

Centre for Alternative Technology

Minutes of Academic Council Meeting 17th January 2020

Minutes of the meeting held on 17th January 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); Jane Fisher (JF)

Attending via Skype: Anna Crowder (AC, Student Rep); Josie Fitzgibbon (JF, Student Rep)

In Attendance: Martin Skelton (MS, minutes)

Apologies: Colm Bowe (CB, LJMU Representative); Ian Lemon (IL, UEL Link Tutor); Peter Tyldesley (PT, CAT CEO); Tim Coleridge (TC)

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. JF advised that concerns about the impact of delays in the cafe on attendance and general student experience had not been included September minutes.

2.2. The draft minutes of the meeting held on 19th September 2019 were otherwise accepted as an accurate record. **Action: MS to amend the draft minutes of the September Academic Council meeting as above and publish on the GSE website.**

3. Matters Arising

(NB: bracketed references are from previous minutes)

(2.1) Action complete: MS advised that minutes of Academic Council meetings have been reinstated in the Quality Assurance section of the GSE website and minutes from the July 2019 meeting have been published.

(8.1) Ongoing: JC said that we are still waiting to hear if the part-time M.Arch will be listed in Annex V to the EU Professional Qualifications Directive (2005/36/EC). **Action: JC to confirm if the part-time MArch programme will be listed in Annex V to Directive 2005/36/EC.**

(9.4) Action postponed: MS advised that the creation of a database for storing and managing student feedback has been postponed in light of an ongoing review of IT provision. MS advised that student feedback will be stored on a spreadsheet in the interim.

- (5.2) Ongoing: AW said that he has been in contact with HEFCW. The requested course information will be submitted this week and it is anticipated that the outcome of this will be available within the next two months. **Action: AW to provide an update on course designation at the next meeting.**
- (6.3) Action complete: MS advised that a process for letting tutors know about students with additional or specific learning needs has been implemented.
- (7.5) Action complete: JF confirmed that LJMU students can access to SPSS via the off-campus facility, however nVivo is not currently available to UEL or LJMU students. AW confirmed that students who require nVivo for their Dissertation should purchase a personal licence and will be reimbursed by CAT on production of a valid receipt.
- (8.3) Action complete: JF confirmed that Stage 1 of CME will be undertaken in March each year, Stage 2 in June and the final stage after students have been awarded.
- (4.1) Action complete.
- (4.3) Action complete.
- (6.3) Action complete.
- (8.6) Action complete.
- (11.1) Ongoing: MS advised that we currently have eight Student Representatives (4 for MSc programmes and 4 for MArch programme). **Action: TC to review the recruitment of additional Student Representatives for the MSc programmes.**
- (12.1) Ongoing: PT was not present to provide an update on IT developments. **Action: PT to provide Council with an update on IT developments at the next meeting.**
- (12.3) Action complete.

4. CAT Alumni Network Update

- 4.1. AW said that following internal discussions towards the end of last year there is support for the creation of a CAT alumni network. This is being taken forward in conjunction with Alis Rees, Graduate School Marketing Officer, and it is hoped that we will be in a position to launch this during the summer, perhaps to coincide with the 10-year anniversary of the opening of the WISE building.
- 4.2. AW acknowledged that a number of Facebook groups have been created by CAT students however many of our students prefer not to use this form of communication and alternative methods are being explored. **Action: AW to provide Council with an update on the development of the CAT Alumni Network at the next meeting.**

5. PREVENT Update & Protecting Students

Prevent Update

- 5.1. AW briefly outlined CAT's responsibilities in respect of the Prevent duty and said that we are also obliged to report to HEFCW on an annual basis. Following a consultation with education providers in July 2019 HEFCW has streamlined its processes and AW advised that although we are required to make a submission to HEFCW direct monitoring will only be required in the event of us reporting any specific concerns to them
- 5.2. AW added that HEFCW require educational institutions to have clear policies and to 'stress-test' those policies from time to time. AW said that CAT's policies were tested in a real life situation

last year following an incident on site that was potentially (but not ultimately) reportable. We are awaiting a response from HEFCW following our submission of our report to them in December 2019.

- 5.3. AW added that he has spoken to students this week in regard to the classification of Extinction Rebellion (XR) as an extremist organisation by a certain police force in England, which has been widely reported on in the Press. AW reported that following discussions with North West Higher Education Coordinator and the Welsh Extremism & Counter Terrorism Unit (WECTU) this is now widely recognised to have been 'a mistake' and the position has been clarified. AW assured students that CAT does not regard any affiliation with XR as a matter of concern however we have a duty of care to ensure that our students are not encouraged or coerced into participating in illegal activities, and we are obliged to report any such concerns.

Student Protection Plan

- 5.4. AW introduced a draft Student Protection Plan which sets out the measures that CAT has in place to protect students' continuation of studies, and noted that we are obliged to have this in place by HEFCW.
- 5.5. The types of event or change which might cause a risk, together with an explanation of the steps the University would take to protect students' continuation of study are set out within the Plan, and include actions to be taken in the event of financial, academic and resource issues. These measures are in addition to the protections that students have under consumer protection law and do not impinge on students' consumer rights.
- 5.6. AW summarised the plan and invited feedback and comments. There were no comments and the draft Student Protection Plan was **approved**. **Action: MS to publish the Student Protection Plan on the GSE website.**

6. Student Progression Rules

- 6.1. AW introduced revised Student Progression Rules and advised that the document had been revised in accordance with the current UEL and LJMU Regulations.
- 6.2. The Progression Rules state what is expected of full- and part-time students in terms of the minimum and maximum number of credits that may be attempted in a single term or academic year. The document also summarises university- and programme-specific progression rules and describes the rules around progressing from an intermediate award.
- 6.3. JC noted that the name of the MArch Sustainable Architecture programme name had been incorrectly stated and asked for a clarification regarding the Integrated Design Project requirements. AW agreed to amend the draft accordingly.
- 6.4. JF said that LJMU recommend part-time MSc students should aim to divide the 120 taught credits equally over two years and it was noted that this recommendation should also apply to UEL students. It was **agreed** to amend the wording of the draft document accordingly.
- 6.5. MS said that UEL students have always been advised that they must attempt a minimum of 15 credits each term, or should otherwise intermit. This has been recently confirmed by UEL's Academic partnership office however we are not aware of any specific Regulation for this. **Action: MS to seek clarification from Ian Lemon regarding the minimum study requirements for UEL students.**

- 6.6. Council approved the revised Student Progression Rules subject to the above corrections and clarifications being made. **Action: MS to correct and clarify the draft Progression Rules as above and publish on the GSE website.**

7. LJMU Extension & Extenuation Policies

- 7.1. JF introduced a revised Extension Policy for LJMU students and advised that a number of changes have been made following recent experience where a number of late and inappropriate requests have been submitted. The revised Policy required the submission extension requests by no later than two working days before the published deadline (exceptional circumstances arising within two days of a deadline will still be considered) to allow the Module or Programme Leader sufficient time to consider the request.
- 7.2. The revised policy includes guidance on qualifying and non-qualifying circumstances and states when supporting evidence will be required. JF acknowledged that students with minor illnesses such as coughs and colds should not be required to visit their doctor for a fit note or letter and advised that self-certification will be permitted for a maximum of seven calendar days.
- 7.3. AC asked if marks are capped where a student is granted an extension and JF advised that marks are not capped.
- 7.4. AC felt that it would be useful to circulate the revised document to all LJMU students and this was **agreed**. MS added that this would also be an opportunity to remind students about the GSE Forms Hub where most of our application forms can be accessed online. JF asked if the qualifying guidance could also be included in the online form and MS agreed to update the form. **Action: MS to circulate the updated Extension policy to all LJMU students and revise the online application form accordingly.**

8. CAT Complaints Policy

- 8.1. MS advised that it was not possible to circulate the draft revised Complaints Policy ahead of the meeting and it will be circulated along with the draft minutes of this meeting.
- 8.2. MS outlined the rationale for updating the policy and briefly summarised the changes that are being made. **Action: MS to finalise the draft Complaints Policy and circulate to Council members for comment.**

9. University Partner Updates

LJMU Updates

- 9.1. None

UEL Updates

- 9.2. None

10. Programme Leader Reports

MArch Sustainable Architecture Programme

- 10.1. JC said that this year's REP report has been submitted to UEL and noted that we have yet not received an official response to the report submitted this time last year. AW agreed that this makes it difficult for us to formally proceed with programme changes and amendments and advised JC to raise this directly with UEL. **Action JC to contact UEL regarding a response to the MArch REP report submitted last year.**

- 10.2. JC advised that the MArch library has been reorganised and said that we have been offered a number of donations to our library by CAT supporters, most notably a sizeable collection of books and journals that would occupy ten square metres of shelving. AW has discussed the possibility of repurposing the Garden Room annex as a library for students and this is being given due consideration. MS added that there is additional storage capacity in the Mezzanine for items that do not need to be accessed regularly. **Action: AW and JC to further discuss the provision of library facilities at CAT.**
- 10.3. Referring back to the earlier discussion about creating an Alumni Network, JC said that regular contact has maintained with recent graduates from the MArch programme and the development of links with 'kindred-spirit' practitioners is going well.
- 10.4. JC was pleased to note that in response to feedback from students additional 'hands-on' teaching has been incorporated across the teaching year with the support of CAT's Master Carpenter Carwyn Lloyd Jones.
- 10.5. JC said that although we do not currently have any part-time MArch students, measures have been taken to ensure that the delivery of the part-time MArch route is well-aligned to the full-time programme, which will help ensure that part-time students do not feel isolated. In response to a question from MS regarding the recruitment to the part-time option this year JC advised that the offer of a part-time MArch option will be kept under review. It was agreed that the part-time option is a useful mechanism whereby full-time students can reduce their workload should they require additional time to complete their studies, and an alternative route for students with limited financial support.
- 10.6. JC highlighted some issues that had been discussed at the most recent MArch programme committee meeting held on 21st December 2019:
- Students expressed their dissatisfaction about the accommodation and café price increases from September 2019. They felt that this had been poorly managed by CAT and felt that they should have been consulted with in advance;
 - Students felt that they were being forced to speculate on the outcome of applications for extenuating circumstances given the infrequency of Extenuation Panel meetings;
 - The poor acoustics in the Sheppard Theatre are causing ongoing problems for some students;
 - JC said that students greatly appreciated the more even spacing of teaching weeks this year however a consequence of this is less 'overlap' with the MSc teaching weeks and some students are concerned about reduced access to onsite pastoral care. JC acknowledged that Dr Frances Hill has offered to be available for MArch students when not staying at CAT and JC expressed his appreciation of this.
- AW **noted** the points raised by JC and said that CAT remains committed to making improvements wherever possible.
- 10.7. JC confirmed that there were no cases of suspected academic conduct to be noted.

LJMU MSc Programmes

- 10.8. JF said that no Quality and Enhancement reports have been submitted since the previous Academic Council meeting in September 2019. The next submission will be made in March and will include the new programmes (Sustainability and Ecology and Sustainability and Behaviour Change).

- 10.9. JF advised that the Sustainable Food and Natural Resources (SFNR) programme is due to be re-validated in April and in advance of this she has discussed potential changes to the programme with onsite students this week. Additional opportunities for students to comment have been offered next week and MS has circulated a questionnaire to all SFNR students and alumni.
- 10.10. JF confirmed that an external adviser has been appointed and thanked the Student Representatives for their offer of support. JF advised that the following proposed amendments will be considered:
- 7501CATSCI – change to assessment
 - 7502CATSCI - change to assessment
 - 7500CATSCI – textual changes relating to the new programmes
 - 7500CATSCI – proposal to offer a part-time option (our progression data suggests that some part-time students are deterred from undertaking the dissertation due to conflicting personal circumstances e.g. work commitments).
- JF said she hopes that the above modifications, if approved during the ASFNR revalidation, can be applied to the two new programmes also.
- 10.11. AW added that if a part-time study option for LJMU students is approved this will be considered for UEL students also.
- 10.12. JF briefly summarised recent feedback from students and said that the inclusion of more content of a practical nature featuring perspectives from farmers and landowners had been welcomed by SFNR students.
- 10.13. JF reported comments made by the MSc SFNR external examiner Prof Erik Millstone at the October assessment board. Prof Millstone commended the programme team on the high academic standards, including of the marking and feedback. He did raise the need for markers to check their spelling and grammar in their feedback since we are sometimes commenting on this in the students' work. He also reminded dissertation supervisors to ensure that MSc dissertation students do not attempt too large projects, though he noted that sometimes students do this despite being advised not to.
- 10.14. JF said that there has not been a Programme Committee since the previous Academic Council meeting and confirmed that there were no cases of suspected academic conduct to be noted.

11. Any Other Business

- 11.1. MS outlined some of the potential benefits of moving the CAT Graduation ceremony from mid-November to earlier in the year when the CAT site and gardens will be at their best, it will be lighter in the evening and the weather is generally better. There was general support for this proposal and JF suggested end of June might be a suitable time. **Action: MS to liaise with Ed Parsons to see if a suitable alternative date is available this year.**
- 11.2. AW reported that we have been approached by the Copyright Licensing Agency to ensure our licence is up to date (it is) and we are operating in accordance with copyright legislation. AW advised that a certificate is available next to the WISE photocopier and this includes guidance for staff and students. AW advised that a further communication regarding copyright rules and regulations will be circulated shortly and this was **noted** by Council. **Action: AW to ensure staff and students are aware of copyright regulations and the appropriate usage of copyrighted materials.**

- 11.3. AC said that some students whose Research Design Proposals (RDP) had not been approved and had needed to take a period of intermission had reported feeling isolated and unsupported whilst on intermission. JF said that where an RDP is not approved it is usual for the student to discuss the areas requiring improvement with their supervisor and agree what needs to be done to ensure the dissertation can go ahead at the next opportunity. JF said that although intermitting students do not receive timetabled tutor support it is normal to maintain an appropriate level of communication. JF asked if LJMU students who are taking a Leave of Absence have access to Dissertation resources on Canvas and MS said he would look into this further. **Action: MS to clarify what resources students can access during periods of intermission or a Leave of Absence.**

12. Date of Next Meeting

- 12.1. Following the meeting AW proposed 17th April & 24th June as dates for the next two Council meetings (TBC).

[End]