

## ***the Academic Council***

Minutes of the third meeting of the Academic Council in the 2023-2024 academic session, held on 28 March 2024 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, Director, GRI
- Peter Griffiths, PVC Engineering & Science
- Aminul Islam, GSU Officer
- Sodiq Lawal, GSU Officer
- Jennifer Marie, PVC Education
- Derek Moore, PVC FEHHS
- Peter Taylor, Chief Operating Officer
- Andrew Westby, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Knowledge Exchange)
- Paul Butler, Executive Director & Chief Information Officer
- 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
- Vanessa Lemm, Deputy VC & Provost
- Mary-Clare Martin, FEHHS Member
- Sofia Stathi, Chair, UREB

### **In attendance:**

Trudy Brighton, Governance Support Manager (minutes)

### **Apologies:**

Anuj Baral, Elected Student Member

Dave Hockham, FLAS Member

Heidi King, Executive Director, Marketing & External Relations

Louise Owusu-Kwarteng, Associate Dean (Student Success), FLAS

Zoe Pettit, Deputy Dean, FLAS

Laziz Tokhirov, GSU Officer

AC 23/45      WELCOME

The Chair congratulated Karen Brickman on her recent appointment as Head of the School of Business, Operations and Strategy in the Greenwich Business School.

AC 23/46      DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were made.

AC 23/47      MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING AND ACTIONS (ARC 23/P37)

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2024 were agreed as an accurate record subject to amendment to the following sentence in minute 23/30 (PTES 2023):

“The PVC Education reported that 16 programmes were below average satisfaction levels and would be required to produce credible action plans. She would ensure that ~~a-the~~ breakdown of programme level results was shared with ~~programme leaders~~ **the DVC & Provost.**”

The actions tracker was received. All actions were either completed or in progress.

AC 23/48      REPORT FROM THE VICE-CHANCELLOR (AC 23/P38)

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

- **Senior Staffing Update:** Professor Vanessa Lemm had taken up her appointment as the new Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost on 1 March 2024. She would continue to lead FLAS whilst recruitment for the new Executive Dean and PVC took place. The Associate Director of Greenwich Online, Amy Sampson, had now started at the University. Oyebanji (Banji) Adewumi MBE would be joining the University on 10 June 2024 as Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
- **University's Achievements:** The University had won a prestigious Mayor of London Cultural Impact Award. In addition, Greenwich had been shortlisted in four categories in the London Higher Awards. The awards ceremony was being held on 6 June 2024.
- **Migration Advisory Committee Review:** The Home Secretary had commissioned the Migration Advisory Committee to review the graduate route visa. The Committee was due to report on 14 May. Further changes to the graduate route could have damaging effects to the higher education sector and higher education bodies were preparing to express their concerns.
- **National Audit Office Report (NAO) into Franchised Higher Education Providers:** The NAO report, which had been published in January 2024, had identified that governance and oversight of franchised higher education provision needed to be strengthened following instances of fraud and abuse in the sector. The Vice-Chancellor reminded Council that the University's domestic partners were all FE Colleges with the exception of the specialist Bird College, with which Greenwich had a long-standing relationship and whose provision had just been assessed as 'Outstanding' by Ofsted.

AC 23/49      GREENWICH STUDENTS' UNION REPORT (AC 23/P39)

The Council received the update on the Greenwich Students' Union's strategic activities and noted that:

- 37 of the 247 students who had put themselves forward for the 2024 Officer elections had been approved to run as candidates. 5,225 votes had been cast, equating to 19% of the student population. The successful candidates had been Ameen Chowdhury, elected as President, and Aminul Fahad, Amrutha Gullapalli and Sodiq Lawal as Officers. The Council congratulated Aminul Fahad and Sodiq Lawal on their re-election.
- 100 modules had been reviewed by 354 students as part of the Awarding Gap project. Alongside analysis of the results, the inclusivity consultants were continuing to arrange focus groups to gather supporting data. The reports were due to be circulated to module leaders by the end of term two.

The PVC Education emphasised the importance of the Awarding Gap project and noted that the work to date had not yet reduced the gap as required. She welcomed any suggestions or thoughts from Council Members to feed into future work.

AC 23/50 FACULTY REPORTS (AC 23/P40)

The Council received reports from the DVC and PVCs and Executive Deans on their Faculties. They presented the following key highlight from the reports:

**50.1 Faculty of Engineering & Science**

Professor Peter Griffiths reported that the Faculty had amalgamated its PTES and NSS action plans for its poorest performing programmes. The action plan for the Medway School of Pharmacy was well developed but the plans for the two Engineering programmes required some further work, especially around graduate outcomes and curriculum refresh.

**50.2 Faculty of Liberal Arts & Sciences**

Professor Vanessa Lemm reported, in relation to addressing the PTES results, that the Faculty was focussing on fostering a stronger sense of belonging. Initiatives being put in place included increased opportunities to socialise and cross Faculty seminars. The PGR and PGT cohorts had been joined together as part of this work.

**50.3 Greenwich Business School**

Professor Petros Ieromonachou reported that the School's PTES results had been positive (89%). The focus for the current year was to improve social opportunities as well as personal tutoring and each School was developing its own bespoke plan of activities. Consideration was being given to the different induction requirements of the September, January and April intakes.

**50.4 Faculty of Education, Health & Human Sciences**

No report was made on behalf of FEHHS as Professor Derek Moore, who was attending via Teams at Avery Hill, was temporarily absent from the meeting due to a fire evacuation. The Council noted the PVC's written report.

AC 23/51 QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW (AC 23/P40A)

The Council received a presentation from the Executive Director of SAS and the PVC Education on the quality assurance (QA) review. The various projects completed over the course of the last 18 months were outlined. There had been a reorganisation of the administrative function with the QA team and standardisation of Academic Regulations across the Faculties. Implementation of the PAB action plan had led to zero missing marks for the September 2023 intake. The Continuous Improvement Tool had been introduced, changes to the degree algorithm implemented and the curriculum management solution was in its discovery phase. Alongside this review work, business as usual activities had continued.

The Executive Director of SAS reported that the next step in the review was a QA improvement plan and the purpose of the session was to seek feedback from Council Members on QA processes. In considering what might potentially have the most impact on improving processes, the following areas of work had been identified:

- New Programme Proposals
- Programme Validation

- Programme and Module Modifications
- Annual Programme Review.

The Council broke into groups to consider what currently worked in these areas and what didn't, what should be changed and which elements should be prioritised for change. Following 15 minute discussions, the groups fed back the following points:

- Consistency was crucial; processes needed to be applied uniformly across the Faculties.
- Simplification of processes would facilitate their automation.
- Agility was essential; having the ability to respond to changes quickly was necessary. Adopting a risk-based approach would enable decision making to be undertaken at Faculty level.
- The current QA processes stifled creativity and innovation in practice.
- The governance around QA processes needed to be simpler and more straightforward and a review was underway.
- The burden of documentation was slowing down implementation of processes. Documentation needed to be reviewed and assessed whether it added to the quality process or was unnecessarily onerous.
- Resourcing around the introduction of new programmes needed to be considered as part of any business case for introducing them.
- There needed to be joint ownership of QA processes and any problematic areas between the University and its partnerships.
- The five-year cycle of QA reviews of partners should be revisited to ensure quality was being delivered and thereby producing the student outcomes expected. Review events needed to be streamlined, more cost-effective and undertaken more efficiently, possibly as hybrid events.
- Many of the processes, including PABs, were over-engineered and their balance needed to be examined.
- Any changes to processes needed to be effective for all programmes, standard and non-standard alike, such as apprenticeships.

Having been invited to provide some student perspectives, the GSU Officers reported that students particularly complained about the length of time taken to feed back PAB decisions. There was also the suggestion that templates for the programme review processes would improve engagement.

The DVC & Provost reported that the comments made resonated with the priorities set for future work. It made sense to utilise existing good practice in the sector and this was being examined. One such example was the establishment of a central repository for standardising forms and documentation, with proper version control. Council Members were invited to share other examples of best practice after the meeting.

The Chair thanked everyone for a very helpful discussion.

AC 23/52

STUDENT SUCCESS KPIs: BAME AWARDING GAP AND CONTINUATION (AC 23/P41)

The PVC Education presented an update on progress made to improve the Continuation and BAME Awarding Gap metrics since the Theories of Change were provided to the Academic Council at its September 2023 meeting.

- In relation to **Continuation**, good progress was being made with a number of interventions including development of an improved Personal

Tutoring framework which would be submitted to the Council in June for approval. The Council had previously suggested an additional focus on induction, and the DVC and Provost would be chairing a stakeholder group to enhance activity in this area including the development of pre-arrival courses.

- In relation to the **BAME Awarding Gap**, the Theory of Change was being updated in order to encompass other experiences, besides curricula, which might impact on student grades. The Inclusive Curriculum Evaluation Tool (ICET) had been condensed to encourage useability and 66 modules had now been reviewed. The learnings from the review of the 100 modules that would have the biggest impact were being considered for scaling across the board. Proposed modifications to the Extenuating Circumstances Policy were currently going through the approval process and would be presented to the Council at its June meeting.

In discussing the ongoing work, it was noted that:

- Speedier provision of student data to help identify at-risk students would be helpful for continuation and other metrics.
- A recent workshop with academics had flagged up the usefulness of considering how feedback was given to students, particularly those from non-traditional disadvantaged backgrounds. Cross-cutting activities such as this would be helpful with several of the metrics.

The Vice-Chancellor reported that work in PAS and ILS on improving student data was in train and asked for a regular update on student data management to be made to future Council meetings.

#### AC 23/53      ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN (AC 23/P42)

The PVC FEHHS introduced an update on the preparation of the 2025/26-2028/29 Access and Participation Plan (APP). The existing Plan was due to end in September 2025 and a new plan needed to be submitted to the OfS by 31 July 2024. The Plan outlined how the University intended to improve equality of opportunity for under-represented groups of students in order to access, succeed in and progress from higher education. It applied to Home students only.

The University had a wide diversity of students and had a good record in providing access to under-represented groups, but there were 'gaps'. He outlined the work undertaken so far to identify five key areas for interventions on Access, Attainment and Progression and the work to gather evidence on and articulate the interventions in place.

The APP Task and Finish Group had completed a first draft of the Plan following consultation with stakeholders and was now working towards producing a second draft by the end of April. Some projects, such as the BAME Awarding Gap, would need to be revisited and longer term activities identified. The final draft would be submitted to the Council in June, prior to sign off by the Governing Body later that month.

The Chair thanked the PVC FEHHS for coordinating the work which illustrated that some of the previous gaps had been closed.

#### AC 23/54      ANNUAL REPORT ON STUDENT CASEWORK (AC 23/P43)

The Council considered the annual report on student casework in 2022/23.

The Executive Director, SAS, stated that the report aimed to provide assurance to the Council and Governing Body that the University's handling of cases met the expectations of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). For 2022/23, 59 students (an increase of 73% from 2021/22) had escalated their cases to the OIA having exhausted internal processes. Of these, two had been found by the OIA to be 'justified' and one had 'partially justified', with the remainder being 'not justified' (30), 'settled' (12), 'ineligible' (7), 'withdrawn' (5) or 'pending' (2).

The volume of casework had risen year on year since 2019/20. For 2022/23 the breakdown of casework was noted to be:

- Completion of Procedures Letters issued – 36% increase to 395.
- Fitness to Practise – 54.5% reduction to 5 cases
- Student Disciplinary cases – 25% reduction to 6 cases
- Formal complaints – 44.9% increase to 113 cases
- Academic appeals – 47.9% increase to 929 cases

It was reported that SAS was implementing an action plan to make processes more efficient and user friendly and reduce the volume of casework. A pilot in FLAS to centralise the Extenuating Circumstances process had seen a huge improvement in the time taken to respond to students and saved considerable academic staff time. Proposed changes to the Extenuating Circumstances Policy were to be brought to the Learning, Quality and Regulations Committee for approval in May and then to the Council in June. The Student Lifecycle Management (SLM) project would deliver a multi-service case management system and the scoping of student complaints and academic appeals would start in July 2024. Alignment of misconduct procedures was underway to ensure a seamless process in circumstances where one procedure crossed over with another.

The University's Internal auditors, KPMG, had recently undertaken a review of the student complaints processes and controls. There had been a positive outcome and the recommendations for improving documentation and controls would be completed by September 2024.

The Vice-Chancellor noted that the pilot of the centralised extenuating circumstances process in FLAS had worked well and asked about the future roll out across other Faculties. The ED, SAS advised that the staffing implications of roll it out more widely needed to be fully understood.

The Council noted that the report provided useful information. In discussion, the Executive Director of SAS agreed to share an earlier draft of the report with the working groups addressing the BAME awarding gap and continuation, as the more granular data on student complaints could be relevant to those groups. The report would also be shared with the GSU.

The Council agreed that the report was a significant improvement on previous annual reports and thanked those involved in producing it. The University Secretary suggested some modifications to the report prior to submission to the Governing Body. These included incorporating some narrative around how the upward trend in OIA cases reflected the pattern in the wider sector and some commentary on the numbers and types of cases reported through the Report and Support platform in 2022/23.

The University Secretary reported that the University's student training on harassment and sexual misconduct had been running in various forms including via Moodle, workshops and online interactive sessions delivered by the Report + Support team. However, the take-up in 2023/24 to date had been limited despite internal comms to support the training. Consequently, it had now been determined that a different approach was needed and the Council was being asked to endorse the principle that the training should become mandatory wef September 2024.

If the Council supported the proposal, a task and finish group of stakeholders would work through the arrangements for delivery, monitoring and enforcement, including sanctions.

The Council was informed that the timeframe for publication of the outcome of the OfS's consultation on a possible new registration condition on student harassment and sexual misconduct was not yet known. This included the suggestion that universities provide mandatory training on harassment and sexual misconduct. In this respect the University's proposal was pre-empting what might become sector practice in the future.

In discussion, the need to consider cultural sensitivities and the possibility of opt-out arrangements for some categories of students were noted.

The Council **endorsed** the proposal for making student harassment and sexual misconduct training mandatory from September 2024. It also recorded its appreciation of the contribution of Becky Smith, Associate Professor in Psychology, who had led the training.

#### AC 23/56 FREEDOM OF SPEECH (AC 23/P45)

The Council received an update on recent consultations by the OfS on its new free speech responsibilities.

The University Secretary reported that the OfS had undertaken consultations on a new free speech complaints scheme and regulation of students' unions on freedom of speech to implement the HE (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 wef 1 August 2024. The University had submitted responses to both of these consultations (as provided in AC 23/P49) and flagged up issues of concern mirroring those of the University Alliance and the UUK. The GSU had submitted separate responses to the consultations and the University and GSU had co-ordinated over their responses.

The OfS had just launched a third consultation on proposed guidance setting out its approach to managing the free speech duties on universities and students' unions. The consultation also included the OfS's proposals on cost recovery and amendments to the regulatory framework. A further consultation on new conditions of registration relating to free speech was expected to be held in the autumn.

The Council noted that amendments to the University's Freedom of Expression Code of Practice would be brought to the next meeting for approval.

#### AC 23/57 DOCTORAL COLLEGE (AC 23/P46)

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Knowledge Exchange) presented the formal proposal for a Doctoral College, following consideration of the preliminary scoping at the last meeting. The proposal sought to improve the experience of postgraduate research (PGR) students, bring about efficiencies and consistency,

improve PRES survey results and grow the PGR population. The Doctoral College would focus on the following key activities:

- i. Leadership and management of post-graduate research
- ii. Coordination of the PGR student journey from application to graduation
- iii. Coordination and delivery of training for PGR students
- iv. Development of research and knowledge exchange skills for academic staff from early career researcher to professor.

The proposed operation of the Doctoral College was outlined below:

- The academic research environment would continue to rest with Faculties, Schools, Institutes and Centres but would be interfaced with the Doctoral College to provide a consistent approach.
- The College would coordinate the student journey across Directorates and Faculties without relocating staff into a physical Doctoral College.
- The College would replace the Research and Enterprise Training Institute and sit within Greenwich Research and Innovation with the Head of the Doctoral College reporting to the Director of GRI.
- There would be three operational teams: Leadership and Management, PGR student journey/records and Researcher Talent Development.
- A Head of Greenwich Doctoral College (0.4 FTE) and Doctoral College Manager (1.0 FTE) would be appointed to lead the College. GRI would be responsible for all other resourcing.
- The College would be the administrative contact for PGR students making use of the Student Lifecycle Management system.

In discussion, the following changes to the proposal document were suggested:

- Reference to be made to the College becoming responsible for the overall administration of the Vice-Chancellor Scholarships.
- More specific reference to the fact that the Doctoral College would be virtual.

The DVC (RKE) acknowledged the contribution of Professor Rosanna Pacella, FEHHS Associate Dean, R&KE, to this work.

The Council **approved** the establishment of a Greenwich Doctoral College and noted the next steps towards operationalisation.

AC 23/58

#### KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE FRAMEWORK (AC 23/P47)

The Council received a report on the University's position in the latest Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF3). Under the Research and Knowledge Exchange sub-strategy, the University aimed to be ranked in the top quintile 3 in five of the seven perspectives. The University had performed well in the KEF3 in 2023, confirming that it was on the right trajectory to achieving this ambition. In order to improve further, analysis of the University's Higher Education Business and Community Interaction survey data was planned to ensure the University was doing itself justice in the returns. The findings of an audit of KEF currently being undertaken by the Internal Auditors, KPMG, would also help to inform future activity to bring about improvements.

The Council noted that the results of the next KEF assessment (KEF4) would be published in September 2024. The date of the next narrative, previously expected to be in 2025 (KEF5), was uncertain pending a possible change by Research England to change the requirement for a narrative to every three years.



The Chair expressed concern about the decline of the University's Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) activity. The Director of GRI advised that some potential partnerships were in the pipeline. There was acknowledgement, however, that "Intellectual Property and Commercialisation" would always be a challenging area to strengthen.

AC 23/59 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

59.1 REF 2029

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (R&KE) briefed the Council on the opportunity for the University to take part in a pilot study concerned with the People, Culture and Environment (PCE) component of REF 2029. There were three ways in which universities could participate, either as an institution producing Units of Assessments submissions, or individuals could act as panel assessors or be involved in the PCE indicators projects setting parameters on how PCE will be assessed. The Council **supported** the University's participation in the pilot process, which would provide valuable insight into how the assessment of PCE might work in the REF exercise.

AC 23/60 ACADEMIC REGULATIONS FOR POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH AWARDS (AC 23/P48)

The Council **received and noted** the updated Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Research Awards which had been approved by the Research & Knowledge Exchange Board at its meeting on 22 February 2024.

AC 23/61 FREEDOM OF SPEECH CONSULTATIONS (AC 23/P49)

The Council **received** the University's responses to the OfS's consultations on the new free speech complaints scheme and the approach to regulating students' unions on free speech matters (see also minute 23/56 on the Council's discussion on the matter).

AC 23/62 SUMMARY REPORTS FROM ACADEMIC COUNCIL COMMITTEES (ARC 23/P50)

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

- Partnerships Board, 7 February 2024
- Research, Knowledge & Exchange Board, 21 February 2024
- Student Success Board, 25 January and 22 February 2024
- University Research Ethics Board, 13 February 2024.

AC 23/63 MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF ACADEMIC COUNCIL COMMITTEES (AC 23/P51)

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

- Partnerships Board, 7 February 2024
- Research and Knowledge Exchange Board, 21 February 2024
- Student Success Board, 25 January and 22 February 2024
- University Research Ethics Board, 13 February 2024.

AC 23/64      ACADEMIC COUNCIL CYCLE OF BUSINESS 2023/24 (AC 23/P52)

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

AC 23/65      DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held at 15:00 on 12 June 2024.

Meeting closed at 4.50 pm.

T.A.Brighton  
3 April 2024