

ACADEMIC REVIEW COMMITTEE 21ST OCTOBER 2021

REDACTED MINUTES FOR PUBLICATION

A Meeting of the Academic Review Committee was held via Zoom video conference from 14.00-16.00 on Thursday 21st October 2021.

Present: Grant Alexander [GA]

Tony Burke [TB]
Helen Edwards [HE]
Wendy Finlay [WF]
Stephen Jackson [SJ]
Hazel Lobo [HL]

Amanda Milambo [AM]

Kenneth Miller [KM] (Chair)

Nick Morton [NMo] Ashley Wheaton [AW]

In attendance: Hannah Al-Katib [HA-K] (for item 4.3 only)

Stephen Bartle [SB] (for item 2.1 only)

Nikki Bulteel [NB] (for items 2.1 & 2.2 only)
Susan Dawson [SD] (observing full meeting)
Kate Deakin [KD] (for item 4.2 only)
Lynne Downey [LD] (for item 4.1 only)
Gethin Edwards [GE] (for item 2.1)
Lyndsay Hughes [LH] (note taker)

Mike Speight [MS] (for item 4.2 only)

Apologies for absence: Jane Fawkes [JEF] (University College Secretary)

1) GENERAL MEETING GOVERNANCE

1.1/ DECARATION OF ANY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

1768 There were no conflicts of interest declared.

1769 1.2/ TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABCENCE

1770 There were no apologies for absence.

1771 1.3/ TO WELCOME NEW PARTICIPANTS TO THE COMMITTEE

1772 The Chair welcomed Susan Dawson to observe the Committee. Susan is Senior

Lecturer, Architecture and Built Environment and Director of Education: Degree Apprenticeships, Engineering and Environment at Northumbria University and is observing the meeting with a view to taking on the External Representative

(Apprenticeships) role.

The Chair also welcomed Grant Alexander, new Student Trustee, to the meeting.

Grant has been appointed a member of the Committee, replacing Phoebe Farrell.

1.4/ TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AND REDACTIONS OF THE MEETING HELD 29TH APRIL 2021

The minutes and proposed redactions (highlighted grey) of the Academic Review Committee held 29th April 2021 were **APPROVED** as a true record. The redacted minutes will be published on the UCEM website in order to maintain compliance with Office for Students Conditions of Registration.

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

An actions summary from the previous meeting was circulated as Paper 1.5 and the Committee noted that the two actions from the last meeting were in progress or were due for discussion later in the agenda.

1.6/ TO APPROVE THE ACADEMIC REVIEW COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

- Following the appointment of a new Student Trustee to the Committee and the potential appointment of a new External Representative (Apprenticeships) the Terms of Reference have been updated once more. Some small changes in nomenclature were also outlined in tracked changes on paper 1.6a.
- The Committee **APPROVED** the Academic Review Committee Terms of Reference V11.01 for approval as the new V12 and noted that should Susan Dawson accept the External Representative (Apprenticeships) position this will be reflected in the newly approved version.

ACTION: Finalise and publish the updated Terms of Reference for the Committee as the new V12.0. [LH]

1.7/ TO APPROVE THE ACADEMIC REVIEW COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

- The Committee reviewed the Annual Report for 2020-21 as presented in paper 1.7.

 The report provides an overview of the work and role of the Committee in 2020-21 and forms part of UCEM's evidence of good governance practice.
- It was agreed that the report clearly demonstrated the prolific output of the Committee over the year and its evolving maturity since its establishment. The Committee further agreed that the report will play an important role in giving the Board of Trustees assurance that UCEM complies with all OfS Conditions of Registration.
- The Committee **APPROVED** the Academic Review Committee Annual Report 2020-21 for presentation to the Board of Trustees for their review and approval in November 2021. The Committee **AGREED** the report will provide useful evidence for UCEM's Permanent Degree Awarding Powers application.

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

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The Chair reminded the Committee of the role of all Sub-Committees of the Board in monitoring ongoing compliance with OfS Conditions of Registration and that the A and B Conditions are the responsibility of the Academic Review Committee. As such it is presented with updates at each meeting of the Committee.

2.1/ UCEM'S ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN <u> 1786</u>

1786 Nikki Bulteel [NB], Stephen Bartle [SB] and Gethin Edwards [GE] joined the meeting to update the committee on the latest activities and progress with UCEM's Access and Participation Plan 2020-2024.

1787 NB presented paper 2.1a on the activities UCEM is undertaking and the action plan it has in place to help meet the targets and milestones UCEM is committed to within the plan.

1788 The activities and actions are set out under the three areas of the student lifecycle within the APP – Access, Success and Progression and all the actions and activities are monitored regularly by the APP Working Group. Highlights for the coming year include UCEM plans to work with Study Higher to better understand and impact the adult learner market. Activities to meet the 'success' targets will include the work of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Team monitoring engagement and making interventions where necessary to retain student on programme. Other activities will include the use of the Hardship Fund, role models, student ambassadors, focus groups and mentoring, though measuring the impact of these activities is challenging. UCEM is also focused on activities for progression with professional body membership advice sessions, bespoke 1-1 sessions for APP-criteria students and interview skills sessions. Finally, UCEM is also doing additional work on development of its supporting data sets for APP monitoring and for tracking APPcriteria students.

> SB presented paper 2.1b on the current progress against the APP access targets through the autumn new student recruitment window. A RAG-rated table illustrated progress in achieving the annual access targets after the autumn semester recruitment window. There are seven targets overall and four of these are considered green, two amber and one red, where effort will be focused to ensure the target can be met by end Spring 2022 recruitment. The Committee was cautioned on the data because very small numbers can make large percentage differences. The key area of focus will be on part-time students recorded as Black and Minority Ethnic.

GE presented paper 2.1c on the OfS Impact Report and the variation requests to UCEM's APP in 2021. GE advised the Committee that UCEM has received the Impact Report in September following submission of the monitoring report in April, relative to the 2019-20 Approved APP. With no issues of concern UCEM consider this a positive outcome and testament to the work underway at UCEM to meet the plan targets. GE also reported that a variation request was made in April 2021, which was confirmed in June, and was noted by the Committee at its last meeting. An additional variation request is also now required to be submitted but this is a technical change

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only regarding the nature of financial support provided to UCEM students and the terminology used for this. With no changes to funding or targets UCEM anticipate this will be approved without issue.

The Chair opened the floor to discussion on the updates provided. The challenge for UCEM in meeting APP access targets where it has primarily mature students, who are already in work, and many of whom are sponsored through their studies by their employers, was noted. It was also noted that apprentice students are now included in the APP so whilst numbers of students are growing in this category, UCEM's ability to influence those students bring recruited is lessening and is in the hands of employers.

The Committee also discussed the challenges in measuring the impact of the qualitative work to support achievement of the targets and would like to see more nuanced reporting on the various projects to support the plan that moves beyond intuition to clearly evidencing their contribution/impact.

The External Representatives commented it has often been APP students who have found continuing with studies harder through the pandemic and attainment gaps have increased. UCEM, has not, however, seem this type of direct impact from Covid-19 because the delivery model has remained unchanged, and the institution scored exceptionally well on Covid-19 measures in the National Student Survey (NSS). In fact, in some instances, like for apprentices in particular, UCEM has seen progression and engagement improve as apprentices on furlough have had increased time to dedicate to their studies. UCEM is monitoring APP students closely now to assess trends in progression and continuation rates and is comparing target groups with comparator groups.

Barriers to success and progression into industry is a key next step in UCEM's data analysis. NM is doing a similar project at his institution in a project called Change Makers and will be happy to discuss this further with NB outside the meeting.

The Committee **NOTED** the actions and endorsed UCEM's efforts to achieve the stretching targets within the approved plan.

The Committee **NOTED** the progress against the APP access targets in the 2021-22 year to date.

The Committee **NOTED** the receipt of the OfS Impact Report, the approval of the revised APP following the first variation request and the submission of a further variation request in October 2021.

The Chair thanked SB and GE for their contributions and invited them to leave the meeting.

1799 2.2/ HARDSHIP FUDING

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Nikki Bulteel presented a paper 2.2 which provided an overview of the Hardship Funding UCEM has managed and distributed to its students in 2020-21. The Committee had requested a full overview of the funding received and how it was distributed at its last meeting.

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NB reported that there are three primary sources of Hardship Funding, the APP, the UCEM reserve and the OfS funding. The various schemes were promoted to students four times over the course of the year and in total UCEM received 307 applications. The success rate was circa 40% and the report provided breakdowns on types of students that secured funding and types of awards that were made. Approximately one third went towards course fees but the overwhelming majority was for study equipment such as laptops. All those students who secured funding, bar one, remain current students or have now been awarded. Anecdotal feedback to tutors demonstrates that the funding made a huge difference for many and enabled them to continue their studies.

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NB reported that the administration of the fund was challenging given the tight timescales applied to the OfS funding and that, as a result, refinements to UCEM processes are planned for 2021-22.

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The Committee noted that the funds available for 2021-22 are considerably less given the withdrawal of the OfS fund. UCEM is hoping demand will be considerably less in line with this and the end of lockdowns due to Covid-19.

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The Committee **NOTED** UCEM's approach to distributing Hardship Funding in 2020-21. The Committee also acknowledged the huge effort and work involved by the UCEM team to distribute the funding in the timescales set by OfS and extended their sincere thanks to these members of staff.

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The Chair thanked NB for her contributions to the Committee and invited her to leave the meeting.

1806 2.3/ THE IMPACT OF RESUBMISSIONS ON STUDENT OUTCOMES

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Hannah Al-Katib joined the meeting to present to UCEM the impact of resubmissions on student retention and progression through programmes since their introduction as part of Project Transform in autumn 2020 (paper 2.3).

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Resubmissions ran for the first time at the end of the autumn 2020 semester in April 2021. It is underway for a second time currently, but the initial impact report focusses on the first iteration only. The report details that the average engagement rate from students eligible for resubmissions across all levels of studies was 30% and that this 30% were primarily students who had engaged with the first attempt. 78% of these students then passed their modules. As a result, the overall impact of resubmissions on module pass rates was an average of 3% across all modules. UCEM now hopes to see rates of engagement with resubmissions increase further as the process and knowledge of it is further embedded at UCEM. In addition, work is underway to ensure the processes associated with resubmissions are enhanced and that communications to students about the process are effective and straightforward.

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The Committee discussed these initial results and agreed that the process is working well for those who have engaged with the first attempt but less so for those who have not engaged with assessment at all. The Committee also discussed whether it was possible for students who were studying two modules concurrently to use the system to their advantage and wait for the resubmission opportunity for their second assessment. UCEM is confident the data does not support this currently but will continue to monitor this as the process further embeds. One way of avoiding

this might be putting in a minimum threshold/eligibility criterion from the first assessment attempt to be eligible for resubmissions (e.g. at 30% if pass mark was 40%) and this will be kept under consideration for the future.

The Committee also considered whether resubmissions would have any impact on overall grade inflation but as a resubmission is capped at a basic pass, rather than any enhanced grade, this was not considered likely.

A key question that UCEM is analysing is when some students disengage from a module. For many students who were eligible for resubmissions, and who have been engaged with their learning, the time frame associated with the process is appropriate to secure the pass through second submission of this same assessment. For those engaging with the assessment at the point of resubmission for the first time it would not be. The Learning and Teaching Enhancement Team are working with students who are not engaging actively in their studies to support them so they are aware of the process and are encouraging engagement so students are successful.

UCEM will work to get more granular data on this process so it understands the right students for whom this is the appropriate intervention (there are other processes more appropriate to different situations) and this will help UCEM further embed and understand the impact of the various routes to successful outcomes that it offers its students.

The Committee **NOTED** the impact of resubmissions on student outcomes since its launch as part of Transform in September 2020.

1814 2.4/ OFS QUALITY AND STANDARDS CONSULTATION PART 2 AND POTENTIAL IMPACT ON UCEM

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Helen Edwards updated the Committee on the OfS consultation underway currently on Quality and Standards (Phase 2) and its potential impact on UCEM (paper 2.4).

HE reported that Part 2 of the Office for Students' (OfS) consultation on its 'B conditions' relating to quality and standards proposes revisions to conditions B1, B2 and B4 (relating to quality) and B5 (relating to standards), as well as the addition of two new conditions that will relate to initial registration for new entrants to the register. Part 3 of the consultation, to be published in autumn 2021, will focus on condition B3 on student outcomes, alongside a consultation on proposals for a new Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) scheme (condition B6). Part 2 of the consultation closed on 27 September 2021.

The Committee noted that one of the key impacts on UCEM would be that all students on higher education courses would fall into scope of the regulator – therefore including international and modular short course students which are not included currently. A further impact is with regards to the current Condition B5 whereby the definition of 'sector-recognised standards' would be expanded to include standards for the classification for Level 6 qualifications, thereby allowing OfS to consider grade inflation. Other significant impacts on UCEM include that OfS will use its role as the body responsible for EQA for integrated higher and degree apprenticeships to inform its judgements about condition B4 which impacts UCEM's Building Control Surveyor Degree Apprenticeship, and that a provider's compliance history in relation to the quality and standards conditions will be used for the

purpose of determining eligibility for other benefits of OfS registration (e.g. participation in TEF).

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The Committee commented that identifying what the 'sector standards' are and determining if an institution is meeting them will be challenging. The Committee anticipated that the OfS aim must be to regulate against the weakest providers in the sector and not aimed at those already operating appropriately. The Committee also concurred that consultation responses are unlikely to make a difference to the cultural and political purpose behind the changes which the OfS wishes to adopt and which will apply to all providers regardless.

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The Committee **NOTED** UCEM's analysis of the OfS Consultation on Quality and Standards Phase 2 and its potential impact on UCEM.

3) ACADEMIC PROJECTS

1820 3.1/ STUDENT OUTCOMES – PROJECT 1000

- Wendy Finlay updated the Committee on the introduction of a new institution wide project to positively and substantially impact student outcomes (paper 3.1).
- In July Project 1,000 was approved by the Board of Trustees. Its aim is to increase UCEM student numbers by 1,000 by 2024/25 through the introduction of new programmes, financial analysis of profitability of programmes and through enhanced focus on student outcomes. UCEM is targeting 70% full award and 15% intermediate exit award. The paper provides the six pillars of work and a position statement of work to date on each of these.
- The Committee considered the plan and welcomed the granular and detailed analysis of data for different modules that will drive the interventions UCEM takes that will impact overall success rates. The Committee also considered international students and relative poorer performance in some Level 7 modules and how these might be enhanced. It is intended that all these aspects will be addressed through the project.
- The Committee requested that at the next meeting greater detail behind the project plan and the project management of this initiative be presented, including the student voice about the changes being made, and how the impact will be assessed in a 3-year time horizon. Three core elements will come forward for reporting about project work, business as usual activities and change management. It was also suggested the employer voice should be captured in the project as it is equally important in apprenticeship delivery this will come through Apprenticeship Outcomes Officers roles in the work. The project will be monitored through UCEM's Learning and Teaching Enhancement Committee.
- The Committee **NOTED** the planned work in Project 1000 in both the short and long term and welcomed the institutional focus on successful student outcomes.

1826 3.2/ UCEM'S VALUE FOR MONEY AUDIT

Ashley Wheaton advised the Committee that the Audit Committee had, earlier this year, commissioned an audit on perceptions of value for money of studying with UCEM. It commissioned UNIAC to undertake focus group discussions with current

and recently awarded students. The outcomes of the project were presented to the Audit Committee in June 2021 and are provided in paper 3.2a. Overall, UNIAC did not consider the issues it raised at UCEM to be uncommon in comparison to peer institutions, and overall students were positive that their experience did provide value for money, especially in terms of employability. As the recommendations UNIAC made were predominantly related to the academic offer, it was agreed that the Academic Review Committee should play the primary role in monitoring and oversight of their adoption at UCEM.

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Grant Alexander reported that he had engaged with the Student Representative network at UCEM about the report findings and in particular the four recommendations it made. They were supportive of UCEM finding new feedback mechanisms that are modern, live-chat oriented and immediate, that UCEM continues to work on consistency in feedback and marking and that feedback is provided in terms of areas for improvement, not just critiquing work submitted. Student representatives would also welcome more active online participation and creation of a sense of community. With regards to overall value for money, it was commented that where students are sponsored through their studies, they do not have such strong opinions about the concept of value in monetary terms.

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The Committee agreed that the focus on value for money should be on the student experience. The Committee also recognised the political backdrop to the audit given that the Government is about to publish its long-awaited response to the Augur Report and the ongoing discussions in sector press about student fees and the investment students make in their education. UCEM has strong evidence and is in a good position to defend its position on value for money and the fees students are charged. Furthermore, it can demonstrate that value is not just about the student experience but is about the qualifications achieved and how they are used to progress careers.

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The Committee **NOTED** the recommendations contained within the UNIAC report and welcomed the feedback it provides to UCEM which is entirely consistent with other sources of feedback UCEM has received and is in many cases already the focus of enhancement work at UCEM.

4) ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND MONITORING

1831 4.1/ NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY RESULT AND ACTION PLAN

Lynne Downey joined the meeting to provide an update to the Committee on the UCEM NSS Result 2021 and the planned activities for 2021-22 to positively impact the next UCEM result (paper 4.1).

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LD reported that satisfaction with UCEM overall had decreased by 8.8% to 74.7% compared to the previous year, a disappointing result but in line with the general trends across the sector this year. UCEM is now analysing the results in greater detail and one key area for focus will be how UCEM moves neutral responders into the satisfied categories (from answering a 3 to a 4 or 5 - there are not significant numbers answering 1 or 2 and showing deep dissatisfaction). There are also trends in the data to explore such as mature students being more satisfied than younger students and apprentices being much less satisfied than non-apprentices. Further analysis on the free text comments is also going to be undertaken when resources allow.

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The Committee **NOTED** that UCEM remained above average for the sector despite the challenges of 2020 and **COMMENDED** its excellent scores in six additional questions related to the Covid-19 pandemic which highlight the benefits of UCEM's delivery model and how well students could continue to be supported. In one question in particular UCEM scored 91.38% against a benchmark of 47.57% (I am content with the delivery of learning and teaching of my course during the covid-19 pandemic).

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The Committee commented on the student voice cycle questions and the importance of being transparent to students about why things may not change following their feedback. There is still work to do to improve student communication and student community at UCEM and this is being undertaken.

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The Committee also noted that UCEM saw a substantial uplift in its own Student Engagement Survey (which mirrors NSS) and was therefore surprised to see the difference between the results of this and the actual NSS result. What has become apparent is that the experience between non-final year and final year students is marked and UCEM must investigate why this drops in the final year so significantly. There is also research that suggests survey fatigue may have crept in by the final year responses to the NSS which may bear some relevance to this analysis.

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The Committee also **NOTED** that a working group has been established to review actions to enhance the student experience and that Student Representatives have been asked to partner with UCEM in the identification and implementation of activities designed to improve UCEM's score in future years.

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The Chair thanked LD for her contribution and invited her to leave the meeting.

1839 4.2/ APPRENTICESHIP KPIs

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Mike Speight and Kate Deakin joined the meeting to provide an update on the Apprenticeship KPIs that UCEM monitors and which provide an overview of performance as well as highlighting particular strengths and areas of focus (paper. 4.2).

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The Committee discussed withdrawal rates and at what stage UCEM becomes aware there are engagement issues and where UCEM is capturing support to bring apprentices back on programme. One key recent change adopted has been on ways of working and performance management of Apprenticeship Outcomes Officers. Their KPIs ensure they are monitoring engagement monthly, and all apprentices are RAG-rated through this process with interventions designed accordingly. This process is ensuring interventions are timely and has given proactive ownership throughout the apprenticeship journey.

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The Committee also discussed the imminence of Ofsted and being able to provide evidence to demonstrate this is being resolved. The data itself is supportive of the

downward trend in withdrawals and documentary evidence around interventions has also been increased through the structured processes put in place. UCEM will continue to capture case studies where its support has kept students on programme as part of evidence gathering and preparations for Ofsted.

The Committee **NOTED** the areas of strength in the programme and the areas of focus that are RAG-rated red of amber.

The Chair thanked MS and KD for their contributions and invited them to leave the meeting.

1848 4.3/ ACADEMIC RISK REGISTER

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Hannah Al-Katib joined the meeting to provide an updated review of the Academic Risk Register to the Committee, focussing on the key academic risks and how these are being mitigated internally (paper 4.3). The full UCEM Risk Register is monitored by the Audit Committee.

The highest risks remain the areas related to compliance with ESFA (E1); meeting the ongoing Conditions of Registration with the OFS (E3); and, Ofsted related to the inspection of Level 6/7 (E2b) following the changes announced by Ofsted in autumn 2020. However, since the last meeting, UCEM also now consider the risk related to achievement of institutional KPIs for module success (SO1) as a significant risk.

HAK reported that the risks related to ESFA continue to be mitigated through the work of the Director of Apprenticeships Compliance role and has remained under the regular review of the Audit Committee. An Ofsted inspection is anticipated imminently (and no later than April 2022) and UCEM now considers itself ready to secure a 'good' outcome. Of risk has reduced in recent months following the approval of the variation request to the Access and Participation Plan 2020-24. Risks on data returns continue to be mitigated, particularly through the appointment of Andy Youell.

HAK also reported that in relation to module success, whilst the vast majority of modules at Levels 4-6 achieved the KPI target overall, performance of sub-groups of students was more variable, and work is needed to close the gap between these groups. For example, at BSc level, apprentices consistently outperform non-apprentices and at Level 7, achievement of overall KPIs is patchier, with UK students outperforming international and Hong Kong students. In the past quarter student success and outcomes has been a major focus (Project 1,000), with six pillars of activity being undertaken to address the gaps in student success, with the aim of raising performance levels in the 2021/22 academic year.

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

1854 4.4/ UCEM ENHANCEMENT PLAN

Helen Edwards provided an update on the UCEM Enhancement Plan and UCEM's performance to date against the targets set out in the plan for 2021-22 (paper 4.4).

HE reported that good progress continues to be made with implementing the majority of identified enhancements and that the wider integration of the

Apprenticeship Enhancement Plan (paper 4.4a) into a single UCEM Plan has now been concluded. There are, however, now a minority of actions that are RAG rated as red. This does not necessarily signify that there is a risk that the action will not be delivered but reflects the fact that the original anticipated completion date has now passed. Now that several actions have been completed the UCEM Enhancement Plan is starting to measure the impact of the action and whether further action needs to be taken.

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It was suggested that once the Project 1,000 position statement is prepared, the actions underway for this be correlated into the Enhancement Plan where necessary.

ACTION:

Correlate the actions underway for Project 1,000 into the UCEM Enhancement Plan where necessary/relevant. [WF/HE]

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The Committee **NOTED** UCEM's Enhancement Plan achievements year to date, praised the exemplary approach taken to tracking and monitoring of activity and welcomed the measurement of impact of actions and the additional value this will bring.

1859 5/ ANY OTHER BUSINESS

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The Chair invited Susan Dawson to provide some feedback on her experience observing the Committee. SD commented that it was a well-balanced group of people on the Committee with positive energy and who add value. SD confirmed her willingness to join the Committee as External Representative (Apprenticeships) for an initial 3-year term of office.

ACTION: Formally appoint Susan Dawson to the Committee for an initial 3year term as External Representative (Apprenticeships).

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The Chair thanked all the external representatives for their continued commitment to the Committee and the valuable perspectives they bring to the Committee and the academic matters it reviews.

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With no additional items of business reported, KM thanked the Committee for their contributions, and called the meeting to a close at 16.03pm.

Date of next meeting:

Thursday 28th April 2022 from 14.00-16.00pm, via Zoom videoconference

Signed:

Name:

Kenny Miller

Met The

Position:

Chair, Academic Review Committee and Independent Trustee

Date:

19th July 2022