



## Centre for Alternative Technology

### Academic Council Meeting 20<sup>th</sup> September 2019

#### **Minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> September 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)\*; Peter Tyldesley (PT, CAT CEO)\*

\* attended via Skype

**In Attendance:** Martin Skelton (MS, minutes)

**Apologies:** Aran Yardley (UEL Student Rep); Colm Bowe (CB, LJMU Representative); Ian Lemon (IL, UEL Link Tutor)

#### **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. The draft minutes of the meeting held on 4th July were accepted as an accurate record. **Action: MS to publish minutes of the July Academic Council on the GSE website.**

#### **3. Matters Arising**

(NB: bracketed references are from previous minutes)

(2.1) Action complete: minutes of the April 2019 meeting have been added to the GSE website. MS advised that the Academic Council files have moved from the Quality Assurance section of the website into the Useful Documents section. It was **agreed** that minutes of these meetings should be kept within Quality Assurance. **Action: MS to ask the website team to ensure Academic Council meeting minutes are stored within the Quality Assurance section of the CAT website.**

(8.1) JC said that the part-time M.Arch is expected to be listed in Annex V to the EU Professional Qualifications Directive (2005/36/EC) however there remains some uncertainty due to possible Brexit outcomes. **Action: JC to confirm if the part-time MArch programme will be listed in Annex V to Directive 2005/36/EC.**

(9.4) Ongoing: MS has outlined the requirements for a student feedback database with Joel Rawson and this is expected to be available later this academic year. **Action: MS to develop a database for recording student feedback with Joel Rawson.**

- (10.4) Action complete: AW has circulated a copy of the marketing review findings to Council members. AW said that there has been a small percentage increase in students choosing to study part-time this year, and said that hopefully the proportion of full-time students can be increased in future. TC noted that because the core introductory modules are delivered in September and November for both full- and part-time students there will be a significant pressure on the MSc delivery team this year due to increased overall recruitment levels.
- (4.2) Action complete: revised MSc Green Building documentation was submitted to UEL by the required deadline and new module codes have been received. AW confirmed that all academic aspects of the validation have been concluded.
- (5.2) Ongoing: AW confirmed that our courses have been designated by the Office for Students (OfS) however discussions are still ongoing with HEFQW, and approval is awaited from the Welsh Government. **Action: AW to liaise with HEFQW regarding course designation.**
- (6.5) Action complete: MS confirmed that the GSE Forms Hub and associated forms have been revised in light of the feedback received and are now available for students to use. Links in Moodle and Canvas and student documentation have been updated accordingly. JC said that MArch students have been briefed about this development.
- (10.1) Action complete: AW said that GSE staff training requirements have been discussed with Ian Lemon and the Head of Academic Training at UEL.
- (5.7) Action complete: MS confirmed that the GSE Withdrawal policy has been published and circulated to students, and a link to our Fees Terms and Conditions was included.
- (6.3) Ongoing: AW confirmed that appropriate discussions have taken place with new students who declared a disability and/or additional needs, and personalised cover-sheets have been provided for students with dyslexia. TC said that sometimes students forget to upload their cover sheet and it is useful to know if any reasonable adjustments need to be accommodated when planning forthcoming modules. It was **agreed** that a register of students with additional needs and any associated adjustments would be shared internally, and updated as required. TC asked if those students with additional needs could be highlighted on module attendance lists. MS said he could see the benefit of that approach however it might be difficult in practice and he would discuss this with the Student Support team. **Action: MS to further consider how academic staff can best be informed about students with additional needs.**
- (7.3) Actions complete: JF said that LJMU students cannot download Office 365 however they can access it via LJMU's Citrix system. JF added that NVivo is not accessible via Citrix however it is available onsite at LJMU. AW asked if SPSS is available and JF confirmed it is available via Citrix. MS confirmed that students have been provided with a link to LJMU's Digital Careers Support website, and AW confirmed that CB had provided him with contact details for the LJMU Academic Registry. TC said it would be useful if LJMU could provide us with a student entitlement letter, as UEL currently do.
- (7.5) Ongoing: TC said that unfortunately Nick Balmforth was unable to visit CAT in September and it remains unclear if GSE staff can access nVivo and SPSS. **Action: TC /**

**JF to check if GSE staff have access to nVivo & SPSS and follow-up with Nick Balmforth if necessary.**

- (8.3) Ongoing: JF advised that CME deadlines have not yet been confirmed. **Action: JF to liaise with LJMU and confirm CME deadlines.**
- (8.4) Action complete.
- (9.2) Action complete. AW advised that some improvements to student accommodation have been completed already and further work will be carried out over the rest of the year. AW said that any further feedback or suggestions should be directed to Ed Parsons, Accommodation and Catering Manager.
- (9.4) Action complete: JC said that UEL have not renewed their subscriptions to the Architects Journal and Architectural Review, however specific articles from these publications can be requested via the UEL Library. JC said that consideration is being given to funding digital subscriptions to at least one of these journals out of the MArch budget.
- (9.5) Action complete: AW advised that a new plotter has been purchased and installed, and JC thanked AW for his assistance with this.
- (10.1) Action complete: AW said it would be unusual for external examiners to attend Academic Council meetings and he did not feel it was necessary or appropriate to invite them to these meetings.
- (10.3) Action complete: at the time of the meeting MS had not discussed the provision of work to external examiners with IL, however this was discussed shortly afterwards and it was agreed not to introduce any changes at this time.

#### **4. Student Charter 2019**

- 4.1. AW introduced an updated version of the CAT Student Charter and advised that it contains minor changes or clarifications to the previous version only, and no new material. AW invited comments of the new draft, which had been circulated in advance of the meeting.
- 4.2. JC commented that some of the wording was specifically aimed at MSc students e.g. the requirement to communicate with Dissertation Supervisors and suggested amending this as the Student Charter is a global document. **Action: AW agreed to amend this section and include MArch students undertaking their Final Design Project.**
- 4.3. Academic Council **approved** the revised Student Charter subject to the minor amendment noted. **Action: MS to ensure the revised Student Charter is published on the GSE website.**

#### **5. GSE Leaver Survey (June 2019)**

- 5.1. MS reported on the June 2019 GSE Leaver Survey findings and described some small changes to the survey questions that had been made this year following poor response rates previously.
- 5.2. Twenty five of the ninety survey recipients (27.8%) provided a response, which is a significant improvement on previous response rates (11.9% in 2017 and 14.5% in 2018). Twenty responses (80%) were from students who had completed one of the Sustainability and Adaptation courses (SA, SABE, SAP) and the other five had studied Architecture.
- 5.3. Of the leavers that responded, most (96%) had found employment since leaving CAT (68% full-time, 28% part-time). Four (16.7%) of the leavers in employment stated their qualification was a

formal requirement of the job, six (25%) said it gave them an advantage and fourteen (58.3%) said it was not required. Half of those in employment had a permanent or open-ended contract and, overall, five leavers (21%) were self-employed or working freelance. Of those in full-time employment over half were receiving a salary in the range £20,000 to £30,000 gross per annum.

- 5.4. Just over two-thirds of respondents reported that studying at CAT had prepared them for employment well (36%) or very well (32%) and all respondents said that studying at CAT had prepared them well or very well for further study.
- 5.5. Almost three-quarters of respondents felt that a range of skills had improved (40% improved slightly; 34% improved greatly). The greatest skill improvements were reported for gathering and using data, and critical analysis of data which is similar to the findings of previous surveys. People management and decision making were the skills showing least improvement.
- 5.6. The vast majority of leavers said they had learned something valuable through studying at CAT studying and felt inspired and empowered to take positive action. The most frequent words chosen by participants to describe their experience of studying at CAT include: fun, life-changing, challenging, informative, practical, rewarding, and inspirational.
- 5.7. AW thanked MS for drafting the report and welcomed the increased participation this year. AW said that it is not uncommon for CAT graduates to set up their own businesses, and noted that the new ZCB Innovation Hub may be of assistance to our graduates who wish to pursue that route. AW said he was encouraged by the number of students who reported that studying at CAT had led or steered them towards their current job.
- 5.8. JF commented that new and potential students attending Open Days like to hear about what CAT graduates have gone on to do after graduating and asked if this survey could assist with that. MS felt that it could, however the survey is only conducted annually and does not collect detailed information. MS suggested that the development of an Alumni Network might be more useful for Marketing purposes. JC said that he had received a number of emails from recent MArch graduates over the summer letting us know what they were engaged with and said he would be happy to share these with the Student Support team.
- 5.9. TC asked if the survey is anonymous and asked if we are able to contact respondents for more information about their employment or interesting particular projects they are involved in. MS said that participants are asked to give their name and give their consent for us to contact them for marketing purposes etc., so this should be possible in most cases.

## **6. Admissions Policy**

- 6.1. AW introduced a revised Admissions policy and advised that new programmes and the part-time M.Arch SA option have been included. The revised policy was circulated ahead of the meeting and AW invited comments
- 6.2. JC said that the wording of the section relating to MArch entry requirements and ARB prescription wasn't correct and offered to send revised wording to AW. MS suggested checking that the GSE website was showing the correct information.
- 6.3. Academic Council **approved** the revised Admissions Policy subject to the above correction being made. **Action/s: AW to correct the draft Admissions policy; MS to publish the revised Admission Policy on the GSE website and ensure that the MArch course entry requirements are otherwise correctly stated on the website.**

## 7. GSE Strategy & Policy Updates

- 7.1. AW said that roughly equal numbers of UEL and LJMU students have been recruited this year and this should be taken into account when reviewing GSE policies. AW said a number of policies are due to be reviewed and draft revisions will be brought to future Academic Council meetings for scrutiny and approval.
- 7.2. Regarding GSE strategy, AW said that a number of discussions have already taken place and a full academic staff meeting will be held in November. AW advised that GSE strategy will form part of CAT's overall strategy which is in the process of being agreed by the CEO and Trustees.
- 7.3. PT advised that the overall CAT strategy is likely to build on current and ongoing objectives and is expected to be evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

## 8. Draft 2019/20 Action Plan

- 8.1. AW introduced the Draft 2019/20 Action Plan and said GSE aims to maintain and build upon the areas of good practice identified at the last QAA inspection.
- 8.2. AW said that the twice-yearly allocation of the CPD budget will continue however the timing of this is likely to be reviewed.
- 8.3. AW highlighted the importance of obtaining and acting on student feedback, recording tutor/student interactions and encouraging and supporting students transitioning to the Dissertation module.
- 8.4. TC said that new students have reacted positively to the revised coursework requirements for the introductory core module in September, which have been introduced this year in response to feedback from our external examiners.
- 8.5. JF said that the approaches to teaching and assessment have been adjusted over the previous year in order to better prepare students taking the Dissertation module. AW thanked JF for raising this and said this would be reflected in the final Plan.
- 8.6. AW outlined additional aspects of the Plan including reviewing student recruitment processes in light of this year's experiences, optimising the quality of Panopto recordings, developing stronger links with Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies, and creating a formal alumni network.  
**Action: AW to finalise the Action Plan and forward to MS, for publishing of the GSE website.**

## 9. University Partner Updates

### LJMU Updates

- 9.1. None

### UEL Updates

- 9.2. None

## 10. Programme Quality and Enhancement Reports

- 10.1. The (Stage 2) CME Programme Performance Summary Report, and an updated Enhancement and Development Plan for the MSc SFNR were circulated in advance of the meeting. AW highlighted the main issues therein and these were **noted** by Council.

## 11. Minutes of Programme Committee Meetings

### MSc Programmes

- 11.1. TC confirmed that minutes from the most recent meeting held in July had been circulated. TC was happy to report that three of the existing student representatives wished to continue however there is a need to recruit a fourth rep who would also be asked to coordinate onsite student social events. **Action: TC to coordinate the recruitment of a fourth Student Representative for the MSc programmes.**

#### MArch

- 11.2. JC advised that the next MArch Programme Committee meeting will be held in November.

### **12. Any Other Business**

- 12.1. TC highlighted his ongoing concern about the quality of IT equipment and the variable availability of IT support staff, and said that unfortunately the shortcomings were very evident during the introductory September module. TC went on to explain how these limitations impact on tutors and student experience. PT acknowledged the issues raised by TC and said that the Board are actively considering the development of IT services and equipment as part of their strategic planning. AW recognised that some improvements have already been made, but welcomed the further assurances from PT. **Action: PT to provide Council with an update on IT developments at the next meeting.**
- 12.2. JF asked if there were any procedures already in place or planned that would cap the numbers of students on modules. AW said that this might need to be considered if student intake remains high in future, however there is nothing in place or planned currently. JF reported that delays in the cafe during busy module weeks, particularly at breakfast time, can impact on attendance and general student experience and this was **noted**.
- 12.3. JF said that LJMU require any instances of proven academic misconduct to be noted at Academic Council meetings, and it was **agreed** to amend the Academic Council meeting agenda template accordingly. **Action: MS to include academic misconduct outcomes as a standing item on the Academic Council agenda template.**

### **13. Date of Next Meeting**

- 13.1. The next Council meeting will be held at 10am on **17<sup>th</sup> January 2020** (Quarry Room, CAT).

[End]