

## Senate

20/50 A meeting of the Senate was held via teams, on Wednesday 30 September 2020 at 2.00 pm.

Present:

The Vice-Chancellor (Chair)

Professor Cindy Becker  
Dr Rebecca Berkley  
Dr Katrina Bicknell  
Professor Helen Bilton  
Professor Ingo Bojak  
Professor David Carter  
Professor Claire Collins  
Professor Peter Dorwood  
Professor Mark Fellowes  
Dr David Field  
Professor Richard Frazier  
Professor Clare Furneaux  
Dr Francesca Greco  
Professor Andrew Godley  
Professor Louise Hague  
Professor Chris Harty  
Dr Lawrence Hill-Cawthorne  
Dr Chloe Houston  
Professor Carmel Houston-Price  
Dr Katherine Hyde  
Mr Paul Inman  
Professor Gunter Kuhnle  
Dr Daniela La Penna  
Dr Allan Laville  
Dr Tim Lees  
Professor Elizabeth McCrum  
Professor Gail Marshall  
Professor Simon Mortimer  
Professor Julian Park  
Dr Karen Poulter  
Professor Jane Setter  
Dr Mark Shanahan  
Ms Stephanie Sharp

Professor Simon Sherratt  
Professor David Stack  
Professor Vesna Stojanovik  
Dr Maria Vahdati  
Professor Sue Walker  
Dr Hong Wei  
Professor Emily West  
Dr Karin Whiteside  
Professor Adrian Williams  
Professor Paul Williams  
Dr Hong Yang  
Professor Parveen Yaqoob  
Professor Dominik Zaum

**Students:**

Oscar Minto  
Alexandre Ribeiro

Rachel Osborne  
George Ingram  
Bandy Karki  
Rachel Wates  
Alex Rose

**In attendance:**

Ms Louise Sharman (Secretary)  
Ms Sam Foley  
Dr Richard Messer  
Mrs Sally Pellow

The Vice-Chancellor welcomed members to the Senate and explained how the meeting would be run through teams.

The main focus of this extraordinary meeting was to present the draft of the Phase 2 report.

## Items for Presentation and Discussion

### 20/51 Planning for a Sustainable Future – Phase 2 (Item 1)

Professor Fellowes gave a presentation to the Senate on the Phase 2 work.

The Senate noted:

- The context to the work. Even before the advent of COVID-19 immense political and regulatory changes to the HE landscape were challenging the University to develop the financial, structural and cultural resilience necessary to safeguard the future of the institution. In particular:
  - Technology – new sources of competition; growth in online providers/private firms; failure to adapt.
  - Legal – changes to the OfS/DfE; willingness to litigate; student charter; perceptions of responsibility; strike.
  - Environment – green agenda; international travel; international students.
  - Political – attitude of Government to HE; issues around international students; lack of support for HE outside of elite institutions; lack of movement on fees and Augar.
  - Economic – student debt and who pays; pensions; strikes.
  - Social – perceptions around value for money/debt; Russell Group and branding; demographics; widening participation; low value courses.
- The University was also facing issues around:
  - Its league table position
  - Questions around perceptions of management
  - Lack of a financial surplus – making investment difficult; reliance on property sales; expensive estate.
  - International – although there had been some successes there was further to go.
  - Student numbers – robust until 2017, but there was little opportunity to grow due to the physical estate.
  - Engagement – there had been a withdrawal from local engagement.
- The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic created other requirements for Phase 2 to address in terms of:
  - Financial challenges
  - Changes to how we work
  - Changes to where we work
  - Changes to attitudes
  - Re-set the competitive area
  - Impact on the international market
- In a post COVID world a number of predictable changes were expected: changes in demand from home students; Brexit; less Government support; increased politicisation; no increase in student fees; increased competition and stratification. There were also a number of unpredictable effects to be considered: international student market; retreat into regionalism; rapid rise in online learning and private providers; impact of Augar and questions around fees; changes in residential demand; what will happen to discretionary funding, e.g. research funding.
- The purpose of the Phase 2 was around delivering the new University Strategy by the University's centenary year.
- The Phase 2 work explored four broad but inter-related themes:
  - How can we make the Schools financially robust?
  - What is the optimal way to deliver the professional services?

- How should we be teaching?
- How do we support excellence and sustainability of our research?
- In terms of engagement:
  - There was a desire to learn from past changes
  - The approach used in the strategy development was continued
  - A range of inputs were sought: findings from the 2019 strategy consultation; feedback from the Leadership Group; Staff Survey results.
  - Input from the Senate would also now be included before comment by the Council.
  - The wider staff community would be asked to comment in the coming weeks.
- There had been clear and consistent themes around: value not just cost, and long-term sustainability; a desire to get the fundamentals right and not 'slash and burn'; student and staff welfare was important; there needed to be consideration around the management and pace of change; flexible workloads; portfolio complexity; better use of the physical and digital estate.
- In regard to how Schools could be made financially robust questions had been raised around: the efficient use of space; more flexible working; the financial model; School rolling health checks; growth in areas of demand and excellence; consolidation into larger Schools where necessary.
- In regard to the optimal way of delivering the professional services questions had been raised around: reviewing service provision; assessing services required including both level and quality; benchmarking against sector; continuous improvement in processes; consideration of alignment and mergers.
- In regard to Teaching questions had been raised around: the portfolio review (rationalising the current offering; establishing expectations for programmes; more blended and online learning); the structure of the academic year; teaching excellence criteria; workload management.
- In regard to supporting excellence and sustainability of research questions had been raised around: workload models; research excellence criteria; expectations around outputs, income and impact; PGR supervision.
- In terms of a SWOT analysis for the Phase 2 work:
  - Strengths – the approach to Phase 2 meant that the University put its own house in order; reduced risks; focussed on core business; ambitious; unambiguous; achievable.
  - Weaknesses – not very 'shiny'; no silver bullet; people and organisational culture; complexity and size; time.
  - Opportunities – demographics; communications; living the principles and strategy; community first; engagement with new international/commercial partners.
  - Threats – further decline in markets; Government policy change; COVID-19;
- Phase 2 was about delivering the University Strategy by 2025/26. There were massive changes on the horizon for HE; the aim of Phase 2 was to position the University to grow.
- There would be further engagement and discussion with the University community before a final version of the plan was submitted back to the Senate in November 2020. A slide pack on the presentation would be circulated after the upcoming all-staff talks.

The following questions and comments were raised in response to Professor Fellowes presentation:

- It was important to remember that international/local engagement was not an

- either/or. Any competent international strategy must have its local dimension.
- Discussion around decreasing fees was important.
  - Considerations around space had largely focused on office space not specialist space.
  - It was suggested that 'health checks' could be Support and Structure Reviews.
  - The word 'Review' had a specific meaning at Reading – and not a positive one.
  - Health checks carried a high risk of false positives when conducted on a healthy group.
  - Any comments on any of the workstreams could be emailed to Professor Fellowes directly.
  - It was expected that Phase 2 would not be fully delivered until 2025/26. It was seen as a five-year programme. It was hoped that the bulk of the changes needed would be implemented by year 3.
  - Was there the possibility of redundancies as part of Phase 2? If Phase 1 had not resolved the liquidity challenge, then part of what financial challenge remained would have been passed to Phase 2. As Phase 1 had proposals to address the liquidity challenge Phase 2 had aimed to deliver financial sustainability without resorting to redundancies.
  - Would the liquidity challenge remerge if there was a second lockdown? The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that some reserves had been held back.
  - Workload issues hit all staff (T&R, TI, RI, Functions).
  - The paper speaks of indicators of excellence that can be externally benchmarked. For Teaching Excellence there were limitations with the available indicators. Attainment gap could be taken as an improvement in outcomes and therefore an indicator of Teaching Excellence.
  - Move to a semester system could bring significant gains and efficiencies in international engagement.

Three of the best developed ideas around space, workload model, and the portfolio review were used for the breakout group discussions. Feedback from each group was recorded and would be considered further. Each group gave the highlights from their discussion.

#### Space:

- There was support for saving costs on the Estates, freeing up space (for either sale/rent), and general support for office sharing.
- Questions had been raised around locality/sense of identity. Staff offices were important for staff wellbeing. There would be some challenges with implementation.
- It was important to consider how the timetable used space – for e.g. timetabling classes close to the School to foster and sense of place.
- Common rooms were very important for both staff and students.
- The pandemic had raised questions around whether more working from home would be permitted in the future.
- Space freed up could be used as bookable space for tutorials/supervision.
- Within HBS a number of colleagues had moved to shared space – there had been some challenges but overall, it was managed well.
- This work should be undertaken quickly.
- More detail on the space strategy would be available at the November meetings.

#### Teaching Portfolio:

- There was enthusiasm about the opportunities to work creatively.
- There was general support in favour of a two term semester systems.
- There was support for more discussion around cross School teaching. However, the financial structure would need considering as this disincentivises cross School cooperation.

- Discussed opportunities for delivering innovative/new ways of study.

Workload:

- The suggested workload model broadly aligned with the HBS model. The balance between T and R would reflect previous academic performance and would be adjusted over time.
- Further consideration around interdependencies would be needed e.g. PDR/probation/promotion, as well as practical implications.
- Consideration would also need to be given to particular circumstances e.g. early career researchers, as well as equality and diversity implications.

The Vice-Chancellor thanked Senators for their engagement and feedback on the paper. Any further comments could be passed directly to Professor Fellowes.

## 20/52 Report of the Vice-Chancellor (Item 2)

The Senate received the Vice-Chancellor's address to the Senate, noting in particular:

- a) **COVID-19** - Work continued apace on the phased return to campus with many students arriving to halls during Welcome Week ahead of the start of term. In line with the latest DfE advice published in mid-September, the University was implementing a blended approach for teaching this year. The teaching timetable had been published and on average students could expect about 50 per cent of their engagement to be face to face. Some teaching colleagues had expressed concerns about face to face teaching and we continue to work with them to explain the importance of our approach, and the safety measures that were in place. In parallel, a small number of students had voiced concerns about their perception of a low proportion of scheduled face to face teaching, with some requesting to be released from accommodation contracts. There had been extensive communication with students about their responsibilities. The overarching message for all of us in our University Community was to *'take responsibility, be kind and respect each other'*.
- b) **Government Visit** - the Government's Universities Minister, Michelle Donelan MP, visited the University of Reading on 21.9.20 at her request to see our COVID-19 preparations for the new academic year. Whilst the opportunity was taken to show the Minister many of the measures that the University had already put in place, we also put to her concerns from our community, including the need for additional testing provision, and the financial impacts facing the University as a result of the COVID crisis.
- c) **Test and Trace** – the University's local outbreak control plan had been completed and submitted to the Government. The University was actively pursuing setting up a local testing centre on Whiteknights campus for students, colleagues and the local community.
- d) **Student Recruitment** - the University was expecting to recruit to 92% of the undergraduate home target (3365 against a target of 3666), and between 66% and 86% of the international target (between 603-784 against a target of 913). This position was slightly better than that modelled as part of the Post COVID-19 Recovery Programme Phase 1, but still considerably below the original planning assumptions. Whilst numbers coming back to halls and enrolling at this stage looked promising, uncertainty remained

for international students around attrition levels. Similarly, with students on postgraduate taught programmes, it was difficult to predict with any certainty how many students would enrol. The University was expecting home full-time (excluding teacher training) recruitment to be roughly to target (658). However international student numbers might be somewhere between 550 and 1100 against a target of 1091, depending on attrition rates.

- e) **University of Reading Malaysia** - student recruitment at UoRM for the September intake was in line with the business plan agreed last year by Council.
- f) **League Tables** - In the Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2021, the University's overall position had risen seven places, moving to joint 31. The University also improved its position in the Guardian University Guide for 2021 to 62, a rise of six places on 2020. The Times Higher Education World University Rankings latest rankings, the University of Reading remained within the 201-250 range for the fourth consecutive year and was ranked joint 30 among UK Institutions.

### Items for report and approval

#### 20/53 Report of the University Board for Teaching, Learning and Student Experience – Degree Outcome Statement (Item 3)

The Senate received the draft Degree Outcomes Statement (DOS) 2020 for immediate onward transmission to Council. It was noted that it was a UKSCQA requirement that the DOS be signed off by the governing body and published before the end of the calendar year.

The Senate noted that UBTLSSE had approved, on the basis of the Working Group on Degree Outcomes Statement's review of the classification profile and the classification algorithm, the recommendations that:

- a) a small working group be convened to review the classification rules with a particular focus on:
  - the criteria used to promote candidates in the borderline
  - the Pass classification and its criteria
  - the capping rules for Finalists
- b) student-facing information about classification and other aspects of the assessment process be reviewed and a more engaging format developed.

It was noted that the Working Group found that the proportion of Firsts and Upper Seconds awarded by the University over the period 2014/5-2018/9 had remained broadly stable, but that there had been a slight upward trend in the proportion of Firsts awarded. The Working Group believed that this was consistent with rising aspirations among students and with the University's investment in improvements in teaching and learning over this period and the preceding years. The DOS acknowledged that, as a priority, the University was working to close attainment gaps in relation to ethnicity, indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) and gender. The Working Group was broadly content with the University's current degree algorithm and endorsed the inclusion of a borderline and the application of clear criteria for promoting a candidate. Nonetheless, it believed that there would be merit in reviewing some elements of its current degree algorithm and that the University could improve its communication of the classification algorithm and other aspects of assessment to students.

Senate noted that, in preparing the DOS, the Working Group considered the University's marking and assessment processes and were satisfied that they were rigorous and fair, and that the external examining processes were effective. The Working Group identified examples of good practice for mention in the DOS.

It was noted that the University had not involved external assistance in the preparation of the DOS. Whilst the UKSCQA Statement of Intent had encouraged the use of an external expert, many universities had not done so and the guidance on the preparation of the DOS had accepted that this might be the case. The UKSCQA offered higher education providers the option to include in their DOS a section on risks and challenges. The Working Group had agreed that there was no compelling reason to include such a section.

The Senate recorded its thanks to the Working Group and approved the draft Degree Outcomes Statement 2020 for immediate onward transmission to Council.

20/54 Appointments to Committees and other bodies (Item 4)

The Senate noted that it needed to appoint a replacement for Professor Sue Walker on the University Personal Titles Committee (UPTC).

It was a requirement that the representative had at least two years' experience of the Personal Titles process at School or University level since 2016-17 and not be a Head of School. They must commit to the time to read and consider applications in May and June each year, to be part of the annual day long UPTC (17 June 2021) and to provide feedback to a small number of unsuccessful applicants.

Anyone interested should contact the University Secretary no later than Monday 12 October. Should there be more than one eligible expression of interest, the Vice-Chancellor as Chair of Senate and of the UPTC will decide upon membership, having due regard to ensuring the diversity of the UPTC.

20/55 Any other business

The Senate noted that a decision around Spring Term teaching and Summer Term exams was likely to be made in the next few weeks.

It was reported that one student had tested positive for COVID-19 and one suspected case was being investigated.