

**ACADEMIC REVIEW COMMITTEE**

**14<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2020**

**REDACTED MINUTES FOR PUBLICATION**

A Meeting of the Academic Review Committee was held via Zoom video conference from 14.00-16.00 on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

Present: Helen Edwards [HE]  
Phoebe Farrell [PF]  
Wendy Finlay [WF]  
Stephen Jackson [SJ]  
Hazel Lobo [HL]  
Amanda Milambo [AM]  
Kenneth Miller [KM] (Chair)  
Nick Morton [NMo]  
Ashley Wheaton [AW]

In attendance: Tony Burke [TB], University of Westminster (observing)  
Nikki Bulteel [NB] (for item 2.1 only)  
Jane Fawkes [JEF] (University College Secretary)  
Alan Hill [AH] (for item 3.4 only)  
Lyndsay Hughes [LH] (note taker)

Apologies for absence:

**1) GENERAL MEETING GOVERNANCE**

**1592            1.1/ DECARATION OF ANY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

1593            There were no conflicts of interest declared.

**1594            1.2/ TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABCENCE**

1595            There were no apologies for absence.

1596            The Chair welcomed Tony Burke to the meeting. Tony is Head of the Centre for Education and Teaching Innovation at the University of Westminster and is observing the meeting with a view to becoming an External Representative on the Committee from 2021. All members of the Committee introduced themselves to Tony in turn.

1597            The Chair welcomed Amanda Milambo to the meeting. Amanda was appointed to the Committee in summer 2020 in her capacity of Staff Trustee on the Board.

**1598            1.3/ TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 30<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2020**

1599 The minutes of the Academic Review Committee held 30<sup>th</sup> April 2020 were **APPROVED** as a true record.

**1600 1.4/ TO APPROVE THE REDACTED MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2020**

1601 The Academic Review Committee **NOTED** that the minutes of this committee meeting were to be published as part of ongoing compliance with Office for Students Conditions of Registration. The Committee reviewed the proposed redactions from the minutes of the meeting held 30<sup>th</sup> April 2020. The proposed redactions from the minutes were **APPROVED** by the Committee. These minutes will be published on the UCEM website on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

**1602 1.5/ TO CONSIDER MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES NOT INCLUDED ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA**

1603 An actions summary from the previous meeting was circulated as Paper 1.5 and the Committee noted that the only action noted at the last meeting has been successfully closed.

**1604 1.6/ TO APPROVE THE ACADEMIC REVIEW COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

1605 At the meeting of the Nominations and Governance Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2020, UCEM's compliance with the CUC Code of Higher Education Governance and the Charity Commission Code of Governance were considered. It was noted that UCEM could strengthen its compliance with the codes by addressing the current lack of reference to ethics at Board level. The Nominations and Governance Committee agreed that ethics was currently covered by the UCEM Research Committee and that nothing further was required at Board level except to amend the Academic Review Committee Terms of Reference to encompass consideration of ethics and link to the Research Committee.

1606 The Committee **APPROVED** the Academic Review Committee Terms of Reference V9.01 for finalisation and publication as the new V10.0.

**1607 1.7/ TO APPROVE THE ACADEMIC REVIEW COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT**

1608 The Committee's draft annual report for 2019-20 was presented in paper 1.7 for the approval of the Committee ahead of being presented to the Board of Trustees for formal approval at its November 2020 meeting. This is the first time the Committee has prepared an annual report. The intention is to demonstrate best practice in higher education governance through annually reviewing the work and efficacy of each sub-committee.

1609 The Committee **NOTED** the report and that it accurately reflects the new focus of the Committee in 2019-20 on ensuring UCEM meets academic compliance requirements of OfS Conditions of Registration, particularly with regards to the Access and Participation Plan, National Student Survey and Student Outcomes. The work of the Committee in overseeing the UCEM response to Covid-19 and safeguarding the student experience was also **NOTED**.

- 1610 The Committee thanked JEF and LH for their work to improve the functioning of the Committee and ensure it is focussed on the appropriate matters.
- 1611 The Committee **APPROVED** that the draft annual report be presented to the Board of Trustees on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2020 for formal approval.

## **2) COMPLIANCE WITH THE CONDITIONS OF REGISTRATION OF THE OFFICE FOR STUDENTS**

### **1612 2.1/ CONDITION A1: UCEM'S ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN 2019-20**

- 1613 Nikki Bulteel [NB] joined the meeting to update the committee on the impact of UCEM's Access and Participation Plan 2019-20 (OfS Condition of Registration A1). NB provided a summary Report of the 2019-20 Access & Participation Plan (APP) results and impact in paper 2.1.
- 1614 NB reported that all activities identified in the plan were completed. The benefits to students and their success have been assessed. Activities were categorised into access activities, success activities, and progression activities and includes schools and college outreach, bursaries, hardship fund, mentoring, student ambassadors and webinars. Success has been determined by the uptake of activities offered. As yet OFS has not published the detailed requirements for the Impact Report related to Access and Participation.
- 1615 HL queried those students in receipt of bursaries and given that they are awarded on need it is likely they may be facing additional challenges in completing their studies. HL would like to see additional academic support provided to these students if required to enable these students to be successful. NB is keen to develop a more sophisticated internal tracking process of APP supported students for this purpose. HL offered to help promote the resilience webinars more extensively within the academic support team. NB reported that a monthly Outreach newsletter is now produced which details the live events the team organises for UCEM students.
- 1616 NM commented that the support package is comprehensive but that he would be surprised if the numbers quoted were the extent of the demand. He queried if UCEM plans to continue with bursary and hardship support and whether if it was sufficient scaled up to meet likely demand. NB responded that the Hardship Fund is not currently sufficient but discussions are underway to bolster it and it is being limited to £200 per student in order to reach more people. There will be £8K in the forthcoming year available for bursaries in the APP and from 2022 UCEM will also offer scholarship awards. UCEM has to strike a balance between all those in need of support and those who meet APP criteria, which is a small proportion of UCEM students overall.
- 1617 Finally, NB reported that UCEM limits the support it can provide through the Hardship Fund to things that will directly help a student study. It was suggested UCEM might expand this to items that indirectly support successful studies, such as positive mental health activities.

1618 The Committee **NOTED** the report, welcomed the outcomes of the first UCEM Access and Participation Plan and thanked NB for her continued focus on delivering the targets within the plan during a challenging year.

1619 KM thanked NB for her contribution and invited her to leave the meeting.

## **1620 2.2/ CONDITION F2: STUDENT TRANSFER ARRANGEMENTS**

1621 JEF reminded the Committee of the role of all Sub-Committees of the Board in monitoring ongoing compliance with OfS Conditions of Registration and that Condition F2, student transfer arrangements, is the responsibility of the Academic Review Committee. JEF assured the Committee of UCEM's full compliance with this condition and provided the Student Transfer Policy for information in paper 2.2.

1622 The Committee queried the number of transfers to UCEM in the last year but it was noted that this was extremely limited to date. UCEM does anticipate this could increase as traditional universities quickly move their provision online. It was suggested that UCEM could more actively but subtly promote the ability to transfer to UCEM in order to gain business in the current pandemic.

**ACTION: Discuss with the Academic Quality Unit and Marketing Team how the UCEM Student Transfer policy might be made (subtly) more prominent to potential students. [JEF]**

1623 The Committee **NOTED** UCEM's compliance with Condition F2 through the published Student Transfer Policy and agreed that it is fit for purpose and discharges the duty of the condition adequately.

## **3) ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND MONITORING**

### **1624 3.1/ NSS RESULT 2020 AND ACTION PLAN 2021**

1625 Wendy Finlay [WF] provided an update to the committee on the results of the 2020 National Student Survey and the action planning underway for NSS 2021. Paper 3.1 was presented to support the update.

1626 UCEM was delighted with the result secured in summer 2020 of 83.4% for overall student satisfaction, a full 10% increase on the 2019 result. UCEM performed 0.78% above the sector average and was 68 out of 164 eligible institutions and is now part of the Times Higher Education league table of higher education institutions. UCEM saw uplifts in most areas of the survey, except for the learning community and the greater level of consistency across the whole survey and between the varying demographics was particularly pleasing. A significant amount of work through a dedicated action plan was carried out prior to the survey, as well as work to promote the survey itself when it went live to reach the participation thresholds.

1627 For future years, UCEM's aim is to achieve consistency year on year and retain or improve further on this result. A Working Group has now been convened and is identifying areas for further improvement and action ahead of NSS 2021. The qualitative comments have also been reviewed to feed into this work.

1628 It was noted that JEF is participating in the OfS NSS Working Group to review the survey for the coming years and it is possible that the format of NSS may change in future years.

1629 NM commended UCEM's result and in particular that overall satisfaction scores hold up well where some individual category scores remain fairly low. Student community scores were particularly low, possibly because the institution is wholly online, but possibly also because UCEM students do not consider the student community vital in the way that students of traditional universities would. This does remain an area of UCEM focus though. The Lead Student Representative believes an uplift will be seen in 2021 due to the impact of Covid-19 both in terms of student community activities this year and in terms of how UCEM has continued to conduct its business so professionally during the challenges of the pandemic.

1630 The Committee thanked WF for the report and **NOTED** the NSS 2020 results and the plans to positively impact NSS 2021.

### **1631                    3.2/ TRANSFORM LAUNCH AND EVALUATION PLAN**

1632 WF updated the Committee on the launch of project Transform, which was successfully released to all students on 28<sup>th</sup> September and 5<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

1633 The Board of Trustees had been very impressed with the outcomes of Transform and how important and significant they are to the institution following the demonstration they received at their meeting in September. To date there has been extremely positive feedback from students so UCEM is thrilled with the early indicators of the positive impact of the project on the student experience.

1634 WF introduced the plans for evaluating the impact of Transform to the Committee, as presented in paper 3.2, which aims to demonstrate how the investment in the project has led to the expected outcomes in student success. The approach to evaluation centres around five specific questions within the evaluation framework.

1635 HL queried whether there is scope for considering the staff experience in the evaluation? WF responded that this is already part of the intent but could be made more fully evident in the plan. TB recommended UCEM reviews qualitative data in the evaluation too.

1636 Given that the original aims relative to commerciality and improved financial outcomes for the institution, the return on investment should be explicitly included in the framework, which is implied rather than explicit currently.

**ACTION:                    Update the Evaluation Framework to reflect the staff impact and the return on investment. [WF]**

1637 The Committee queried the changes UCEM has implemented in assessment methodology, which were brought in sooner than planned due to Covid-19. Initial feedback suggests that the removal of exams has been welcomed positively. Levels of engagement were higher but results from this first round of take-home exams have not yet been published though.

1638 The Committee **NOTED** the positive reception of Transform to date and welcomed the evaluation plan, which WF will ensure is further enhanced through the feedback provided by the Committee.

**1639 3.3/ TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON OFSTED READINESS AND LEVEL 3 PROGRAMME CLOSURE PROGRESS**

1640 Helen Edwards presented an update on UCEM's Ofsted readiness and Level 3 programme closure progress on behalf of Vicki Murray (see paper 3.3). The closure of UCEM Level 3 provision was agreed in June 2020 and the paper outlines all the activities planned for the run-out of the provision. The Committee did note that since the decision in June, the Government has now announced that all apprenticeships, including degree level apprenticeships, will be subject to the Ofsted inspection regime from April 2021 – this will now impact UCEM's level 6 and 7 apprenticeship provision and the institution is beginning to prepare itself for this.

1641 The Committee **NOTED** the significant amount of work that has been undertaken by the Apprenticeship Team and UCEM to mitigate the risks identified and the very good progress that has already been made by the new managers since their appointment from September 2020. The Committee also **NOTED** the appointment of two new Directors in the Apprenticeships department focused on operations and compliance as a result of John Pratt's retirement from UCEM in autumn 2020.

1642 The Committee **NOTED** that the operational readiness risk tracker is now live and monitored monthly by SLT.

1643 The Committee **NOTED** that there continues to be further work to mitigate any risks following the decision to close the Level 3 Surveying Technician Apprenticeship including the creation of the L3 programme closure group which actively monitors the steps taken to retain the student experience as the programme is taught out.

1644 The Committee **NOTED** that there has been good progress to mitigate risk areas associated with the programme closure including reputational damage through proactive communication with all stakeholders, quick identification of alternate providers and collaborative working to share good practice and delivery methodology.

1645 The Committee **NOTED** that action to mitigate the risks to those students who are on programme has been swift and a significant amount of work has taken place to retain staff, provide students with the opportunity to complete their programme where they have been on a break in learning and ensure assessment flexibilities had been put in place and approved before teaching resumed in 20/21.

1646 The Committee welcomed some of the initiatives put in place for Ofsted readiness and for the Level 3 programmes and suggested these would be welcome across all UCEM apprenticeship provision, such as more connectivity between Apprenticeships Outcomes Officers and academic delivery teams, particularly as the likelihood of Ofsted inspecting at this level becomes a reality.

**1647 3.4a/ COVID-19: PROTECTING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE – ADJUSTMENTS MADE TO LEARNING, TEACHING, ASSESSMENT, APPRENTICESHIP, POLICIES AND PROCESSES**

1648 Helen Edwards presented an update on adjustments UCEM has made as a direct result of Covid-19 in order to preserve the UCEM student experience (see paper 3.4a).

1649 HE reported that the work undertaken focussed on continuity of service, maintaining the student experience and supporting students (e.g. their employment status). HE reported that workshops are now moving online permanently, adjustments to assessment were made through the implementation of take-home exams, and that changes to policies and procedures have been enacted. HE also reported that UCEM decided not to introduce a no-detriment policy as UCEM delivery was not unduly affected by Covid-19. In fact, through Covid-19, data shows engagement levels by UCEM students with the VLE have improved. UCEM did make changes to mitigating circumstances and gave extensions where necessary – it's aim being to provide targeted support whilst maintaining quality and standards.

1650 In 2020-21 UCEM will continue a similar approach and most adjustments remain in place. The Covid-19 Student Experience Group continues, and exams have been fully removed from UCEM programmes as a result of Transform.

1651 The Committee **NOTED** the adjustments UCEM has made to its provision and that the approach has received positive feedback from students to date.

### **1652 3.4b/ COVID-19: PROTECTING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE – STUDENT OUTCOMES**

1653 Alan Hill [AH] joined the meeting to update the committee on the student outcomes during Covid-19 (see paper 3.4b). He outlined the impact of Covid-19 on student performance through reviewing the summary of overall module success rates for the Spring 2020 semester with a comparison to previous semesters, to analyse the impact of the adjustments on student module outcomes.

1654 **REDACTED**

1655 Take-Home Exams were well received by students and the 7-day timing for completion was appropriate and the type of work requested being more reflective of how people work within the sector. Given the success, UCEM hopes this assessment type can be introduced as a regular assessment vehicle in the future.

1656 The Committee **NOTED** the enhanced student engagement rates and outcomes as a result of adjustments made during Covid-19.

1657 KM thanked AH for his contribution and invited him to leave the meeting.

### **1658 3.5/ UCEM ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE REVIEW**

1659 Jane Fawkes advised the Committee that UCEM had undertaken an academic governance review in 2019-20 (see paper 3.5).

1660 The review was received positively and the action plan within the paper welcomed. The Committee specifically welcomed the proposed review of the remit of the Academic Review committee to avoid duplication with Academic Board's remit. This

is likely to result in the Academic Review Committee receiving fewer reports and some items in summary form only.

1661 The Committee **WELCOMED** the academic governance review and **NOTED** that the outcomes and recommendations were approved by the Academic Board in September 2020.

### **1662 3.6/ PERMANENT DEGREE AWARDING POWERS APPLICATION**

1663 Helen Edwards provided an update to the Committee on progress to date with UCEM's application for permanent degree awarding powers and the likely timescales of the process as a whole (see paper 3.6).

1664 UCEM had commenced the process to apply for permanent degree awarding powers with the OfS in January 2020. In May, the initial assessment period was paused due to Covid-19 and there has been no update from OfS since. UCEM is preparing its self-assessment documentation internally with the intention this will already be ready when the process resumes. A first draft will be ready for review and scrutiny in late October. UCEM is in a great position to get the application process completed and the powers secured so hopes further delay will not be significant.

1665 The Committee **NOTED** the update on the application process and UCEM progress against it.

### **1666 3.7/ ACADEMIC RISK REGISTER**

1667 Jane Fawkes provided an updated review of the Academic Risk Register to the Committee, focussing on the key academic risks and how these are being mitigated internally (see paper 3.7). The full UCEM Risk Register is monitored by the Audit Committee.

1668 The highest risks are on ESFA compliance, Ofsted (at all levels), and Cybersecurity and the OFS. Transform remains on the register and flagged as red due to the continued volume of work to reach the next milestone in Spring 2021 and the risks around maintaining staff energy levels to continue to deliver through the challenging working conditions in 2020.

1669 The Committee **NOTED** the key academic risks to the institution and were content that these are being appropriately mitigated.

### **1670 3.8/ UCEM ENHANCEMENT PLAN**

1671 Helen Edwards provided an update to the Committee on UCEM's performance in 2019-20 against the targets set out in its Enhancement Plan and the new actions being adopted for the 2020-21 Enhancement Plan (see paper 3.8, 3.8a and 3.8b).

1672 In summary, UCEM is not as far ahead it would like to be but in the context of the year this has been considered acceptable.

1673 The Committee **NOTED** the 27 completed enhancement actions, the 25 enhancement actions still in progress or due to commence shortly, the 3 enhancement actions closed as they have been superseded by events and the 8



enhancement actions that are temporarily on hold due to external factors. The Committee also **NOTED** the intended action in the enhancement plan for the 2020-21 academic year.

**1674**      **4/ ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

1675      The Chair invited TB to make observations on the meeting. He responded that the discussions had been both interesting and relevant and that he would be happy to formally join the Committee as an External Representative.

1676      NM thanked the UCEM team for the quality of papers for the meeting and the positive direction of travel of both the Committee / its role and of UCEM in recent years.

1677      With no additional items of business reported, KM thanked the Committee for their contributions, and called the meeting to a close at 15.55pm.

**Date of next meeting:**

**Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2021 from 14.00-16.00pm, via Zoom videoconference**

**Signed:**



**Name:**

**Kenny Miller**

**Position:**

**Chair, Academic Review Committee and Independent Trustee**

**Date:**

**29<sup>th</sup> April 2021**