

**REASEHEATH COLLEGE BOARD**  
**HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE**  
**Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 26 February 2019 at 2.00pm**  
**Committee Room, Reaseheath Hall**

Present: Marcus Clinton (principal) MC  
 Francesca Francis (independent) (Chair) FF  
 Dr Chris Haslam (co-opted) CH  
 Prof Chris Gaskell (independent) CG  
 Anne McKay (staff) AM  
 Richard Ratcliffe (independent) RR

Attending: Aimee Donohue (HE student rep) (standing in for Luci Newell, student governor) AD  
 Peter Greenall (assistant principal and dean of HE) PG  
 Dr Jane Richardson (HE curriculum area manager) JR  
 Shane Wild (HE student data and records officer) SWild  
 Ian Watts (HE student data and records assistant) IW  
 Jackie Schillinger (clerk) JS

| Item      | Content   |
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| <b>1.</b> | <b>WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b>  |
| 1.1       | The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Luci Newell, HE student governor. HE student rep Aimee Donohue has kindly attended in Luci's absence, which was much appreciated by the committee. Introductions were made and Aimee explained that she is studying a Zoo Management Foundation Degree |
| 1.2       | Attendees Dave Kynaston and Shaun Williams had also sent their apologies.   |
| 1.3       | The meeting was declared quorate.   |
| <b>2.</b> | <b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b>   |
| 2.1       | The declaration of interests form was circulated. There were no interests declared as giving rise to a conflict of interest in relation to the agenda items for the meeting.  |
| <b>3.</b> | <b>TERMS OF REFERENCE AND FORWARD PLAN OF BUSINESS 2018-19</b>  |
| 3.1       | The Committee Terms of Reference (TOR) were received, for information. It was noted that the termly safeguarding reporting now at full board level required a slight amendment to the TOR, as did the reference to HEFCE, which required updating to the Office for Students. <i>JS to action for next meeting.</i>                                 |
| 3.2       | The Forward Plan of Committee Business was received, for information.   |

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| <p><b>4.</b></p> <p>4.1</p>            | <p><b>MINUTES</b></p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, FF. The rolling action log was considered and it was updated accordingly. FF confirmed that all other matters arising were covered in the agenda for the present meeting.</p>   |
| <p><b>5.</b></p> <p>5.1</p> <p>5.2</p> | <p><b>STUDENT EXPERIENCE FOCUS</b></p> <p>Student experience case study: The Curriculum Area Manager, JR, presented an anonymised student case study of a student who is the faculty's nominee for student of the term: The student is a mature student returning to education, a single parent, with a number of financial challenges to overcome. The student has been highly motivated on the foundation degree zoo management course, with a high level of achievement, engagement, sharing good practice and helping others, including a great deal of charity work, for example with Chester Zoo.</p> <p>FF thanked JR on behalf of the meeting for sharing the case study, which provided an inspirational story of achievement and development in difficult circumstances and the committee was pleased to see this had been supported by UCR and recognised via the student of the term award nomination.</p>   |
| <p><b>6.</b></p> <p>6.1</p> <p>6.2</p> | <p><b>STRATEGIC UPDATE</b></p> <p>The Assistant Principal and Dean of HE, PG, provided his update on the latest developments at UCR, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The awaited publication of guidance from the Office for Students (OfS) regarding the next iteration of the Access and Participation plan, which is expected to focus more on widening access and participation outcomes than expenditure or retention related activities;</li> <li>• Fees for both the OfS and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) for 2019/20 remain unknown at this point;</li> <li>• Unconditional offers have recently received media attention, and UCR has published a brief statement through UCAS regarding UCR's approach which UCR believes is robust and ethical;</li> <li>• The Auger review of post-18 education is expected in the spring term (date to be announced) and has the potential to initiate radical change in HE funding policy;</li> <li>• The Department for Education (DfE) review of level 4/5 education is still underway and it is hoped that the outcomes will be beneficial for Colleges like Reaseheath operating in the professional/technical space of with applied/vocational higher education provision;</li> <li>• UCR has entered a provider submission for assessment within TEF year 4, and awaits the publication of the outcome of assessment by June. The initial hypothesis is bronze, however UCR is hopeful that the strong provider submission will secure the higher rating of silver;</li> <li>• The OfS has launched an independent review of the TEF and UCR intends to make a submission under the 'call for views';</li> <li>• Internal progression between FE and HE has increased, with 35% more internal applicants than in the previous year at this point in the cycle. Progression between levels has also been strengthened;</li> <li>• Curriculum developments are progressing and are expected to be successful despite a range of challenges and a certain element of remaining risk.</li> </ul> <p>CH confirmed his understanding is that the outcome of the TEF submission will be published in June at the earliest and that the case around the metrics is crucial as metrics are being emphasised as the key determiner of rating.</p> |

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| <p>6.3</p> <p>6.4</p> <p>6.5</p> <p>6.6</p> <p>6.7</p> | <p>Discussion focused on the issue of unconditional offers. PG explained UCR’s position in that it does not make unconditional offers in advance of students achieving the grades, and does not make ‘conditional unconditional’ offers, which is the practice that has received particularly bad press. GH confirmed that the University of Chester is not making unconditional offers. CG expressed his view that the pressure has come about due to the lobbying by schools on the matter and that colleges and universities may consider pushing back on the issue. He wondered if there has been a change of approach by others and questioned if UCR is happy with its approach, taking into account the competitiveness of the market. CH agreed that the HE market is flat or declining currently and so there is a lot of competition for market share. PG agreed to ensure that UCR keep a watching brief on the matter and UCR’s competitiveness. CH also noted the impact of the pressure to avoid unconditional offers could see more low grades offers coming through.</p> <p>CG asked about progression between foundation degree and top up, which he would hope would show as positive. PG agreed to include this in the June committee meeting performance data report to show progression from foundation to top up.</p> <p>PG provided more information on the vet nursing curriculum development. He noted that the process is progressing well but there is the challenge of achieving a crucial mass of signed memorandums of understanding with veterinary practices for the work placement element, due to the long lead in time and obtaining commitment for something such a long time in the future. FF asked if UCR would consider starting with a small number of students. CH noted that the problem with this is that UCR needs to show the provision is sustainable from the outset. PG noted that UCR hoped to be able to show sustainability through its commitment to support the growth of the programme, acknowledging that the first year or so would need support. CG asked how much work has been done with corporates rather than smaller or medium sized group practices. PG explained the approach taken and CG stressed that he felt that the more UCR could focus on the large corporates the better the chance of achieving the critical mass needed.</p> <p>On external financial pressures, CH noted that it was expected that the OfS and QAA fees would be up slightly. He noted that the Auger review is due to publish after Easter and could be proposing a fee of £7.5k, with doubt that the government would cover the gap in funding. GC asked whether the college has yet modelled £7.5k and other permutation. MC explained that this will be done shortly through the 10-year modelling process.</p> <p>FF thanked members for their input in the discussion and the meeting received the strategic update report, with thanks.</p> |
| <p><b>7.</b></p> <p>7.1</p>                            | <p><b>COLLEGE STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER AND KPIS</b></p> <p>The Principal, MC introduced the risk register report and updated members on the HE related risks. He provided assurance that UCR is secure on HE income in the current year, but there may be some early warning signs on HE applications for next year. However, the underlying picture of first choice applications and firm acceptances is strong. Overall, the picture is suggesting that there will not be any growth but neither should there be a significant drop in numbers and it will be important to ensure the budgeting process links closely to this emerging data. MC welcomed the increase shown on internal progression, which he said is the result of hard work from the team and he thanked the HE team for their work to improve internal progression. He noted that whilst specialist staffing is a significant risk in some areas of college provision, HE faculty staffing is stable at the moment, but specialist staffing issues do impact on the potential to grow HE into areas such as engineering. The risk report also highlighted the continuing increase in mental health issues amongst HE students and the need to consider the HE student environment more in terms of social learning space and separate areas to enhance the HE specific student experience. AD agreed that the HE students place a high value on separate HE and FE social and learning spaces.</p>  |

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| 7.2 | <p>Questions on the risk register report followed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RR asked about how much UCR can find out about a student’s mental health history and support needs before they come to UCR. PG explained that students self-declare and so when they do this, a lot of work is done to ensure that support is put in place for them, but not all students declare problems and again, some may not experience problems to the extent that they do when they move away from home and start the course.</li> <li>• AM asked what UCR is doing to build resilience. PG explained that he has set up a working group to build a programme, in the same vein as BeReady (working title Keys to Success), which will be a holistic programme with different delivery to the FE BeReady programme, and moving to launch in September.</li> <li>• CH questioned the risk scoring on staffing as a red risk, as he thought that this perhaps overstated the risk. He also wondered if the income risk was too high as shown as the mitigating actions are intended to bring down the risk level, whereas in this case, it has increased.</li> <li>• FF thanked members for their comments and confirmed that the executive team would take away the helpful comments on the risk register for review.</li> </ul>   |
| 8.1 | <p><b>8. PERFORMANCE MONITORING</b></p> <p>SW presented the Student data report, indicating the following:</p> <p><b>Retention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retention has increased by 1.02% for students starting in September, and by 1.67% when measured from November onwards. UCR is on track to achieve our 85% retention target.</li> </ul> <p><b>Recruitment (2019/20)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 677 applicants have applied to UCR programmes compared to 831 applicants in 2018-19, a reduction of 154 applicants and a 19% decrease compared to the previous year.</li> <li>• 835 applications (choices) have been made to UCR programmes compared to 987 applications (choices) in 2018-19 representing a reduction of 152 applications in comparison to the previous year (15% decrease).</li> <li>• The decline in applications is most notable in programmes associated with Animal Science (16% decrease compared to 2018-19), Equine (23% decrease compared to 2018-19) and Food (24% decrease compared to 2018-19) curriculum areas. It should however be noted that numbers in Food are relatively low, therefore the percentage is somewhat misleading.</li> <li>• The decline in applicants and applications is undoubtedly a concern as it suggests that general interest in UCR provision has wavered. We are however somewhat reassured by the conversion of our applications to firm responses, which has increased by 4% compared to the same period last year. The largest decline in applications is associated with those which we have historically declined our offer which could suggest that we are simply seeing a reduction in ‘noise’ within the admissions cycle.</li> <li>• Apart from a spike in applications data in 2017/18, the data shows a steadily upward trend from 2015/16 onwards.</li> <li>• Applications from existing Reaseheath students (internal applicants and applications) have increased by 18% compared to the same point in 2017/18 and 35% compared to 2018/19; the number of internal applications have increased by 10% compared to 2017/18 and 33% compared to 2018/19. This would suggest that the strategies we have employed to strengthen this aspect of our recruitment are having a positive impact. Reaseheath students are also more likely to convert, which will help to address the shortfall in overall applications/applicants.</li> <li>• Recruitment figures also exclude the Veterinary Nursing programme, which has 95 students on the waiting list. The number of students we can accept is limited by the number of work placements we can secure before September but is expected to be at least 20. The programme is due to be validated with the University of Chester and accredited by the RCVS in April 2019</li> </ul> |

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| <p>8.2</p> <p>8.3</p> <p>8.4</p> <p>8.5</p> | <p>FF thanked SW for his comprehensive data report. She also thanked him for all his work for UCR and with the HE Committee as he was moving on to another role outside UCR and she wished him all the best.</p> <p>PG presented the UCR Quality Improvement Plan 2018-19 monitoring report, indicating good progress on the whole. CG asked if this report highlighted an issue with assessment generally. PG agreed and CG suggested that it seems it almost wants a fundamental review of assessment as part of the curriculum. AD gave her view on the student experience on assessments. She confirmed that it seems as though they all come together, which causes a lot of pressure on students. PG agreed that he intends to review to improve how assessment is used within the curriculum and take into account the full holistic picture.</p> <p>The Module Evaluation Survey Overview Report was provided for information and assurance, with an opportunity for comment or questions. Members confirmed that they saw it as showing a generally good overall picture, with teaching and learning feedback very pleasing. They noted that assessment had been identified as discussed in the previous report. Members took assurance from a solid position from which to improve and enhance, by looking in more depth at the variances. The length of lectures was highlighted and AD gave some examples of where lectures had been far too long and other areas for improvements. PG and the committee welcomed this useful feedback. FF asked that the numbers as well as percentages be included in the report in future to give more context. <i>Action for next meeting.PG</i></p> <p>PG presented the Access Agreement Monitoring Return Overview Report for information and assurance. He explained that the report has been submitted and provides a summary of UCR's provision. He gave assurance that there is nothing of concern in the monitoring report and no significant concerns, with the OfS happy with UCR's access and participation plan. PG alerted members to some policy changes ahead that might come through from the OfS, including the requirement to report outcomes rather than expenditure, which can cause particular problems for FE providers of HE.</p>  |
| <p>9.</p> <p>9.1</p>                        | <p><b>ITEMS FOR APPROVAL/RATIFICATION</b></p> <p>PG presented his paper on Tuition Fees 2020-21, for discussion before a recommendation to be made to the Board to approve the fees policy. He presented the key question in the paper of whether UCR should increase its foundation degree fees to the same level as its full degrees. CH confirmed his view that the decision on fee policy is for UCR to make, based on competitive factors and benchmarking. CH asked about the competitor analysis undertaken and members considered appendix B to the report that provided the analysis. CH noted that those competitors charging the full £9250k for foundation degrees are TEF Gold. PG gave his view that the market is not particularly price sensitive or TEF sensitive at the moment. CH's initial inclination was to keep the foundation fees the same as they are now, in line with the competitors that are TEF Bronze. PG noted that whilst these fees were lower than £9250, they were charging the same fees for foundation degrees and degrees. PG confirmed that the provision is of parity and the trend in the market now is to charge the same fee for both foundation degrees and degrees. He confirmed that this is not the case with Higher National fees and the suggestion is that these remain at the lower fee scale. MC supported the increase to move towards consistency. RR confirmed that he supported an increase. CG expressed his view that if UCR decided to increase the foundation degree fees, they should increase to £9250 to be consistent. He also noted the link between quality and price that suggests that an increase can enhance rather than cause detriment. CH agreed with this point and noted that UCR could increase its foundation degree fees and then look to utilise bursary options if needed. FF thanked members for their input and summarised that the committee agreed with the opportunity to look at a price increase to achieve consistency between foundation degree and degree fee levels for 2020, to be considered and approved by the Board. For completeness, it was noted that there was no suggested change to the fee for the Cert Ed, which is based on local market fee levels. FF also noted that the International students would need to be adjusted in line with the foundation degree fee increase.</p> |

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| <b>10.</b> | <b>ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/ASSURANCE</b>  |
| 10.1       | UCR TEF Year 4 Provider Submission: FF thanked PG for an excellent paper and congratulated the team, with the outcome awaited in June.  |
| 10.2       | HE Academic Board meeting minutes: CH queried a point on page 6 in relation to the University Board of Studies requirement and he offered to work with PG to progress this through the process as quickly as possible.  |
| 10.3       | HE Student Complaints Monitoring Report: The committee suggested the process and complaints at year end be reviewed to see if the new process had had a positive impact.  |
| <b>11.</b> | <b>MATTERS TO REPORT TO THE BOARD</b>   |
| 11.1       | The meeting confirmed the Chair's report to be made to the board with a copy of the minutes, for information and assurance.   |
| <b>12.</b> | <b>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</b>   |
| 12.1       | There was no other business reported to the meeting.  |
| <b>13.</b> | <b>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</b>   |
| 13.1       | Tuesday 4 June 2019 at 2pm. FF requested that the day be changed in next year's meetings calendar as Tuesdays were difficult for her. CH noted Wednesdays were not good for him. JS agreed to plan the meetings for next academic year, avoiding Tuesdays and Wednesdays. |

HE Student forum meeting follows at 3.30pm – An opportunity to meet current HE students and discuss their experience on their courses.

Close 4.20pm

Signed:

Dated: