



Centre for Alternative Technology

Minutes of Academic Council Meeting – June 2020

Minutes of the meeting held on 24th June at 2pm

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

Present: N/A - the meeting was conducted via Zoom

Attending via Zoom: Adrian Watson (AW, Head of School) (Chair); Jane Fisher (JF); John Carter (JC); Tim Coleridge (TC); Peter Tyldesley (PT, CAT CEO); Aran Yardley (AY, MSc Student Rep); Josie Fitzgibbon (JoF, MSc Student Rep); Olivia Harrison (OH, MArch Student Rep); Leah Davis (LD, MArch Student Rep)

In Attendance: Martin Skelton (MS) (minutes)

Apologies: Ian Lemon (IL, UEL Link Tutor); Colm Bowe (CB, LJMU Link Tutor); Anna Crowder (AC, MSc Student Rep); Natasha Simpkins (NS, MSc Student Rep)

1. Welcome, Introduction and Apologies

1.1. AW welcomed those attending the meeting and apologies were noted. We welcomed Leah Davis who has recently taken over from Wiktorja Krzekotowska as MArch Student Representative.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

2.1. The draft minutes of the Academic Council meeting held on 17th April 2020 were accepted as an accurate record. **Action: MS to publish minutes of the April Academic Council meeting on the GSE website.**

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 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). The delay is due to ongoing uncertainty about the Brexit situation and JC advised that the ARB website is being regularly updated. **Action: JC to confirm if the part-time MArch programme will be listed in Annex V to Directive 2005/36/EC.**

(5.2) Action complete: AW has received verbal confirmation from HEFCW that our courses have been designated for student finance in the 2020/21 academic

year, and we understand that OfS will designate our courses in accordance with this decision. AW confirmed that HEFCW have given us permission to notify current and prospective students of this decision. **Action: Student Support & Graduate School Marketing Officer to advise students that course designation (academic year 2020/21) has been approved.**

AW advised that from September 2021 European students will be classed as overseas students and this was **noted**. In response to a question from TC, AW said his understanding is that returning overseas students would not be charged overseas students fees after September 2021. **Action: Student Support & Graduate School Marketing Officer to advise current and prospective EU students of the changes to be introduced from September 2021.**

- (10.1) Ongoing: TC stated that he is still awaiting a reply from UEL to his enquiries about REP feedback for MSc programmes. JC said that he has not received feedback from the MArch REP also, and **noted** his thanks to IL for assisting with the ARB's Annual Management Review (see 11.3). **Action: TC and JC to raise outstanding REP Report audit and feedback with Dr Aurore Julien, incoming UEL Link Tutor.**
- (10.2) Action complete (updated 24/6/20): AW advised that CAT has received a sizeable donation of Architecture books from a CAT supporter, George Marshall. Items that are not included in our library will be offered for sale via the CAT shop. CAT is very grateful to Mr Marshall, for his generous donation, and our thanks were **noted**.
- (11.1) Ongoing: Ed Parsons will be returning to CAT in July and MS will liaise with him regarding possible dates for Graduation in 2021. Options for this year's Graduation event in November were briefly discussed. If it is not possible to hold the event onsite as normal, consideration will be given to offering a virtual Graduation or delaying Graduation until next year. It was noted that many students have deferred the submission of their research this year due to the Covid-19 situation, and fewer students will graduate in October as a result. **Action: MS to discuss potential dates for Graduation 2021 with Ed Parsons; Student Representatives to canvas opinion from the student body.**
- (11.2) Ongoing: Copyright regulations: AW advised that a guidance document for staff and students and will be circulated shortly. **Action: AW to circulate copyright guidance to staff and students.**
- (4.3) Action complete: AW confirmed that our LMJU students may be allowed to progress to their research module on gaining 105 credits rather than the usual 120 credits, with the approval of the Programme Leader. JF advised that approximately 70 students in total attended the May Dissertation Workshop.
- (5.6) Action complete: the updated Terms of Reference for meetings of the CAT Academic Council has been published on our website.
- (5.7) Action complete: the updated Terms of Reference for Programme Committee meetings has been published on our website.
- (6.6) Action complete: the revised Complaints Policy has been published on our website.

- (8.8) Ongoing: AW has contacted NLW regarding access to their electronic resources and is awaiting a response. **Action: AW to report on GSE access to NLW electronic resources at the next meeting.**
- (9.3) See Item 6

4. OIA Annual Statement 2019

- 4.1. AW advised that the OIA Annual Report (2019) is available for download from the OIAHE website (<https://www.oiahe.org.uk/media/2470/oia-annual-report-2019.pdf>).
- 4.2. The report shows there is a trend of increasing number of complaints referred to OIA, and a particularly high number in 2019 however it is noted that some of the increase in 2019 relates to specific events e.g. industrial action; closure of a provider.
- 4.3. AW was pleased to report that there were no complaints submitted by CAT students and advised that OIA are allowing providers and students additional flexibility around reporting deadlines etc. in recognition of delays due to the Covid-19 situation.
- 4.4. The key findings of the 2019 OIA Report were **noted**.

5. IT Update & Office 365

- 5.1. AW advised that plans to introduce Office 365 are progressing well, and a major change to email infrastructure is expected to be completed towards the end of July.
- 5.2. In addition to providing staff and students with access to the latest Office software, we will also have access to MS Teams (video conferencing) and cloud-based document storage, which will enable us to review our usage of VLE's and Dropbox.
- 5.3. It is anticipated that new students enrolling in September will be allocated a CAT email address and have online access to a cloud-based suite of Microsoft Office programmes.
- 5.4. AY advised informing students how to automatically forward messages from their CAT email address to their personal address, in order to prevent important communications being overlooked. **Action: MS to ensure all students are informed how to forward CAT emails to their personal email account following the change.**
- 5.5. JoF asked how long CAT students would be able to keep their CAT email address for after graduating. AW said that it would depend upon the number of licences available but felt it would be unlikely that the CAT email address would be withdrawn immediately after graduation.
- 5.6. TC gave his thanks to the IT team and others that have been involved with this project to date.

6. Extenuating Circumstances & Covid-19

- 6.1. AW reported there has been a large number of applications for extenuating circumstances (EC) due to the impact of Covid-19, against a background of general increases in the number of applications received.
- 6.2. Whilst acknowledging that increased student numbers will have contributed towards a general increase in EC applications, MS shared some data showing applications have almost doubled every year since 2017/18.
- 6.3. The data also showed that MArch students have been significantly more likely to apply for extenuation during the current academic year than UEL MSc students. JC felt that this was probably due to the inherently increased workload for MArch students at this time of

year coinciding with the Covid-19 outbreak. JC added that a number of students have difficulties with mental health and for many of them the Covid-19 outbreak and subsequent lockdown has exacerbated their symptoms.

- 6.4. AW announced that UEL intend to make mental health awareness courses available to students from next year and the Welsh Government are putting in place welfare and support packages for students with mental health difficulties, hopefully by the end of July 2020.
- 6.5. JF advised that there has also been a significant increase in the number of applications for coursework extensions from LJMU students. JF added that although the requirement to provide supporting evidence has been relaxed for Covid-related circumstances, it is important that this does not become established practice and we must return to the situation where students are required to provide independent evidence where possible.
- 6.6. Under normal circumstances CAT's Extenuation Panel meets ahead of the scheduled university Boards, however in order to consider a number of late applications and meet university deadlines, AW said that the Panel have necessarily been meeting more frequently.
- 6.7. JC said that the MArch students appreciated the more frequent Extenuation Panel meetings, as this had shortened the period of uncertainty whilst they are await a decision. JC said that he hoped that Panel meetings would continue to be held more frequently, and AW advised that they would. JC added that he felt the UEL Regulations are, to some degree, 'illogical' and AW advised that we will discuss any concerns with our Link Tutor.

7. CAT / GSE Strategy

- 7.1. AW invited PT to provide an update on CAT's broad strategy for the next 2 – 3 years. PT acknowledged the work already undertaken by CAT staff and the previous CEO, Adrian Ramsay, towards the development of a CAT Strategic Plan and advised that the draft Plan was due to be considered by the Trustees in June 2020. However, due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation, the draft Strategic Plan has needed to be revised and will now be presented to the Trustees in mid-August 2020.
- 7.2. AW outlined how the GSE strategy will align with CAT's wider objectives, and confirmed that GSE will continue to aim for sustainable growth in student numbers whilst ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning is not compromised in any way, and continues to improve. Although it has not been possible to pursue a Tier IV licence this year, GSE remains committed to increasing our worldwide reach and recruiting significantly more students from overseas.
- 7.3. AW summarised a number of 'evolutionary' aims such as developing existing relationships e.g. with IBERS; exploring new opportunities for collaborative working e.g. with The Hutton Institute and De Montfort University; seeking accreditation for our courses with e.g. Association for Environment Conscious Building, and offering PhD opportunities.
- 7.4. TC asked if the collaborative review of UEL programmes has been included in the GSE Strategy and AW confirmed that it has.

8. MSc SFNR Revalidation

- 8.1. The MSc Sustainable Food and Natural Resources (MSc SFNR) programme was initially validated for a period of three years from September 2017, and AW confirmed that the

revalidation would take place on 8th July 2020, via a virtual meeting. A number of documents were submitted to LJMU ahead of the revalidation meeting and AW advised that he would be responding to a number of questions arising in advance.

- 8.2. JF confirmed that one of our Student Representatives and a further two additional MSc SFNR students have volunteered to assist with the revalidation meeting.
- 8.3. JF said that a number of proposed modifications will be considered during the revalidation process and confirmed that current students had been widely informed and consulted about this.
- 8.4. TC added that the proposed module changes had been discussed at the most recent Programme Committee meeting and it was noted that the proposed module changes will impact on, and enhance, our other LJMU programmes too. **Action: AW and JF to report on the outcome of the MSc SFNR revalidation meeting to be held on 8th July 2020.**

9. Marking & Feedback Deadlines

- 9.1. MS said that 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.
- 9.2. 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.
- 9.3. In order to standardise and simplify this, the Student Support team propose 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.
- 9.4. TC, JF and AW supported the proposal and acknowledged the difficulties in managing feedback release dates where there are multiple submission deadlines for a module. TC added that we should aim to release marks and feedback within the six week period where this is possible. In the absence of CB, it was agreed that this could be approved subject to agreement of CB via correspondence. **Action: MS to seek approval from CB to standardise the release of marks and feedback for students who have been granted an extension.**

10. University Partner Updates

LJMU Updates

- 10.1. No update (apologies received from CB).

UEL Updates

- 10.2. No update (apologies received from IL).
- 10.3. AW advised that Dr Aurore Julien will be taking over from Ian Lemon as Link Tutor in the next academic year, and we look forward to working with her in due course.
- 10.4. AW advised that he has received a letter from UEL setting out a number of new services that will become available to students in future, namely access to 'Mental Wealth' modules, virtual career zones, and alumni support. UEL will also offer support to teaching staff dual delivery (blended) learning. The letter confirmed that CAT will be exempt from the capping of student numbers that has recently been announced by the Department for Education in England.

- 10.5. JF asked if we have received any recent updated from UEL and LJMU regarding the provision of library services and access to journals, and AW advised that we have not.

11. Programme Leader Reports

MArch Sustainable Architecture Programme

- 11.1. JC said that MArch has held 'virtual' teaching weeks in April, May and June and the feedback from students has been generally positive. The ability to engage with geographically distant speaker's using video conferencing software has been an unexpected bonus and this is likely to continue even after we are able to resume onsite teaching.
- 11.2. Virtual exams will be held in mid-July and arrangements have been made to facilitate external examination.
- 11.3. JC advised that our first ARB Annual Monitoring Report for the MArch programme was submitted towards the end of January, and a number of questions arising from this have subsequently been addressed. ARB's Educational Committee have ratified the Report, and it will be presented to the full Board in July. **Action: JC to report on the final outcome of our ARB Annual Monitoring Report submission.**
- 11.4. JC reported that current MArch students have asked if tuition fee payments can be scheduled more evenly throughout the programme. AW said that the Fees Terms and Conditions have already been published for the 2020/21 year and it would be difficult to amend this now, however it is something that can be considered in future. AW added that tuition fee payment deadlines for MArch students are in part determined by student finance payment dates. OH added that it is the MArch students who are not eligible for a loan that would benefit most from more even tuition fee payments. **Action: AW to discuss MArch tuition fee payment schedule with the Finance team.**
- 11.5. TC asked if students would again be affected by the change in designation and course duration payments last year in the next academic year. AW said he understands it was a one-time correction that was applied last year, and part time students will receive more consistent loan payments in future.

LJMU MSc Programmes

- 11.6. JF summarised the modules that have been delivered entirely by distance learning since the Covid-19 lockdown began, and advised that a small number of students have started their research projects early due to growing season considerations.
- 11.7. JF thanked everyone involved in making module marks available for the forthcoming Board of Examiners, which will be held on 3rd July. JF noted that this will be the first Board for modules taken as part of the Sustainability and Ecology and Sustainability and Behaviour Change programmes and we look forward to receiving feedback from the external examiners.
- 11.8. JF confirmed that the (virtual) revalidation event for the MSc Sustainable Food and Natural Resources programme would be held on 8th July,

UEL MSc Programmes

- 11.9. TC said that a number of different approaches to delivery have been adopted during the lockdown period ranging from an 'intensive' week of distance learning for the Building Materials module, to the new Circular Building module for Green Building students which

was spread over six weeks. Adopting a flexible approach has enables staff to manage vastly differing cohort sizes, ranging from fewer than ten up to ninety.

- 11.10. Echoing the earlier comments by JC, TC said that external speakers who do not normally engage with distance learning students had been able to engage with a wider group of students. JF added that the lockdown had provided staff with a useful opportunity to engage with new applications such as Zoom, and engaging with much larger groups of students via distance learning.
- 11.11. TC acknowledged that valuable insights have been gained from recent teaching experiences and these will shape and enhance delivery of the forthcoming autumn modules, and distance learning delivery in the longer term thereafter.
- 11.12. TC gave a verbal update on actions from the Programme Committee meeting held on 31st March 2020. TC drew attention to a novel approach for obtaining student feedback using a shared Google document, which has conveniently enabled students to provide rich module feedback in an anonymous way. TC noted his thanks to Alis Rees, the Marketing team and others who have been involved in making the virtual open days such a tremendous success. TC highlighted the ongoing difficulty in creating a shared discussion forum for LJMU and UEL students, and welcomed the introduction of Office 365 and the wider benefits this bring.

Academic Misconduct Hearings (all programmes)

- 11.13. There were no academic misconduct hearings have been held since the last Academic Council meeting in April 2020.

12. Any Other Business

- 12.1. JF advised that she has almost completed her taught modules and offered to step down as a student representative, to enable another student to get involved. TC thanked all the current MSc reps for giving their continued support this year and said consideration can be given to recruiting new student representatives from the new intake of students in September. **Action: TC and JF to further consider the recruitment of student representatives from the new cohort of students starting in September.**
- 12.2. AY said that he would be happy to continue as a student representative, or give way to a student who would be engaging with taught modules.
- 12.3. TC welcomed Dr Ivor Davies to the teaching team.
- 12.4. JF asked if the requirement for LJMU students to choose their modules at the start of the academic year has been provisioned for. AW advised that the arrangements for this were still under discussion with the Student Support team. **Action AW and the Student Support team to finalise plans for module bookings in 2020/21.**
- 12.5. JC thanked AW for the support he has given to the MArch team during what has been an extremely challenging period in many ways.
- 12.6. PT expressed his gratitude to the entire GSE team for almost seamlessly maintaining teaching and learning activities during a period of unprecedented challenge.
- 12.7. AW advised that GSE's Teaching and Learning Strategy will be reviewed at the next Academic Council meeting. **Action: AW to review GSE Teaching and Learning Strategy.**

- 12.8. AW **noted** his thanks Alis Rees and others involved in the virtual open days. These have been a great success, and we have engaged with over four hundred prospective students and our reach has been much greater than is normally achieved.
- 12.9. AW **noted** his thanks to Ian Lemon who has been a long term supporter of CAT and undertaken the role of UEL Link Tutor for many years.
- 12.10. AW advised that planning for what might be possible in September is underway and he intends to canvas the views of students.
- 12.11. Referring to the extensive press coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement, AW advised that the senior management team at CAT is undertaking a review of CAT's approach to inclusivity and advised that a statement would follow in due course. PT added that this topic would also be discussed at the forthcoming Board meeting.

13. Date of Next Meeting

- 13.1. The next meeting will be held during the week commencing 28th September 2020 (tbc).

[End]