Confirmed minutes

Meeting:	Academic Committee
Date:	24 November 2023
Time:	12 PM – 2 PM
Venue:	Euston Road, Room 101

Name	Designation
John Fairhurst*	Principal and Chief Executive Officer
Joan O'Mahony	Deputy Principal (Acting Chair)
Slawomir Grzybek	Head of Quality
Sarah Bailey	Director of the Centre for Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Success (SEWS)
Sunmi Ayorinde*	Deputy COO
Nnamdi Obiosa*	Head of the School of Accounting and Finance
Marcus MA. Astley	Head of the School of Business
Ian Miller	Director of Bloomsbury Law Clinic and Head of School of Law
Maria Jackson*	Head of Governance and Company Secretary
Dr Michelle Morgan	External Academic Advisor
Professor Gwyneth Pitt	External Academic Advisor
Carol Cook*	Non-Executive Director (Chair of the Board of Directors)
Sayed Mustafa Sadat	Student Representative (Student President)
Marcia Barrant**	Student Council Student Representation from LLB
Svetlana Zbirnea*	Student Council Student Representation from AFM Year 1 - GU
Abidur Rahman**	Student Council Student Representation from AFM
Johana Petit-Frere	Quality Executive (Secretary)

In attendance

Name	Designation
Victoria Hurley	Student Engagement and Success Manager (for item 8.1 Peer Assisted Learning Review)
Nadia Michail	Disability and Wellbeing Manager (for item 8.2 Disability Office Annual Report 2022-23)

No.	Item
1.0	**Welcome**

J O'Mahony welcomed everyone and opened the meeting.

	Apologies

**Did not attend not having sent apologies

The Committee received apologies from S Ayorinde, N Obiosa, S Zbirnea, J Fairhurst, M Jackson and C Cook.

	Declarations of Interest
There were no declarations of interest.	
2.0	**Minutes for approval and Action Tracker/Matters Arising:**
	2.1 Minutes from the previous meeting: 27 September 2023
The minutes of the September AC meeting were agreed as a true record of the meeting and were **approved** by the Committee.	
	2.2 Matters Arising/Action Tracker
There were no outstanding actions.	
3.0	**Chair's Action**
None were taken.	
4.0	**Academic Principal's Business**
	4.1 Principal's Report
The Committee received and noted the Principal's Report. It was further noted that the Principal's Report underscores future matters, whether internal or external, that may exert either positive or negative influences on the Institute. This proactive approach aims to ensure that we take these into account and respond accordingly.	
Part 1: Academic Regulatory, Policy and Procedural Documents for Approval, and Information	
5.0	**For approval by AC** *No further approvals required*
	5.1 Engagement Policy
The Head of Quality reported that, on behalf of the Deputy COO, he would present the revised Engagement Policy and explained that the Deputy COO, currently attending the Board of Directors meeting, was unable to be present. He reported that changes were minor, involving adjustments to role titles in section 6, an update to the policy to reflect change in practice stating, "15 minutes after the start of the lecture, attendance is marked as absent," and modifications to the methods for Northampton and Wrexham students to complete Mitigating Circumstances. The Committee received and noted the changes, and no comments were raised. The Engagement Policy was **approved** by the Committee.	
	5.2 Curriculum Modification Form BUS7B68
The Head of School for Business and Management reported on the proposed changes to the Final Project module (BUS7B68) for MBA and MSc Management. These changes were approved at the QAEC meeting in November and recommended for approval at the Academic Committee meeting. The key modifications include making the research proposal a summative assessment (previously formative) and introducing a verbally proofed component within this assessment. These changes aim to encourage early engagement, improve the performance of students on the module both in terms of the mark	

achieved and the integrity of their work, while ensuring they develop a clear plan and meet their supervisors from the beginning.

It was further added that a substantial number of students do not engage early enough with their research. The delay in their engagement contributes to weak marks in general. In some cases, it may even be tempting some students who fall behind to use AI or commissioning services to do the work.

The adjustments are set to be implemented starting from February 2024 version of the module (BUS7B68) subject to approval by our awarding partner.

The Academic Committee **approved** the Curriculum Modification Form for BUS7B68.

6.0	**Academic Performance Report**

The Academic Performance Report provided insights on students pass and progression rates and identified current and new actions where appropriate, with focus on the Postgraduate (PG) and Undergraduate (UG) provision. The Chair highlighted the favourable performance of PG, while UG faced challenges. Prompt actions had been taken to address the UG performance and improvement has been seen. Due to the very late arrivals of the PG intake, amendments were made to the delivery of the academic skills module. This was led by the Head of LE in-class with the scheduling of a distinct module to begin in the second term.

The Committee discussed the format of the Academic Performance Report. One of the external academic advisors emphasised the importance of the Board of Directors consulting with the Academic Committee on Academic matters and requests for information, a view which the Committee supported.

The Chair addressed several queries. Column A had been agreed to show the one figure for passing all modules or all bar one as in both cases the student can progress, so we do not break that down further. The comment in the report that the reduction of the UG intake to one per year reduces stress on the assessment cycle means there is more time to focus on learning and supporting the assessments: passing at the first-sit is key so as to reduce stress for students and this is a core part of teaching. [This has been very much emphasised this year in the context of late arrivals of Postgraduate students for example and the importance of getting them over the line first try regardless of late arrival].

The Chair noted the importance of meeting OfS B3 conditions. Previous research work (D Leonard's) on assessment briefs was noted and that it would be good for the team to revisit this. Initiatives to address the performance of international students have included English language, agents/recruiting and continues to include work of LE and SEWS.

There was a lot of praise for the recent community event at the Indian YMCA welcoming late arrivals.

The Academic Committee **approved** the Academic Performance Report.

7.0	**Academic Assurance Report** [for approval by the Board of Directors]

The Academic Assurance Report serves the purpose of offering a thorough and transparent evaluation of the institution's educational provision and associated processes. It aims to assure stakeholders of the institution's standards of academic excellence, highlighting strengths and opportunities for improvement.

While the layout of the Academic Assurance Report is still evolving, the Committee received and acknowledged the report, recognising its role in providing valuable insights into the institution's academic quality and areas for enhancement.

8.0	**For information only** *AC approval is not required*
	8.1 Peer Assisted Learning Review 2022-23

The Student Engagement and Success Manager presented the Peer Assisted Learning Review, which analyses both the Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) Scheme and the Peer Mentoring Scheme from January to September. The report covered feedback from all stakeholders, showcasing progress and developments aligning with Student Voice and the Institute's goals.

Looking forward, the PAL scheme aims to expand its reach by introducing sessions for modules at both Level 4 (L4) and Level 5 (L5) starting in October 2023. In terms of development, collaboration with SEER ensures effective evaluation, incorporating a theory of change to identify outcome measures and methods.

The Student Engagement and Success Manager acknowledged to have taken into consideration the comments that the Head of Governance and Company Secretary had shared prior to the meeting and will forward her feedback to the Head of Governance and Company Secretary.

A suggestion was made to explore the possibility of extending the schemes, particularly in the context of increased postgraduate (PG) students, especially within the wellbeing elements of the schemes. The introduction of a new PG mentoring scheme called the "Buddy Scheme" was discussed, highlighting its ease of implementation, as students can be trained in the second term to assist and support new PG students in transitioning to study and life in the UK. However, it was noted that PAL, being module-specific, involves students going through the experience of the respective modules, making it distinct from other schemes.

The Committee received and noted the Peer Assisted Learning Review.

	8.2 Disability and Wellbeing Office Annual Report 2022-23

The Disability and Wellbeing Manager reported on the support provided to students with disabilities, long-term health conditions, or Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD). The office aims to create an environment where students feel comfortable discussing their concerns and difficulties. The report covered students from both Wrexham and the University of Northampton during the 2022-23 academic year.

Workshops focusing on wellbeing were delivered face-to-face during the academic year. The Disability and Wellbeing Manager mentioned ongoing efforts to explore ways for students to sign in on specific courses within the Togetherall platform, a digital mental health support platform that offers 24/7 anonymous support. Wellbeing workshops were conducted by the SEWS team and the Guild to foster a sense of community among students.

The Disability and Wellbeing Manager expressed openness to incorporating specific requests from the Committee into future reports and encouraged members to reach out with any suggestions. Similar to the Peer Assisted Learning Review, the Disability and Wellbeing Manager acknowledged that she had taken into consideration the comments that the Head of Governance and Company Secretary had shared prior to the meeting.

	8.3 Corporate Risk Register

Document received:

- 8.3.1 Corporate Risk Register – September 2023 Review

- 8.3.2 Corporate Risk Register – September 2023 Review Commentary

The Committee noted the following Risks:

- Risk 3 – Failure to recruit to target for domestic students in 2023-24. The domestic target for 2023-24 has been reduced to 50 in the reforecast.

- Risk 4 – Increase in the number of international students from a specific country or region dilutes the students' UK higher education experience. This risk has been removed but is being monitored through the Academic Division's local Risk Register.

- Risk 11 – Failure of students to pay their fees in full in 2023-24. From October 2023, students from high-risk regions are now required to pay a 75% deposit.

At a previous Board meeting, there was a request to consider a risk/KPI related to staff wellbeing/capability. The Risk Management Working Group, which convened on August 30, discussed this matter. It was recognised that as far as wellbeing is concerned, data had begun to be collected from sources such as exit interviews and staff surveys. However, at that point, there was no sufficient data available to establish a KPI that could be accurately measured.

In the context of including a risk in the Corporate Risk Register, it was agreed that both these risks should be entered in the People, Talent, and Culture Risk Register, as well as in all individual Departmental/Divisional Risk Registers for Heads to monitor.

	8.4 External Examiner Report WU

Document received:

- 8.4.1 Response to MSc Management (validated provision) External Examiner Report

- 8.4.2 Response to MBA Management (validated provision) External Examiner Report

The Head of School for Business and Management reported that both reports highlight positive feedback on the quality of our materials, teaching, and delivery, as well as the degree to which employability was embedded in the syllabus and delivered.

He flagged that the External Examiners mentioned that neither program was accredited by a professional body. It was clarified as they were not aware that the programmes are indeed accredited by CMI (Chartered Management Institute). In the future, EE comments will be solicited regarding the extent to which the courses reflect and are enhanced by the institution's relationship with CMI.

	8.5 Student Guild Report

The Committee welcomed the new Student President, S Mustafa Sadat, congratulating him on his campaign and becoming the Student President and introductions were made. The Student President then presented the Student Guild Report, summarising the activities, achievements, and challenges of the Student Guild between August and October 2023.

The Guild participated in a presentation by The Independent Higher Education (IHE) on preparing for effective student elections. The student elections occurred in October, and the results were particularly exciting as the Student President role was tied, leading to a Hand in the Box decision. The Guild was grateful to C Bennett from Wrexham University Student Union for her support and for attending the Results Day.

Additionally, the Guild engaged with students through various social media platforms, promoting different aspects of student life and keeping students informed about important events and resources, including campaigns on the Guild's employability workshop and student life at Bloomsbury Institute.

Regarding employability and volunteering activities for the quarter, the Guild has set a target to help 10% of the student population obtain workable CVs. They hold weekly one-to-one appointments and workshops, advertising via mail chimp to track which students are opening their emails.

The Guild has attended three job fairs with students, including:

	—	The London Job Show in Stratford, East London.
	—	The London Job Show White City, West London.

They have also organised events and activities such as:

- Black History Month.

- Welcome Event Bowling.

- Kahoot General Knowledge Quiz.

The Committee found the report very informative and appreciated the comprehensive overview of the Student Guild's activities and achievements between August and October 2023.

	8.6 Learning Enhancement Annual Report 2022-23

The Head of Learning and Enhancement presented the Learning Enhancement Annual report 2022-23 which covered ongoing support to students, the range of advice and guidance offered; engagement, and amendments to the offer.

The Deputy Principal thanked D Leonard for presenting a very thorough Learning Enhancement Annual Report and invited comments or questions from committee members. M Morgan asked the Head of Learning Enhancement what her experience was of the digital literacy, experience and skills of our students on arrival. The Head of Learning Enhancement said that the digital literacy levels of our students varied greatly with some students never having used a computer before and struggling with the very basics compared with others having the skills you would expect of young students. She added that often students will have their laptops with them in class but will use their phones to look things up instead. M Morgan said that D Leonard's experience mirrored the findings she has set out in a recent report in this area, and commented on how shocked her colleagues were at the University of East London by the fact that 40% of their postgraduate students have no or little experience of using a VLE.

The Head of School for Business and Management thanked the Head of Learning Enhancement for the excellent support she provides to the students and said that the challenge lay in persuading students to seek help. He said that when more than half of the recent postgraduate BM cohort arrived in Week 5, he arranged for someone from the IT team to join the SEWS Induction Day in order to provide a short IT induction and provide practical help to around 20 students on how to log on, set passwords etc. The Deputy Principal commented that this has proved very successful.

The Head of School for Law also commented on how useful his students had found a session that the Head of Learning Enhancement led on within the classroom on how to use OSCOLA.

The Deputy Principal returned to one of the points raised by the Head of Governance and Company Secretary in reference to the report regarding some students not knowing what a poster presentation was. The Head of Learning Enhancement clarified that the issue had been with just a few students on one particular intake but that expectations are covered in detail in class. She added that in the recent FY Course Committee, members had discussed a number of issues raised within her report and the Head of Quality had suggested having a TLF session for academics to share best practice on how they explain Assessment Briefs and assessment matters. The Deputy Principal agreed with the suggestion.

	8.7 Teaching Excellent Framework Updates

The Deputy Principal reminded the Committee that she had shared with them a copy of our TEF letter and Panel Report which set out details of our overall Bronze rating for Student Outcomes and overall Silver rating for Student Experience. M Michelle described the Student Experience rating as "phenomenal".

The Deputy Principal highlighted the recognition received for progression to graduate employment, explaining that we had not gone into detail in our submission on continuation and completion other than to say that we were working to an Action Plan agreed with the OfS. She also flagged that the work led by D Leonard on Learning and Enhancement was considered to be an outstanding feature of our provision.

She also explained that when the TEF Panel Report had been shared on the OfS portal, we had noticed a couple of small typos and errors. However, given advice from the OfS that any requests to amend reports would result in delays in their publication and should only be made if we felt that this would impact on our scores, the SLT agreed to accept the report uncontested.

The Head of School for Business and Management asked whether the recent SEWS IHE nomination would have value in the context of the TEF. The Deputy Principal said that it would and so it will feature in our next TEF submission in 4 years' time.

She also said she would be preparing a response for various committees on "What Next".

	8.8 Annual Research and Output Report 2022-23

The Chair noted that the Institute is a Teaching-only provider with a strong commitment to a research environment where staff- especially early-career researchers can develop and flourish in their research. She further added that the Annual Research and Output Report provided an overview and highlights of research activities and outputs undertaken and produced by research-active staff at Bloomsbury Institute during the 2022-23 academic year. Research at Bloomsbury Institute is supported by staff across the Institute and a total of 12 research-active staff submitted plans. The Head of Law remarked that it was very encouraging to see the amount of research activity underway.

Part 2: Standing Items	
9.0	**KPIs 2023-24**
	9.1 KPIs November 2023 Update

It was reported that there were no Academic KPIs due for review. The full template specifies when they are due, which was introduced at the September Academic Committee. The Committee suggested to have the full template circulate to members.

Action: The Secretary to circulate the full KPIs template via email to the AC members.

10.0	**Admissions and Recruitment**

There were no updates on Admissions and Recruitment.

11.0	**Equality Diversity and Inclusion**
	10.1 EDI Update Report: October 2023

The Committee received and noted the October 2023 EDI Update Report.

	10.2 EDI Update Report: November 2023

In the absence of the Head of Governance and Company Secretary, who could not attend the AC meeting because of her attendance at the parallel Board of Directors meeting. The Head of Quality presented the EDI Update Report: November 2023 and flagged the following:

- Universities have faced increased scrutiny regarding whether they should have a duty of care concerning suicide prevention.

- However, there has been a recent legal case (Feder and McCamish v The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD) in which student claimants have argued that they experienced harm caused by the institution's negligent investigation into their complaints of sexual misconduct, and that the institution failed in its duty of care.

- The judge found in favour of the students, ruling that the college was negligent in its response to the sexual assault allegations, and had failed in a particular duty of care relating to the processes surrounding the allegations.

The Committee received and noted the EDI Update Report November 2023.

12.0	**Internal Student Complaints**

It was reported that there are currently four student complaints, with two being internal complaints and the other two directed against other students. These cases are currently under investigation and in the process of seeking resolution.

13.0	**OfS Updates**
	13.1 APP Updates

The Access and Participation Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, November 30, with a focus on the new Access and Participation Plan (APP). An update following this meeting will be provided in the next Academic Committee.

14.0	**Wrexham University**

It was reported that the Deputy Academic Principal, Deputy COO, and Head of Quality are working closely with the newly appointed Head of Quality at Wrexham University, H Weller.

15.0	**TDAP**

We are still awaiting the final decision with regards to our TDAP application.

16.0	**Confirmed minutes from other forums or committees for information, consideration, or action.**
	16.1 Board of Directors – July 2023

There have been no matters referred for Academic Committee to consider.

	16.2 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee – 20 September 2023

There have been no matters referred for Academic Committee to consider.

It was clarified that in relation to section 9, to close the feedback loop, the Head of Governance and Company Secretary reported to the Chair and Secretary of QAEC that she had been asked for advice earlier in the year regarding students wearing the kirpan and had provided the same. The SSLM subsequently took advice from the Deputy CEO on this matter to resolve the issue.

17.0	**Actions referred from other forums/committees where the minutes are unconfirmed/not yet available.**
	17.1 Board of Directors – 25 September 2023

There were no matters referred for Academic Committee to consider.	
	17.2 <u>Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee – 15 November 2023</u>
There were no matters referred for Academic Committee to consider.	

Part 3: Any Other Business and Date/Time of Next Meeting	
18.0	**Any Other Business**
Nothing to consider.	
19.0	**Date, Time, and Venue of Next Meeting:** Friday 26 January 2023, Venue, TBC.