

the Academic Council

Minutes of the third meeting of the Academic Council in the
2024-2025 academic session, held on 19 March 2025 at 3.00 pm in Room N008,
Nelson Building, Medway Campus

Present:

Jane Harrington, Vice-Chancellor (Chair)

Peter Garrod, University Secretary
(Executive Secretary)

- Rachel Ashton, Executive Director, Student and Academic Services
- Gary Brown, Associate Dean: Student Success, GBS
- Peter Griffiths, PVC Engineering & Science
- Vanessa Lemm, Deputy VC & Provost
- Mary-Clare Martin, FEHHS Member
- Catherine Tonry, FES Member
- Natasha Vall, PVC: FLAS
- Noel-Ann Bradshaw, Deputy Dean: FES
- Karen Brickman, GBS Member
- Leigh Doster, PVC Business
- Andy Frost, Director, GRI
- Sheryl Hendriks, Director of NRI
- Sodiq Lawal, GSU Officer
- Jennifer Marie, PVC Education
- Tracey Reynolds, Associate Dean: R&KE, FLAS
- Andrew Westby, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Knowledge Exchange)

In attendance:

Trudy Brighton, Governance Support Manager (minutes)
Kelvin Fawdrey, Associate Director, Student Recruitment & Admissions, MER
Rebecca Gee, Head of Information, Advice & Participation, SAS (Observer)
Charlotte Jeavons, Head of School of Human Sciences, FEHHS (item 24/49.1)
Simon Lewis, Executive Director of Strategic Planning (item 24/54)

Apologies:

Paul Butler, Executive Director & Chief Information Officer
Ameen Chowdhury, President GSU
Myrtle Emmanuel, Associate Professor in HRM & Organisation, GBS/EDI Adviser
Amrutha Gullapalli, GSU Officer
Dave Hockham, FLAS Member
Aminul Islam, GSU Officer
Heidi King, Executive Director, Marketing & External Relations
Derek Moore, PVC FEHHS
Sofia Stathi, Chair, UREB
Peter Taylor, Chief Operating Officer

AC 24/44 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were made.

AC 24/45 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING AND ACTIONS (AC 24/P34)

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2025 were agreed as an accurate record. The actions tracker was received. Three actions were on the agenda and others were in progress or completed. In relation to action 24/37, the Vice-Chancellor reported that a number of staff had attended the funeral of David Grzywacz and the action was now closed.

AC 24/46 MATTERS ARISING

46.1 Student Payment Plan (AC 24/P35)

The Executive Director of Student & Academic Services reported progress with the new automated student repayment platform which would provide students with a self-service functionality, 24/7 customer service and a selection of instalment plans. The platform provider had been selected following a competitive tender process and the business case had now been approved. Implementation of the new system was targeted for September 2025 and was expected to result in improved student satisfaction, enhanced continuation rates and improved debt collection.

The Vice-Chancellor acknowledged the role of Sodiq Lawal, GSU Officer, in driving the momentum to implement the new payment platform for the 2025/26 academic year.


46.2 Freedom of Speech (ARC 24/P36)

The University Secretary provided an update on the Government's plans to implement the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, which had been paused after the July election. The Government would be bringing some aspects into force but no commencement order had yet been published. Neither the regulation of students' unions regarding freedom of speech nor the statutory tort allowing claims against universities would proceed. Student complaints related to freedom of speech would now be handled by the OIA, whilst staff and visiting speaker complaints would be considered by the OfS.

The University Secretary provided assurance that the University was well prepared for the changes, having revised the Code of Practice and created a dedicated web page. Any further changes were unlikely to require major modification to these.

AC 24/47 REPORT FROM THE VICE-CHANCELLOR (AC 24/P37)

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

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- **University's Achievements and Awards:** The University had received the Greener Greenwich Award at the Best of Royal Greenwich Business Awards and had been shortlisted for the 2025 Purpose Coalition Awards in the category of 'Closing the Digital Divide'. The University Secretary and Report + Support Team had been shortlisted for three Culture Shift awards and the

Vice-Chancellor wished them good luck for the award ceremony taking place later in the day.

- **Upcoming Spending Review:** Several higher education sector bodies had made submissions to the Treasury ahead of the Spending Review. Major changes to support universities were unlikely, ensuring that challenges to financial sustainability would continue. The results of the Spending Review were expected in June.

AC 24/48 STUDENTS' UNION REPORT (AC 24/P38)

Mr Lawal, GSU sabbatical officer, presented an update on key areas of GSU strategic activity and noted that:

- **Student Representation:** Student feedback collected since January 2025 by programme representatives had been shared with Faculties for resolution. Based on categories in the NSS, students had been positive about the flexible teaching methods, the supportive and engaging staff, the beneficial industry connections and guest speakers. In terms of challenges, students had identified timetabling issues including last minute changes and schedule conflicts, unsuitable spaces and over-crowded laboratories. Students had also struggled with feedback delays and unclear assessment guidelines.

The Executive Director of SAS reported that she met regularly with the GSU Officers to talk through the plans for addressing student concerns to ensure that these were relayed to them. Mr Lawal had organised a useful Town Hall session with the two Deputy Vice-Chancellors, and Professor Westby confirmed that he was following up issues raised about a Medway laboratory. A further Town Hall session with student representatives and professional services team was being arranged.

The DVC & Provost reported that as part of the work around the NSS, the GSU Head of Student Voice & Representation had given a presentation at a recent Student Success Board meeting on the student representatives' work and the collaborative approach to problem-solving. The Board had been delighted to hear the positive feedback from students on the new Greenwich Tutoring Framework and their interactions with the new Faculty Student Advisers.

- **GSU Officer Elections:** 17% of students had voted in the recent GSU Officer elections which had involved campaigns from 25 candidates. The successful candidates were Muhammad Abdulmumin (President), Chirag Ahuja, Hari Prasad Boddupally and Md Saif Mollah Chanchol.
- **Check-In Service:** 8434 student calls had been made as part of the Check-In Service, previously known as the Retention Calling Project. 1225 students had been spoken to and 172 had received follow-up support. Common issues identified had included illness and personal/family circumstances. 94% of students had continued their studies. 55% of students had positively commented on the 'quality of teaching'.

AC 24/49 FACULTY REPORTS (AC 24/P39))

The Council **received** reports from the PVCs and Executive Deans or their representative on their Faculties. The following key highlights were presented from the reports:

49.1 Faculty of Education, Health & Human Sciences

Dr Charlotte Jeavons, Head of the School of Human Sciences, highlighted the ongoing work around Initial Teacher Training (ITT) accreditation, which was on track for submission on 6 April, followed by a presentation on 1 May. The format of this accreditation application round was different to prior events and the team was repackaging a previously successful submission.

49.2 Faculty of Engineering and Science

[REDACTED] There had been successful accreditations from three professional bodies including the Joint Board of Moderations, the Institute of Chemical Engineers and the General Pharmaceutical Council. He highlighted the success of two NRI students who had received a British Council Women in STEM Scholarship.

49.3 Faculty of Liberal Arts & Sciences

Professor Natasha Vall highlighted the recent exhibitions in the University's Galleries including the Holocaust Memorial Day exhibition and the 10th anniversary of the Stockwell Street Building, which included contributions from the animation students and staff in the Faculty of Education, Health & Human Sciences.

49.4 Greenwich Business School

Professor Leigh Doster reported that the recent EFMD accreditation visit had gone well and the Faculty was optimistic about a positive outcome. The results of the Small Business Charter accreditation were awaited.

Approval of the Devonport House planning application had been received the week before. This was exciting news and the culmination of two years of work. There had been no objections or conditions imposed which was a significant achievement.

AC 24/50 GREENWICH CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK (AC 24/P40)

The DVC & Provost presented the proposed Greenwich Curriculum Framework which would replace the current Curriculum Framework. The revised Framework had been developed to ensure strategic alignment with the curriculum, to deliver Education without Boundaries and to become the best modern university through enhancing systems, processes and platforms to support the curriculum and student experience. The Framework took a student-centred approach and provided a consistent structure across the institution, with a 30-credit module as the norm, minimum student numbers for pedagogical viability and consolidation of optional modules in the second and third years. The Framework was founded on the institutional values of being collaborative, impactful and inclusive and embedded real-world problems, meaningful employability opportunities and academic and digital skills development.

In discussing the Framework, a concern was raised about the potential risks of losing 15 credit modules on smaller programmes, about the possible loss of research-led teaching in specialist areas and about becoming less competitive in term of subjects offer. Assurance was provided that 30-credit structures operated successfully across the sector and without any market drop off. There was recognition of the importance of reflecting subject specialism, but also that modules which became too specialist and small could impact negatively on the student experience whilst putting the viability of the module at risk. It was also

emphasised that the Framework sought to strengthen the articulation between teaching and research through the embedding of real-world problems.

The intention for reading lists to be put together at a programme level was noted and a comment made that this would be challenging for multi-disciplinary teams. The approach for reading lists to be set in the context of programmes was believed to be in keeping with the programme-led structure of the Framework.

There had been extensive consultation around the development of the Framework and the DVC & Provost thanked everyone involved in the process for their input.

The Council **approved** the Greenwich Curriculum Framework. One dissenting vote was noted.

AC 24/51 ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK POLICY (AC 24/P41)

The PVC Education presented proposed revisions to the Assessment and Feedback Policy, which aligned with the Greenwich Curriculum Framework. The changes were designed to ensure that assessment met student needs and aimed to improve student achievement and retention. In reviewing the Policy, consideration had been given to strengthening support for authentic assessments in the context of real-world problems and the embedding of meaningful employment opportunities. Consideration had similarly been given to strengthening the alignment of learning, academic and digital skills in assessment and to measures to reduce assessment-related stress, such as avoiding clustering assessment and utilising formative assessments to prepare students. Other policy adaptations included strengthened measures for academic integrity, such as around AI, and verification of student identity at each stage of assessment.

The Council noted that there had been widespread consultation across the University during the revision process including the Faculties, the QA team and the GSU. Feedback from Faculties had helped to inform the changes and ensure that the Policy was also suitable for bespoke assessments, such as those carried out in Labs and Studios. The revised Policy had also been approved by the Student Success Board.

The Policy encouraged incorporating generative AI as a learning tool and the PVC Education explained that use of AI was an important employability skill for students and support was available for staff on how to use AI with integrity in teaching. As the Policy on AI had been written some time ago, it was agreed that the Policy should be revisited and an updated iteration brought back to a future meeting.

The Council **approved** the Assessment and Feedback Policy for implementation.

AC 24/52 ANNUAL REPORT ON STUDENT CASEWORK IN 2023/24 (ARC 24/P43)

The Executive Director of Student & Academic Services presented the 2023/24 annual report on student casework which had been prepared to provide the Council and the Governing Body with assurance that the University's handling of student casework was meeting the expectations set by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

For the 2024 academic year, 59 cases had been elevated to the OIA (the same as in 2023). Of these, one had been found by the OIA to be 'Justified' and one

had been held to be 'Partly Justified', with the remainder being 'Not Justified' (19), 'Settled' (20), 'Ineligible' (8), 'Withdrawn' (2) or 'Pending' (8).

The overall number of student cases had fallen by 15% during the year with Academic Appeals reducing significantly. However, as anticipated, now that the platform had been fully embedded and publicised, the caseload associated with Report + Support had increased substantially. For 2023/24 the breakdown of casework was noted to be:

- Completion of Procedures Letters issued – 213 (46% reduction from 395)
- Fitness to Practise – 5 (same as 2022/23)
- Student Disciplinary cases - 83% increase to 11 cases
- Formal complaints - 8% reduction to 104 cases
- Academic Appeals - 27% reduction to 682 cases
- Report + Support - 245% increase from 66 to 228 student disclosures (however, 2023/24 was Report + Support's first full year of operation).

The Council noted the work undertaken during the past year to strengthen the quality of the casework provision by the Academic Registry Student Casework teams. These included revisions of regulations and procedures, monitoring of consistency of casework and enhanced accuracy of result letters. There had also been significant collaboration with the Student Lifecycle Management (SLM) project to enable Formal Complaints and Academic Appeals to go live during 2024/25. Extenuating Circumstances, Student Disciplinary and Fitness to Practise would go live in September 2025. Over the coming months, Informal Complaints would also transfer to the SLM. The University Secretary's work on addressing the OfS registration condition E6 around harassment and sexual misconduct would be continuing.

The Council noted that the significant fall in student cases was believed to reflect a general fall in academic appeals which in turn was attributed to the new process for Extenuating Circumstances, consistent application of resit opportunities and application of standardised regulations.

The Vice-Chancellor sought assurance that the issues which had led to the two upheld/partially upheld complaints had been addressed. Assurance was provided that measures had been put in place; there would now be more detailed and more consistent record-keeping of exceptional decisions made at Progression and Award Boards (PABs) and specific training for PAB Chairs on these would be included in the routine annual training.

The Board noted that the report referenced that home students were more likely to use Report + Support than international students and asked for the reasons behind this. It was believed that international students were under-reporting and this could be because of the cultural stigma attached to sexual harassment and assault. SAS was proactively working with the international team to address the under-reporting and improve students' confidence in using the system. The GSU Officer asked for a detailed breakdown of the academic appeals for home and international students to identify the main reasons and help reduce their number.

The Board noted the report in advance of its submission to the Governing Body.

AC 24/53 GREENWICH STUDENT SURVEY (AC 24/P42)

Dr Simon Lewis, Executive Director of Strategic Planning, attended for this item.

The Executive Director of Strategic Planning presented the Greenwich Student Survey results for 2024. The Council was reminded that the survey was internally run and designed to mimic the NSS and typically went out to Year 1 and 2 students.

The headline results were:

- overall satisfaction remained stable at 75%.
- the results were generally similar to or slightly better than for 2023.
- the two metrics which fed into the strategic KPI remained the same as 2023, with 'Teaching on my Course' scoring 86% and 'Assessment and Feedback' scoring 83%.
- Marginal improvements of +1% point for 'Organisation and Management', 'Learning Resources', 'Student Voice' and the communication of information about 'Mental Wellbeing Services'.
- An improvement of +3% points from 74% to 77% for overall satisfaction for FLAS and of +1% for the other three Faculties.
- School satisfaction levels ranging from 65% to 84%.

The Council noted that the response rate had fallen by -4% to 21%, equating to 2129 responses. Work was underway to improve the response rates for the 2025 survey with the GSS itself scheduled for a review in 2025/26.

The Council noted that analysis of the results by demographic characteristics showed little variation across ethnicities and disabilities, but overall, international students were more satisfied than home students. The small numbers of responses made detailed analysis challenging but the results suggested that the work to improve 'Organisation and Management' and 'Student Voice' was not moving quickly enough. There had been some pleasing results across Schools, but the Medway School of Pharmacy's performance had been disappointing. The Strategic Planning team had created a breakdown of results by question at Faculty and School level which would be useful as the basis of identifying areas for future focus.

AC 24/54 GRADUATE OUTCOMES

The Associate Dean, Student Success for GBS updated the Council on work to improve Graduate Outcomes in the Business School, [REDACTED] Work was being focussed on the Business and Management and Accounting and Finance programmes in particular, with planning for improvement incorporating the following seven elements:

- (1) Expansion of internship support.
- (2) Career employability coaching.
- (3) Curriculum skills enhancement for employability.
- (4) Appointment of a Faculty Employability Lead.
- (5) Introduction of additional support for students considering further study.
- (6) Introduction of Dean's Scholarships for postgraduate study – targeted at specific cohorts.
- (7) Development of a Theory of change in order to monitor and evaluate the impact of work (currently being developed in consultation with the Associate Director of Evaluation).

In addition to the above, other needs identified included credit-bearing accreditation modules, additional financial and logistical support for placements, the introduction of specialist skills roles for targeted support for students, recruitment of industry advisers from under-represented backgrounds, and additional work integrated learning modules to help expand entrepreneurship pathways.

The Council noted that the Graduate Outcomes Stakeholder Group was taking an interest in this work and discussions on resource support were in train. Council Members expressed their support for the work and agreed it would be

helpful to have an understanding of the interventions that brought about improvement. It was agreed that an evaluation would be provided to a future meeting.

AC 24/55 RESEARCH POWER (ARC 24/P45)

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (R&KE) updated the Council on the strategic KPI on Research Power in advance of REF2029, explaining that the metric “measured the REF GPA by the total number of full-time equivalent staff submitted with Significant Responsibility for research”. This metric was concerned therefore with:

- improving **Research Quality** which comprised three components: Research Outputs (50%), Impact Case Studies (25%) and People, Culture and Environment (25%). The quality of outputs assessed in the GREAT assessments was used as a proxy indicator.
- increasing the number of **Staff with Significant Responsibility for Research** providing the volume. These were defined according to the criteria of Time Allocation, active involvement in independent research and research as a requirement of the job role. The number of staff with 20% of time allocated to R&KE in the Academic Workload Planning tool was used as a proxy indicator.

The DVC (R&KE) reported that a Research Power score of 2000 was being targeted and the current score was 1128. At the mid-point of the 2024 GREAT assessment, indicative data suggested that around 1625 research outputs of 3*/4* quality with a staff base of 650 with Significant Responsibility for Research were needed to achieve a Research Power of 2000. The GREAT assessment indicated that the University was on track to reach the requisite number of research outputs and that staff meeting the requisite criteria numbered over 600.

Various interventions and projects to improve research quality, increase volume (Staff with Significant Responsibility) and strengthen the research and knowledge exchange culture overall (ie People, Culture and Environment) were in progress. Some risks had been identified which would need careful management, but there was good support across the Faculties. The next steps involved completing the Code of Practice for REF2029 and modelling it to understand its impact, developing more good quality staff and aligning the research outputs and impact case studies with the Units of Assessments following GREAT2024. In response to questioning about decision making about the Units of Assessments, it was reported that more data would be available from the GREAT 2024 exercise in the autumn and decisions would be made at that time, but the aim was to have larger and more consolidated Units of Assessments.

The Chair thanked the DVC (R&KE) for the comprehensive update and was pleased to note that overall work was on track.

AC 24/56 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

C 24/57 ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION WORKING GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE
(AC 24/P48)

The Council recalled that the revised governance arrangements for student success and partnership and programmes, approved at its meeting on 12 June 2024, had included the establishment of a working group to oversee the technical aspects of implementing the Access and Participation Plan. Proposed Terms of Reference for the working group had now been developed and agreed by the Student Success Board for recommendation to the Council. The Council **approved** the Terms of Reference for the Access and Participation Working Group for immediate adoption.

AC 24/58 SUMMARY REPORTS FROM ACADEMIC COUNCIL COMMITTEES
(AC 24/P47)

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

- Partnerships Board, 11 February 2025
- Research and Knowledge Exchange Board, 19 February 2025
- Student Success Board, 21 January and 26 February 2025

AC 24/59 MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF ACADEMIC COUNCIL COMMITTEES (AC
24/P48)

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

- Partnerships Board, 11 February 2025
- Research and Knowledge Exchange Board, 11 December 2024
- Student Success Board, 21 January 2025

AC 24/60 ACADEMIC COUNCIL CYCLE OF BUSINESS (AC 24/P49)

The Council **received** an updated cycle of business for 2024/25.

AC 24/61 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held at 15:00 on 11 June 2025 at Greenwich.

Meeting closed at 4.25 pm.

T.A.Brighton
3 April 2025