Centre for Alternative Technology

Academic Council Meeting 4th July 2019

Minutes of the meeting held on 4th July at 10am at the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT)

(minutes of previous Academic Council meetings are available from the Quality Assurance section of the GSE website)

Present: Adrian Watson (AW, Head of School) (Chair); John Carter (JC)*; Tim Coleridge (TC); Jane Fisher (JF)*; Anna Crowder (AC, SFNR Student Rep)*; Colm Bowe (CB, LJMU Representative)*; Ian Lemon (IL, UEL Link Tutor)
* attended via Skype

In Attendance: Martin Skelton (MS, minutes)

Apologies: None received

1. Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

1.1.   AW welcomed those present to the meeting and apologies were noted.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

2.1.   Referring to item 8.6 in the draft minutes of the April Council meeting JF advised that LJMU provide us with a programme handbook template each year and there are limitations on what content we can edit, and said that we can provide students with information about ESR & FMA in module guides. The draft minutes of the April 2019 meeting were otherwise **agreed** as an accurate record. **Action: MS to amend the draft minutes as above and publish minutes of the April 2019 Academic Council meeting on the GSE website.**

2.2.   TC asked if future Academic Council minutes could include a weblink to the section of the GSE website where previous minutes are stored, and this was **agreed**. **Action: MS to include a link to previous minutes in all future Academic Council meeting minutes.**

3. Matters Arising

NB: The following references are from the minutes of the April 2019 meeting.

(2.1)   Action complete. Minutes of the January 2019 meeting have been added to the GSE website.

(6.8)   Action Complete: AW advised that a generic risk assessment and explanatory text has been appended to the existing Student Support and Welfare Guide.

(8.1)   JC confirmed that we have received confirmation that the EU has accepted our application, via the Architects Registration Board, for our full-time MArch Sustainable Architecture course to be listed in Annex V to the EU Professional Qualifications Directive (2005/36/EC). This allows our graduating students qualifications to be

recognised professionally across Europe, and Council **noted** this welcome development. AW asked if this will include the part-time study option and JC advised that he is seeking clarification on this. **Action: JC to confirm if the part-time MArch programme will also be listed in Annex V to Directive 2005/36/EC.**

(9.4)   Ongoing: it remains an aspiration to create a database for collating student feedback later in the year**. Action: MS to develop a database for recording student feedback.**

(10.4)   Action complete: AW summarised the findings of the CAT / GSE marketing review and thanked all of those involved with its production. One of the co-authors, Christina Jackson, has since left her position as Graduate School Marketing Officer (GSMO) and it was **noted** that Alis Rees has recently been appointed to this post.

JC reported that the end of year show at CAT and more recently our student's exhibition at the Festival of Architecture in London and CAT's presence at Glastonbury have been very successful and we have received some valuable feedback and publicity. In response to a question from JC, IL said that there might be scope for collaborating with UEL in future. TC said that consideration will be given to hosting a reunion event for MSc alumni, following the recent success of the MArch reunion event. **Action: AW to circulate a copy of the marketing review findings to Council members.**

(4.2)   AW confirmed that the validation of the 'Sustainability and Ecology' and 'Sustainability and Behaviour Change' courses has been completed by LJMU and we have received in excess of twenty applications to each of these to date.

The Green Building validation event was held at UEL on 8th May and attended in person by AW and TC. AW said it had been a successful event and thanked IL for his support. TC added that we had also received some useful feedback about teaching and learning and the planned curriculum from the external advisers. AW summarised the conditions and recommendations arising from the validation event and advised that revised documentation will be submitted by the 19th July deadline. TC noted that it would be helpful to have new module codes as soon as possible, to assist with preparing documentation for students, and noted that the recommendations will be further considered as part of the Review and Enhancement process later this year. **Action: AW to submit revised documentation to UEL on or before 19th July and to obtain new module codes.**

(5.2)   AW said that we received a letter from the Office for Students (OfS) on 18th June informing us of the process for applying for specific course designation. It is understood that OfS will be able to use much of the information that we submitted to the Department of Education in support of our initial application in December 2018. However, there will inevitably be a further delay and AW acknowledged this is far from satisfactory and will impact on our students who wish to apply for student loans. **Action: AW to liaise with OfS regarding our application for course designation.**

(6.5)   MS advised that the most of the online forms are ready for use and a link to them has been sent to the MSc student representatives for comment and feedback. Some of the MArch forms require amending in line with feedback from JC, and MS advised these will be shared with the MArch student representatives when this work has been completed. The online forms will be available to new students from September and

will be trialled with existing students in the interim. Existing forms will remain available should students not wish to use the online system. **Action: MS to finalise MArch forms and share with MArch student representatives for comment.**

(7.4)   Action complete.

(9.4)   See agenda item 5.

(10.1)   AW said that GSE staff training requirements are to be considered at the forthcoming academic staff meeting, on 8th July. **Action: AW to discuss training needs with IL following the GSE academic staff meeting.**

4. OIA Annual Statement 2018

4.1.   AW introduced the [Office of Independent Adjudication (OIA) Report (2018)](#) and summarised the key findings. AW confirmed that the OIA did not close any complaints about Centre for Alternative Technology Charity Limited in 2018 (see https://statements.oiahe.org.uk/). The OIA 2018 report and key findings were **noted**.

5. Student Withdrawal Policy

5.1.   MS introduced a draft Student Withdrawal policy and outlined the proposed procedure for withdrawing students voluntarily or involuntarily. The policy describes a number of situations whereby it might be appropriate to withdraw a student against their wishes or without their knowledge and provides a framework for ensuring it is done in a measured and consistent way.

5.2.   Where it is felt there are grounds to withdraw a student involuntarily the policy comprises an initial stage whereby informal and supportive actions will be explored in order to resolve the issues that are giving cause for concern. The informal stage will last for not less than ten working days and will not normally exceed one calendar month.

5.3.   If it has not been possible to resolve matters informally the Student Support team will recommend to the Programme Leader or Head of School that the student be withdrawn. The Programme Leader or Head of School may, at their discretion, grant the student a further opportunity to comply with requirements and in these cases a further period not exceeding one calendar month will be allowed for this.

5.4.   If, after any agreed final deadline has passed, the student has still failed to comply with requirements they will be informed in writing that they are to be withdrawn from their programme of study at the earliest opportunity. Regardless of the reason for their withdrawal, students will have a right to appeal the decision within 10 working days of the withdrawal notification date. Appeals will be managed in accordance with the GSE Complaints Policy and Procedures.

5.5.   AW thanked MS for drafting the Student Withdrawal policy and invited comments from Council members. TC asked if, by adopting this policy, some GSE students would be withdrawn earlier than they would normally be by their awarding university. MS said that this would be likely and especially in cases where students fail to keep in touch with us and engage with their studies.

5.6.   CB supported the introduction of the policy and advised that LJMU rules for referral and deferral may need to be taken into consideration in some cases.

5.7.   With reference to the non-payment of tuition fees, JC said he has previously received notifications of non-payment very late and this can put teaching staff in a very difficult position if

the student who has not paid their tuition fee subsequently arrives at CAT expecting to participate. MS said that the GSE Fees Terms and Conditions are very clear about payment deadlines, and all students are made aware of this. It was **agreed** that a reference to the Fees Terms and Conditions would be a useful addition to the policy and subject to this the draft Withdrawal policy was **approved**. **Action: MS to include a reference to GSE Fees Terms and Conditions and publish the GSE Withdrawal policy.**

6. GSE Strategy & Policy Updates

6.1.   MS and AW have recently audited our document register and a number of policies and procedures will be reviewed over the summer period. Differences between LJMU and UEL procedures and the introduction of new courses from September 2019 will be highlighted in all document revisions.

6.2.   AW advised that the Student Support and Welfare Guide has been reviewed and a template for assessing any individual student needs has been included as an appendix (see item (6.8) in Matters Arising). AW said that the template has been developed with the help of Louise Halestrap and in accordance with advice from Disability Rights, and said that the approach we are taking is appropriate given that reasonable adjustments are often bespoke in nature. AW added that this has been piloted with a small number of students earlier in the year and has proved to be successful.

6.3.   TC welcomed the inclusion of the template in the Student Support and Welfare Guide and said it helps to bring clarity about what can be accommodated and what has been agreed both for ourselves and the students concerned. TC felt it would might useful to further develop this approach by the inclusion of a mechanism in the student database whereby academic staff could be notified in a timely manner about any additional needs, recognising that this would need to be achieved whist fulfilling our data protection and confidentiality obligations. MS suggested using a shared document for recording additional needs and agreed reasonable adjustments with the student's identifiably by their student ID number only. **Action: AW, TC and MS to further discuss how additional needs and reasonable adjustments can be communicated confidentially and effectively to academic staff.**

7. University Partner Updates

LJMU Updates

7.1.   CB said he was pleased that the validation of the Sustainability and Ecology and Sustainability and Behaviour Change courses has been successfully concluded and that recruitment onto both courses appears to be progressing well.

7.2.   CB confirmed that CAT is free to use its own Ethics policy and added that LJMU's Ethics Adviser is happy to provide any further advice if required.

7.3.   CB said that internal discussions are ongoing at LJMU regarding the availability of IT, student support and careers services to collaborative partners and it is expected that an information sheet will be provided by the end of December 2019.

CB said that Office 365 is not available to CAT students however Office software should be available to CAT students via the Citrix off-campus system. AW asked if CAT students have access nVivo and JF advised that she had been told this is only available via onsite facilities at LJMU. CB agreed to provide further details if needed and said it would be helpful if CAT students

could check what is available. **Action: AC and JF to check availability and access to Office and other software via LJMU Citrix.**

CB said that CAT students have access to a Digital Careers Support website and agreed to forward a link to this. **Action: CB to send a link to LJMU Digital Careers Support website to MS; MS to ensure students are aware of and have access to this resource.**

CB advised that their Academic Registry would be happy to hold discussions with CAT regarding the provision of student support and welfare services, over and above what is currently available at CAT. AW said that he would like to explore this further and asked CB to provide him with contact details. **Action: CB to provide AW with LJMU Academic Registry contact details.**

UEL Updates

7.4. IL confirmed that UEL is offering training updates to its partners and will be happy to discuss this with AW following GSE's forthcoming end of year academic meeting. IL commended GSE for its rigorous approach to ensuring the quality of its teaching and learning activities.

7.5. TC enquired about access to nVivo and SPSS. JF said that she has recently been in contact with our subject librarian, Nick Balmforth, and understands that our students can access these resources however JF was uncertain if our academic staff can access them. **Action: TC / JF to check if GSE staff have access to nVivo & SPSS and follow-up with Nick Balmforth if necessary.**

7.6. TC asked IL if he is aware of any policy updates that are expected to be implemented before the start of the new academic year and IL said that he was not aware of any.

8. Programme Quality and Enhancement Reports

8.1. TC said that module evaluations are underway and the outcomes of this process will be formally documented in the Review and Enhancement (REP) report, the first draft of which will be submitted to UEL in November.

8.2. JC said the MArch programme is also being reviewed, and it is an opportune time to do this as we are nearing the end of the first two-year cycle of the programme. JC said although the previous twelve months has gone very well in general there is a desire to build on this in order to develop and improve the programme further.

8.3. JF said that LJMU employ a continuous monitoring and enhancement (CME) and asked CB to confirm if there is a specific date when the next report is due by. **Action: CB to confirm forthcoming CME deadlines to JF.**

8.4. JF said it is her intention to gather student feedback about the programme as a whole after the July module has been delivered and asked CB about the revalidation process that will be undertaken during the next academic year. AW confirmed that the two new courses will have a five-year validation period and CB agreed to explore the possibility of aligning the validation of all three LJMU programmes in future. **Action: CB to provide JF with details of the re-validation process and to ask if re-validation dates can by synchronised in future.**

9. Minutes of Programme Committee Meetings

MSc Programmes

9.1. TC said the most recent MSc programme committee was held on 3rd July and minutes will be available in due course. TC said that a range of topics had been discussed but highlighted the negative feedback received from students about the tuition and accommodation fee increases

that will take effect from September 2019. AC confirmed that some current students were unhappy with the level of fee increase and also that this should have been communicated to them sooner. AC said that even small increases in fees can be very significant to students on low income and some students would appreciate an explanation of how the fee increases have been arrived at.

9.2.   In response, AW said whilst it has been possible to maintain MArch tuition fees at the current level it has been necessary to increase MSc tuition fees and accommodation fees from September 2019 to cover additional staffing and maintenance costs. AW said he was aware that MArch students have written to the WISE management team about the increase in accommodation fees and the quality of some accommodation options, and advised that the response to this will be shared with MSc students also. AW said that to the best of his knowledge accommodation fees had not been increased since the WISE building was built and whilst CAT has endeavoured to keep fees to a minimum, with the benefit of hindsight it would have been more prudent to apply smaller fee increases over the preceding years. AW said that the reduction in the length of the teaching week from September will help mitigate the accommodation fee increase for MSc onsite students. TC acknowledged this and said the change to a five-day teaching week will have a more professional feel, and added that although module leaders will have some discretion regarding the module start and finish times some students might have to stay for additional nights due to travel limitations. **Action: AW to ensure that students are provided with a response to the concerns they have raised about fee increases.**

9.3.   TC said the other key issue arising from the programme committee meeting was the need for a shared discussion platform that will allow students on all GSE programmes to communicate with each other. TC said that in the absence of a dedicated discussion forum Facebook is being used by some students however it was noted that not all students have an account and many do not wish to use it.

MArch

9.4.   JC said that the lack of access to some important architectural journals was raised during their most recent programme committee meeting on 2nd June 2019 and said that GSE may have to consider funding its own subscriptions if necessary. IL suggested contacting the UEL librarian, Nick Balmforth, to ascertain which journals are currently available. IL added that he will be happy to discuss this further with Nick Balmforth if necessary. **Action: JC to contact Nick Balmforth regarding the provision of architectural journals.**

9.5.   JC said the other main issue raised was the lack of access to reliable plotting facilities. AW said that a student had made him aware of this independently and he will follow this up with CAT's IT department. **Action: AW to review the provision of plotting facilities in GSE.**

10. Any Other Business

10.1.   TC reported that he has had a useful conversation with Julie Gwilliam about her external examination experiences over the year, and said that Julie has expressed an interest in attending one of our future Academic Council meetings. TC felt that this would be useful and suggested inviting other external examiners from time to time. AW agreed to give this further consideration. JF said that Prof Erik Millstone intends to visit CAT during the July teaching week and talk to staff and students about the Sustainable Food and Natural Resources programme. **Action: AW to consider inviting external examiners to future Academic Council meetings.**

10.2.   IL said that work is underway to bring the MArch programme into the same Board as our MSc programmes and said he would welcome a further discussion about which Boards GSE feel it is most useful for their staff to attend.

10.3.   IL said there have been some logistical problems relating to accessing work provided for external assessment from various Dropbox folders and asked if GSE could consider alternative ways of organising this in future. MS said he would be happy to consider this and would welcome suggestions from IL, based on his wider experience in working with other collaborative partners. **Action: MS to review the mechanism for the provision of work to UEL for external examination.**

10.4.   AW informed Council about the recent appointment of CAT's new Chief Executive Officer, Peter Tyldesley, and added that Peter is expected to start in post from September 2019.

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

11.1.   The next two Council meetings will be held at 10am on **20th September 2019** and **17th January 2020** (Quarry Room, CAT).

End