Centre for Alternative Technology

Academic Council Meeting 12th April 2018

Minutes of the meeting of 12th April 2018 held at 2pm at the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT)

Present: Adrian Ramsay (AR, CEO) (Chair), Alun Thomas (AT, Head of School), John Carter* (JC), Jane Fisher* (JF), Frances Hill* (FH), Tim Coleridge (TC), Elaine Hemers (EH, LJMU Representative)

* attended via Skype

In Attendance: Martin Skelton (MS, minutes)

Apologies: Anca Ciupala (AC, UEL Link Tutor)

1. **Welcome, Introduction and Apologies**

    1.1.   AR welcomed those present to the meeting and specifically welcomed Elaine Hemers to her first Council meeting. Anca Ciupala has taken over from Alex Apeagyei as UEL representative but was unable to attend on this occasion. AT and TC advised that a new student representative for Council will be appointed from two interested candidates and invited to the next meeting.

2. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

    2.1.   TC noted that the date should be 10th January in item 9. The draft minutes of the September meeting were otherwise **agreed** as an accurate record. **Action: MS to correct Item 9 in the January minutes and add them to the GSE website.**

3. **Matters Arising**

    (NB: References are from the previous meeting's minutes)

    (9.5)   Action complete: AT confirmed that supervised visits and research undertaken in the UK are covered by our existing insurance cover, provided associated risk assessments have been completed. Students conducting research overseas need to make their own arrangements in respect of personal and public liability insurances. **Action: JF to make students aware of this at the forthcoming Dissertation Workshop and ensure the Dissertation Guide is updated accordingly.**

    (6.7)   Action complete.

    (6.8)   Action complete

    (4.4)   Action complete

    (6.2)   Ongoing: JF and TC have a good understanding of the differences for our most commonly used policies however this will remain ongoing until a full review of all UEL and LMJU policies has been completed. AT believes it will be necessary for CAT to have separate policies for certain procedures e.g. extenuating circumstances as there are significant differences between UEL and LJMU processes. **Action: TC and JF to continue to identify policy differences and make recommendations about how CAT policies should be developed.**

(8.4)   Action complete: TC informed Council of two initiatives that were being explored to help showcase employment and business opportunities for CAT students and graduates i.e. the development of our Alumni network and proposals for a Science Symposium to be held in Spring 2019. AR agreed these were useful initiatives and thanked TC for his work on these. **Action: TC to further develop these ideas with the Graduate School Marketing Officer.**

(8.7)   Action complete: MS advised that a Leaver Survey was issued in March on behalf of the Programme Leaders. **Action: MS to report initial findings of the March Leaver Destinations Survey at the June Academic Council meeting.**

4.   QAA Action Plan Draft

4.1.   AT introduced a draft action plan following receipt of the final QAA report and advised it will be published on our website with a link to the report page on the QAA website. The draft plan is based around building on and securing the areas where we received commendations and ensuring that any actions alluded to in our submission to the QAA and reflected in the report are effected.

4.2.   The draft makes use of student feedback as a success indicator for several of the proposed actions. This seems appropriate given our emphasis on ensuring student engagement and several of the praiseworthy comments in the report. However, additional success indicators are sought from Council members.

4.3.   Commenting on the action plan, MS said that it has previously been agreed that our Leaver Survey will be issued annually. TC commented that the frequency of one to one meetings between tutors and students is typically less frequent than stated in the action plan for MSc SA students. JC felt that the action plan should reflect our ambition to maintain and improve quality whilst simultaneously growing our student numbers. AT **agreed** the action plan should reflect current practices and **agreed** to amend the plan accordingly. **Action: AT to amend the draft action plan in light of these comments.**

4.4.   TC believed that we need to improve the quality of distance learning teaching and, in order to meet our ambitions for increasing the number of distance learning students, we will need to ensure the necessary physical and human resources are available. AR agreed this will be important, and also would be ensuring that our existing IT staff resource is used effectively. The IT department has been asked to provide costs for improving IT infrastructure and increasing capacity and it was **agreed** that AT would discuss this further with Tim Jenkins. **Action: AT to discuss IT improvements needed with Tim Jenkins.**

4.5.   JF raised a concern about the unavailability of IT support outside normal office hours and advised this has occasionally impeded the recording of lectures held during evenings and at weekends. AR advised that there are a number of staff who can be asked to provide IT support out of normal working hours and IT support can be requested when booking rooms. AR offered to discuss this further with the SMT. **Action: AR to discuss the provision of out of hours IT support with the SMT.**

5.   GSE Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy: Update

5.1.   AT advised that the GSE Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy was agreed by Council in April 2017 and it is timely to review progress against the implementation plan and to amend it as

appropriate. This agenda item gives Council the opportunity to review progress against the 10 key aims of the plan.

5.2. Enhancement of the quality of the student learning experience is heavily emphasised in the Quality Code and we received a commendation for our work in this area in the HERAP report. As befits the need for continuous improvement, the implementation plan has several 'ongoing' actions and members are invited to provide examples of how these actions are being implemented. Consideration of the work that we have already effected to implement our learning and teaching enhancement strategy will help underpin this.

5.3. JC asked if a logbook should be maintained to evidence action against the plan. AT felt this would be an acceptable approach but a report to Council would be needed in any event.

5.4. TC advised that Programme Leaders currently record examples of good practice within the annual REP Reports and agreed this was a good time to review the action plan.

5.5. It was **agreed** that members would contribute to a paper detailing progress made in respect of the action plan, and this would be presented at the next Council meeting. **Action: Head of School to liaise with Members and present a revised action plan at the next Council meeting**

6. Support for Students with Additional Educational Needs

6.1. JC introduced this agenda item, which was prompted by the growing number of students within the MArch: Sustainable Architecture programme with additional educational needs (AENs). Often these conditions and/or difficulties are not made known to GSE staff at application and we are unaware until we detect AENs; or students self-refer to Louise Halestrap, the GSE staff member responsible for supporting these students.

6.2. This overall situation is exacerbated because there is insufficient staff time to provide the extra 1-to-1 tuition that appears to be needed by the students. The MArch course does not have regular vacations, and there appears to be a relatively high incidence of dyslexia amongst architecture students. JC emphasised that this is an issue that needs to be addressed now, to ensure that CAT continues to provide a good-standard, all-round academic and pastoral service to its students; with the additional imperative that, with student numbers set to increase, the overall number with AENs is likely to increase.

6.3. UEL does not appear to be an appropriate port-of-call for this matter to be addressed, on the basis of geography and knowledge-of-our-students alone. Face-to-face, personal dialogue appears to be needed by the students concerned. GSE staff (academic and support) urgently need guidance and direction on this matter.

6.4. AR thanked JC for highlighting this issue. TC acknowledged that the situation is different for MSc students but expressed similar concerns about the increasing number of students with additional needs.

6.5. EH asked if it was a requirement for students to declare any known additional needs at application and AT advised that applicants are invited, but not required, to do so. AR asked EH what LJMU have in place for students with AEN's and EH replied that support is offered on a case by case basis, funded from the School budget.

6.6. TC noted that there has never been any provision within our Memorandum of Cooperation for our students to access UEL's support services. JF believed that our LJMU students are able to access LJMU student services but would be unlikely to so as they typically do not live close by. AR

asked if it would be possible to explore what support LJMU could offer our students and JF agreed to do this. **Action: JF to ascertain from LJMU what support is available to our students.**

6.7.   TC said that Louise Halestrap has been informally discussing these issues with one of our Trustees, Clare Cherry, who has some professional experience in this subject. Early suggestions include developing a policy that would assist staff in effectively supporting students with additional needs e.g. when agreeing reasonable adjustments, and engaging with external providers.

6.8.   JC acknowledged the potential role of external agencies, but felt an in-house solution was preferable, and suggested that academic staff could help establish what level of additional resource is needed by keeping records of the time needed to support students with additional needs. Council **agreed** these were useful suggestions to take forward. **Action: AT to discuss policy requirements with Louise Halestrap and Clare Cherry.**

6.9.   AR asked if anyone had any knowledge about the support processes that other providers of a similar size have in place and AT agreed to research this further. **Action: AT to ascertain what other similar sized providers offer to students with additional needs.**

6.10.   AR asked JC if anything could be done to mitigate the lack of regular vacations on the MArch course. JC felt that there was scope for some minor changes within the programme delivery schedule. AR asked JC what arrangements are in place for allowing students additional time for completing assignments. JC replied that all students are given two months to submit assignments and, due to the nature of the course, there would be a significant risk of students falling behind even if it was permitted to give them additional time, rather than the option to intermit. **Action: JC agreed to monitor the situation.**

7.   University Partner Updates

7.1.   AT stated that this agenda item offers our partner representatives a formal opportunity to raise items for discussion. Council **noted** that there were no partner updates for discussion on this occasion.

8.   Minutes of Programme Committee Meetings

8.1.   JC provided an update on our application for ARB prescription. A final decision is expected after the ARB Board meeting in May. **Action: JC to notify Council of the ARB Board meeting outcome**.

8.2.   JC advised that despite great efforts to ready the Pratten Room, students had failed to make use of this space in a consistent way, citing its location and lack of internet connection as reasons. AR asked whether using the Well Wishers Room had met their needs and JC confirmed that it had, and anticipated that it would be needed between January and June next year too. **Action JC to discuss future use of Well Wishers Room with John Challen.**

8.3.   TC noted that it is not easy for students to navigate our website when searching for forms and policies etc. and asked when the new website will be up and running. In response AR said that work is underway and the new website is expected to be available towards the end of 2018. It was **noted** that the current website does not have a search facility. **Action: MS to ask Julie Jones if a search facility can be added to the existing website and improve signposting for students.**

8.4.   TC would like to provide students with an update on the progress that has been made towards the planned introduction of new MSc programmes, following the consultation with students last

year. AT agreed the latest documentation could be shared with the student representatives, for them to share more widely within the student body. AT added that the latest proposals have been approved by AR and the Trustees but have yet to be ratified by Council. **Action: AT to provide TC with the latest proposals for three new MSc programmes, to be shared with the student body via the student representatives.**

9. **Any Other Business**

9.1.   AT asked Council to consider and approve the circulated revised Terms of Reference. Council membership has been updated to include our LJMU Representative and to remove the position of Lead Academic. Council **noted** the changes and **agreed** the revised Terms of Reference.

9.2.   TC asked about the implications of GDPR on handling student records and staff operational communications. MS replied that he is representing GSE at regular GDPR preparation meetings being held at CAT but recognised this is chiefly in respect of onsite processes. AT felt a member of academic staff should attend future GDPR meetings and agreed to discuss with Nigel Pompeus. **Action: AT to discuss GDPR meeting membership with Nigel Pompeus.**

9.3.   TC asked Council to consider the need for investment in professional webinar software to improve the quality of distance learning students' experience. AR acknowledged that there were limitations with the current provision for this and recognised that there are wider benefits to be gained from investing in a more professional system e.g. promotion and broadcasting of other CAT meetings and events, and external conferences etc. TC asked EH if it would be possible to receive some informal advice about software and online teaching tools from LJMU. **Action: All to feed in needs and suggestions for improving IT services to Tim Jenkins in IT.**

9.4.   TC expressed disappointment about the lack of insurance provision for students wishing to undertake research overseas. AT noted that it is extremely difficult for insurance providers to adequately assess the risks associated with overseas research activities and, therefore, insurance is either unavailable or prohibitively expensive. JF and TC asked for further details of our insurance provision ahead of the next dissertation workshop in May. **Action: AT to supply additional detail in regard to our insurance policy.** TC has discussed with John Challen the process for signing off students' risk assessments, and the requirement to provide dissertation supervisors with appropriate training. **Action: TC to further discuss risk assessment processes with John Challen.**

9.5.   AR summarised the staffing changes that had been confirmed since the last meeting. Dr Adrian Watson has been appointed to the Head of School vacancy and will commence in post on 8th May. As this will be his final Council meeting AR took the opportunity to thank AT for successfully leading the Graduate School through a period of significant growth and development against a background of increasing compliance requirements. AR announced that JF and Tom Barker have stood down from the Lead Academic role and thanked them for their work in enhancing the student experience in GSE, and in developing and introducing new courses. The duties formerly undertaken by the Lead Academic will in future be jointly undertaken by the Head of School (who will lead on new course development) and the Engagement team (which will administer university visits), with Dr Alan Owen leading on the academic content for university visits. Council recognised and **thanked** Jane, Tom and Alun for their valuable contributions.

9.6.   AT informed Council that the proposed, new "Green Building" degree had been submitted to UEL and that the other two new proposed courses were nearly ready to be submitted to LJMU.   AT

noted that there will be an opportunity for Council to formally ratify new courses before they become effective.

10. <u>Date of Next Meeting</u>

10.1.   2pm, 28th June 2018