

ACADEMIC REVIEW COMMITTEE

30th APRIL 2020

REDACTED MINUTES FOR PUBLICATION

A Meeting of the Academic Review Committee was held via Zoom video conference from 1.30-3.30pm on Thursday 30th April 2020.

Present:	Helen Edwards [HE] Phoebe Farrell [PF] Wendy Finlay [WF] Stephen Jackson [SJ] Hazel Lobo [HL] Kenneth Miller [KM] (Chair) Nick Morton [NMo] Ashley Wheaton [AW]
In attendance:	Hannah Al-Katib [HAK] (for item 2.2c only) Nikki Bulteel [NB] (for item 2.1 only) Gethin Edwards [GE] (for item 2.3a only) Jane Fawkes [JEF] (University College Secretary) Ruth Grindey (for item 2.2biii only) Lyndsay Hughes [LH] (note taker) John Pratt [JP] (for item 3.1 only)

Apologies for absence:

1) GENERAL MEETING GOVERNANCE

1514 1.1/ DECARATION OF ANY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

1515 There were no conflicts of interest declared.

1516 1.2/ TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABCENCE

1517 There were no apologies for absence.

1518 1.3/ TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 26TH FEBRUARY 2020

1519 The minutes of the Academic Review Committee held 26th February 2020 were **APPROVED** as a true record.

1520 1.4/ TO APPROVE THE REDACTED MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26TH FEBRUARY 2020

1521 The Academic Review Committee **NOTED** that the minutes of this committee meeting were to be published as part of ongoing compliance with Office for Students

Conditions of Registration. The Committee reviewed the proposed redactions from the minutes of the meeting held 26th February 2020. The minutes, including the proposed redactions, were **APPROVED** by the Committee.

1522 1.5/ TO CONSIDER MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES NOT INCLUDED ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA

1523 An actions summary from the previous meeting was circulated as Paper 1.5 and all matters were either closed, due to be discussed further during the course of the meeting, or for review at a subsequent meeting of the Committee.

2) COMPLIANCE WITH THE CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION OF THE OFFICE FOR STUDENTS

1524 2.1/ TO REVIEW UCEM’S MONITORING OF THE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN

1525 Nikki Bulteel [NB] joined the meeting to update the committee on progress against the 2019-20 Access and Participation Plan (OfS Condition of Registration A1).

1526 NB provided a summary Report of the 2019-20 Access & Participation Plan in paper 2.1 and the updated progress/actions log in paper 2.1a.

1527 NB reported that two outreach activities within the plan are not possible in the current circumstances of lockdown, therefore the progress log identified more items at red than UCEM would wish. Some of the money available for planned physical activities that cannot now take place will be moved to the Hardship Fund with the intention the full sum will still be spent by the end of the current academic year (an OfS expectation). This fund has been underpinned by a further budgeted sum of money, as the current situation may make the available funding oversubscribed.

1528 The key remaining challenge for UCEM is to determine how it evaluates and measures the impact of the activities undertaken and clearly demonstrates this to the OfS.

1529 JEF thanked NB for her continued focus on delivering the expected outcomes of the plan, which has been particularly challenging during the Covid-19 pandemic period.

1530 KM thanked NB for her contribution and invited her to leave the meeting.

1531 2.2/ CONDITION B1: PROVISION OF HIGH-QUALITY COURSES AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE

1532 2.2a/ OFS COVID-19 REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

1533 JEF provided an update on the changes to regulatory reporting to the OfS as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (see paper 2.2a).

1534 JEF reported that the current OfS regulatory framework and reporting requirements have been relaxed and focus on three key priorities – sharing of information from

the government, protecting student interests and minimising the long-term impacts to the higher education sector. The change of tone is noticeable and more supportive.

1535 The OfS has also updated its guidance on reportable events, many of which are suspended for the foreseeable period. Those which remain in scope during the pandemic period focus on the long-term financial sustainability of institutions or cessation of delivery. Many data reporting requirements have also been suspended or extended. With regards to quality and standards, a separate briefing was issued on OfS expectations, in which the importance of continuing to meet the B conditions of registration was key, ensuring students interests are protected.

1536 The Committee **NOTED** the change in OfS requirements during Covid-19 and their continued expectation that providers maintain standards and protect the student interest.

1537 **2.2b/ PROTECTING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN LIGHT OF COVID-19**

1538 Three update reports were provided to the Committee as evidence of how UCEM is making adjustments to protect the Student Experience as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

1539 Paper 2.2bi was provided by Wendy Finlay and gave an overview of adjustments to delivery of education with both learning and teaching generally and with delivery of apprenticeships. The priority has been to de-risk the delivery model and as a result increased levels of asynchronous delivery have been put in place to ensure continuous and smooth delivery for students where there may be issues with staff cover. Delivery of webinar content has also been reduced, with some recordings made for asynchronous delivery or use of resources from the previous year. Protection of opportunities for students to communicate with staff in real-time have been provided wherever possible. UCEM is confident this delivery structure is more appropriate in the current circumstances.

1540 Students have been communicated with directly throughout this process and feedback to date has been positive. UCEM has staff monitoring student engagement with a view to catching those who may be struggling as early as possible.

1541 UCEM is also live tracking apprenticeship student status, which has revealed that most continue in their roles and can therefore continue with their qualifications, as can those who have been furloughed. Progress review requirements have been modified in light of the situation. Workshops are now being delivered via Zoom with positive feedback to date. In many cases, higher levels of engagement are being seen by students, where they have more time available to now focus on their studies.

1542 The Committee **NOTED** the changes to delivery as a result of Covid-19 and commended the work and the measures taken as wholly appropriate to the situation.

1543 Paper 2.2bii was provided by Helen Edwards and gave an overview of adjustments to procedures at UCEM to preserve the student experience during the pandemic period. Most changes have been minor in nature, approved by the relevant deliberative committee and communicated to students regularly.

- 1544 The primary items of note include the relaxation of rules around extensions, allowing students to request extensions on all their first assessments within the spring 2020 semester. UCEM has also temporarily relaxed the evidence requirements (medical note) for mitigating circumstances and in order to process requests in a timely manner devolved decision-making powers have been introduced. UCEM is allowing temporary Additional Support Plans to be put in place without medical evidence for disabled students. Additional support for project modules has been introduced and a discretionary approach to the approval of certificates in the admissions process has been introduced. There is now no need for physical attendance at meetings for appeals or misconduct and other meetings like, Board of Examiners, are being held remotely.
- 1545 UCEM is keeping all temporary changes under review and monitoring case numbers so it can further adapt processes as necessary. Evidence to date indicates the measures have been effective and there are relatively low numbers of deferrals, suspensions and mitigating circumstances.
- 1546 PF/NM commented that in general students do feel supported by UCEM and that the measures taken to date have been appropriate and fair. The Committee **NOTED** the report and endorsed this feedback.
- 1547 Ruth Grindey joined the meeting to provide an update on take home exams (see paper 2.2biii). RG reported that all in-person examinations are being replaced by a take-home open book examination which students will have seven days to complete. The assessments will be unsupervised and there will be no opportunity for tutor feedback. The assessments will use authored examination briefs but will be modified to include word-count limits and a statement on the need for appropriate referencing. The assessments will be submitted via Turnitin to ensure they are checked for academic misconduct. The assessments will undergo internal scrutiny.
- 1548 RG reported that both External Examiners and students are supportive of the plans and they were approved by Senior Leadership for implementation in late March 2020. This is an approach being adopted by many institutions. The process will go live in July 2020 on the spring semester.
- 1549 NM reported that Birmingham City University has adopted a similar approach and has also tested the integrity of the process. UCEM anticipates that performance may actually improve as a result of this process, as UCEM students are already very familiar with working online. In addition, UCEM has already had the opportunity to test the process in Hong Kong, where lockdown commenced earlier than in the UK. It will be reviewed in full there before going live in the UK in July. UCEM does not believe it requires a 'no detriment' policy.
- 1550 The Committee **NOTED** the take-home examinations plan and were supportive. AW thanked RG for having led UCEM on this important piece of work. PF stated that students had been very supportive as they have desired this initiative for many years.
- 1551 KM thanked RG for her contribution and invited her to leave the meeting

1552 2.2c/ TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON PROJECT TRANSFORM

- 1553 Hannah Al-Katib [HAK] joined the meeting to present an update on the Transform Project to the Committee in light of the Covid-19 pandemic (see paper 2.2c).
- 1554 HAK reported that the team undertook a full project appraisal after lockdown and home working was enforced to determine what project workstream areas might be affected by home working and/or increased staff sickness.
- 1555 UCEM is dependent on external bodies to achieve **Accreditation** and has learnt that the RICS has furloughed the team that handles this work. UCEM has been assured that in the interim period it will retain its existing accreditation. UCEM has one programme not yet accredited and is seeking clarity on how it can proceed. Overall, this workstream is considered low risk.
- 1556 UCEM has brought forward the removal of exams to Spring 2020 due to Covid-19 which is an integral part of the **Assessment Strategy** workstream. UCEM had also wished to introduce innovative assessment techniques with new technologies from autumn 2020 but has now deferred this to Spring 2021 to reduce reliance on new companies, products and staff during the crisis. UCEM is now focusing on using and enhancing existing technologies for the autumn 2020 launch.
- 1557 **Module Development** is dependent on staff availability across various teams and is therefore considered at higher risk. Mitigation strategies have been developed in case of higher sickness levels and fortnightly project reviews are underway to enable an agile response. Workstream remains on track.
- 1558 **Transfer mapping**, the process of moving existing students to new programme diets based on validated modules is now underway. It is resource intensive and must be completed by September but is on track currently.
- 1559 Staff availability is the key risk factor to the **results processing** workstream but remains on track. Resubmissions has the longest lead time as the process does not need to be operational until Spring 2021.
- 1560 UCEM has intended to introduce a 50% fee for interruptions to studies as part of the **registration enhancements** workstream but has decided to delay this change until autumn 2021.
- 1561 It has been agreed that the **Academic Development** workstream will be descoped and no longer focus on redefining the academic teaching and support models. Instead it will focus on work to ensure the impact of the semester convergence is managed for teaching and marking resource.
- 1562 An updated **Academic Calendar** was recently approved as an output of Transform due to the convergence of the postgraduate and undergraduate semesters in autumn 2020 and the need to reflect this in internal operations. It is not currently at risk but is also not a critical delivery in autumn 2020.
- 1563 JEF thanked HAK for continuing to lead the Transform project so effectively. The Committee queried HAK's overall comfort level with project delivery for September 2020. HAK responded that the key risk to project work is ongoing business as usual

taking staff time but she, and the academic team, are confident the risk is being managed.

1564 The Committee **NOTED** the positive update and the low risk overall to project delivery.

1565 KM thanked HAK for her contribution and invited her to leave the meeting.

1566 2.3/ CONDITION B3: DELIVER SUCCESSFUL STUDENT OUTCOMES

1567 2.3a/ RETENTION AND PROGRESSION RATES FOR AUTUMN 2019

1568 Gethin Edwards [GE] joined the meeting to present the retention and progression rates data for autumn 2019, measured against the KPI of 75%, to the Committee (see paper 2.3a).

1569 GE reported that the overall postgraduate module success rate remained lower than that on the undergraduate modules but at similar levels to previous semesters, with a continuation of relatively high level of success from UK domiciled students. GE also reported that undergraduate module success rates have continued to improve, with success rates from Level 6 apprenticeship students higher than those amongst students on a non-apprenticeship BSc programme.

1570 **REDACTED**

1571 The Committee **NOTED** the student success rate data and that Gethin Edwards will be moving to the new role of Director of Regulatory Compliance from 1st May 2020.

1572 KM thanked GE for his contribution and invited him to leave the meeting.

1573 2.4/ CONDITION B5: UPHOLDING OF ACADEMIC STANDARDS

1574 2.4a/ DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT

1575 Helen Edwards provided an update on the Degree Outcomes Statement (see paper 2.4a). UCEM is required to publish a statement before the end of the 2019-20 academic year as per the requirement in the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) Degree Classification: Transparency, Reliability and Fairness guidance. The draft statement in the paper follows the guidance set out by the QAA on what should be included. One of UCEM's External Examiners is currently commenting on the paper ahead of its submission to the Quality Standards and Enhancement Committee, the Academic Board and then the Board of Trustees for approval.

1576 The key challenge in producing the draft has been inclusion of sufficient detail to analyse degree classification data with sufficient brevity overall. Section one provides institutional classification data over the last four years, including University of Reading validated programmes, with the general trend showing a slight improvement over time which can be attributed to enhancements implemented when UCEM began awarding its own degrees following TDAP. The statement also covers academic governance structures, classification algorithms, enhancements to

teaching practices and learning resources and identifies areas of good practice and future actions to improve student outcomes further.

- 1577 HE invited preliminary feedback on the draft statement from the Committee. The Committee concurred that the data does not indicate that UCEM has any issue with degree inflation and that the institution maintains its academic standards well. The Committee felt the document covered the required content appropriately. The Committee noted that UCEM, like most institutions, has a lower attainment level by BAME students and that this presents an opportunity to promote the work UCEM is undertaking through its Access and Participation Plan to address this discrepancy. The Committee also suggested that UCEM reviews and tracks data from lower second class honours level and below to monitor the impact of improvements given that many initiatives are aimed at lower levels of attainment to help bring about improvements.
- 1578 PF commented that UCEM degrees are seen a more challenging and better linked to the RICS APC and that they therefore have a higher standing in industry.
- 1579 JEF thanked HE and the working group for the effort to reach this point with the statement. The intention is to use the baseline data to take a long-term view and improve practices, not just publish the statement as a compliance activity alone.
- 1580 The Committee **NOTED** the draft Degree Outcomes statement and the timelines to further review, approval and publication.

3) COMPLIANCE WITH OFSTED AT LEVEL 3

1581 3.1/ TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON THE OFSTED QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN (QIP)

- 1582 John Pratt [JP] joined the meeting to present on UCEM's progress with the OFSTED Quality Improvement Plan (see paper 3.1).
- 1583 JP reported that overall, progress since the last report to the Committee had been reasonable but that some activities are no longer possible due to Covid-19. These are generally considered non-essential improvement activities in terms of UCEM ability to secure a good outcome at Ofsted inspection.
- 1584 **REDACTED**
- 1585 JP informed the Committee that since the update paper was drafted, UCEM has agreed to draft an addendum to the Quality Improvement Plan to cover the Covid-19 period. This enables the team to focus on how things have had to change during the pandemic and subsequently how they can be returned to normal apprenticeship study thereafter.
- 1586 The Committee suggested that the QIP should separate out into two columns the progress and impact of specific actions in order to better support UCEM in demonstrating the impact of its improvement activities.

ACTION **Separate out the QIP column on progress and impact to two separate columns. [HE/JP]**

1587 The Committee **NOTED** the overall update provided and welcomed the new format of the update report to the Committee.

1588 KM thanked JP for his contribution and invited him to leave the meeting.

1589 **4/ ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

1590 The Chair thanked the JEF/AW and the entire team involved for the quality of papers for the meeting and for their ongoing work to secure the future of UCEM in a very challenging and uncertain period. The Committee welcomed the highly effective approach to governance through short, focussed meeting that achieve the necessary outcomes in a manageable timeframe.

1591 With no additional items of business reported, KM thanked the Committee for their contributions, and called the meeting to a close at 15.10pm.

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 14th October 2020 from 13.30-15.30pm, via Zoom videoconference

Signed



Name

Professor Kenny Miller

Position

Chair, Academic Review Committee

Date

14th October 2020