



**REASEHEATH COLLEGE BOARD  
HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2024 at 1.30pm**

**Committee Room, Reaseheath Hall**

**Present:** Jane Artess (independent, co-opted)  
 Claire Blanchard (independent)  
 Prof Chris Gaskell (independent, Chair)  
 Prof Gary Crowe (independent)  
 Prof Paul Johnson (external, co-opted)  
 Marcus Clinton (principal)  
 Liz Watts (staff)

**Attending:** Jane Nickisson (dean)  
 Sarah Hopkinson (assistant dean)  
 Thomas Furness (academic registrar)  
 Jackie Schillinger (head of governance)

PART A unless stated

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<b>1.</b>	<b>Opening items</b>
1.1	There were no apologies for absence from committee members. The meeting was quorate and remained quorate throughout.
1.2	There were no declarations of interest received.
1.3	RESOLVED: In line with the board's decision, approval for the appointment of Francesca Cooper and Jane Artess to the committee and the confirmation of Jane Artess as chair of the committee for the spring and summer term meetings in the 2024-25 academic year.
1.4	RESOLVED: The minutes of meeting held on 21 June 2024 were approved as a correct record.
<b>2.</b>	<b>College Strategy – Engage: Provide a high quality, robust and responsive curriculum to meet the needs and interests of our students, employers, community, and national skills priorities, supporting people to develop transformational personal, social, and technical skills</b>
2.1	<p>UCR Self Evaluation Document 2023-24: The UCR self-evaluation report provided a review of 2023-24 provision and gave assurance on the quality of education and student outcomes for UCR higher education provision. It reported key strengths as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submission and Approval of new Access and Participation Plan (APP) 2025-2029</li> <li>• National Student Survey (NSS)24 Theme 4 Academic Support: 91.46% - 4ppt above UCR benchmark, 6ppt above UK average and 2nd in land-based competitor group</li> <li>• NSS24 Theme 7 Student Voice: 78.46% - 4.4ppt above UCR benchmark and UK average, 1st in land-based competitor group</li> <li>• Recruitment: small increase in student recruitment overall with markedly higher applications and enrolments in animal sciences and agriculture.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of Future Focus Strategy which will be launched during 2024-25 academic year</li> <li>• Significant undergraduate research activity across a range of disciplines supported by staff led scholarly activity.</li> </ul>
2.2	<p>Committee members asked questions on the performance report, resulting in the following points of clarity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment in animal sciences is good and like previous years, with the other core area of agriculture seeing early signs of progress. There is work to do on the future offer in sport and food to seek growth in these areas.</li> <li>• Reasons explored for the graduate outcomes data continuation and completion showing slightly above threshold but with a drop in BSc and foundation on previous year, with mental health and non-academic reasons seen as the most likely factor.</li> <li>• Reasons explored for achievement rates decline at the first sitting in some specific modules with improvements put in place where this was an issue.</li> <li>• Review of disengagement in reassessment opportunity, with a clear action to focus on this and to make the most of first sit opportunity. In addition, staff resource had been put in to support with the academic support coach, which had already seen the benefits of this resource on an individual level.</li> <li>• Improved completion rates</li> <li>• Achievement gap in relation to students with a learning disability so a key area of focus to reduce that gap.</li> <li>• Roll out of the future focus strategy should provide evidence to support progression data in relation to the Office for Students thresholds.</li> <li>• There are appropriate policies, processes, checks and balances in place in relation to UCR's sponsorship licence for international students. Whilst this is not a strategic priority for UCR, there is always some interest but less conversion of international students.</li> </ul>
2.3	<p>RESOLVED: The UCR Self-Evaluation Document 2023-24 provided a comprehensive overview of and substantial assurance on UCR educational performance and quality of provision.</p>
2.4	<p>UCR Quality Improvement Plan 2024-25: The UCR Quality Improvement Plan set out the priority areas for improvement, which would be monitored by the committee over the year, with reporting to the board on progress made against the priorities. The key areas for improvement linked to the college strategic priorities 2024 -27 were reported as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student recruitment: Increase student enrolments on HE programmes in 2025-26</li> <li>• Student outcomes: Improve or maintain outcomes for students above Office for Students thresholds and UCR benchmarks</li> <li>• Quality of Learning experience: Improve learning experience of all UCR students</li> <li>• Student Engagement: Increase student engagement in quality improvement and enhancement activities</li> <li>• Curriculum Development: Enhance curriculum offer to support year on year increases in student recruitment over the next three years.</li> </ul>
2.5	<p>Committee members questioned the quality improvement plan priorities and tested the proposed key performance indicators, resulting in the following clarified priorities and actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The key priorities are growth, closing achievement gaps and meeting the OfS student outcome thresholds.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On growth, the focus to be on progression of own students initially with several suggested ways to promote the offer using current HE students and taster days and with offering shorter programmes such as a higher education certificate that you can then progress from. Clear targeted marketing and promotion work. Some bursaries and incentives for internally progressing students.</li> <li>KPI modelling of growth targets based on the existing data and a built in attrition rate. The committee recommended UCR be ambitious but not unrealistic and requested a consideration of the financial model for the curriculum plan at the next meeting.</li> <li>The KPI on continuation was challenged as being potentially too ambitious. It was agreed to amend the KPI slightly and report this back to the next meeting.</li> <li>Assurance gained on strong focus on teaching quality improvement, including fellowship of the academy with all having a personal continuing professional development plan (CPD).</li> </ul>
2.6	RESOLVED: The committee approved the quality improvement plan as a credible plan and supported the link to the multi-year overall college strategy, with the committee receiving a progress report on the plan at the committee meeting in March 2025.
2.7	RESOLVED: The student complaints report was received for substantial assurance on management and resolution of concerns at an informal stage resulting in few formal complaints, with all processes followed and a 'lessons learned' process in place.
2.8	The dean presented her report including government regulation and policy (secretary of state for education update; lifelong learning entitlement (LLE); and office for students) and the UCR student recruitment and curriculum plan (current enrolment position and proposed higher education curriculum plan 2024-2029).
2.9	<p>Committee members considered the proposed plan and strategic policy environment and made the following recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pickup conversations outside the meeting with Chester colleagues to work on taking the plan forwards looked at holistically and working in partnership, including on several opportunities such as collaboration on adult skills training and continuation of prosperity funding.</li> <li>Revisit terms and conditions and access and participation plan in relation to maximum cap increases when possible.</li> </ul>
2.10	RESOLVED: The committee takes substantial assurance from reporting in the meeting that Strategic Risk 3: Quality of provision and student outcomes remains well managed within risk appetite of Cautious: We are willing to accept modest and largely controllable levels of risk to achieve acceptable key outcomes and benefits.
<b>3.</b>	<b>Items for approval/assurance</b>
3.1	RESOLVED: In line with the board's decision, the committee supported the increase to the UCR Higher Education Tuition Fees by £285 per year to £9535 in line with the maximum fee cap, for all new students from 2025-26 academic year.
3.2	<p>RESOLVED: the following items were received for information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>UCR Academic Board Minutes 27 November 2024</li> <li>Access and Participation Plan Approval Letter</li> </ul>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Governance</b>
4.1	RESOLVED: With the addition on the cycle of business for March 2025 of the KPI reporting in the Dean's Report, the committee considered its terms of reference responsibilities were covered in the year's business cycle.

5.	Closing items
5.1	Under any other business the dean reported that the OfS familiarisation visit would be taking place on 18 March 2025 and that Tom Furness was moving on from the college to a new opportunity. Committee members thanked Tom for all his work in supporting the committee and wished him well for the future. Members were pleased to note that the role had been recruited to with a new member of staff starting in January.
5.2	The dates of next meetings were confirmed as 27 February 2025 (joint meeting with quality and standards committee on special educational needs outcomes theme) and 14 March 2025 (committee meeting).

The meeting closed at 3.25pm

Approved as a correct record 14 March 2025

Chair