

REASEHEATH COLLEGE BOARD
HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2020 at 2.00pm
Committee Room, Reaseheath Hall

Present: Marcus Clinton (principal) MC
 Francesca Francis (independent) (Chair) FF
 Prof Chris Gaskell (independent) CG
 Anne McKay (staff) AM (*items 1-10 inclusive*)

Attending: Yvette Foulds-Davis (Acting HE curriculum area manager) YFD
 Ian Britton (University of Chester) IB
 Ian Watts (HE student data manager) IW (*items 1-8.1 inclusive*)
 Jackie Schillinger (clerk) JS

Part A unless stated

Item	Content
1.	WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
1.1	The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Gary Crowe, Chris Haslam and Charlotte Brunt. The committee expressed its disappointment that the student governor had not been able to attend either of the meetings so far this year. Apologies were also received from the Dean of Higher Education who was currently poorly, and the meeting wished him a speedy recovery.
1.2	The meeting was declared quorate.
2.	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
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.
3.	TERMS OF REFERENCE/FORWARD PLAN OF BUSINESS 2019-20
3.1	The Committee Terms of Reference (TOR) were received and it was agreed that the external examiner reports referred to in the terms should be accessible to members if they wished to see them but the committee would not expect to see them as routine as the information would be covered in the quality monitoring report.
3.2	The Forward Plan of Committee Business was received, for information and the meeting requested to see a Scholarly activity report in the autumn term each year adding to the business cycle.

4.	<p>MINUTES</p> <p>4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 28 November 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, FF. The rolling action log was considered and updated.</p>
5.	<p>STUDENT EXPERIENCE FOCUS</p> <p>5.1 Student experience: Acting Curriculum Area Manager, YFD, presented feedback from a recent student forum that she had arranged on the use of digital resources at UCR. She had spoken to four students, two mature students on an access to HE programme, one BSC and one FSD student in the first year. They shared their feedback on the use of digital resources before they arrived on campus, in the first few weeks and since. She shared the key themes from the discussion. These were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -They had no exposure to any digital systems before they arrived and so it took a while to get used to the systems in the first few weeks. They said that they liked MyDay and the Graduate Toolkit, especially the resources such as the referencing guides. They had experienced problems with continuous logging in on multiple platforms and they would have liked more engagement before they arrive so that they could get up to speed more quickly on arrival. -They have experienced problems with infrastructure such as slow WiFi and solstice, which are challenging for staff trying to run efficient and effective sessions. They did note that most of these issues improved after a few months. -They said that there is not always a lot of digital resource available in the form of computer spaces and bookable laptops. <p>5.2 YFD reflected that she feels that the digital resources and the infrastructure has improved significantly in the last couple of years but there is more that can be done. MC explained the plans this year to improve the environment for access to digital, but it was noted that many of the students' own devices do not have the capacity to run some of the specialist software used on the programmes, so the provision of hardware is also important. MC noted that this aspect needs to be factored into the plans to develop those spaces and a further consultation with students would be carried out. The point made by the students about being joined into the systems before starting would be taken forwards and this could also help with conversion of applications. FF thanked YFD on behalf of the meeting for sharing the student forum feedback.</p>
6.	<p>STRATEGIC UPDATE</p> <p>6.1 Dean's Report: In the absence of the Dean, MC requested any questions or comments on the Dean's report. FF noted her concern on the staff turnover and sickness rates and how is it being dealt with, including how students are being communicated with. MC explained that he had spoken to staff and made it clear that the college is open to looking at ways of working, the work model and providing a stronger sense of progression within UCR to help retain staff, as part of a wider discussion on structures to help with retention. He noted that appointments have been made and there is a period of waiting for these new members of staff to start, but the fact that they are experienced staff is very much a positive. He confirmed that all current vacant posts are now filled except the academic registrar and assistant dean. He also noted that line managers are using casual staff to cover sickness. He highlighted one area that is particularly struggling with staffing but said that actions have been taken and UCR has resourced a specialist trainer to cover this area at a significant cost. In terms of communication with students he gave assurance that this is happening and the faculty is working with the affected students to ensure that they understand and are kept informed of the actions in place. It was agreed that the Dean would meet with the affected students to ensure that they feel that things are being done to alleviate the</p>

	<p>issues. AM noted that her team has also been supporting with the new staff. FF wondered if considering some form of gesture to those most affected could help and YFD agreed to look into this. CG welcomed the actions for the short term and he also requested more information on medium and longer term measures that would come out of the work being done on work models and staff progression mentioned earlier. IB requested and received assurance that the full curriculum is being delivered and so students will not be disadvantaged, even though there will likely be some dissatisfaction. Thanks were expressed to YFD and the rest of the team for all their hard work and commitment to keep everything on the road during this challenging time, recognising that the college is working to alleviate the pressures.</p>
6.2	<p>In terms of student recruitment, it was noted that this would be covered in the student data report agenda item, but the meeting reflected on the opportunities and challenges of the vet nursing provision. Discussion focused around maximising placements and also the ability to provide alternative courses for some applicants, which is proving successful in reducing the impact of the limit on placements. GC noted the new joint vet school in the region, and it was thought that this could be an opportunity as well as a risk.</p>
6.3	<p>The Office for Students' Annual Review was received for information. FF noted that the tone of the approach is very much 'comply or else'. She highlighted the key issues in the review of the injudicious use of unconditional offers, grade inflation, securing better access to higher education and value for money.</p>
6.4	<p>Access and Participation Plan (APP) Monitoring Report: IW presented the tabled report and took members through the context and key data. CG questioned whether the college had measures in place at the time it set its targets to know if it could evidence achievement. FF emphasised this is an issue across the sector and the approach now being taken by the OFS is very different to the previous approach and so all providers will struggle. IB agreed with FF that for most providers evidencing progress up to now has been a retrospective exercise. CG requested and received assurance that with the new APP all the expenditure is being tracked and a specific member of staff has been recruited to manage this aspect of the APP. MC gave assurance that he hears the same from the University and that all providers will be in the same position. IW provided assurance that, taking into account the need to estimate in some areas, the team is confident in the figures and the total expenditure is in line with predications. He explained the figures in relation to Access, Success, Progression and Bursary and confirmed that UCR is confident that it can justify and evidence these figures. Members took assurance from the report and presentation by IW and were content to support the submission to the OFS.</p>
6.5	<p>RESOLVED: To approve the submission of the Access and Participation Plan Monitoring Report to the Office for Students.</p>
6.6	<p>Higher Education Marketing Strategy: MC presented the development of the strategy to date and provided the action plan created by the Head of Marketing. He noted that the Head of Marketing would be attending the Finance and General Purposes Committee to discuss HE income and recruitment. Questions and discussion followed. FF noted that the plan needed to be more specific on target dates, ensure that social media campaigns are evaluated and prioritise the most key actions as there were a lot of actions within the plan. MC agreed and he assured the meeting that resources were being rebalanced to ensure that HE marketing is the top priority across the college currently. He also provided assurance that he considered good progress can be made on the offer working with the University under the new Vice Chancellor. FF emphasised that there is still a good opportunity to increase internal progression this year and MC agreed and assured her that this remains a priority. CG noted that internal progression is low compared to last year and wondered if this had been impacted by the staffing situation. Discussion focused on actions and approaches to increase internal progression and the variance across the college. AM noted an external development of a zoo at Hopward Hall that could</p>

	<p>impact. The opportunities of working more closely with the University on progression to post graduate provision was discussed as well as the need for the offer at Reaseheath to be developed, with support from the University. FF noted it can be useful to enable FE students to experience the HE facilities and this could be an opportunity to expand on what already happens so that this is happening for first year students and well as second years. The marketing report was received with thanks and the meeting acknowledged that the HE business plan update had been postponed to the next meeting due to the Dean's illness and that there was also an opportunity to look at this further in the May strategy development event.</p>
<p>7.</p> <p>7.1</p> <p>7.2</p>	<p>COLLEGE STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER AND KPIs</p> <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> <p>Student Outcomes/Quality and Reputation: The risk register rating remains unchanged following executive. It is within the target risk score for the current year. UCR currently has a TEF Silver rating. Student retention is up on this time last year. The in-year module student satisfaction survey and the QIP monitoring report indicate that student satisfaction in areas of course organisation and management and assessment and feedback remain a concern (though course organisation and management satisfaction did increase by 3% in the latest survey).</p> <p>Access and Participation Plan: The risk register rating remains unchanged following executive review. It is above the target risk score. However, progress has been made in that the APP has now been approved by the OFS and dedicated staffing resource has been approved. However, at this early stage there is not a high level of assurance against this risk and it remains 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.</p> <p>OFS regulatory risk: This risk score has been reviewed by executive and remains as scored previously and is above the target risk score. This is due to the complex and punitive regime and the need to ensure that UCR avoids regulatory intervention and that our cross-college systems and processes are fully able to meet the requirements of the OFS regulatory regime. There have been no adverse regulatory incidents since last reporting but the high number of quick turnaround communications and information requirements from the OFS continue – these are currently being well managed.</p> <p>Strategic partnerships: This risk score has decreased slightly following executive review but remains amber and above the target risk score. The risk level remains above target risk score due to new leadership at the University from January 2020. However, a good working relationship is being developed and the partnership should continue to be very positive for both parties.</p> <p>HE income and recruitment: In terms of HE income risk, the impact of the failure to meet the budget target for 2019-20 has been mitigated to a minor overall impact on the college. However, looking to 2020-21 recruitment data in year currently shows a reduction on applications on this time last year. Actions to improve recruitment for 2020-21 will be key.</p> <p>Prevent in HE Annual Overview Report: The meeting received the Dean's overview report on Prevent for assurance. It was confirmed that the safeguarding function is a central function that covers FE and HE and that weekly safeguarding and prevent reports are considered by the executive team. The reports were received for assurance.</p>
<p>8.</p> <p>8.1</p>	<p>PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2019-20</p> <p>Student data report: IW presented the student data report. He reported that student retention is up on last year and that this year measures are in place to address the level of exam failure experienced last</p>

8.2	<p>year. He highlighted the two year downwards trend on recruitment and gave detail on the different areas of provision. He provided assurance that the HE team is working more closely than ever before with the marketing team and he is very hopeful that the activity being carried out and planned will have an impact. Internal progression data was explored further and the areas where the offer needed development were discussed. IW gave assurance that the team is turning around applications very quickly and getting offers out within a week. The committee thanked IW for his excellent report.</p> <p>UCR KPIs and Quality Improvement Plan 2019-20: In the absence of the Dean, MC took questions on the quality improvement plan report. It was noted that student satisfaction on learning resources and IT had not changed and the meeting discussed possible reasons for this, noting the difficulty accessing online journals earlier in the year. CG provided feedback on risk rating and suggested at this early stage it may be more prudent to retain amber rather than move to green. The meeting took assurance that the report evidenced good progress overall but there were some areas of red rating, particularly in relation to the likely impact of the staffing issues on student satisfaction.</p>
9.	<p>ITEMS FOR APPROVAL</p> <p>9.1 Higher Education Tuition Fees 2021-22: The proposed fees were presented for approval. The proposal was to keep fees at the current level. CG checked for assurance that comprehensive benchmarking had been completed and the relationship with the validating partner had been considered. IB confirmed that partner colleges set their own fees and MC confirmed benchmarking had been completed. It was noted that on benchmarking analysis, the foundation degree fee was increased last year, to commence in the 2020-21 year.</p> <p>9.2 RESOLVED: To recommend approval of the Higher Education Tuition Fees for 2021-22 unchanged from that agreed for 2020-21.</p>
10	<p>ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/ASSURANCE</p> <p>10.1 The following items were received for information and assurance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HE Student Complaints Monitoring Report • HE Academic Board meeting minutes • HE Quality and Curriculum Development Committee minutes • HE Learning, Teaching and Scholarship Committee minutes <p>10.2 Members appreciated sight of the HE Quality and Curriculum Development Committee and the HE Learning, Teaching and Scholarship Committee minutes and requested that if possible, in future, the Dean pull out the key themes from these meetings to include in his Dean's report. FF asked for and received clarification on the change to the academic calendar and received assurance that the move should be a positive one for student outcomes.</p>
11.	<p>MATTERS TO ESCALATE TO RISK REGISTER/REPORT</p> <p>The committee would report to the Board, highlighting the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval of the submission of the Access and Participation Plan Monitoring Report to the Office for Students. • Recommended approval by the Board of the Higher Education Tuition Fees for 2021-22 unchanged from that agreed for 2020-21.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key risks on HE recruitment for next year and actions in place discussed with more work to be carried out on the HE offer and business planning that will be considered by the Board and the Finance and General Purposes Committee. Staffing instability this year has impacted on quality improvement plan progress and student satisfaction in some areas, but staffing is now well placed to move forward positively with only a couple of positions to be filled. • The Office for Students' Annual Review evidences a 'comply or else' approach with a focus on the injudicious use of unconditional offers, grade inflation, securing better access to higher education and value for money.
12.	ANY OTHER BUSINESS
12.1	The meeting received the Higher Education Student Early Statistics Survey (HESES) return for information and assurance.
13.	DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS
	<p>The dates of the next meetings were confirmed as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thursday 30 April 2020 at 2pm – joint meeting with Q&S committee • Thursday 18 June 2020 at 2pm

The meeting closed at 4.30pm

Signed:

Dated: