next years.
- [REDACTED]
- **League Tables** – In the recently published national league tables for 2023, the University had dropped rankings in three of the five major league tables but had been ranked 68th in the new Daily Mail League Table and 45th in the Times Higher Education NSS 2023 League Table. The results could be attributed to mixed and inconsistent performance across several metrics, with contributory factors including subject level performance, the use of lag data and challenges in staff recruitment. Nevertheless, there was also evidence that areas of focus, such as teaching quality and student experience, had shown improvement, although not sufficient to secure higher rankings in the three League Tables.

The Chair stated that it was important to continue the focussed efforts to elevate the University's standing across the metrics. There would be particular focus on the NSS, Continuation, Employability and the BAME Awarding Gap. The VCE had been given an objective to increase the University's ranking by a minimum of 20 places from the 2023 position in the Guardian League table and targeting a more substantial improvement by 30 places for 2024. Six sub-groups had been established to work on areas requiring particular improvement and reporting on progress was a standing item at VCE. Updates on progress would be provided to future Council meetings.

- **Update on Strategy Programme Work** – Grant Lewis, appointed as the new Head of Strategy Programme in June, was leading work to enhance the project delivery framework. The Council noted the key successes over the last six months and priorities for the next six months for each sub-strategy.
- **Industry and Regulators Committee report into the OfS** – A recent report published by the House of Lords Industry and Regulators Committee had criticised the performance of the Office for Students. It included a series of recommendations for the OfS and the Government.
- **OfS Quality Assessment Reports** – the OfS had published the findings of

two assessment visits focussed on the quality of business and management courses at two universities. The OfS was now considering whether any regulatory action was appropriate.

- **Postgraduate Study**

In response to a question from a member of Council on the reasons for the fall in the number of undergraduate students going on to further study, the Chair listed a number of factors including the attractiveness of the postgraduate portfolio. Cost was a real consideration and the Executive Director, SAS agreed to look into the difficulty of accessing postgraduate loans. It was discussed that there needed to be better publicising of postgraduate opportunities and research pathways and that continuing into further study needed to be given parity with employment. It was agreed that the Council would receive an update on this issue at a future meeting.

AC 23/06 GREENWICH STUDENTS' UNION REPORT (AC 23/P05)

The President of Greenwich Students' Union presented an update on strategic activities:

- Over 4510 students had voted in the Officer elections this year, representing 19% of the student population. The four elected Officers had undergone a comprehensive induction process over the summer and had developed their campaigns for the coming year.
- 94% of students contacted as part of the Retention Calling Project had continued into the next phase of study. The project would continue into 2023/24 when students from Polar 1 backgrounds would be specifically targeted.
- Other project work included the Awarding Gap Project focussing on student voice and the Polar 1 Project working to engage students from low participation backgrounds and provide tailored support to remove barriers to higher education.

The Chair thanked the President for his report and congratulated the GSU on the recent successful and lively Welcome Week.

AC 23/07 FACULTY REPORTS (AC 23/P06)

The Executive Deans & PVCs presented key highlights from their Faculty reports:

7.1 Faculty of Education, Health & Human Sciences

Professor Derek Moore drew the Council's attention to the following:

- [REDACTED]
- **NSS:** The Faculty's NSS results had been mixed. Health had performed well but the results for Psychology had not been so positive. Some areas, such as 'Organisation and Management', would require particular focus.
- **Initial Teacher Training:** The education provision had received a good Ofsted result and the Faculty would be working with the University of Derby for accreditation for the next few years.

7.2 Faculty of Engineering & Science

Professor Peter Griffiths drew the Council's attention to the following:

- [REDACTED]

- **NSS:** The Faculty's results had been mixed, with some positive outcomes and some programmes performing below the sector benchmark. Work to ensure that the Faculty was getting the basics right was under way.
- **Staff and Culture:** A new MPharm programme had been launched.
- **R&KE:** Amongst a number of recent accomplishments, Dr Noushin Emami, NRI, had been awarded the prestigious 2023 Flormanksa prize by the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences.

7.3 Faculty of Liberal Arts & Sciences

Professor Vanessa Lemm drew the Council's attention to the following:

- [REDACTED]
- **Staff and Culture:** Action plans across the Faculty had been completed and priorities established. Dr Catherine Maffioletti had been appointed as interim Head of the School of Design.
- **NSS:** There had been some positive results in the NSS with significant improvements for Law, Architecture and Drama. English Literature and Creative Writing had performed particularly strongly.
- **Events:** A new exhibition, 'Spectrum' showcasing the work of MA Digital Arts and MA Design students had opened in the Stephen Lawrence Gallery.

7.4 Greenwich Business School

Professor Leigh Doster drew the Council's attention to the following:

- **Staff and Culture:** The new Bloomberg Trading Floor and Digital Marketing Laboratory would be opening shortly.
- **NSS:** Substantial improvement in scores had been made as the result of focussed interventions. Three programmes had achieved 90% in four or more of the seven core areas. Scores for 'academic support' and 'organisation and management' had exceeded the University's overall scores.
- **R&KE:** There had been 16 PhD completions and 24 new starters.

- [REDACTED]

AC 23/08 NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2023 (AC 23/P07)

The Executive Director of Strategic Planning presented the highlights of the 2023 National Student Survey (NSS). Following the OfS's review of the NSS, this year's survey was different to previous iterations. The format had moved from a five to a four point scale and the neutral '*neither agree or disagree*' option removed. The questions were more direct; the question on overall student satisfaction had been removed but new questions on freedom of expression and mental wellbeing support had been added. As a consequence of the changes, meaningful year-on-year trend analysis was now difficult.

Overall the University's performance remained relatively stable and broadly in line with the sector. The University had chosen to retain 'overall satisfaction' as an optional question and the score of 76% was identical to the previous year's (and practically matched the Greenwich Student Survey satisfaction score of 75%). However, in terms of relative performance, the university had seen small relative declines of 1-2%pts across most question areas.

Although the University's performance was likely to lead to a decline in relative league table position, The Times Higher Education had ranked Greenwich as

45th in the sector in its league table based on average responses in the core 27 questions.

The highest score in the survey overall had been the question, “*How good are teaching staff at explaining things?*” which had scored 91%, matching the sector average. Other positive results, above the sector average, related to Mental Wellbeing, Student Voice, Learning Opportunities and Marking and Assessment as well as the healthcare, allied health and clinical practice placements questions. Subject level benchmarking by questions and themes from the OfS indicated strong performances in ‘Teaching on my Course’ and ‘Assessment and Marking’ in ‘Subjects Allied to Medicine’, ‘Media, Journalism and Communications’, and ‘Engineering and Technology’, amongst others.

The Council noted that the NSS Taskforce approach was continuing, with this year’s programmes being selected on the basis of the five areas of the TEF together with ‘Organisation and Management’:

- Programmes scoring above 90% in 3 or more of the 5 TEF areas would celebrate and share good practice.
- Programmes scoring below 75% in 4 or more of the 5 TEF areas had been selected for inclusion in the Task Force (and would produce action plans)
- Programmes scoring below 75% in any of the 5 TEF areas or ‘organisation and management’ would be involved in targeted workshops.

The Chair noted that, despite some improvement in the last two years, it would be necessary to maintain the focus on areas performing below benchmark to ensure that students received the best possible experience. In response to a question about the rationale for only inviting programme leaders to the Task Force sessions, it was explained that the Faculty PVC, Associate Dean (Student Success) and Deputy Dean would be present but essential groups could also be added. The intention was that the conversations would be cascaded through academic Heads and Associate Deans and other academics would have an opportunity to contribute to discussions in other meetings.

AC 23/09 GRADUATE OUTCOMES SURVEY 2023 (AC 23/P08)

The Executive Director of Strategic Planning presented the results of the 2023 Graduate Outcomes Survey. The survey captured the outcomes of the cohort of full-time domiciled undergraduate students who had graduated in 2020/21. This information was used by the OfS to analyse the number of graduates in employment and/or further study as well as the progression metric measured under Condition B3.

The headline information was:

- An increase in the University’s OfS progression metric of 2.1% to 73%, which broadly tracked the sector’s performance.
- A rise in full-time employment outcomes and an equivalent reduction in part-time employment.
- 88% of the graduates were in some form of employment or engaged in further study.
- 7% were unemployed (representing a 1% fall from 2019/2020 graduates).

The Council noted the University’s positive relative performance against comparator institutions. It had maintained its 4th out of 14 ranking amongst modern London institutions, moved up one place to 4th against the core comparator group and been ranked 7th within the University Alliance. The Council discussed ways in which to improve the metrics. There was sub-

strategy work focussing on employability and graduate outcomes. The work to take forward the employability agenda would be led by the PVC Education and the Executive Director of Strategic Planning. The take-up of opportunities in business and internships in order to bridge the gap between the world of work and study was important to this work.

The Chair thanked the Executive Director of Strategic Planning for the clear and insightful analysis.

AC 23/10 FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION (AC 23/P09)

The University Secretary presented a report on the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 and its implications for the University. The Act was now law but most of its substantive provisions were not expected to come into effect until August 2024 and September 2025. The OfS anticipated that the new statutory duties on universities and students' unions would come into effect on 1 August 2024 along with the OfS's freedom of speech complaints scheme and the regulation of students' unions with regard to freedom of speech. A new registration condition relating to freedom of speech and academic freedom would follow in September 2025 together with the requirements related to monitoring of overseas funding.

The Act placed new responsibilities on universities and the proposed steps to be taken to prepare for these requirements were set out in the report. These included:

- By March 2024: reviewing the Freedom of Expression Code of Practice;
- By March 2024: reviewing complaints procedures to ensure clear pathways for students, staff and external speakers wishing to complain in respect of freedom of speech and academic freedom;
- By June 2024: GSU to issue a Freedom of Speech Code of Practice;
- By June 2024: agree a communications plan for 2024/25 to promote the importance of freedom of speech and academic freedom to students;
- By September 2024: prepare for the new responsibilities to be introduced in 2025 regarding reporting requirements of overseas funding

The Council noted that the Act extended the ambit of the OfS to students' unions. The GSU would need to review its speaker policy and replace it with a Freedom of Speech Code of Practice. The University would work with its partners at Medway around ensuring compliance with the Act.

The Chair noted that the University normally allowed events flagged by Prevent to proceed through putting appropriate mitigations in place.

AC 23/11 PRELIMINARY RESULTS POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH EXPERIENCE STUDENT SURVEY (PRES) 2023 (AC 23/P10)

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (R&KE) presented the preliminary results of PRES 2023. The overall satisfaction score (71%) was very similar to the previous survey (72%). In contrast to the sector, the response rate had risen to 40% (representing about 500 students). The survey covered nine core categories as well as 'overall experience', and the University's best scores had been for 'supervision', 'resources', progression' 'responsibilities' and 'research skills'. Benchmarking comparison across the sector identified that the University's highest score was for 'supervision' but it was behind in a number of areas.

The Council noted that the PRES survey had been run in order to provide an up-to-date picture of PGR provision and highlight areas requiring improvement. The

data revealed much good practice but 'Culture' and 'Environment' needed considerable future focus. More detailed analysis was being carried out to help understand the changes needed to make impact and inform an Action plan for the next PRES. The Council supported the approach taken and noted that an updated report would be provided later in the year.

AC 23/12 PROCESSES FOR DECLARING CONFLICTS OF INTEREST (AC 23/P11)

The University Secretary introduced changes to the University's processes for declaring conflicts of interests and gifts and hospitality. Currently staff were required to make such declarations under the University's Financial Regulations and Anti-Bribery Policy and an annual register of interests circulated to senior staff, Governors and staff in areas considered to be at higher risk. However, a mechanism enabling all staff to make declarations during the year as matters arose had now been approved by the Vice-Chancellor's Executive. This new process would supplement the annual register of interests exercise and would enable more timely declarations and ensure that issues were identified and managed effectively. A new webpage setting out the requirements had been set up including two new declaration forms.

It was reported that the changes had been publicised by Internal Comms and Academic Council members were asked to help raise awareness. Slides were being prepared to help this dissemination. The Council supported the changes which would help to socialise the process across the University.

AC 23/13 CONCORDAT TO SUPPORT RESEARCH INTEGRITY (AC 23/P12)

The Council noted that, as a condition of receiving funding from Research England, the University was required to meet the requirements of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity issued by the UUK and UK research funding councils and bodies. This included an annual statement detailed the processes which enhanced research integrity and a summary of any official investigation of research misconduct. There had been one investigation of postgraduate research student misconduct in 2022/23.

The Council **approved** the Annual Statement on Research Integrity. The Statement would be presented to the Governing Body.

AC 23/14 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None was raised.

AC 23/15 ACADEMIC COUNCIL TERMS OF REFERENCE (AC 23/P13)

The Council **received** revised Terms of Reference which had been approved by Chair's Action and noted that these included:

- Provisions to allow the Vice-Chancellor to appoint additional staff members to the Council because of their expertise.
- Incorporation of the Council's responsibilities in relation to OfS compliance (as recommended in an internal audit review in 2022/23).

AC 23/16 EXTENSION OF EMERITUS PROFESSORSHIP (AC 23/P14)

The Council **noted** that the Emeritus Professorship of Professor Keith Tomlins had been renewed for a further three years ending 2025/26.

AC 23/17 UPDATE ON RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE SUB-STRATEGY: FORMATION OF CENTRES AND INSTITUTES (AC 23/P15)

The Council **received** an update on the approval of new R&KE Centres and Institutes and noted that:

- 25 Centres had been approved by the R&KE Board
- Centres Leaders had been appointed for most Centres
- Each Centre had been asked to develop a theory of change linking their R&KE activities to long-term impact.

AC 23/18 SUMMARY REPORTS FROM ACADEMIC COUNCIL COMMITTEES

The Council **received** summary reports from the following Academic Council's committees:

- Partnerships Board, 3 July 2023
- Research and Knowledge Exchange Board, 4 July 2023
- Student Success Board, 22 June 2023
- University Research Ethics Board, 27 June 2023

AC 23/19 MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF ACADEMIC COUNCIL COMMITTEES (AC 23/P17)

The Council **received** minutes from the following Academic Council's committee meetings:

- Partnerships Board, 3 July 2023
- Research and Knowledge Exchange Board, 17 May 2023
- Student Success Board, 22 June 2023
- University Research Ethics Board, 27 June 2023

AC 23/20 ACADEMIC COUNCIL CYCLE OF BUSINESS 2023/24 (AC 23/P18)

The Council **received** an updated cycle of business for 2023/24.

AC 23/21 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held at 15:00 on 24 January 2024.

Meeting closed at 4.40 pm.

T.A.Brighton
13 November 2023