



Board of Governors

## ACADEMIC BOARD

Minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2024 in Room 2Q50 on Frenchay Campus.

**Present:** Jo Midgley (Chair), Sasirindu Bandara, Gracie Bell, Georgie Benford, Peter Clegg, Bernhard Gross, John Hancock, Khadiza Hossein, James Lee, Phil Legg, James Macdonald, Elena Marco, Jo Michell, Cathy Minett-Smith, Kolawole Samuel Olure, Marcus Pugh, Andrew Simpson, Jackie Rogers, Alex Tanyi Nkeng, Sarah Voss, Jenni Wilkinson

**Apologies:** Steve West, Yvonne Beach, Jason Briddon, Amanda Coffey, Wendy Colvin, Gareth Edwards, Georgina Gough, Katie Jenkins, Vlasios Sarantinos, Nicola Temple, Dan Wood

**In attendance:** Jodie Anstee, Rachel Cowie, Chris Gledhill, Heather Moyes (Secretary), Ros Rouse (item 6.2), Ian Stratton (item 7.2), David Young (Officer)

**Observers:** Margaret Simmons-Bird from the Board of Governors.

### AB.24.12.1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

AB.24.12.1.1 The Chair welcomed members, particularly the lay member of the Board of Governors attending in an observational capacity, and the three newly recruited Lead School Representatives. Apologies were noted.

AB.24.12.1.2 The Chair informed the Board that, in the absence of the regular Deputy Chair, they have been nominated to the position by the Vice-Chancellor.

AB.24.12.1.3 The Chair explained to members the importance of declaring conflicts of interest. Any member with a substantive interest in the outcome of any agenda item must declare it. This stipulation is not at the expense of academic freedom or internal discussion. No declarations of interest were received.

### AB.24.12.2 ACADEMIC BOARD BUSINESS

**AB.24.12.2.1****Sub-committee terms of reference and business plans**

*Paper AB.24.12.01 was received.*

## AB.24.12.2.1.1

Members noted the terms of reference and indicative business plan for the Research Knowledge and Exchange Committee (RKEC). This was submitted to the current Academic Board because the first RKEC of the academic year did not take place until 17 October. Members approved the terms of reference and, being assured that the priorities were appropriate, approved the business plan.

## AB.24.12.2.1.2

Members also noted amended terms of reference for the University Ethics and Integrity Committee (UEIC). The latter committee had proposed a change to membership whereby the two independent external positions (not yet filled for 2024/25) would be removed as standing members. Expertise would be provided through existing membership, with any external expertise to be pre-identified for future committee business and invited on that basis. Academic Board approved the amended terms of reference.

**AB.24.12.2.2****Programme Management Committees (PMC)**

*Paper AB.24.12.02 was received.*

## AB.24.12.2.2.1

The Chair noted that minor administrative changes had been made to the PMC terms of reference. Academic Board approved the amendments.

**AB.24.12.3****MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING****AB.24.12.3.1****Previous minutes**

*Paper AB.24.12.03 was received.*

## AB.24.12.3.1.1

Members approved the minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2024.

**AB.24.12.3.2****Action sheet and matters arising**

*Paper AB.24.12.04 was received.*

## AB.24.12.3.2.1

Members noted that the majority of actions on the action sheet were now closed or not yet due.

## AB.24.12.3.2.2

The Deputy Registrar introduced a brief paper on progress of the Reasonable Adjustment to Deadline Task and Finish Group (minute AB.24.10.5.2.3). Members were informed that a wide range of people are contributing to this group, which has now met twice.

Terms of reference have been agreed. Obtaining the staff voice and widening the student voice (e.g. through the student survey undertaken by the Students' Union in October 2024) will both be necessary to gather the best possible data. The group will report to Academic Board in May 2025 after initial consideration by the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee (LTSEC) in April.

AB.24.12.3.2.3 The Academic Registrar introduced a resubmitted policy governance framework that shows the status of policies and the review schedule (minute AB.24.10.8.1.2). It was noted that the status of a small number of policies has now been updated. It was also clarified that the Intellectual Property Policy is a corporate policy which falls within the general scope of RKEC but does not require Academic Board oversight *per se*.

AB.24.12.3.2.4 In response to an enquiry about the location of policies in relation to the learning and teaching space, a link to the collected UWE policies on the internet will be sent to the PVC and Head of CATE [**Action:** Committee Officer].

AB.24.12.3.2.4 The Deputy Registrar gave a further verbal update on the extension of late arrivals of international students (minute AB.24.07.3.2.2). Members were assured that active discussions have been ongoing with the College Deans, with plans in place for late arrivals, including the opportunity to catch up on missed assessment. Action closed.

**AB.24.12.3.3 Chair's actions**  
*Paper AB.24.12.05 was received.*

AB.24.12.3.3.1 Members noted the following items approved under Chair's action since the last meeting:

1. Emeritus Professor Appointment: Prof. Lamine Mahdjoubi.

## **AB.24.12.4 STANDING AGENDA ITEMS**

**AB.24.12.4.1 Vice-Chancellor's report**  
*Paper AB.24.12.06 was received.*

AB.24.12.4.1.1 Members noted the report for information.

The Chair noted that the Vice-Chancellor's report covered student recruitment, HE policy and regulatory matters, and the EDI

Advisory Group, together with updates on the Creative and Cultural Plan and Board of Governors' business.

**AB.24.12.4.2**

**The Students' Union report**

*Paper AB.24.12.07 was received.*

AB.24.12.4.2.1

The SU President and VP Education introduced their report.

AB.24.12.4.2.2

A positive update on the Reasonable Adjustment to Deadline Task and Finish Group was noted, corroborating earlier remarks made by the Deputy Registrar (see AB.24.12.3.2.2 above).

AB.24.12.4.2.3

Further monitoring of the Wednesday Afternoon Teaching Project was requested to take place. After a review of the current academic year (weeks 7 through 18) - and taking into account the existing agreed exemptions (e.g. degree apprenticeship teaching) - the SU have identified 793 instances of teaching that encroach upon the Wednesday afternoon opportunity for students to participate in sport and other activities. Of these, 253 concern teaching activities that are timetabled to start after 13:00.

AB.24.12.4.2.4

Discussion was held on the Wednesday Afternoon Teaching Project, with the following comments and observations made:

1. SDLT representatives expressed willingness to look again at these activities with a view to reducing their number.
2. The principles governing any prospective changes the SU wishes to make need to be considered.

AB.24.12.4.2.5

Academic Board agreed to investigate whether these identified instances are legitimate exceptions to the general principle that teaching should end by 13:00 on Wednesdays. A central, coordinating point within the University to review and report back to the next meeting [**Action:** Deputy Registrar].

AB.24.12.4.2.6

In a substantial follow-up discussion, members of Academic Board debated "reading" or "preparation weeks." The following comments were made:

1. Given 12-week semesters, students would likely find such weeks valuable.
2. Not all programmes have the same structure, so preparation weeks tend to be left to the individual Schools.
3. The University must tread carefully. A commitment to a set number of contact hours is stipulated on the website, with

serious CMA (Competition and Market Authority) implications if these are not met. That said, contact hours are not necessarily calibrated on a hebdomadal basis.

4. A week's break could have well-being benefits for both students and staff.
5. Revisiting this issue gives UWE Programmes the opportunity to make well-being a primary focus.

AB.24.12.4.2.7 UWE Programmes to investigate the parameters and possibilities of incorporating a reading week. The next Academic Board to receive an update on this as part of a wider UWE Programmes update [**Action:** Deputy Registrar].

### **AB.24.12.4.3 Thematic sub-committee business reports**

*Papers AB.24.12.08-11 were received.*

AB.24.12.4.3.1 Members were updated on the business considered and the decisions and recommendations taken by the thematic sub-committees of Academic Board. The summary reports were presented as evidence that the University activity delegated by Academic Board to its thematic committees was being appropriately scrutinised and/or progressed.

AB.24.12.4.3.2 The DVC-Registrar, who chaired the LTSEC meeting on the 6 November 2024, reported that the Committee, during that session, discussed the Graduate Outcomes Survey 21/22 results, current GOS strategy and progress to date. There was also a detailed conversation in LTSEC on the review of the new regulatory framework (particularly regarding uncapped resits), and substantial debate on the latest KPI data relating to Awarding Gaps and Non-Continuation data. The Annual Quality Report and Degree Outcomes Statement were both scrutinised and endorsed for further Academic Board consideration.

#### *Escalation to Academic Board:*

1. Annual Quality Report, 2023/24 (see item AB.24.12.6.1).
2. Degree Outcomes Statement (see item AB.24.12.6.4).
3. Slide deck on Awarding Gaps and Non-Continuation data provided to Academic Board members for noting (appendix to current item).

AB.24.12.4.3.3 In the absence of the RKEC Chair, the Chair of Academic Board noted that, on the 17 October, the Committee discussed the three UWE Beacons of Excellence which will be used to power economic growth, social impact and prosperity through research, innovation,

skills and enterprise (RISE). There were also presentations on 2023-24 research metrics and bidding data, as well as the current and future position of the Quality Research (QR) and Higher Education innovation fund (HEIF). An update on the progress of actions on the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers was also received. It was noted that formal reporting on the Concordat will go to Academic Board in May 2025.

*Escalation to Academic Board:*

1. 2024/25 terms of reference and business plan (see item AB.24.12.2.1.1).
2. Updated UWE Research Publications Policy noted by Board (link to Policy in SharePoint provided).

AB.24.12.4.3.4

The DVC-Registrar, who chaired the Strategic Academic Portfolio Group (SAPG) on the 19 November, reported that its members discussed the size and shape of the UWE portfolio, specifically themes identified at the recent VCE Away Day. Challenges, performance, growth and subject readiness were examined. The UG portfolio was concluded to be in good shape, but opportunities existed to do more in cross-disciplinary areas, PGT, and in the region. Also discussed by the Group was an update on the UWE Foundation, which highlighted how the University's offer was being reshaped for the market, and a report on initial launch outcomes of the UWE Online. Regarding this online provision, the Chair summarised, for Academic Board members, the status of the delivery so far and the reviews that will be put in place.

AB.24.12.4.3.5

The Chair of UEIC noted that, on the meeting of 5 November, the Committee discussed the revised membership on the terms of reference, the work of the sub-committees, the various aspects of the UEIC Audit Programme, a forthcoming review of the Research Misconduct Procedure, and the scope of the University's Collaborative Provision Review. The Committee also scrutinised the Policy statement on the use of animals in research, the Code of Good Research Conduct, the University Policy on not accepting tobacco industry funding for research, and the Annual Statement on Research Integrity. The Anti-Racism Strategy was also debated, with further substantive discussion planned.

*Escalation to Academic Board:*

- 1) Revised 2024/25 terms of reference (see item AB.24.12.2.1.2).

- 2) The Annual Statement on Research Integrity endorsed by UEIC and submitted to Academic Board members for further consideration (see item AB.24.12.6.2).
- 3) Agreed Policy statement on the use of animals in research noted by Board (link to Policy statement on the website provided).
- 4) Approved Code of Good Research Conduct noted by Board (link to Code in SharePoint provided).
- 5) Renewed University Policy on not accepting tobacco industry funding for research noted by Board (link to Policy in SharePoint provided).

AB.24.12.4.3.6 Members of Academic Board were confirmed that they were assured with regards to the delegated academic activities of the thematic sub-committees.

## **AB.24.12.5 ASSURANCE**

### **AB.24.12.5.1 Academic Risks Assurance Report**

*Paper AB.24.12.12 was received.*

AB.24.12.5.1.1 The Chief of Staff and Clerk to the Board of Governors introduced a report on the current risk level for each of the University's strategic and tactical academic risks.

AB.24.12.5.1.2 Members were assured that the risk levels were reducing and that the different committees that feed into Academic Board are engaged effectively with the specific areas of academic risk for which they have responsibility. The Board welcomed the evidence of strengthened oversight and management of key institutional risks.

## **AB.24.12.6 ITEMS FOR APPROVAL OR ENDORSEMENT**

### **AB.24.12.6.1 Annual Quality Report, 2023/24**

*Paper AB.24.12.13 was received.*

AB.24.12.6.1.1 The Academic Registrar introduced the Annual Report on Quality and Standards for Academic Board's consideration and endorsement. The Annual Report is the mechanism which provides assurance to the Board of Governors that the University is complying with, and where appropriate exceeding, the requirements set by the sector regulator OfS (Office for Students). The Board was informed that this document has previously been scrutinised by LTSEC at its 6 November meeting.

The following issues were flagged to Board members:

AB.24.12.6.1.2

- 1) The proposed confidence rating for Academic Regulations has been raised to "Green" (in the RAG-rating system), reflecting that the transition to the new Regulations has been effectively progressed.
- 2) Although the rating for Student Partnership and Student Voice remains at "Amber", the expectation is that the ongoing Reimagining Student Representation Project will ensure that a full confidence rating is evidenced in due course.
- 3) In the area of Award and Assessment, the University's Good Honours rate continues to track marginally below the sector, yet it remains broadly in line with pre-pandemic performance. The classification profile generally is back to pre-Covid levels. Award board processes were unaffected by external disruptions for the first time since 2018/19. Less progress has been made on the Black-White Awarding Gap than hoped for, although the gap is the smallest it has been for the last six years.
- 4) Collaborative provision remains an area of higher tactical risk where processes need to be enhanced. However, opportunities exist to further strengthen due diligence and quality oversight.

AB.24.12.6.1.3

Academic Board endorsed the draft report for onward submission to the People, Culture, Quality and Standards Committee (PCQSC) on 4 February 2025 [**Action:** Clerk to the Board of Governors].

AB.24.12.6.1.4

The PVC Head of CHSS recommended that, when scheduling forthcoming items of Academic Board business, appropriate focus should be placed on the above "amber areas" [**Action:** Secretary].

AB.24.12.6.1.5

It was agreed that it would be beneficial for strengthening the Student Voice for a student-friendly version of the Quality report to be prepared and sent to the Students' Union [**Action:** Secretary].

AB.24.12.6.1.6

In response to a specific query raised by a student representative, it was agreed that the 2025 Graduation week info currently on the intranet will be transferred to the internet [**Action:** Deputy Registrar].

**AB.24.12.6.2**

**Annual Statement of Research Integrity, 2023/24**

*Paper AB.24.12.14 was received.*



- AB.24.12.6.2.1 The Research Governance Manager introduced the Annual Statement on Research Integrity, an important public-facing document which provides assurance that UWE Bristol supports good research practice and a healthy research culture. External publication of this document is one of the key conditions for drawing down research funds from UKRI.
- AB.24.12.6.2.2 The Board was informed that the draft of the Statement has previously been scrutinised by UEIC at its 5 November meeting and in subsequent comments by correspondence. The Chair of UEIC confirmed to Board members that he agrees with the contents of the report and has endorsed it through Chair's action. The Statement is accompanied by a commentary for the benefit of Academic Board (and PCQSC and Board of Governors) which outlines areas of challenge and the plan for addressing these issues. Once it has passed through the committee stage, the Statement without commentary will be published externally. UEIC will have the responsibility of monitoring all issues going forward.
- AB.24.12.6.2.3 The PVC Head of CATE commented that the College and the School of Arts have worked closely with the Research Governance team, and they are confident that the Annual Statement provides a pragmatic framework.
- AB.24.12.6.2.4 Academic Board considered the Statement and supporting commentary and endorsed them for further submission to PCQSC on 4 February 2025 [**Action:** Clerk to the Board of Governors].
- AB.24.12.6.3** **Admissions Policy 2025**  
*Paper AB.24.12.15 was received.*
- AB.24.12.6.3.1 In the absence of the Director of Future Students, Communications and Marketing, the Chair introduced a paper that detailed recent changes made to the University's admissions policy.
- AB.24.12.6.3.2 Amendments were noted in the following areas: the addition of a UWE Skilled application form, DBS requirements and good character checks for international applicants, enhanced safeguarding on certain placement degrees, and a plagiarism alert process on fraudulent applications.
- AB.24.12.6.3.3 Several amendments to Section 6 of the Admissions Policy will be made to ensure cross-referencing with the Fees Policy. Also, before the Admissions Policy is published, reference to changes to fees

will no longer be described as "major" [**Action:** Director Future Students, Communications and Marketing].

AB.24.12.6.3.4

The VP Education was given assurance that changes that have material impacts on international offer-holders (e.g. changes to fees, teaching dates, modes of assessment) are always communicated in good time, as the University must abide by CMA regulations. To allay concerns, the Students' Union will be sent the template offer letter together with the supplementary information [**Action:** Director Future Students, Communications and Marketing].

**AB.24.12.6.4**

**Degree Outcomes Statement, 2022-23**

*Paper AB.24.12.16 was received.*

AB.24.12.6.4.1

The Academic Registrar introduced the Degree Outcomes Statement, a summary analysis of UWE Bristol's degree classification profile over the past five years, supported by a more detailed internal data report covering 2023/24.

The purpose of bringing this paper to the Board was to show how UWE is providing assurance about its standards of academic performance. The analysis and supporting data have been previously considered by LTSEC, and, after due consideration, members were invited to endorse it for submission to PCQSC, from where it will escalate to Board of Governors and be externally published on the UWE website.

AB.24.12.6.4.2

It was noted that Academic Board is considering this Degree Outcomes Statement in December rather than July due to a change in HESA reporting arrangements.

AB.24.12.6.4.3

It was reported that the University's Good Honours (GH) rates appear to be stabilising after a spike during the pandemic and immediate post-pandemic period. They are currently close to the market average but trending slightly below. A wide-ranging discussion then took place on possible explanations for the various patterns in the data (including UWE's below-average trend in first class classifications), the need to view the data through the lens of intersectionality, the impact of Covid, the impact of the new algorithm, UWE's consistency in marking, the role of UWE Programmes, subject-by-subject benchmarking across a relevant data sample, and the awarding gap.

AB.24.12.6.4.4 The draft statement and supporting data were endorsed for onward submission to the PCQSC meeting on 4 February 2025 [**Action:** Clerk to the Board of Governors].

AB.24.12.6.4.5 To more fully understand the data, it was recommended that patterns are evaluated across UWE's comparator group: the University Alliance of professional and technical universities [**Action:** Academic Registrar].

## **AB.24.12.7 ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**

### **AB.24.12.7.1 Lessons from Halpin: Governance Effectiveness and Enhancement**

*Paper AB.24.12.17 was received.*

AB.24.12.7.1.1 The Chief of Staff and Clerk of the Board of Governors introduced a presentation on the recommendations of the Halpin review. Members were informed that an external review of Governance effectiveness across corporate and academic governance was undertaken in 2024 by the Halpin management consultancy. The final report was presented to the Steering Group on 23 September 2024. The report was then considered by the Nominations and Governance Committee on 21 October and the Board of Governors on 20 November.

AB.24.12.7.1.2 Overall, the University was rated as "improving to good," with further work needed on clarifying the structure and the purpose of Academic Board, making the flow from Academic Board back down through the governance structure more unambiguous, being more consistent when a broader academic perspective is sought, producing shorter papers, and fostering greater scrutiny and challenge from a diversity of views. The report's 30-plus recommendations and suggestions should positively impact upon the practice, efficacy and transparency of all committees within the academic governance structure.

AB.24.12.7.1.3 Members were asked about their initial reactions to the report, a possible training and development plan for Academic Board, ideas for enhanced feedback flows, and the opportunity for better engagement with the wider University community (i.e. communicating the role and impact of Academic Board).

AB.24.12.7.1.4 To fulfil one of the "next steps" to be taken, Academic Board agreed to revisit discussion of Halpin during a deep dive workshop

at the February meeting [**Action:** Chief of Staff and Clerk of the Board of Governors/ Secretary/ Committee Officer].

## **AB.24.12.7.2**

### **Condition of Registration E6 compliance activity update**

*Paper AB.24.12.18 was received.*

#### **AB.24.12.7.2.1**

The Head of Student & Academic Policy Enhancement introduced a paper detailing the roadmap for implementation of the OfS Condition of Registration E6, a new stipulation due to take effect from August 2025 that ensures that HE institutions sufficiently and appropriately support students who suffer from harassment and sexual misconduct.

#### **AB.24.12.7.2.2**

Aspects of the UWE compliance plan include consent training for all new (and possibly also returning) students, new innovative staff training materials, and working with other sector bodies in the region.

#### **AB.24.12.7.2.3**

A substantial discussion resulted with the following comments and observations being made:

1. It is incumbent upon HE institutions not to make legal definitions but rather to support students through policy and the establishment of a clear reporting space. Internal legal advice has been taken, but it is imperative that the University does not stray beyond its competence.
2. Also, HEIs need to implement their procedures based on a balance of possibilities (i.e. not a courtroom level "beyond reasonable doubt" standard).
3. Open, honest and robust conversations about sexual matters are important, but inevitably difficult considering the diverse cultural constituency at a modern university.
4. It is vital that staff are supported too, especially those with personal experience of harassment and sexual misconduct.
5. Support is to be extended to staff to help them deal with the NSS question on sexual misconduct.
6. The "Enough" campaign is being engaged with, but the DNA kits they are handing out on campus are legally and medically problematic.
7. Work with research organisations has taken place, and UEIC is ready to assist where it can.
8. The University's TNE partners also fall under the jurisdiction of the E6 requirement. Communications will need to be tailored to this potentially very different audience.

9. PGR students are additionally being considered in the roadmap implementation.
10. Before August 2025, Academic Board should be assured that students are safe during the interim period. There is a significant amount of casework activity, awareness, and internal/external co-ordination going on.

AB.24.12.7.2.4 Academic Board was assured that the clear and forward-looking approach being planned will ensure that UWE Bristol is compliant with the condition, that it will be able to protect students to the best of the University's competence, and that it will help to foster a culture of respect, inclusion and accountability.

**AB.24.12.8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

None to report.

**AB.24.12.9 DATE(S) OF NEXT MEETING(S)**

- AB.24.12.9.1 Next meeting dates for academic year 2024/25:
- 26 February 2025
  - 7 May 2025
  - 2 July 2025
  - 8 July 2025 (joint session with the Board of Governors)