



Board of Governors

## ACADEMIC BOARD

Minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2024 in EP1, Frenchay Campus.

**Present:** Steve West (Chair), Georgie Benford, Amanda Coffey, Adele Drew-Hill, Kevin Golden, Georgina Gough (until item 4.1), John Griffiths, Marc Griffiths, Bernhard Gross, John Hancock, Sabiha Khan, Jessica Lamond, James Macdonald, Harry Marcks, Elena Marco, Jo Midgley, Cathy Minett-Smith, Oluwadamilola Okeyoyin, Kolawole Samuel Olure, Kezia Paul, Vlasios Sarantinos, Kos Siliafis, Jim Smith, Nicola Temple, Emma Weitkamp, Dan Wood

**Apologies:** Yvonne Beach, Wendy Colvin, Hilary Lowe, Jo Michell

**In attendance:** Jodie Anstee, Rachel Cowie, Chris Evans (until item 4.1), Caitlin Flint (until item 4.1), Chris Gledhill, Heather Moyes (Secretary), Callum Reilly (Officer), Richard Strange

### AB.24.03.1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

AB.24.03.1.1 Members were welcomed to the meeting and apologies were noted.

AB.24.03.1.2 No declarations of interest were received.

### AB.24.03.2 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

**AB.24.03.2.1 Previous minutes**  
*Paper AB.24.03.01 was received.*

AB.24.03.2.1.1 Members approved the minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2023.

**AB.24.03.2.2 Action sheet and matters arising**  
*Paper AB.24.03.02 was received.*

AB.24.03.2.2.1

Action AB.23.12.4.1.2 (student communications on assessment engagement)

The Deputy Registrar gave a verbal update noting that:

1. The Deputy Director of Planning and Business Intelligence (PBI) is working to analyse resits data, which currently indicates that in 2022/23 a greater proportion of students took resits compared with before the pandemic.
2. There are signs of positive progress on awarding gaps, but further analysis is needed to identify the impact of the student communications campaign to increase engagement with assessments, as well as to examine the proportion of students taking resits who attempted a first sit.

**AB.24.03.2.3**

**Chair's actions**

*Papers AB.24.03.03–07 were received.*

AB.24.03.2.3.1

Members noted the approval of the following items under Chair's action:

1. Revised University Validation Panel terms of reference
2. Updates to the Academic Regulations on compensation
3. Designation of Hainan Medical University as an affiliated institution
4. Academic calendar for 2024/25 to 2027/28
5. Change to the Postgraduate Degree Classification Algorithm.

AB.24.03.2.3.2

In discussion, members commented on the need for further work on the Postgraduate Degree Classification Algorithm, including ongoing monitoring of the equality impact and staff readiness for the systems changes required.

AB.24.03.2.3.3

Members noted that:

1. The work required to implement the new algorithm has already been planned in; staff in Student Data and Systems and in IT Services are prepared for implementation in 2024/25.
2. The equality analysis indicates that Black and Asian students would be slightly more affected by the change, which would bring overall average marks down by 3.
3. Since the equality analysis is based on student performance under the existing algorithm, it cannot model the impact of behaviour change resulting from student awareness of the

new algorithm, nor the impact of applying borderline uplifts; real-world impact is therefore more difficult to determine. The equality analysis would therefore be kept under review with real data once the algorithm is implemented; Examining Boards would also provide a monitoring point.

**[ACTION: Deputy Registrar to consider running old and new versions of the algorithm concurrently to better assess the equality impact of the change]**

4. There is a need to ensure the algorithm is in line with sector practice, which the current algorithm is not. While there is further progress to be made in closing awarding gaps, the algorithm is not an appropriate tool to address these. Meaningful progress can be better made through enhanced student support and embedding inclusive assessment, work on which is underway through UWE Programmes.
5. The practice of allowing students to arrive up to four weeks into the first teaching block does not set them up for success. It is therefore even more important that these students are well supported if all module credits are to count towards the final degree classification.

**[ACTION: To consider risk to the student experience and mitigating actions to support students arriving up to 4 weeks into the first teaching block]**

**AB.24.03.3 STANDING AGENDA ITEMS**

**AB.24.03.3.1 Vice-Chancellor's report**

*Paper AB.24.03.08 was received.*

AB.24.03.3.1.1 In addition to the report, members noted an update from the Chair on the nomination of two Academic Board representatives to serve on the Board of Governors, since the current role holders are due to stand down. The Board of Governors continues to value the input of Academic Board's representatives.

AB.24.03.3.1.2 The Pro Vice-Chancellor Head of College (CATE) is proposed as the next nominee from the Vice-Chancellor's Executive. The position of elected staff representative of Academic Board on the Board of Governors would be determined via expressions of interest from those eligible. Nominations accepted by Academic Board would nevertheless need to be approved by the Board of Governors.

**[ACTION: Elected members (UWE staff only) interested in serving as the Academic Board nominee on the Board of Governors to express their interest to the Chair]**

The Chair gave a verbal update noting:

AB.24.03.3.1.3

1. The passing of Professor Martin Boddy, a memorial for whom is scheduled and expected to be well attended by University representatives; a digital condolence book has also been created. Members noted his significant accomplishments within and beyond the University.
2. The University Alliance (of which UWE Bristol is a member) and Universities UK are engaging with the Government to minimise the impact of future policy developments (including a potential cap on international intake). Existing policies are already having a significant impact on the ability of UK universities to attract international students.
3. The international market is also affected by geopolitical developments, as well as new markets for international students opening up elsewhere. Research-intensive universities are beginning to turn their attention towards markets that universities such as UWE Bristol would typically be part of.
4. There is a need to balance cost certainty against long-term investment in the context of the University's current position.

AB.24.03.3.1.4

Members noted that the student experience will continue to be considered a priority; justifiable opportunities to support programme growth would be considered in detail on a case-by-case basis and would not be outright declined. Simultaneously, there is a continued need to address areas in which student numbers are declining.

**AB.24.03.3.2**

**The Students' Union report**

*Paper AB.24.03.09 was received.*

AB.24.03.3.2.1

The Students' Union President introduced the paper, highlighting:

1. A strong leadership contest, ending in the re-election of the SU President and the VP Education.
2. Questions raised through the SU Advice Centre regarding international students coming to the UK to study at the University without having accommodation arranged. The SU is working with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Registrar on addressing this issue.

3. A related issue regarding the use of third-party guarantors for student accommodation, which some accommodation providers do not accept and instead require students to pay rent upfront.

AB.24.03.3.2.2

Members noted that:

1. While the Student Money Service can offer advice to students on renting accommodation, the University is not able to act as a guarantor. The University and the SU must work together on student support, communications and advice, particularly to ensure that international students do not travel to the UK without accommodation in place.
2. Planning for new third-party accommodation blocks is underway; if approved, this would relieve some of the demand for student accommodation within the region. The accommodation stock is expected to recover beginning in 2026/27.

AB.24.03.3.2.3

It was requested that future reports from The Students' Union consider the experiences of a wider range of students, beyond international students.

**[ACTION: The SU President to consider how to engage Academic Board on issues affecting broader groups of students in the SU's reports]**

AB.24.03.3.2.4

A separate issue was raised concerning the reinstatement of Blackboard access for students whose access is temporarily revoked due to non-payment of fees without having an agreed repayment plan.

AB.24.03.3.2.5

Members noted that Blackboard access can be reinstated quickly, but that it was more difficult to address cases where students were unable to submit assessments by the deadline due to not having access. Such students are therefore advised to contact their module leader at the earliest opportunity and to continue otherwise engaging in their studies.

AB.24.03.3.2.6

It was further noted that some delays in reinstating access may relate to the process of agreeing repayment plans with Credit Control. While Credit Control is able to negotiate, and each repayment plan is tailored to the student, they are not able to agree to a repayment plan that is not deliverable. The reasons for

the delay in reinstating Blackboard therefore need further investigation.

**[ACTION: The SU President to forward to the Deputy Registrar a list of cases involving students missing submission points due to Blackboard access being removed]**

### **AB.24.03.3.3**

#### **Strategy 2030: Corporate Scorecard update**

*Paper AB.24.03.10 was received.*

#### **AB.24.03.3.3.1**

The Deputy Director of Planning and Business Intelligence (PBI) gave a presentation on the latest corporate scorecard, highlighting that:

1. The Strategy 2030 scorecard has been significantly streamlined from the 2020 iteration, focusing on the 12 KPIs that relate most closely to the current strategy, with agreed targets for each. The scorecard is updated regularly throughout the year, though the bulk of the data is released at the end of the academic year.
2. The awarding gap for white/Black good honours rates has seen a 4 percentage point reduction from 2021/22 to 2022/23.
3. Clearing exposure is currently flat at 8% but remains on track to meet the 2030 target.
4. The overall trend in non-continuation rates shows a slight increase. The University is currently above the OfS benchmark, but its future position will depend on how far the OfS adjusts this to reflect current sector performance, and on the impact of the OfS revised methodology for determining non-continuation.
5. Non-completion is a new metric for the sector, based on the long-term status of students, including whether they have completed after four years. UWE's non-completion rate has increased slightly and is below the OfS benchmark.
6. Other metrics relevant to Academic Board include NSS (overall teaching quality), which though UWE has seen a reduced ranking is still on track, and research income, which remains broadly flat with a significant gap to target.
7. Portfolio scorecards have been introduced to capture value-added metrics relating to Purpose, Place and organisational health, along with a School scorecard, which presents School-level metrics based on the main 12 KPIs.

AB.24.03.3.3.2 In discussion, members commented that the automatic awarding of CertHEs for all students who withdraw after completing 120 credits would contribute positively to reducing non-completion rates.

AB.24.03.3.3.3 It was noted that the corporate scorecard would be further reviewed in terms of the appropriateness of its targets, in light of the University's current position.

#### **AB.24.03.4 ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

##### **AB.24.03.4.1 Governance external review** *Paper AB.24.03.11 was received.*

AB.24.03.4.1.1 The Clerk to the Board of Governors introduced the paper, thanking those members who contributed to the academic governance benchmarking survey in late 2023.

AB.24.03.4.1.2 It was noted that:

1. Since a wider external review of both corporate and academic governance was already scheduled to take place in 2024, there is an opportunity for this to be informed by the benchmarking results.
2. The benchmarking results have highlighted several areas to take forward, including practices to support inclusive governance, recruitment and induction, academic risks and complexities within the structure.
3. Academic Board would be engaged in the review as it develops over the next term.

#### **AB.24.03.5 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

##### **AB.24.03.5.1 External examining principles mapping** *Paper AB.24.03.12 was received.*

AB.24.03.5.1.1 The Academic Registrar introduced the paper, highlighting that:

1. The paper assesses UWE compliance against the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment and Quality (UKSCQA) Assurance Agency (QAA) principles on external examining, based on the most recent reporting cycle for 2022/23. Each theme has been RAG-rated, with green across most areas indicating that the University is well aligned with the principles.

2. There are nevertheless areas in which alignment could be strengthened, with some deficits in relation to School responses to external examiner reports. Though there are reasons for this (including late receipt of external examiner reports), some remedial work is needed.
3. Some areas are not yet monitored, including external examiner participation in calibration activities. These will be addressed in the next cycle.
4. Work with IT Services on systems and process improvements to support pre- and post-assessment scrutiny is currently underway.
5. As part of the enhancement work, relevant teams will draw from good practice identified by UWE staff who are external examiners elsewhere.
6. The School Boards of Studies are a key assurance mechanism for the University's approach and will report on this to the University Quality and Standards Sub-Committee (UQSSC), which oversees external examining at this level, at the next opportunity.

AB.24.03.5.1.2

In discussion, members noted that:

1. There is a need to identify the cause of late external examiner responses and to rectify this in order to close the loops relating to feedback expressing limited or no confidence.

**[ACTION: UQSSC to review external examiner principles mapping to ensure areas of limited/no external examiner confidence are addressed]**

2. It is anticipated that some of the issues raised by external examiners would be addressed by a recent clarification on module data requirements for Examining Boards, for which external examiners are still required to attend.

**AB.24.03.5.2**

**Honorary Degrees Committee report**

*Paper AB.24.03.13 was received.*

AB.24.03.5.2.1

Members noted the paper for information.

**AB.24.03.5.3**

**Assessment offences**

*Paper AB.24.03.14 was received.*

AB.24.03.5.3.1

Members noted the paper for information.



**AB.24.03.5.4 Knowledge Exchange Framework 2023 results**

*Paper AB.24.03.15 was received.*

AB.24.03.5.4.1 Members noted the paper for information.

**AB.24.03.6 SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTING**

**AB.24.03.6.1 Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee**

*Paper AB.24.03.16 was received.*

AB.24.03.6.1.1 Members noted the paper for information.

**AB.24.03.6.2 Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee**

*Paper AB.24.03.17 was received.*

AB.24.03.6.2.1 Members noted the paper for information.

**AB.24.03.6.3 Strategic Academic Portfolio Group**

*Paper AB.24.03.18 was received.*

AB.24.03.6.3.1 Members noted the paper for information.

**AB.24.03.6.4 University Ethics and Integrity Committee**

*Paper AB.24.03.19 was received.*

AB.24.03.6.4.1 The Chair of the University Ethics and Integrity Committee (UEIC) introduced the paper noting that two issues have been escalated from the Animal Welfare and Ethics Sub-Committee at the previous UEIC meeting on 5 March 2024. Both issues concerned student projects, one of which will be investigated on health and safety grounds; the other was resolved but has raised a wider issue with partnership contracting, which is being addressed by the General Counsel.

**AB.24.03.7 DEEP DIVE**

**AB.24.03.7.1 Athena SWAN action plan**

*Paper AB.24.03.20 was received.*

AB.24.03.7.1.1 The Athena Swan Co-Chair presented the paper, highlighting that:

1. The Athena SWAN award is presented in recognition of positive institutional culture change to support gender equality. UWE Bristol was awarded silver in the most recent round of the award, representing a significant achievement and is one of only two University Alliance members to have this distinction.

2. Institutional-level impacts include the inclusive resourcing toolkit, the academic promotion scheme, and Trans and Non-binary allyship, as well as data from the staff survey demonstrating an increase in the proportion of staff who feel they are treated fairly regardless of gender.
3. The action plan, which accompanied the Athena SWAN submission, addresses a range of themes; while the themes are not necessarily student-focused, student aspects can be addressed at School level. Future action plans are expected to bring together gender-based research and other projects across the University, as well as building actions for which impact can be evidenced.
4. Academic Board and senior staff are asked to support how strategies can contribute towards or refer to the Athena SWAN action plan. Staff within the Schools are also invited to join the Athena SWAN Collaborative Group.

AB.24.03.7.1.2                      Members welcomed the presentation and congratulated the team on the award achieved and on the clear action plan.

**AB.24.03.8                      ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

AB.24.03.8.1                      Members welcomed the announcement that the University has been awarded University Mental Health Charter status, becoming the first university to receive a merit and with 14 of 16 categories identified as excellent practice.

AB.24.03.8.2                      Members also noted positive developments in other areas of the University, including positive results in the Sustainability Institution of the Year award and uniform swap shops in CHSS.

**AB.24.03.9                      DATE(S) OF NEXT MEETING(S)**

AB.24.03.9.1                      Next meeting dates for academic year 2023/24:

- 15 May 2024
- 3 July 2024
- 9 July 2024 (joint strategic session with the Board of Governors)