

## Senate

20/17 A meeting of the Senate was held via teams, on Wednesday 6 May 2020 at 2.15 pm.

Present:

The Vice-Chancellor (Chair)

Dr Emma Aston  
Professor Cindy Becker  
Professor Adrian Bell  
Dr Rebecca Berkley  
Dr Katrina Bicknell  
Professor Helen Bilton  
Professor Ingo Bojak  
Professor David Carter  
Professor Claire Collins  
Professor Ben Cosh  
Dr Giuseppe Di Fatta  
Professor Mark Fellowes  
Dr David Field  
Professor Richard Frazier  
Professor Clare Furneaux  
Dr Francesca Greco  
Professor Andrew Godley  
Professor Louise Hague  
Dr Rebecca Harris  
Professor Chris Harty  
Dr Lawrence Hill-Cawthorne  
Dr Chloe Houston  
Professor Carmel Houston-Price  
Dr Katherine Hyde  
Ms Rebecca Jerrome  
Professor Gunter Kuhnle  
Dr Daniela La Penna  
Dr Allan Laville  
Professor Gail Marshall  
Professor Elizabeth McCrum  
Professor Simon Mortimer  
Professor Steve Musson  
Dr Karen Poulter  
Professor Jane Setter

Dr Mark Shanahan  
Dr Stephanie Sharp  
Professor Simon Sherratt  
Professor David Stack  
Professor Vesna Stojanovik  
Professor Katja Strohfeldt  
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:**

Molli Cleaver  
Fifi Bangham  
Gemma King  
Daisy O'Connor

**Student Representatives:**

Nikolaos Dimitriou

**In attendance:**

Ms Louise Sharman (Secretary)  
Ms Sam Foley  
Dr Richard Messer  
Deepa Govindarajan Driver

The Vice-Chancellor welcomed members to the Senate and explained how the meeting would be run through teams. Questions had been collated in advance of the meeting and additional comments would be raised via the chat function.

20/18 The Minutes (20/01 - 20/16) of the meeting held on 4 March 2020 were approved.

## Items for Presentation and Discussion

### 20/19 Vice-Chancellor's Report (Item 4)

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

a) Major Incident Team

The MIT had operated successfully over the past weeks dealing with the immediate response to the crisis. Four sub-groups to the MIT had been established focussing on student related matters, staff welfare, infrastructure, and the estate, and to support the NHS. Approximately 1000 students remained on campus for various reasons (such as being unable to return home, protecting vulnerable family members, being dependent on local medical support) – the Estates, Campus Commerce and Student Services continued to provide services to them.

The MIT was now planning the detail of a phased return once lockdown was relaxed. Any return would need to take social distancing into account and consider the protection of vulnerable individuals including those with underlying conditions. Colleagues who were fully able to work from home should continue to do so for as long as possible.

It would be important to capture any benefits from the new ways of working to inform a renewed approach to our core business in the year ahead.

b) Education

Senate had approved by correspondence the move to online exam periods for both the current exam and August examination period. Work had continued at pace, and sometimes at a speed quicker than would have been liked. We have taken the best decisions we could putting the interests of students and colleagues at the heart of decision making.

There has been some strong and challenging feedback from our internal community and from our students regarding the approach taken towards online exams. It was agreed to mitigate the disadvantage at the level of impact rather than to implement a blanket approach. The University has been careful to maintain academic standards; this may prove wise in the fact that conditions might be put in place on any financial bailout to the sector. Many institutions claiming to have introduced an approach with no detriment to students had in fact adopted a similar approach to Reading when their policies were examined in detail.

The May exam period had now begun, and initial impressions were that the process was working, and take-home exams have improved accessibility for the majority of students with disabilities. Clearly, these changes had created significant workload for all colleagues, not least as a result of the number of Circumstances Impact Process (CIP) submitted for extenuating circumstances. Additional or different workloads would continue for the summer examination period and for implementing plans for next year. The Board were mindful that this would create additional pressure for colleagues juggling work and home life; HR had created a range of pages on the staff portal signposting many tools and resources to support colleagues.

c) University of Reading Malaysia

In Malaysia, the lockdown was extended until at least 12 May with conditions tighter than in the UK. All teaching for the summer term was online and preparations were complete for take-home exams. The QAA had published a report on TNE in Malaysia, which was very positive.

d) Support for the NHS and local community

Many colleagues continued to play an important role in contributing to the response to the pandemic in the UK and worldwide. The University has received a number of requests to support the NHS and local community; the #wearetogether campaign has shared a number of these stories.

e) Financial Implications of COVID-19

The Vice-Chancellor had been clear in the start of term message and the recent all-staff talks that there would be significant financial implications of the pandemic. A report commissioned from London Economics by UCU suggested that the impact of COVID-19 as being £2.5bn (this report addressed first year undergraduate only); UUK analysis suggested an impact of £6.5bn.

Based on the UUK assumptions of a 50% reduction in international students and a 10% reduction in home students the University was likely to face a financial deficit in the order of £40-£60m for next year.

UUK had submitted a proposal seeking Government support for the sector. This contained 15 detailed requests, with the most significant being requests for: a doubling of QR funding, 100% FEC, a student number control for home students.

The Vice-Chancellor advised that the Government had recently issued a response to the request which stopped short of offering the sector significant new financial support, especially around the guaranteed funding for research requested. The University's priority was a strong recruitment round for 2020/21 within the cap on numbers proposed.

The University would now move forward at pace on financial planning for the short and long term.

f) Other news

- The University had received a Silver level Athena SWAN award.
- Colleagues had secured over £17m in research grant funding in the first two quarters of 2019/20.
- The RUSU excellence awards celebrated colleagues working collaboratively with students to improve the teaching and learning experience.
- The University was working with a commercial partner to build a film studio at Thames Valley Science Park.

In response to questions raised ahead of the meeting and in the meeting chat:

- The Vice-Chancellor acknowledged that the pace of decision making around exams, assessment and changes to processes had been quicker than would have been liked. It was noted that Senate had been asked to comment at very short notice. In addition, it was acknowledged that communications to students and staff was not always as we would have wanted it to be and that ideally staff should have received communications further in advance.
- The University could continue to charge full fees as long as it maintained excellent standards – through either face-to-face or online delivery.
- Was the baseline student number based on current Part 1 cohort size? – Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor Fellowes suggested that the University would [redacted, section 43] students and that this year’s recruitment round would be very competitive.
- It was confirmed that the impact on Masters students had been modelled.
- Is the demographic dip with 18-year olds to our benefit? – The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that in the longer-term there would be a benefit but that 2020/21 would be challenging.
- Concerns had been raised about money being spent on UPP – The Chief Financial Officer advised that she was directly and regularly in contact with UPP and a number of other universities who were affected.

20/20 Report of the University Board for Teaching, Learning and Student Experience (Item 5)

The Senate received the Report of the meetings of the University Board for Teaching, Learning and Student Experience (UBTLSE) held on 26 February, 17 March, and 21 April 2020.

The Senate noted that UBTLSE had considered the following:

- COVID-19 provision
- Term Dates for 2023/24
- PVC Education and Student Experience appointments and interim TLD appointment
- Future of TLSB
- T&L Risk Register
- Examiner nominations
- Review of extenuating circumstances
- UoRM QAA Transnational Education Review
- Curriculum Framework
- Student Voice and Partnership
- EMA Programme
- Graduate Outcomes
- PSRBs
- Teaching after 6pm
- University Collaborative Awards for Teaching and Learning 2020
- RUSU Excellence Awards

The Senate received detailed papers setting out the full range of measure taken to mitigate the impact of circumstances related to COVID-19 on teaching, learning, assessment to date.

In particular, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor McCrum drew to the Senate's attention:

- The University had moved quickly with measures to support BIT/NUIST/UoRM in moving to online teaching and assessment. Colleagues were being supported with staff training and development in order to support online delivery.
- Assessment, Progression and Classification – guiding principles had been developed: a) to act fairly to all students, providing as full an opportunity as reasonably possible for students to consolidate their learning demonstrate their academic achievement, and gain the full benefit of their studies; b) to ensure that all students were reliably assessed, and that awards achieved by students met sector and professional requirements, were respected by employers, accrediting bodies and other stakeholders, and have the same value as degrees awarded in previous years; c) to support students to complete the academic year and undertake their assessments, allowing flexibility and reflecting the diverse needs of our students and the different circumstances that they find themselves in as a result of the current situation; d) to enable students to achieve their degree or to progress to the following year in accordance with the normal schedule, as far as reasonably possible.
- The University's approach to assessment, progression and classification was consistent with the principles outlined in the OfS and QAA guidance documents.
- Exams had now started online – initial feedback was that these were working well.
- The University was working closely with Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) to meet their expectations and requirements.
- A package of measures had been developed to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. Students had a comprehensive, individualised safety net to mitigate the impact on assessment, progression, and classification. This comprised three elements: a) the opportunity to defer Summer Term examinations until the resit period in August/September, and to request reasonable extensions on the deadline for submission of coursework; b) the implementation of a mark safety net which, subject to a number of conditions to safeguard the standards of awards, gives students the benefit of the better of their performance prior to the end of the Spring Term and their performance in the year as a whole; c) the opportunity after the publication of provisional results in July to retake the assessment of any module in which they have underperformed due to adverse circumstances. Provided the student was sitting the Summer Term exam as a first attempt, the retake would count as a first attempt, the result would not be capped for classification purposes, and there was no charge for the retake.

- Students had been engaged with through RUSU and via School Boards for Teaching and Learning.

In response to questions raised ahead of the meeting and in the meeting chat:

- Could all policy-related communications to students be sent to staff first and not at the end of the day/week. Students often to turn to staff and it helps to know in advance. – we have tried to keep up with communications and to keep staff informed but we recognise that this has not always been as we would want it to be for which apologies were given. It was recognised that at the start of the major incident communications were issued very quickly and that there was not as much time as would have been liked to brief colleagues. This feedback had been taken on board.
- The Leadership Group had been briefed three times per week, but it was recognised that the cascade of information down into Schools could be improved. Meetings had also been held with School Directors of Teaching and Learning. Consideration should be given to expanding communications wider than the Leadership Group.
- How will we deal with cheating – academic misconduct in take home exams was being dealt with in the same way as for coursework and the academic misconduct policy had been aligned with this.
- How are we thinking about handling the impact on staff on multiple submission deadlines and resits – UEB was very aware of the workload issues for colleagues and was working with HR and Heads of School to think about ways of support.
- Working through all of these measures will impact us progressing the important task of how to teach the Autumn Term. Staff are being stretched and are not at full capacity with the complications of WFH without the ideal environment and equipment. How will we make sure that staff do not fall over? – there was no one simple answer to this, work was being undertaken with Heads of School and Function to look at the support required. Consideration was being given to allowing colleagues to return to campus to collect additional material and equipment.
- Would there be guidance on marking exams relative to more typical scripts? Some students were completing the exam during the recommended time, others taking the full time. – There was not much that could be done in terms of differential marking but if a student felt that they had been disadvantaged in an exam they would be able to ask to retake it.
- What effect do you think there will be for students being from “The Class of 2020”? – the University was mindful of this given different approaches across the sector.
- Would students have the right to pick which mark to take forward (summer or resit)? – this was being worked on at present.

20/21 Alternative ways of teaching in academic year 2020/21 (Item 6)

The Senate received a paper seeking its input into planning for teaching for the next

academic year.

With no current published national plan for a phased return to activities the University was considering a variety of scenarios. It was likely that formal decisions would need to be taken at speed once key announcements were made (possibly on 10.5.20), in order to ensure certainty for students and colleagues and that everything was in place to provide the best possible academic experience. Senators had been asked in advance of the meeting to respond to the following questions:

- 1) Do you agree with the direction of travel for teaching next year and the principles being adopted?
- 2) What was missing from the approach?

The following points and assumptions were noted:

- There were likely to be travel restrictions
- We might still be operating under some form of lockdown in the autumn and it was likely that social distancing will be in place
- Some students might be nervous about travelling to Reading to study
- When lockdown restrictions were eased, they might be re-imposed at short notice
- The financial challenge for the year ahead was in the order of £40-£60m – the start of term simply could not be deferred to the next calendar year
- Our objective must be to start teaching as soon as practicable and provide an effective educational experience for all students wherever they may be
- Schools were considering some form of ‘blended learning’ or ‘flipped learning’ approach. Most Schools had agreed that lectures could go online, but a baseline expectation would need to be agreed regarding the form and quality of the online lecture experience. There was much to work through a range of issues related to the delivery of practical’s, studio work, fieldwork etc.
- There would be further cost issues if rooms remained empty in halls.
- We are mindful of the impact on colleagues of the approach taken to delivering teaching in the year ahead. Clearly any move to new ways of teaching would require additional support for colleagues and students
- The University was working through its networks to gain an insight into sector plans

Three broad options were being considered for the autumn term:

- 1) Starting the term as planned/advertised – this would enable more time for teaching which might be needed in order to adhere with social distancing.
- 2) Delaying the start of term by 1 or 2 week – this could enable more time to prepare to provide students with the best teaching experience
- 3) Starting term in November – we would only agree to this if this was a sector-wide move to which we could align.

The Senate noted that a group had been established to think through challenges around the autumn term. This group comprised SDTLs and Heads of School. The

group was currently gathering information from students and Schools and was reviewing what other HEIs were planning.

The Senate noted that ideally a decision on the autumn term would need to be taken in the next couple of weeks. Detail on what the autumn term learning experience would look like for students would be needed and the University would need to be clear that it could deliver this. Comments and questions raised would be fed back to the group considering this.

The following comments were raised ahead of the meeting and in the meeting chat:

- Should we think beyond next year and put a strategy in place that will help in the future. We have fewer students now, but numbers are likely to rise, and it will be a very different market. We should make sure we lead and do not follow. Students might get to like remote learning and we would then be competing with many more universities e.g. Dutch and German programmes in English.

Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor Park informed the Senate that UEB was undertaking a large piece of work around the size/shape of the University and that longer-term suggestions would be pulled into those considerations. The challenge was to interleave longer-term ideas with measures required in the short term.

It was reported that the University had started discussions with an online provider around moving some limited PGT programmes online. The University already has a successful MOOCs provision.

- Should we not look at the academic year as a whole and be innovative about restructuring the whole teaching year so that students get the full benefit, just in a modified timeline and format. For examples starting somewhat later in the autumn term, doing autumn exams in January, and then teaching further into the Spring/Summer terms. That way we can make the best use of online teaching in the Autumn and move to face-to face in a planned way in Spring.
- On blended learning and student participation from their home, the challenge we have was Blackboard VLE which did not support a very intuitive student learning journey. Would there be resource for investing in additional VLE support
- We should recognise that many come to Reading because of the campus. Online was great but on the ground was our distinction.
- Uncertainty causes a lot of stress. We should focus effort on developing fantastic online teaching then any face-to-face was a bonus.
- Could we offer students added value next year by providing mainly online independent study resources for the first few weeks of term to help then in their return to study (and gives us time to prepare for the rest of the year) and then offer them more summer term teaching.
- I was initially keen on a later start-date, but the significant disruptions that would result from tracking and tracing, could lead to seminar groups and members of staff being put into a 14-day quarantine period by just one symptomatic person. Starting at the usual time would be important in giving

time to be ill/recover/teach/learn.

- TEL and ADE would give guidance and advise on best practice re blended versus face-to-face.
- The University already had good online provision – MOOCS, AHEP, HBS, AFTP. It would be good to combine that experience and share good practice (Professor Strohfeldt was pulling that together).
- [Redacted, section 43]
- The start date for HBS international MScs was 28.9.20 was not the cliff-edge. It was three months before then when IELTS were taken and then applications for pre-sessional English. Delaying the Autumn Term by 3 or 4 weeks would be really helpful for those students. IELTS had not restarted in China. ISLI had recently approved a number of online tests as alternatives to IELTS and give access to our pre-sessional English programme.
- SPEIR had upgraded a room for lecture capture – this would be shared to allow a quality product for students.
- Delaying the Autumn Term without clawing back this delay would have a significant impact on some programmes, e.g. Pharmacy students go on clinical training after graduation.
- Vloggers might be able to help and have ideas that are not ‘standard’.
- Recognise that there are no easier answers – we should do what we can to work across Schools to pool skills and ideas.
- Any plans to support students without laptops – this was being looked into.
- IoE wanted to start on time as much work would be connected to what happens in school used for placements.
- The impact of tracking and tracing would present difference issues to now.
- Split strategy – normal start for UG and a 2-week delay for PGT.
- We could easily delay by one week – even keeping week 6.
- A firm decision on the start date was needed very soon – as little delay as possible to avoid any knock on to other terms.
- Staggered start date – Part 1 and PGT first (do not have Welcome Week). Start on core modules. Drop week 6, finish term a week later and start Parts 2 & 3 in Week 3.
- Do not start late – social distancing and practical classes would mean that more time was needed in those subjects.
- HBS had surveyed their Chinese MSc offer holders very few would come for a September 28<sup>th</sup> start.
- Shift modules that needed face-to face to Spring Term.
- Might need more time for Welcome Week activities and intake weekend to facilitate social distancing.
- Difficult to manage staggered start dates.
- International PGTs often faced visa delays – do we feel confident that visas would be issued smoothly.
- Have students been consulted?
- Would term be delayed and compressed to finish on time?
- PGT was an important sector/lucrative market – do not just be UG led.
- Other HEIs would start their year a week later than UoR, delaying by a week or two would not be out of the ordinary.
- Start at the normal time – we have no way of knowing how lockdown would

be lifted so may as well proceed as normal. Starting late would upset students with houses.

- As we have published dates would we be liable for private accommodation costs if we delay the start of term?
- Please think carefully about week 6 – this is going to be a difficult term for staff a break might be helpful.
- A strong message is we start as usual. Announcing a delay might make it sound that we are well prepared.
- The trade-off is that an early start would equal a significant loss of income for HBS.
- Student School Reps could be used to gather student feedback.
- Students were keen to return to campus, particularly those with private accommodation.
- The MIT was looking at a phased reopening of buildings as well as allowing colleagues to return to campus to pick up materials and office equipment.

The Vice-Chancellor thanked Senators for their input. A variety of views had been expressed, there was no simple answer nor overall consensus.

The comments would be passed to the working group.

#### 20/22 Ways of Working. (Item 8)

The Vice-Chancellor advised that it was likely that the next Senate would be run in a similar way and asked for feedback on the meeting. It was noted that Senate was one of the larger governance meetings to have been run through teams.

The Senate agreed that the teams format had worked well.

The Vice-chancellor recorded his thanks to the Senate. Clearly there were no easy answers to issues at the current time, but it was Senate's role to advise, challenge and scrutinise academic matters.

#### 20/23 Date of next meeting

Thursday 25 June 2020 at 2.15 pm.