the
Academic Council

Minutes of the first meeting of the Academic Council in the 2024-2025 academic session, held on 2 October 2024 at 3.00 pm in Room 120, Queen Anne Court, Greenwich campus and via Microsoft Teams

Present:

Jane Harrington, Vice-Chancellor (Chair)

Peter Garrod, University Secretary (Executive Secretary)

- Rachel Ashton, Executive Director, Student and Academic Services
- Paul Butler, Executive Director & Chief Information Officer
- Myrtle Emmanuel, Associate Professor in HRM & Organisation, GBS/EDI Adviser
- Sheryl Hendriks, Director of NRI
- Aminul Islam, GSU Officer
- Sodiq Lawal, GSU Officer
- Jennifer Marie, PVC Education
- Tracey Reynolds, Associate Dean: R&KE, FLAS
- Natasha Vall, PVC: FLAS

- Karen Brickman, GBS Member
- Gary Brown, Associate Dean: Student Success, GBS
- Ameen Chowdhury, President GSU
- Leigh Doster, PVC Business
- Andy Frost, Director, GRI
- Peter Griffiths, PVC Engineering & Science
- Amrutha Gullapalli, GSU Officer
- Dave Hockham, FLAS Member
- Heidi King, Executive Director, Marketing & External Relations
- Mary-Clare Martin, FEHHS Member
- Peter Taylor, Chief Operating Officer
- Catherine Tonry, FES Member
- Andrew Westby, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Knowledge Exchange)

In attendance:
Trudy Brighton, Governance Support Manager (minutes)
Simon Lewis, Executive Director of Strategic Planning (item 24/09-10)
Hayriye Mehmet, Associate Director of Student Registry

Apologies:
Noel-Ann Bradshaw. Deputy Dean: FES
Vanessa Lemm, Deputy VC & Provost
Derek Moore, PVC FEHHS
Sofia Stathi, Chair, UREB

AC 24/01   WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Professor Natasha Vall, the new PVC and Executive Dean of FLAS, to the Council. Dr Gary Brown and Professor Tracey Reynolds, the two new Associate Dean members, were welcomed to their first meeting. Ameen Chowdhury and Amrutha Gullapalli, two new Sabbatical Officers, were also welcomed to their first meeting.

AC 24/02   DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were made.

AC 24/03   **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING AND ACTIONS (ARC 24/P01)**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2024 were agreed as an accurate record. The actions tracker was received. All actions were either completed, in progress or on the agenda.

AC 24/04   **MATTERS ARISING**

4.1   Freedom of Speech

The University Secretary reported that the new Government had paused implementation of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, planned for August 2024, to consider the approach it wished to take. In the interim, the previous legislation remained in place. The University's Freedom of Speech Code of Practice approved by the Council and Governing Body in June 2024 met those requirements.

AC 24/05   **REPORT FROM THE VICE-CHANCELLOR (AC 24/P38)**

The Vice-Chancellor reported on recent developments and highlighted the following:

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- **Registration and Welcome**: The roll-out of the online registration platform and improvements to processes had resulted in the largest ever number of students completing registration at this stage. As a consequence, there had been higher engagement with Welcome activities. Consideration would be given to holding next year's 'Welcome' at a later date to help settle international students.
- **NSS 2024 Results**: The NSS 2024 results published in July had indicated that Greenwich was broadly on target with an average of 81.3% for 'Assessment and Feedback' and 'Teaching on my Course'. A fuller update would be considered later in the meeting but the Council would be monitoring the Continuation, Graduate Outcomes, BAME Awarding Gap and NSS metrics throughout the year.
- **Labour Party Conference**: The Vice-Chancellor had attended the recent Labour Party Conference and had met with a number of Labour MPs. There had been some positive comments about universities and research.

AC 24/06   **GREENWICH STUDENTS' UNION REPORT (AC 24/P39)**

The Council received an update on the Greenwich Students' Union's strategic activities and noted that:
- The new Officer Team would be working on their campaigns based on their elected mandates during the year. These included the national working hours campaign, affordable and diverse meals on campus, the needs of disabled students and instalment plans for tuition fees.
- GSU was aiming to fill 45% of programme representative roles for the 2024/25 academic year. The GSU NSS Working Group was working

with Faculties on action plans to target student voice work to taskforce programmes. Eight paid Liberation Network chairs were being introduced to provide representation across the diverse student groups. The PVC: FES highlighted the importance of the role of student representative and asked how Faculties could help to generate a better take-up of the role. The GSU Officers advised that there were challenges in raising awareness and benefits of the role, in providing proper training and identifying incentives. There was agreement that the Faculty Student Success Committees were well placed to assist the GSU with these issues.

- The Retention Calling Project was continuing during 2024/25. There would be a focus on students identified through attendance monitoring, Polar Q1 students, students on NSS Taskforce programmes and those who had previously interrupted their studies. Issues identified as affecting students at risk of withdrawal included employment, finances, family and travel.

The Executive Director of SAS addressed the issues causing hardship to students contacted via the Retention Calling Project. A cost-of-living workshop with GSU had been held in the spring. Current support for students included community breakfasts and dinner, food vouchers and bus tickets. A process to provide the GSU with bus tickets was being considered. A project for the introduction of a payment platform for student fees was currently at the business case stage. It would provide students with optionality around payment as well as having other useful functionalities. The GSU Officer welcomed the news and having asked about the deadline for the platform, was advised that a timescale would be provided at the next meeting.

In response to a question from a Council member, it was noted that the GSU and the University had a data sharing agreement in place which would also cover the Retention Calling Project. The University Secretary would clarify whether there were any obstacles to sharing data from the project with the University.

AC 24/07   FACULTY REPORTS (AC 24/P04)

The Council received reports from the PVCs and Executive Deans on their Faculties. They presented the following key highlight from the reports:

7.1.   Faculty of Education, Health & Human Sciences
Dr Mary Clare Martin (in the absence of the PVC: FEHHS) reported that Priti Chopra, Associate Professor in Education & Social Justice, had received a prestigious grant from the Arts & Humanities Research Council.

7.2   Faculty of Engineering and Science
Professor Peter Griffiths reported that a new format for a common level 4 course in the School of Science, which included an enhanced focus on skills development, had been introduced. It was hoped that the creation of good practices from the outset would help to improve retention and NSS scores.

7.3   Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Professor Natasha Vall highlighted the award of two significant grants won by Professor Tim Acott and Professor Elena Vacchelli.

7.4   Greenwich Business School
Professor Leigh Doster reported that the Faculty had achieved 89% in the 2024 Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) against the University's overall score of 86%. The Vice-Chancellor commended the Faculty on this outcome

and suggested that the initiatives put in place should be shared with the other Faculties.

The Vice-Chancellor asked that future reports outline progress with the four Student Success metrics.

AC 24/08   STUDENT SUCCESS UPDATE AND PRIORITIES FOR 2024/25 (AC 24/P05)

The PVC: Education presented an update on progress implementing the Student Success Sub-Strategy. Considerable work had been undertaken in putting in place the foundations to enable student success. Governance at Faculty level had been re-structured, an annual communications plan had been developed and School and Faculty student success Plans-on-a-Page had recently been published. The first phase of the Greenwich Tutoring Framework had been implemented across all Faculties and the Quality Assurance Review was progressing well, with the release of revised modification and programme proposal forms in the coming weeks.

The focus of the work was now turning to innovations and interventions. As part of the Innovations workstream, the Curriculum Framework was being redesigned and a draft for consultation would be shared soon. The Framework aimed to ensure a consistency of structure and content of the curriculum which embedded employability and transferable skills. The Interventions work focussed on improving student success metrics. The NSS Taskforce had been re-badged as the Academic Programme Taskforce and now covered all four Student Success metrics. New Stakeholder Groups had been established for each metric. New pre-arrival courses for international and BAME/BTEC students and a new Extenuating Circumstances Policy had been put in place to help continuation and BAME awarding gap metrics.

The Vice-Chancellor stated that it was important to share good practice to ensure continuing improvement in the key areas of activity. Workshops on sharing good practice were being arranged and templates would be available to assist with this. A more detailed briefing on the Curriculum Shape project would be provided to the next meeting.

AC 24/09   NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS) 2024 (AC 24/P06)

The Executive Director of Strategic Planning presented the 2024 NSS results which had been published in July 2024. Following the OfS's major review of the NSS in 2022, the University's strategic KPI for student satisfaction now combined the scores for *'Teaching on My Course'* and *'Assessment of Feedback'*. The latest results indicated:

- A marginal improvement of 0.3% to 81.3% on the student success KPI. Due to sector bunching, the University had lost relative ground and fallen 12 places from 57th to 69th in the rankings and had had fallen short of the yearly Strategy milestone of 81.8%.
- In relation to the seven key question areas*, 'Assessment and Feedback', 'Organisation and Management'* and *'Student Voice'* had all maintained their position relative to the sector, but *'Teaching on my Course', 'Learning Opportunities', 'Learning Resources'* and *'Academic Support'* had seen scores which resulted in relative drops against the sector average. In total, relative to the sector, the University had lost 0-2% pts across the seven question areas.
- Amongst University Alliance institutions, the University had moved two places up the ranking for student satisfaction from 13th to 11th place.

The Vice-Chancellor reported that future work needed to focus on sustaining improvements across the key areas. This was a Faculty responsibility and a programme-led response was not sufficient. It would be necessary to draw on good practice elsewhere but the Curriculum Shape work and the focus on the Student Success metrics should help to bring about improvement.

In discussion, the following points were made:
- Council Members wished to better understand the key factors influencing some of the scores, particularly for *'Teaching on my Course'*. The Executive Director of Strategic Planning reported that the information was being drilled down to module level and included in Academic Programme Taskforce packs. He advised that *'Teaching on my Course'* comprised four questions. The responses to *'How good are teaching staff at explaining things?* had scored highly but other areas such as making subjects engaging were pulling the scores down. The qualitative comments often provided useful insights into the issues that were detrimentally affecting scores.
- *'Organisation and Management'* had been one of the lowest performing areas. Improvement in this area was crucial as there was a clear relationship with improvement in overall student satisfaction.
- The Associate Dean (Student Success), GBS reported that the Faculty had analysed the scores and module leaders were using network connections to share examples of good practice. The Vice-Chancellor endorsed this approach saying that evaluation of issues at modular level gave the chance to address issues early.
- GSU had analysed the responses to questions relevant to 'student voice' and had examined the programme and Faculty variations. The GSU Representatives offered to share any relevant feedback with the executive.

The Council would regularly return to this subject at future meetings.

AC 24/10   GRADUATE OUTCOMES SURVEY 2024 (AC 24/P07)

The Executive Director of Strategic Planning presented a report on the 2024 Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS). The survey, which provided insight into graduates' career destinations and development, related to students who had graduated in the 2021/22 academic year. The results were used to produce statistics about the number of graduates in employment and/or further study and inform the OfS' Progression metric and the institutional KPI#3.

The OfS data released over the summer had confirmed that the University's **Progression** metric had dropped by 2.7% pts to 70.4% (compared to a sector fall of 1.9%). This meant that the University had lost most of its 3% pts improvement the year before and was losing ground on the sector.

The headline results of the survey were that:

- the University's overall employment and further study rate now stood at 85% compared to a sector average of 89%.
- 8% of graduates had reported they were unemployed, a 1% pt rise on the previous year.
- black progression rates continued to have better outcomes than white progression rates.
- Asian progression rates had declined by 9.3% pts, contributing to a widening of the white vs Asian gap from 10.5% to 17.75.
- the results by subject area were mixed. '*Design*' and '*Accounting & Finance'* had improved but some subject areas had lost the majority of their gains in 2020/21.

The Vice-Chancellor stated that this particular cohort had graduated in a tough economic environment but the GOS results were disappointing. The DVC and PVC: Education would be consulting with Faculties on proposed actions to address the results. Further breakdowns of data regarding comparative performance in London and against University Alliance institutions were being worked on.

The Council noted that the Access and Participation Plan (APP) included a specific strategy to reduce the gap between Asian and White students. The Strategic Planning team was undertaking a deep dive into the data around the decline of black and Asian students' progression and the data was being more closely scrutinised in relevant Stakeholder Groups. Some of the results were subject dependent, for example, black students had good employment outcomes in FEHHS but were less successful in Business subjects. This information needed to be fed into intervention strategies.

The Vice-Chancellor reported that a deep dive on graduate outcomes would be scheduled for the next meeting involving the Executive Director of Strategic Planning and Associate Director of Employability & Apprenticeships.

AC 24/11   HARASSMENT AND SEXUAL MISCONDUCT (AC 24/P08)

The Council considered an update on student harassment and sexual misconduct. The University Secretary reported that the mandatory online training on Healthy Sex and Relationships for students had been redesigned and launched during the September Welcome period. All new and returning students were automatically enrolled on the course. A light touch approach had been adopted this year and students could opt out for trauma related reasons. Completion rates were increasing and so far around 2800 students had completed the training (compared to under 100 in 2023/24, when it had been voluntary). Staff training was being developed for launching in Term 2.

The requirements of the new OfS registration condition on harassment and sexual misconduct (E6) were due to come into effect on 1 August 2025, except for a ban on the use of non-disclosure agreements in student harassment and sexual misconduct cases which had come into effect on 1 September 2024. Under the new condition, the University would need to produce a *'single comprehensive source of information'* about its policies and procedures for dealing with incidents of harassment and sexual misconduct for publication on its website. A mapping of the requirements against what was already in place indicated that the University was well on its way to meeting the OfS's requirements and it was proposed to develop the *'single source of information'* for early in the New Year.

AC 24/12   OIA ANNUAL STATEMENT (AC 24/P09)

Hayriye Mehmet, Interim Director of Student & Academic Services (Registry) presented an overview of the OIA Annual Statement for the University of Greenwich for the calendar year ending 31 December 2023. The number of complaints and appeals being escalated through the University's formal processes had increased by 34%. This mirrored the OIA's experience which had reported the highest ever number of complaints totalling 3137. The University had been assigned to OIA's Band G (30,001-50,000 students including TNE numbers). The headline information was that:

- the University had tracked on average with other Band G institutions across all complaint categories with the exception of academic appeals

which was +34% higher than the Band G average. Greenwich had a lower percentage of complaints (12.5%) categorised as 'Service Issues' against the Band G average of 32.07%.

- A total of 395 Completion of Procedures (CoP) letters had been issued (2022: 289).
- The number of complaints and appeals escalated to the OIA was 59, representing a 42% increase year-on-year (one in every 7.8 students issued with a CoP letter during 2022 escalated their complaint to the OIA by the end of 2023).
- The OIA had concluded that two complaints had been justified (both relating to attendance and engagement) and one had been partly justified (relating to an academic appeal).

The Council noted that:

(i)   the number of complaints arising from academic appeals had doubled year-on-year to 34. This was attributed to an increase in claims for Extenuating Circumstances which had been rejected and appeals relating to the outcome of PABs. A number of interventions were being put in place to offset this increase.

(II)   the University had issued 395 CoPs, which was significantly higher than the Band median of 143. It was recognised that work was needed to bring Greenwich more into line with sector performance. Some specific steps had already been taken, such as the review of Academic Regulations and Extenuating Circumstances Policy and the root causes of issues would be examined in order to resolve as many complaints as possible before they reached the formal complaints stage.

In response to a question from the Vice-Chancellor about responses to the lessons learnt, the Assistant Director confirmed that changes to practices and the attendance monitoring policy had been made. The Vice-Chancellor asked that future reports provide assurance on the University's response to issues raised in cases.

AC 24/13   ANNUAL STATEMENT ON RESEARCH INTEGRITY (AC 24/P10)

The University Secretary reported that the University was required to produce an annual statement on research integrity in order to meet the requirements of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity. The Annual Statement for 2024 followed a template produced by the UK Research Integrity Office. Section 2B highlighted changes around research ethics which had happened during the year including the appointment of a dedicated research ethics officer in GRI and the ongoing development of a business case for a new research management system with an ethics component. The Council **approved** the Annual Statement on Research Integrity for recommendation to the Governing Body.

AC 24/14   ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

AC 24/15   ACADEMIC COUNCIL DELEGATION FRAMEWORK (AC 24/P11)

The Council noted that, as part of its annual review, the Academic Council Delegation Framework had been reformatted to ensure that it met web content accessibility requirements and had also been updated to reflect changes to committees. The Council **approved** the updated Academic Council Delegation Framework for immediate implementation.

AC 24/16   ACADEMIC COUNCIL TERMS OF REFERENCE (AC 24/P12)

Following annual review, the Council **approved** minor amendments to its terms of reference for recommendation to the Governing Body.

AC 24/17   SUMMARY REPORTS FROM ACADEMIC COUNCIL COMMITTEES (ARC 24/P13)

The Council **received** summary reports from the following Academic Council committees:

- Partnerships Board, 11 July 2024
- Research and Knowledge Exchange Board, 3 July and 23 September 2024
- Student Success Board, 26 June, 25 July and 25 September 2024
- University Research Ethics Board, 3 July 2024

AC 24/18   MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF ACADEMIC COUNCIL COMMITTEES (AC 24/P14)

The Council **received** minutes from the following meetings of the Academic Council's committees:

- Partnerships Board, 11 July 2024
- Research and Knowledge Exchange Board, 3 July 2024
- Student Success Board, 26 June and 25 July 2024
- University Research Ethics Board, 3 July 2024

AC 24/19   ACADEMIC COUNCIL CYCLES OF BUSINESS (AC 24/P15)

The Council **received** an updated cycle of business for 2024/25.

AC 24/20   DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held at 15:00 on 29 January 2025.

Meeting closed at 4.25 pm.

T.A.Brighton / Peter Garrod
16 November 2024