

**REASEHEATH COLLEGE BOARD**  
**HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2019 at 2.00pm**  
**Committee Room, Reaseheath Hall**

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

Attending: Peter Greenall (assistant principal and dean of HE) PG  
 Yvette Foulds-Davis (Acting HE curriculum area manager) YFD  
 Shaun Williams (HE quality enhancement manager) SW  
 Jackie Schillinger (clerk) JS  
 Liz Watts (Head of Marketing) LW

**Part A unless stated**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Content</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR</b>
1.1	The meeting was declared quorate.
<b>1.2</b>	<b>RESOLVED: Francesca Francis appointed as chair of the committee for the 2019-20 academic year.</b>
<b>1.3</b>	<b>RESOLVED: Professor Chris Gaskell appointed as Vice Chair of the committee for the 2019-20 academic year.</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b>
	The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Charlotte Brunt.
<b>3.</b>	<b>APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEE MEMBER</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>RESOLVED: Professor Gary Crowe was appointed as a member of the committee, to attend from the next meeting in February 2020.</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b>
4.1	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.

<p>5.</p> <p>5.1</p> <p>5.2</p>	<p><b>TERMS OF REFERENCE/FORWARD PLAN OF BUSINESS 2019-20</b></p> <p>The Committee Terms of Reference (TOR) were received, a couple of minor changes were suggested, noted by the clerk.</p> <p>The Forward Plan of Committee Business was received, for information.</p>
<p>6.</p> <p>6.1</p>	<p><b>MINUTES</b></p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, FF. The rolling action log was considered and updated.</p>
<p>7.</p> <p>7.1</p> <p>7.2</p> <p>7.3</p>	<p><b>STUDENT EXPERIENCE FOCUS</b></p> <p>Student experience case study: Acting Curriculum Area Manager, YFD presented an anonymised student case study. YFD explained that this student was in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) and had a study mentor, note taker and a range of tools and software provided. The student attended the initial first foundation degree year last year and has now progressed to a top up, which is far over and above the individual's expectation of what they could achieve. This progression has provided many challenges for the student with the complexities of a dissertation project, complex instructions and independent learning. UCR has supported the student in this challenge including by enabling the note taker to join the supervisor meetings, holding additional meetings more regularly to break down the project work into manageable sections. The student's research project is at Chester Zoo and has involved collecting 60 hours of data on orangutan behaviour. YFD said that the message is that the bespoke support has enabled this student to progress beyond where they were expected to. She confirmed that the student has found it hard to step up from FE to HE and that the student had initially moved to another college to do HE but then returned to Reaseheath because of the level of support provided here. FF thanked YFD on behalf of the meeting for sharing the case study, which provided an insight into the support for students at UCR.</p> <p>FF and CG then shared their experience of the HE Faulty link visit and learning walks that they had experienced on their visit that morning. These included a level 6 zoo management lecture and practical sessions in the foundation degree in zoo management and the foundation degree in animal management. Observations from these sessions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good student engagement in the lecture and good use of whiteboard and video, with good feedback from the lecturer very noticeable;</li> <li>• Students get direct practical experience of setting up a virtual zoo themselves and keeping records, which allows them to be ready for employment;</li> <li>• Practical experience of inspection regimes for zoo animals, with students off to collect the data and fill in the forms for the animal;</li> <li>• Excellent study trips to relevant external organisations.</li> </ul> <p>Graduate Toolkit overview: YFD presented an overview of the new induction and study support programme, the Graduate Toolkit. She explained that it sits as par to the online hub, which is intended to be an online one stop shop, with convenient features such as being able to book tutorials and study pods online, which is proving very popular. Members were very impressed with the look and functionality of the programme. Key points noted were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FF suggested that it could be used to promote the module surveys and the NSS;</li> <li>• CG and PG suggested access to some of it could work well as a recruitment tool;</li> </ul>

7.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CH noted that the approach was spot on and he suggested that it would be helpful to Chester for the relevant person to come and see the team to see what they have created;</li> <li>• MC noted the depth of content and good use of data, he suggested online content such as the land-based learning digital packs could be something to consider. PG explained that the programme is intended to provide support for learning rather than information giving, and so the digital content would be very useful to have on Moodle and to link to the graduate toolkit;</li> <li>• CH asked what success looked like in relation to this development and PG confirmed that would support improved retention and recruitment.</li> </ul> <p>National Student Survey (NSS) report 2018-19: SW presented an overview of the 2018-19 National Student Survey (NSS) Results. He noted that overall satisfaction was 80%, 4% below sector and lower than last year. He added that the response rate lower than last year and so this year the team are promoting it more and earlier. He highlighted the areas that have improved and those that have deteriorated, with a couple of persistent areas for improvement being Assessment and feedback and Organisation. These areas for improvement have been fed into the quality improvement plan (QIP). Members received the report with thanks. In questions and discussion, the following points were made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AM asked whether the team thought over-surveying could contribute to the lower response rate and scores. SW did not think so as the feedback from students has not suggested this and the team think they have a better balance this year;</li> <li>• SW confirmed that the 'You said We did' outcomes from the surveys is having a positive impact;</li> <li>• CG noted that some courses seem to be struggling more than others. He asked whether the team is drilling down at course level to find out what the individual issues are. MC agreed that even an issue with a small number of students can have a significant impact and he explained that the spotlight is put on these areas in a similar way to the notice to improve (NTI) system in place for FE areas, as well as ensuring best practice is shared to help these areas to improve what they do;</li> <li>• AM asked whether the negative comments received correlate to these particular courses and SW confirmed that they did;</li> <li>• FF asked if the free text comments are passed down to the individual course teams and SW confirmed they are;</li> <li>• CH noted that the survey shows clear strengths and that sharing good performance is good. He suggested that as well as the survey approach, the team could try a less formal approach in a more social setting to pick up things that don't necessarily come out in the staff student liaison meetings;</li> <li>• CH also noted that the NSS will apply at all levels in future, not just level 6 as the Office for Students (OFS) is keen to demonstrate value for money at every level. SW confirmed the team is planning for this;</li> <li>• SW added that the 'first impressions' survey this year is encouraging.</li> </ul>
8.	<p><b>STRATEGIC UPDATE</b></p> <p>8.1 Dean's Report: The Assistant Principal and Dean of HE, PG, provided his update on the latest developments at UCR. FF thanked him for his very thorough report and suggested it be sent out with the minutes to inform all governors of latest developments, especially in relation to the OFS. Discussion and questions followed, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PG confirmed that there will need to be a focus by this committee and the governing body on the OFS monitoring and intervention approach and reportable events. The governing body will need to have a framework to establish what it considers a reportable event, put in place steps to ensure it tracks and acts within the tight timescales and also is able to evidence appropriate discussion on potential reportable events in order to show due consideration has been given to</li> </ul>

	<p>the regulatory requirements on an ongoing basis. Equally, work is needed to better align the UCR Self-Evaluation Document (SED) to the OFS minimum obligations. He noted that these will be big pieces of work;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Access and Participation Plan (APP) is awaiting final approval, which is now likely to be after the election;</li> <li>• The 2019 graduation ceremony went very well and was a wonderful celebration, with thanks to the University of Chester.</li> </ul>
8.2	<p>In relation to potential reportable events, FF raised the issue of the shortfall in HE numbers this year, resulting in a £600k shortfall of HE income against budget. However, she explained that this will not be the case with the overall budget and it will not cause a significant issue for the organisation, which is still expected to come in close to budget and students will not be impacted. The committee considered the issue and decided that it was not something that the committee considers to be material to the institution as a whole and therefore not a reportable event. It agreed to report this to the governing body via these minutes.</p>
8.3	<p>Access and Participation Plan Update: PG presented the final draft of the APP, noting that the committee has seen and reviewed a previous draft. He highlighted the three main elements that the OFS had pushed back on and that have changed in the final draft as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The BAME gap reduction: This is a challenge for land-based sector and will require a joined-up approach;</li> <li>• Implementation of the strategic measures: to make clear what is planned in each year against each measure;</li> <li>• Monitoring and evaluation: Further stretch in UCR’s ambition to evidence the impact of activities.</li> </ul> <p>The committee received the final draft APP with thanks and recognition of all the hard work by the HE team.</p>
8.4	<p>Marketing of Higher Education: The Head of Marketing, LW, presented the context and planning for the marketing strategy for higher education. She welcomed committee feedback and views at this initial stage and confirmed that she would report back on the development of the strategy at the next meeting. Discussion followed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AM queried how data was being use to target the marketing and recommended the use of social media data analytics. CG agreed that social media analysis generally would be useful to see what the feedback is on UCR and other organisations and what UCR needs to be saying and to whom, acknowledging that this may vary significantly between the different provision at UCR and the internal and external audience;</li> <li>• FF emphasised the importance of the marketing strategy aligning to the longer-term strategic plan over the next 5 years;</li> <li>• CG noted that the unique selling point of UCR needed to be expressed in the external marketing, such as the community, HE family that is UCR;</li> <li>• CG also emphasised the need to consider the ‘green’ credentials of the organisation and how these are coming across externally;</li> <li>• CH agreed it is about getting the right message to the right people at the right time and he added that the university has carried out work to understand their different audiences and how to target these groups with a significant move into social media communications;</li> <li>• Unconditional offers were discussed, with CH confirming that the university does not do this at the moment. The committee noted that unconditional offers can lead to more withdrawals and is not favoured by the OFS, though they have stopped short of banning the practice. The committee also noted the fact that if others are doing it, is UCR losing out by not doing so, as it</li> </ul>

	does have an impact on student choices. All agreed it was a complex issue but one to be considered alongside everything else in the strategy.
<b>9.</b>	<b>COLLEGE STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER AND KPIS</b>
9.1	<p>The Principal, MC introduced the risk register report and updated members on the HE related risks. His report summarised the key areas of risk as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2019 UCR achieved a Silver TEF rating. The Self-Evaluation Report and the Quality Improvement Plan is reported in the meeting to provide assurance that UCR is managing the quality risk well and has identified and planned actions for improvement in 2019-20. The risk remains a green rating and is within the risk appetite identified by the executive. The team will need to monitor the emerging subject level TEF potential impacts going forwards and will report developments through to the committee;</li> <li>• The UCR Access and Participation Plan has now progressed through OFS scrutiny and is awaiting final formal approval. The risk in relation to implementation and evidencing impact of the plan has been added as a risk to the strategic risk register. Whilst not an immediate risk, this is a significant challenge that will require careful planning and implementation and will require monitoring by the committee. At this stage, there is not a high level of assurance against this risk and it is an amber risk, above the risk target of green, with work to be done over the next year to bring this risk within the risk target score;</li> <li>• The risk of failure to comply with the OFS regulatory requirements has been added as a separate risk to the regulatory breach risk section of the risk register. This is due to the emerging complex and punitive regime and the need to ensure that UCR avoids regulatory intervention and that cross-college systems and processes are fully able to meet the requirements of the OFS regulatory regime;</li> <li>• In relation to the strategic partnership with the University of Chester, the risk level has increased due to the change in leadership at the University from January 2020 and the need to develop new relationships and establish the strategic direction going forwards;</li> <li>• In terms of HE income risk, a risk to income for 2019-20 had been identified and a fall in numbers did occur. Actions this year to improve recruitment, including a focused marketing and recruitment strategy. The Finance and General Purposes Committee will be considering this income risk in more detail when they consider the financial risk sections of the risk register in the meeting on 4 December.</li> </ul> <p>The committee received the risk register update and noted the movement in risk, with the need for close monitoring of key risk areas in 2019-20.</p>
<b>10.</b>	<b>PERFORMANCE 2018-19</b>
10.1	<p>Self-Evaluation Document (SED) 2018-19: PG presented the SED 2018-19 for review. He referred members to the executive summary in paper, which provided an overview of sector and UCR performance. The report provided an evaluation of quality of the academic experience and outcomes for students across UCR and provided an action plan for continued improvement. He noted that the SED captures the successes in 2018-19 but also acknowledges that UCR operates in a changing competitive environment with the new OFS regime setting out minimum regulatory requirements in terms of quality that will require a focus in 2019-20. He also noted that there are pockets of under-performance that need some specific focus, which is shown in the drilling down of the SED and the link to the quality improvement plan (QIP) FOR 2019-20. The committee thanked PG for this thorough report. FF asked how the HE Quality and Curriculum Development Committee (QCDC) reports through the governance</p>

	<p>framework. PG confirmed that this group reports in to HE Academic Board and via that up to the HE Committee. FF requested that the QCDC reporting to be made more visible in the HE Academic Board minutes so that HE Committee could pick this up. The committee received the SED for information and assurance.</p>
<b>11.</b>	<b>PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2019-20</b>
11.1	<p>Student data report: SW presented the executive summary of the data report:  End of year retention for 18/19 was reported as 83.06% - a percentage point down on the end of 17/18, which was disappointing as retention was up all the way through the year;  Equine was considered, as the data showed lower retention, particularly in a couple of courses. SW explained that these courses have since been revalidated this academic year;  Year 1 withdrawals in particular were reported as down on last year. SW explained that the Graduate Toolkit is intended to help reduce withdrawals;  Applications for 2019/20 were reported as down on 2018/19, and down on the previous year. However, firm decisions and acceptances are still in line with previous years, indicating a better conversion rate than previous years;  Achievement and success data were reported as down on last year. Initial analysis indicates that there were a significant number of students who failed to participate in reassessment activity, which significantly impacted on the final outturn. SW explained that the revised approach to course management, launched at the start of this academic year aims to more closely monitor student progress and initiate early intervention. He added that to date, there have been 10 withdrawals compared to 29 at the same point last year, indicating that the refreshed approach to induction, the revised model and introduction of the Graduate Toolkit have made an immediate impact.</p>
11.2	<p>In the discussion that followed, AM questioned what mitigations are in place for the recent vacancies in the Faculty. PG commented that recruitment is in place to fill the vacancies quickly and it is also about good communication with the team and to see the opportunities from this. CH asked for more detail on the equine position. PG explained that the feeling with some students that the course did not deliver to expectations from the title contributed towards the retention issues. He added that that foundation degree has been retired and now changed and so he felt that the equine offer is now better placed to improve on these issues, especially as there are good level 3 numbers and good numbers at the out-centre that are keen to progress. CG asked if the team had any external advice on where the courses are moving to in the equine sector. PG had considered the insight report from UCAS and he noted that it is one of these areas where the downturn is linked to demographics in the next 12 months or so. MC noted that the college is keen to work with a specialist commercial equine facility that has just opened close to the college and he confirmed that the Equine business and events programme has been refreshed and is going through validation.</p>
11.3	<p>UCR KPIs and Quality Improvement Plan 2019-20: PG presented the UCR KPIs and Quality Improvement Plan for approval. Members could see that it was closely linked to the SED, considered earlier in the meeting. He explained the overarching ambition for the planned improvements, the quantitative measures in place and the specific actions required. FF requested and received assurance that any outstanding actions from the 2018-19 QIP were carried forwards in the 2019-20 QIP. FF also requested and received assurance that the accountable person for the actions in the QIP would be a person within the team rather than a higher-level manager as she felt this was important to ensure everyone takes responsibility to drive forward the improvement actions. Discussion followed on the detail of the plan and members sought and received assurance on a number of actions and were then content to receive and approve the plan.</p>
<b>11.4</b>	<b>RESOLVED: To receive and approve the UCR KPIs and Quality Improvement Plan 2019-20.</b>

<b>12.</b>	<b>ITEMS FOR APPROVAL</b>
<b>12.1</b>	<b>RESOVED: To approve the Higher Education Complaints Policy.</b>
<b>13.</b>	<b>ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/ASSURANCE</b>
13.1	The committee received the following items for information and assurance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HE Academic Board meeting minutes;</li> <li>• HE Student Complaints Monitoring Report.</li> </ul>
13.2	Members received some detail on the complaints report, including the one shown as ongoing. PG explained that this was now at the point that it could go to the University and so has to be kept open for now. An update was provided on the access to certain journals, which is not yet completely resolved, but is being activity progressed to reach a solution as soon as possible. PG gave assurance that it is being managed well so far.
<b>14.</b>	<b>MATTERS TO ESCALATE TO RISK REGISTER/REPORT</b>
	FF summarised the key points to be reported to the Board as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The risk situation on the APP and the OFS regulatory regime contravention requirements, with the Dean’s report to be provided to the full board alongside the minutes.</li> <li>• Recognition by this committee of the weight of work on the HE team in the current external policy environment and the short-term staffing vacancies.</li> <li>• The positive impact on the student experience of the UCR graduate toolkit.</li> <li>• Celebration of the huge amount of really good work going on as well as the challenges faced.</li> </ul>
<b>15.</b>	<b>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</b>
	FF thanked SW, who was moving on to pastures new, for all his work for UCR and wished him all the best in his new role.
<b>16.</b>	<b>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</b>
	The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Thursday 27 February 2020 at 2pm.

The meeting closed at 4.30pm

Signed:

Dated: