UWE Bristol | University of the West of England

Board of Governors

ACADEMIC BOARD

Minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2023 in Room 2E25 on Frenchay Campus.

Present:	Amanda Coffey (Chair), Yvonne Beach, Georgie Benford, Hilary Drew, Adele Drew-Hill, Georgina Gough, Marc Griffiths, Elena Marco, Harrison Marcks, Jo Michell, Cathy Minett-Smith, Oluwadamilola Okeyoyin, Kolawole Samuel Olure, Vlasios Sarantinos, Kos Siliafis, Jim Smith, Logan Smith, Nicola Temple, Emma Weitkamp
Apologies:	Kevin Golden, John Griffiths, Katie Jenkins, James Macdonald, Jo Midgley, Richard Strange, Steven West, Dan Wood
In attendance:	Jodie Anstee, Rachel Cowie, Chris Gledhill, Heather Moyes (Secretary), Aman Hart (item 2), Callum Reilly (Officer)
Observers:	Jamie Paddon and Andrea Young (Board of Governors)

AB.23.10.1	**WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**
AB.23.10.1.1	The Chair welcomed the meeting and members introduced themselves; apologies were noted.
AB.23.10.1.2	No declarations of interest were received.
AB.23.10.2	**WORKSHOP/DEEP-DIVE**
AB.23.10.2.1	**Consumer rights and higher education providers** *Paper AB.23.10.01 was received.*
AB.23.10.2.1.1	The General Counsel and the Academic Registrar gave a presentation on consumer protection law for higher education, outlining the revised Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) guidance for higher education providers, which was published in May 2023.

AB.23.10.2.1.2   Members heard that:

1. The guidance draws from recent developments including industrial action and the pandemic, with group action cases now beginning to open in the sector. The OfS has also established an agreement with Trading Standards, which could allow any potential breach to be investigated by local Trading Standards teams.
2. Under the updated guidance, all students are now clearly in scope and not just undergraduates as was previously the case. As such, it covers all those studying towards a UWE qualification (including those at partner providers in the UK or overseas).
3. The new guidance includes specific considerations for students deferring, third-party provision and limitations of liability. Regarding the latter, it is now less likely that the impact of industrial action would be considered beyond universities' control.
4. The guidance also stipulates that more detail should be provided about course composition and that sanctions related to non-academic debt (e.g. library fees) are likely to be unfair. Providers are discouraged from requiring students to re-sign terms and conditions every year.
5. At UWE, there has been an increase in the number of complaints relating to consumer protection. Key risks are changes to option modules, modes of delivery and late changes to programmes. A key challenge is balancing the continuous improvement approach, which requires change to innovate, against CMA compliance.

AB.23.10.2.1.3   After a brief workshop in small groups, members in wider discussion commented that:

1. There is a need to establish what information students need to make informed decisions about their course. Work is in place to review the guidance provided to academic staff; academic staff are being encouraged to work with their Senior Quality Adviser on the information provided.
2. Caution should be exercised over changes to academic regulations and ensuring these are clearly communicated to students. However, it was noted that this would be unlikely to constitute material information that would fall within the scope of the CMA guidance.

	3. CMA compliance should be considered as a part of the policy development cycle.
AB.23.10.2.1.4	Members were invited to send further observations and comments about the CMA guidance to the Academic Registrar.

AB.23.10.3   ACADEMIC BOARD BUSINESS

AB.23.10.3.1   Academic Board terms of reference and membership 2023/24
Paper AB.23.10.02 was received.

AB.23.10.3.1.1   Members noted the terms of reference and membership.

AB.23.10.3.1.2   A proposal to increase the number of student representatives on Academic Board was presented by The Students' Union. It was noted that joint work on supporting student representation is in development; the matter would be taken to the next UWE/SU Partnership Board meeting.
ACTION: To discuss the appropriateness of the number of students represented on Academic Board at the next meeting of the UWE/SU Partnership Board (**Chair, SU President**).

AB.23.10.3.1.3   In discussion, members noted difficulties filling existing student representative vacancies and that enhancing the student voice is not necessarily best achieved by increasing the number of students represented on Academic Board and its committees.

AB.23.10.3.2   Academic Board business plan 2023/24
Paper AB.23.10.03 was received.

AB.23.10.3.2.1   The Secretary introduced the indicative business plan, including suggested deep-dive topics aligned to major developments within UWE and the sector more widely; the schedule of other routine business remains largely unchanged. Members endorsed the plan.

AB.23.10.3.3   Sub-committee terms of reference
Paper AB.23.10.04 was received.

AB.23.10.3.3.1   Members noted the terms of reference for standing committees of Academic Board; it was further noted that revised terms of reference had been received for the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee, which had already been approved by Academic Board at the previous meeting.

AB.23.10.3.4   Sub-committee business plans and priorities

Paper AB.23.10.05 was received.

AB.23.10.3.4.1   The Secretary introduced the indicative annual business plans and priorities for Academic Board's standing committees. Members were assured that the priorities were appropriate and approved the plans.

AB.23.10.3.5   Academic Governance Assurance Report
Paper AB.23.10.06 was received.

AB.23.10.3.5.1   The Secretary introduced the report, noting that the new format now includes a RAG rating across three key areas of Academic Board's performance. The report is part of assurance to the Board of Governors on meeting the OfS conditions of registration.

AB.23.10.3.5.2   It was noted that the report has been informed by a self-effectiveness survey of members conducted over the summer. Academic Board's operation and constitution and the effectiveness of its oversight of academic governance were rated as green; student representation was rated as amber, reflecting feedback regarding the confidence of students contributing to meetings and feeling supported to participate fully as members.

AB.23.10.3.5.3   In discussion, it was noted that support for student representatives was already being considered as part of the University's and the SU's joint work on student representation.

AB.23.10.3.5.4   Members endorsed the report for submission to the People, Culture, Quality and Standards Committee.

AB.23.10.3.6   Academic governance structure update
Paper AB.23.10.07 was received.

AB.23.10.3.6.1   The Officer gave an update on the implementation of the new academic governance structure, which was approved by Academic Board in July 2022.

AB.23.10.3.6.2   Members heard that:

1. The structure was developed to align with the new College- and School-based University structure, and to devolve responsibility to Colleges and Schools where relevant and appropriate.
2. As College and School structures are now defined, and with most leadership roles appointed, the transition to the new structure is nearly complete. This includes the

establishment of the School Boards of Studies, which began to meet in September 2023.

3. The remaining elements still to be implemented are within the research strand of academic governance, including the College Research Knowledge Exchange Committees and their sub-committees. Approval for further changes to the terms of reference would be sought via Chair's action where appropriate to ensure academic governance arrangements remain effective.

AB.23.10.3.7   **Academic governance by-election results**
Paper AB.23.10.08 was received.

AB.23.10.3.7.1   Members noted the results and congratulated the new elected members.

AB.23.10.4   **MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

AB.23.10.4.1   **Previous minutes**
Paper AB.23.10.09 was received.

AB.23.10.4.1.1   Members approved the minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2023, subject to a clarification that some student representatives present disagreed with the proposal to reduce the five-day late submission window.
ACTION: To amend the minutes to accordingly (**Officer**).

AB.23.10.4.2   **Action sheet and matters arising**
Paper AB.23.10.10 was received.

AB.23.10.4.2.1   Members noted the action sheet for information.

AB.23.10.4.3   **Chair's actions**
Paper AB.23.10.11 was received.

AB.23.10.4.3.1   Members noted the Chair's actions taken since the last meeting and wished to congratulate the Emeritus Professors appointed.

AB.23.10.5   **STANDING AGENDA ITEMS**

AB.23.10.5.1   **Vice-Chancellor's report**
Paper AB.23.10.12 was received.

AB.23.10.5.1.1   Members noted the report for information.

AB.23.10.5.2   **The Students' Union report**
Paper AB.23.10.13 was received.

AB.23.10.5.2.1	The SU President introduced the report noting that:

1. A by-election would be held in October to elect remaining part-time officer positions. A separate deadline of 26 October has been set for the election of student representatives.
2. The SU has identified ongoing accommodation issues, with some new students still arriving at the University without accommodation in place, affecting international students particularly.
3. Work is taking place within the SU and in partnership with UWE to build on current progress in addressing the NSS result on the effectiveness of the SU.
4. Recent highlights of SU activity include delivering Freshers' Fairs, producing pronoun badges, work to mitigate the cost of living, and lobbying trade unions and university leadership to resolve the industrial dispute.

AB.23.10.5.2.2	Members were asked whether they would approve a proposal for SU senior staff to attend meetings for which student representatives and SU elected officers are members in order to support their work. It was agreed that this would be considered as part of the wider joint work on student representation already in development. It was further noted that recruitment timelines were a challenge to student representation and would also be reviewed. **ACTION:** To consider the issue of SU staff attendance at meetings and recruitment timings into the wider joint work on student representation (**SU President, Academic Registrar**).

AB.23.10.5.2.3	Members were also asked how the University would mitigate the impact of any future industrial action, including marking and assessment boycotts. It was confirmed that Student and Academic Services have ensured assessment timelines are in place; specialist markers have been retained so marking can be delivered promptly. Further work has been carried out to identify where action is likely to have the greatest impact and mitigate accordingly.

AB.23.10.6	**ITEMS FOR APPROVAL OR ENDORSEMENT**

AB.23.10.6.1	**Casework Annual Report 2022/23**
	Paper AB.23.10.15 was received.

AB.23.10.6.1.1	The Academic Registrar introduced the paper, highlighting that:

1. The report has previously been endorsed by the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee (LTSEC) after detailed consideration.
2. There has been an increase in student complaints, but this was largely anticipated due to the industrial action that took place over the year.
3. An increase in reports of harassment and sexual misconduct may indicate that work to encourage students to report incidents has been effective.
4. Despite an increased number of referrals to the Student Casework team under the Behaviour and Health Framework, fewer referrals developed into formal cases, reflecting work to support early intervention.
5. The Student Casework team's priorities for 2023/24 include a review of the Behaviour and Health Framework, implementation of a new casework management system and embedding the risk assessment approach.

AB.23.10.6.1.2   Members welcomed the report and commented that due to the complexity of some cases (especially Professional Suitability Policy referrals), holistic support must be available for students in professional environments.

AB.23.10.6.1.3   Concerning the increase in wellbeing cases being attributed to improved reporting mechanisms and early intervention, it was acknowledged that some of the increase may reflect a genuine increase in mental health issues, particularly those associated with the pandemic. However, the University has undertaken work to encourage better signposting to services from academic colleagues and to encourage students to engage with services early.

AB.23.10.6.1.4   Further clarity was sought on the number of student wellbeing cases compared with wellbeing data for the general population of the same age.
ACTION: To source comparable data on wellbeing for the general population and share with Academic Board (**Academic Registrar**).

AB.23.10.6.1.5   Members endorsed the report for submission to the People, Culture, Quality and Standards Committee.

AB.23.10.6.2   **Policy Governance Framework: implementation report**
Paper AB.23.10.16 was received.

| AB.23.10.6.2.1 | The Academic Registrar introduced the report, noting that: |

1. The Policy Governance Framework was introduced to support Academic Board's oversight of policies within its remit, including those delegated to LTSEC and the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC).
2. The report confirms that the Policy Governance Framework has been successfully implemented and is now incorporated as business as usual. Development work will be taken forward through the Academic Governance team and the Community of Good Governance Practice to grow capability further.

| AB.23.10.6.2.2 | Members endorsed the report. In discussion, members noted that while there was no specific advice on appropriate metrics for the success of policies, the framework advises that evaluation should be considered as part of the policy development cycle. |

AB.23.10.6.3   **External assessor attendance at Award Boards**
Paper AB.23.10.17 was received.

| AB.23.10.6.3.1 | The Academic Registrar introduced a proposal to invite external assessors to attend Award Boards for apprenticeships (as a delivery requirement). Members approved the proposal. **ACTION:** To update and publish the amended Award Boards membership list in the relevant Exam Board Code of Practice (**Academic Registrar**). |

AB.23.10.6.4   **Tianfu College affiliation**
Paper AB.23.10.18 was received.

| AB.23.10.6.4.1 | The Academic Registrar introduced a proposal for Tianfu College of Southwestern University of Finance and Economics to become an affiliated institution of UWE Bristol. This was the recommendation of a Special University Validation Panel meeting, subject to one condition that has since been met. Members were satisfied that appropriate due diligence had been followed throughout the process and approved the proposal. |

AB.23.10.6.5   **Emeritus Professor appointment process**
Paper AB.23.10.19 was received.

| AB.23.10.6.5.1 | The Chair introduced a proposed change of process to ensure timeliness and consistency in the processing of Emeritus/Emerita Professor applications. Applications are to be approved by the Chair of Academic Board, which would be reported at each |

meeting as with other Chair's actions, and audited by a member at the end of the academic year. Members approved the proposal.

AB.23.10.7	**ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

AB.23.10.7.1	**Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023 panel statement** *Paper AB.23.10.20 was received.*

AB.23.10.7.1.1   The Chair introduced the paper and reminded members that it should be treated as an internal-only document and not reproduced or quoted from publicly; a more concise publicly shareable report would be circulated more widely when available.

AB.23.10.7.1.2   In discussion, members noted that, subject to conditions, the rating will last for four years (until the next TEF exercise). Members were reminded that the underlying data for TEF 2023 is retrospective. OfS will publish updated metrics dashboards annually.
ACTION: Academic Board to retain oversight of TEF benchmarking through LTSEC (**Secretary/Officer**).

AB.23.10.7.2	**Student survey results 2022/23** *Paper AB.23.10.21 was received.*

AB.23.10.7.2.1   The Academic Registrar summarised results of the National Student Survey (NSS), Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), noting that:

1. The NSS overall satisfaction question was removed from the survey in 2022/23; a question on the quality of teaching on the course has therefore been adopted as a proxy KPI. Though the score for this question has improved since 2021/22, the sector has made significantly more progress and UWE is ranked lower as a result. The paper shows the relative impact of particular programmes (either positively or negatively) on the overall institutional score; it was noted that there were some pockets of exceptionally strong performance over 95%.
2. The PTES KPI has dropped slightly to 84% but remains above the sector; UWE is ranked 42 out of 101, scoring particularly high for resources. The response rate of 32% was relatively low.
3. In the PRES, overall satisfaction dropped to 74% (down 4% on 2019/20) and UWE is below the sector average.

Research culture scored particularly poorly, though resources remained an institutional strength.

AB.23.10.7.2.2   In discussion, members commented that:

1. There is a need for greater focus on developing the postgraduate research experience. The Doctoral Academy will be working closely with the Colleges on ensuring PGR students feel they are a part of the University's research culture.
2. The low response rate for the PTES may have been due to the survey overlapping with the postgraduate NSS pilot.
3. Actions to address issues emerging from the NSS ought to be analysed thematically, structured carefully and prioritised appropriately at School level.

AB.23.10.8   ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

AB.23.10.8.1   Quality thresholds for student outcomes (B3 conditions)
Paper AB.23.10.22 was received.

AB.23.10.8.1.1   The Academic Registrar introduced the paper, noting that:

1. The Planning and Business Intelligence team has conducted an analysis of programmes and subjects at risk of not meeting the minimum quality thresholds for student outcomes (OfS condition of registration B3), as well as highlighting those in need of review.
2. The OfS has the power to investigate or sanction universities that fail to meet minimum thresholds for student outcomes; it was noted that OfS will have access only to institutional and subject level data, and not programme-level data.
3. Areas identified as being at risk are mostly due to legacy issues that have since been addressed, though these would potentially be captured in the data accessible to the OfS; there is ongoing work to monitor areas in need of review, especially regarding completion and graduate outcomes.

ACTION: To bring regular updates on at-risk and for-review areas in relation to minimum quality thresholds to Academic Board (**Secretary/Officer**).

AB.23.10.8.1.2   In discussion, it was noted that while meeting the minimum thresholds was important, the University should continue to deliver

its continuous improvement ethos, going above and beyond the minimum. It was further noted that targeted support for improvement should be considered, ensuring a focus on key programmes where the biggest institutional impact can be made.

AB.23.10.8.2   **Access and Participation Plan (APP)**
Paper AB.23.10.23 was received.

AB.23.10.8.2.1   Members noted the finalised APP, which is a requirement of the OfS. The plan was submitted in July 2023 in a new format as part of an OfS pilot, including specific intervention targets and associated costings. Oversight of the plan is delegated to LTSEC, which has been closely consulted throughout its development.

AB.23.10.9   **SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTING**

AB.23.10.9.1   **Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee**
Paper AB.23.10.24 was received.

AB.23.10.9.1.1   Members noted the summary report of the 7 June and 20 September meetings and approved a proposal to include the Director of Student Life within the membership following reorganisation of professional services for student experience.
ACTION: To update LTSEC's terms of reference to include the Director of Student Life (**Officer**).

AB.23.10.9.2   **Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee**
Paper AB.23.10.25 was received.

AB.23.10.9.2.1   Members noted the summary report of the 27 September meeting and requested that the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) results be shared with Academic Board.
ACTION: To share KEF results at the next meeting of Academic Board (**Officer**).

AB.23.10.9.3   **Strategic Academic Portfolio Group**
Paper AB.23.10.26 was received.

AB.23.10.9.3.1   Members noted the summary report of the 26 September meeting.

AB.23.10.9.4   **University Ethics and Integrity Committee**
Paper AB.23.10.27 was received.

AB.23.10.9.4.1   Members noted the summary report of the 26 September meeting.

AB.23.10.10   **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

AB.23.10.10.1   **Academic Board papers**

| AB.23.10.10.1.1 | Members requested that papers for future meetings be linked from the agenda (a boardpack would nevertheless still be made available). |
| | **ACTION:** To provide direct links to papers from future Academic Board agendas (**Officer**). |

| **AB.23.10.11** | **DATE(S) OF NEXT MEETING(S)** |

| AB.23.10.11.1 | Next meeting dates for academic year 2023/24: |

- 6 December 2023
- 13 March 2024
- 1 May 2024
- 3 July 2024
- 9 July 2024 (joint session with the Board of Governors)