



Centre for Alternative Technology

Minutes of Academic Council Meeting – October 2020

Minutes of the meeting held on 28th October 2020 at 2pm

(Minutes of previous Academic Council meetings are available from the [Quality Assurance](#) section of the GSE website)

Present: N/A – meeting held online

In Attendance: Adrian Watson (AW, Head of School) (Chair); John Carter (JC); Peter Tyldesley (PT, CAT CEO); Leah Davis (LD, MArch Student Rep); Sarah Dalrymple (SD, LJMU Link Tutor); Aran Yardley (AY, MSc Student Rep)

Martin Skelton (MS) (minutes)

Apologies: Jane Fisher (JF); Tim Coleridge (TC); Colm Bowe (CB)

1. Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

1.1. AW welcomed those attending the meeting and apologies were noted. Sarah Dalrymple was welcomed to her first Academic Council meeting, having recently taken over the role of link tutor from Colm Bowe.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

2.1. The draft minutes of the Academic Council meeting held on 24th June 2020 were accepted as an accurate record. **Action: MS to publish minutes of the June 2020 Academic Council meeting on the GSE website. *Note for next meeting: these were sent to Billy 30/11/20***

3. Matters Arising

(NB: bracketed references are from previous minutes)

(2.1) Action complete: MS advised that minutes of the April 2020 Academic Council meeting were amended as agreed and published on the GSE website.

(8.1) Ongoing: JC said that both the full and part-time versions of our M.Arch programme are listed on the ARB website, and advised that only the qualification (not the route) is required to be listed in Annex V to the EU Professional Qualifications Directive (2005/36/EC). JC has recently been advised by ARB that there is ongoing uncertainty about the possible impact of Brexit on this matter. **Action: JC to report on the impact of Brexit negotiations on the listing of the MArch programme in Annex V to Directive 2005/36/EC.**

(5.2) Action/s complete: students were informed that all our courses were designated for student finance in 2020/21. AW advised that our website and (soon to be

published) 2021/22 Fees Terms and conditions advise that students from the 'European Economic Area' will be liable for overseas tuition fee rates from September 2021.

- (10.1) Action complete: prior to the meeting TC advised that UEL have amended their audit process to only review a sample of CAM Reports, not every single one. This may explain the lack of UEL response to auditing CAT's MSc REP Report last year.
- JC and AW both expressed their concern about the sampling approach being taken, as it would not guarantee that UEL have oversight of programme developments and, furthermore, it might compromise the requirements that are placed on us by ARB. **Action: AW to discuss our concerns about the CAM process with Dr Aurore Julien, UEL Link Tutor.**
- (11.1) Action complete: MS advised that following discussions with Ed Parsons, Accommodation manager, a provisional date of Saturday 19th June 2021 has been reserved for an onsite Graduation event at CAT.
- (11.2) Action complete: AW advised that a guidance document for staff and students is available next to the photocopier in the WISE building.
- (8.8) Ongoing: AW has been trying to contact NLW regarding access to their electronic resources with no success. This may be due to NLW staff working remotely, and AW advised that he will keep trying. **Action: AW to report on GSE access to NLW electronic resources at the next meeting.**
- (5.4) Action complete: MS confirmed that all students issued with a CAT email address have been informed about how they can forward emails to an alternative email address. MS said a small number of students have been unhappy about using Microsoft products and/or having an additional email account to monitor, however in general terms this has gone very smoothly.
- LD said that some students have experienced problems when trying to log into UEL and their CAT email account simultaneously and MS advised that this is due to an unavoidable conflict between the two systems. Fortunately the conflict can be avoided by using different browsers, or by accessing one of the platforms in an incognito window.
- (9.4) See Agenda item 10
- (11.3) Action complete: JC confirmed that our annual monitoring submission to ARB has been satisfactorily concluded.
- (11.4) Action complete: AW advised that the scheduling of MArch tuition fees has been addressed in the soon to be published 2021/22 Fees Terms and Conditions.
- (12.1) Ongoing: ahead of this meeting TC advised that the current MSc Student Reps (Anna Crowder, Josephine FitzGibbon, Natasha Simpkins and Aran Yardley) confirmed that they wish to stand down, and we are seeking nominations for new MSc Reps. Our sincere thanks to all our MSc Reps - Anna, Aran, Josie and Natasha, for their valuable work over the last academic year, was **noted**. **Action: TC to provide an update on progress towards the election of new MSc Student Representatives at the next meeting.**
- JC advised that two new 4th year MArch Student Reps, Ashley Barley and Francesca Miles, have been elected and confirmed that Lead Davis and Liv Harrison will continue as 5th year Student Reps. **Action: MS to revise the**

distribution of Academic Council agenda and minutes accordingly. *Note for next meeting: text document showing current attendees added to Academic Council folder (GSEshare / Quality)*

- (12.4) Action complete: AW confirmed that module booking arrangements have been agreed.
- (12.7) Ongoing: AW advised that the Teaching and Learning Strategy will require additional work and considerations due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and requested that this item be carried forward to the next meeting: **Action: AW to review GSE Teaching and Learning Strategy.**

4. Student Enrolment and Progression

- 4.1. Commenting on recently collected data, AW noted that our intake of students this year is remarkably similar to our September 2019 student intake, in terms of student demographics (age, gender, ethnicity etc.).
- 4.2. The majority (87.5%) of our students are of white ethnicity and this is similar to previous intakes at The Graduate School, and perhaps reflects diversity within the UK sustainability sector in general. AW and PT noted that, as an organisation, CAT is committed to broadening its appeal to staff and students from ethnic minorities, and appropriate strategies for achieving this are being considered by the Trustees and the Senior Management Team.
- 4.3. Likewise, the proportion of overseas students enrolled this year is very similar to last year. It was noted that our capacity for recruiting overseas students is limited by not holding a Tier IV licence, which is a barrier to us recruiting overseas students who wish to mostly study onsite at CAT.
- 4.4. LJMU programmes have been very popular again, and we have enrolled forty to fifty students onto each of the three programmes this year. In comparison, with the exception of the MSc Green Building programme on which over forty students enrolled this year, between ten and twenty students were enrolled onto each of the programmes offered in collaboration with UEL.
- 4.5. AW noted a small but significant increase in the number of students enrolled this year who already have a Masters level qualification. This may be due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on certain job sectors, encouraging students to undertake further study in order to improve their employability.
- 4.6. MS advised that due to the proximity of this meeting to the October Boards, it has not been possible to collate representative data on student progression. **Action: AW to report on student progression at the next Academic Council meeting.**

5. GSE Research Ethics Committee Terms of Reference and Membership

- 5.1. AW introduced an updated version of the GSE Ethics Committee Terms of Reference and Membership, and advised that no fundamental changes have been made and the remains very much aligned to the equivalent documents published by our university partners.
- 5.2. AW advised that new guidance has been included for the approval of projects that have a health or social care component, and summarised the changes to membership of the committee following recent staffing changes within The Graduate School.

- 5.3. In response to a request from AW, SD said that colleagues at LJMU would be happy to assist CAT with any aspects of the research ethics process, and offer further guidance as required.
- 5.4. The revised GSE Research Ethics Committee Terms of Reference and Membership were **approved** without changes.

6. IT Updates

- 6.1. AW confirmed that CAT has now formally transitioned to Microsoft Office 365. Although alternative platforms such as Skype and Zoom might still be used where advantageous to do so, it is anticipated that MS Teams will be used to support the vast majority of staff-staff and staff - student interactions in future, and this will help to minimise the number of platforms that staff and students will need to access and be familiar with.
- 6.2. AW recognised the efforts of CAT's IT team, and Tom Wild in particular, in ensuring a relatively seamless transition to Office 365, and added that attention will now focus on configuring and utilising the new platforms such as Teams and SharePoint to deliver maximum gains to staff and students.
- 6.3. SD advised that LJMU recommend that their teaching staff use Teams for tutorials, and use Zoom and Panopto for recording video content. This is partly to address problems that Mac users have reported with using Teams.
- 6.4. JC said that using Zoom has been particularly useful for teaching MArch students because of the 'annotate' function, however this or something similar might be available via Teams.

7. Revised Teaching Arrangements / Covid-19 Updates

- 7.1. AW was pleased to report that it had been possible for a number of students to attend CAT in September and October as planned, however the numbers of students who were able to do so was limited by the requirements for maintaining social distancing in teaching spaces, and accommodation capacity.
- 7.2. In order to mitigate for reduced capacity onsite, the usual teaching week was split into two, three-day sessions for MSc students and the fourth and fifth year MArch students attended during separate weeks.
- 7.3. Following a change in Welsh Government rules, it was necessary to return to distance learning only towards the end of the final October teaching week, and it is expected that this will now remain the case until at least February 2021.
- 7.4. AW stressed the importance of operating in accordance with Welsh Government rules, and ensuring that the safety of local communities is not compromised by the movement of our students from across the UK and beyond, and reiterated that CAT is committed to offering onsite teaching to as many students as possible as soon as it is possible and safe to do so.
- 7.5. AW said he was grateful for the support shown by students to the approach taken by CAT to date, and said he is committed to giving students as much notice as possible of any future changes to teaching arrangements. LD said that the MArch students have felt supported academically and emotionally, however for some students the financial implications of altered teaching arrangements have been challenging. AY said he was aware of one student who was very disappointed not to have an opportunity to attend the

October Dissertation Workshop onsite, however he was not aware of any other issues raised by students.

- 7.6. In response to a question from AW, SD said that in general LJMU students have been supportive of their revised teaching arrangements, and additional flexibilities and adjustments have been available to students who were particularly anxious about potential risks to their health.

8. MSc SFNR Revalidation

- 8.1. AW advised that the revalidation for the Sustainable Food and Natural Resources (SFNR) programme was slightly delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and was undertaken as an online event for the same reasons.
- 8.2. AW expressed his sincere thanks to all those involved in the revalidation process, which was undertaken and concluded very efficiently and smoothly, and added that the external auditor has agreed to become an external examiner for the SFNR programme.
- 8.3. Prior to the meeting, JF advised that the following recommendations were made:
- The programme team explore ways in which they can articulate the Systems Approach to delivery within the public information about the programme, and
 - The programme team keep under review, through the Board of Studies meetings, the consistency of the assessment strategy and the balance of assessment weightings.

The following features of good practice were highlighted:

- The Systems Approach to teaching is excellent and contemporary and is fully aligned with the current UK approach to Food Policy;
 - The range, variety and flexibility within the assessment approaches and teaching on the programme;
 - The approach taken by the programme team to develop a philosophy of teaching, and to explore transformational change, is inspiring and unique;
 - The combination of distance learning opportunities with on-site delivery is innovative, and the support mechanisms for the blended approach and effective engagement with students.
- 8.4. Post revalidation the SFNR programme is operating in two modes - one with the students who enrolled prior to Sept 2020 who can keep the 'old' module choices or chose to follow the newly available modules, and the students who enrolled Sept 2020 who chose from the new modules.
- 8.5. Post revalidation, all part-time LJMU students will have access to a part-time version of the Dissertation module which will be offered each September, starting from September 2020.

9. UEL New Academic Framework

- 9.1. AW advised that he has been contacted by UEL with regard to changes to their Academic Framework for undergraduate and postgraduate courses, which will become effective from 2021. AW said that the changes are likely to impact on GSE in a relatively minor way, as our modules are already largely compliant.
- 9.2. Following internal discussions with the Programme Leaders for the MSc and MArch programmes, AW asked UEL if a proposed review of our programmes this year could be

postponed until the quinquennial revalidation of our UEL programmes that is already scheduled to take place during the 2021/22 academic year.

- 9.3. AW advised that UEL have agreed to this, however they have asked us to adopt the use of their revised document proformas in the interim. **Action: AW to discuss the implications of UEL's revised Academic Framework with Tim Coleridge and John Carter.**

10. Marking & Feedback Deadlines

- 10.1. As discussed at the previous meeting, the granting of extensions to LJMU students, and the consequent staggering of deadlines, complicates the process of providing marks and feedback to students in a timely way.
- 10.2. Students normally expect to receive their marks and feedback three weeks after submitting their work, which can be six weeks after the published deadline where a student has been granted a 15 working day extension.
- 10.3. The Student Support team have proposed that all students who are granted an extension of 1 to 15 working days, are advised that marks and feedback may not be available until six weeks after the published deadline.
- 10.4. TC, JF and AW supported this proposal during the June meeting however Colm Bowe was not in attendance to agree to this on behalf of LJMU.
- 10.5. MS advised that he had been unable to discuss this with Colm Bowe following the June meeting, however SD advised she could support standardising the release of marks and feedback for all students given an extension as proposed, and it was agreed. Action: MS to inform the Student Support Team of this decision. *Note for next meeting: action complete*

11. University Partner Updates

LJMU Updates

- 11.1. SD advised that she is due to attend a meeting with LJMU's Collaborative Provision team later in the week, and will pass on any relevant updates by email.

UEL Updates

- 11.2. No updates received.

12. Programme Leader Reports

MArch Sustainable Architecture Programme

- 12.1. JC reported that he has recently received reports from the MArch external examiners, both of which were very complementary about the programme in general, and contained some helpful commentary.
- 12.2. JC said that due to the impact of Covid-19, it was necessary to extend the usual end of the academic year from June to July. Furthermore, following the postponement of the 'build module' from May to September this year, JC advised that current final year MArch students will not be able to complete the course until July 2021.
- 12.3. JC confirmed that all MArch students who have been affected by this have been kept fully informed throughout, and have been very supportive of the changes that have necessarily been made.

LJMU MSc Programmes

12.4. JF was not able to join the meeting, and circulated the following notes in advance:

- The programme team and AW met to discuss the 'bunching' of SBC modules in January, and it was agreed to consult with students about an alternative option;
- SFNR external examiner, Professor Erik Millstone, is due to end his tenure at the end of this academic year. JF has approached Damien Maye, external advisor on the food programme for the revalidation, to ask if he would be able to take over.
- SBC external examiner, Dr Christina Demski, is due to take maternity leave from November 2020 for one year. JF is applying to extend Dr Sam Bonnet's role, current external examiner for Sustainability and Ecology, to cover this programme for one year.

AW advised that both proposals in respect of external examiners above, have been approved, and arrangements are being made to facilitate this.

- The new academic year has seen the first SE core modules delivered using a blended approach through 'Teams' with all lecturers being online for all students, and outdoor practical activities being offered onsite for those who could attend, and at distance for those who could not. The onsite students were very complementary about having the experience to be onsite, learn and meet fellow students and staff. The distance learning via 'teams' has gone smoothly.
- The large intake has led to a huge number of emails and queries from new starters about how the module was organised during September, module choices and emails requesting permission to take both the January food and behaviour change module. JF has suggested recording a video on module choices for students to watch/listen to next year to reduce the queries next year.
- The large number of general queries from new students raises questions about the level of information provided to applicants and if they have engaged with this information before beginning their studies. It may be useful to review the content of Open Day presentations and the format of Q&A sessions prior to the enrolment of new students in September 2021.

12.5. Prior to the meeting, Enhancement & and Development Plans (EDP's) for the LJMU programmes, and the Stage 3 CME Report for the SFNT programme were circulated.

UEL MSc Programmes

12.6. TC was not in attendance, but had previously advised that the next MSc Programme Committee meeting will be held in January 2021, following the recruitment of new student representatives.

Academic Misconduct Hearings (all programmes)

12.7. There have been no academic misconduct hearings held since the last Academic Council meeting in June 2020.

13. Any Other Business

13.1. PT asked for his thanks and appreciation of all those who were involved in the recruitment of new students this year to be **noted**.

13.2. LD asked if current MArch students could be involved in the recruitment of the next Programme Leader for the MArch Programme Leader, ahead of the forthcoming retirement of John Carter. AW said that interview preparations were underway and

provision had been made for students to attend the presentation element of the interviews.

- 13.3. AW advised that following the Welsh Government elections in March 2021, there may be a consultation regarding the replacement of HEFCW. AW said that he will represent CAT at a meeting of Alternative Providers (AP's) in Wales during November, with a view to agreeing a joint position to ensure that AP's are not disadvantaged in any way.
- 13.4. AW informed the meeting that Martin Skelton would shortly be stepping down as Student Support Manager, and thanked him for his contribution to these meetings and the student support service more widely.

14. Date of Next Meeting

- 14.1. The next meeting will be held in late January 2021 (28th or 29th, tbc). **Action: AW to confirm the date and time of the next Academic Council meeting.**

[End]