SCHOOL OF NATURAL SCIENCES

UNAPPROVED MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SCHOOL BOARD
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 13th JAN AT 2PM, ZOOM

Item No.	Item	Action By	Date Due
1	**Chairs Business**		
	Minutes from the previous meeting held on Tuesday 22nd September 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.		
2	**Head of School Update including discussion on School Priorities and Planning (Chris Hardacre)**		
	School Priorities • Chris gave an overview of the School priorities and objectives which cover the areas of workforce & budget planning, teaching, learning and student experience, enabling staff time, internationalisation & industry and our culture. To address the priorities two Task and Finish groups have been set up to look at a series of strategic areas, the first two are financial sustainability and size and shape. Budget • Chris advised that the School budget planning cycle will be in two phases. The first phase includes tuition fees, student numbers, pay and capital and to be concluded by 12th March 2021. The second phase includes research, OOE and overall position and concluded by 2nd June 2021. • The student number planning will consider the contribution made to the centre and the reasons we are doing certain courses to get a better understanding of student numbers. Further considerations include balancing between international and home student's numbers and the climate change agenda. • Chris highlighted that strategic staff appointments will be limited as there is uncertainty in the budget for 2021/2022. • Chris confirmed that staff start-up packages are to be held at School level and discretionary spend is currently paused due to budget restraints and will be reconsidered how they operate. Strategic Planning • Strategic staff planning and capital equipment bid planning take place at School Leadership Team meetings and a School ranked priority list will be formed and put forward for approval by Faculty. Events • President and Vice Chancellor's visit to the School is taking place on Tuesday 2nd February. Staff are encouraged to register to attend virtual staff open meeting via Eventbrite. Overseas working requests • OW1 form is required for all overseas working requests – both new and existing staff • Information from this is used by HR and International tax accountant to assess the employer obligations and permanent establishment risk • Often requires consulting external advice to proceed and this needs Head of School (HoS) approval and Dean approval		

	• To request HoS and Dean Approval a business case is required, this needs to demonstrate the business need for overseas working. • Chris acknowledged that many requests currently under review are for staff working overseas for personal reasons – many impacted by covid-19 **Jen Lockhart** to circulate the Overseas Working Request (OW1) form to Heads of Departments and Deputy School Operation Managers. **Questions raised include:** 1. **Will the campus opening hours be reconsidered and will the views of PGRs and PDRAs will be sought on this occasion?** Chris confirmed it will be reconsidered at the Campus Management Meeting. 2. **How many first year UGs are currently registered in the school? Chris Hardacre** to circulate the student registration figures in the Departments. 3. **Does the Campus Management Group have Academic Input?** Chris confirmed it has PS and Academic Input (50/50).	**JL** **CH**	**January** **Complete**
3	**Growing a School Culture (Giles Johnson & Emma Nichols)**		
	Activity is underway within the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team to prepare for the Athena Swan Award which has to be submitted by November 2021. The charter is a mechanism which is used to support gender equality. The Board were invited to answer the question 'How would you describe the culture of the School now?' via Menti.com. The word cloud that was generated from the responses will be used for the Athena Swan application. The School Board was split into break out rooms for 5 minutes to discuss 'What culture should the School aspire too?' and the feedback was inputted on to Menti.com. The word clouds are to be shared and staff are encouraged to continue to contribute to Menti.com. Staff were encouraged to complete the EDI survey which will be an important part of the School Athena Swan Application: https://apps.mhs.manchester.ac.uk/surveys/TakeSurvey.aspx?SurveyID=88K175l4K		
4	**Improving the Student Experience in Exceptional Times (Francesca Moss)**		
	Fran Moss (Student Experience Manager) attended to deliver an overview of Student Experience in the School of Natural Sciences. It was noted that the main focus has been on blended learning and to ensure everyone is connected during the COVID pandemic. Fran outlined the challenges and opportunities as a result of having to adapt to the new ways of working and interacting with students in an online environment. Fran highlighted the achievements including the delivery of online graduation celebrations in June and December that were set up to recognise the student's achievements and can be viewed online. Future plans for semester 2 were outlined including developing framework on the journey of the student voice, hosting several employability events with Industry, holding a student away day and continue to run SAG and increase membership of students. **Questions/comments raised included:** 1. **Why is student experience only a brief item to discuss when it's majorly affecting the lives of hundreds of students?** The item will have increased time allocated at the next School Board meeting and specific topics are to be agreed in		

advance. It was noted that Student Rep details were confirmed a few days prior to the meeting and therefore not sufficient notice.

2. **Student Representative highlighted that there is a disconnect between what is reported as being delivered and the student experience due to difficulty in communication. For example communication on assessment and structure of courses since September has been intermittent. Workload is incredibly high**

Sam Ryder to organise a meeting with Student Reps and School representatives to discuss issues raised during the School Board.	SR	Complete

Student Reps were encouraged to engage with the Student Union Reps however it was noted that there have been number of issues with response times and communication with the SU leading to difficulties being able to contribute to relevant meetings.

3. **Student Representative highlighted that blended learning should be more exciting and interactive**

4. **Student representative expressed concerns regarding lack of communication following the National Lockdown announcement and that students are concerned about examinations and the impact of the lockdown/restrictions on student's wellbeing and mental health. The representative expressed a lack of empathy shown from the School/Faculty and the University.**

5	**Issues from the Departments (Chairs of Department For a)**		
	Department of Mathematics (Joel Daou) Raised a No-Confidence-Motion-16.12.20.pdf (ucu.org.uk). It was agreed not to discuss during the meeting but to circulate for consideration by Board members and discussion at Department Forums, pending discussion at the next Board.		
6	**Update from Head of Research (Kevin Taylor)**		
	A report by Kevin Taylor had been received and had been circulated. Philippa highlighted key issues in Kevin absence. • REF is going well and has been finalised • Positive news in relation to EU Funding however the Erasmus exchange programme will end • UKRI are extending application deadlines for several of their calls • Any essential research travel will need to be approved by Head of School during lock down period • Chris Jackson will be joining the school from February. His Royal Institution Christmas Lecture and interview on "A life Scientific" is available in BBC iPlayer.		
7	**Update from Head of School Operations (Sam Ryder)**		
	A report by Sam Ryder had been received and had been circulated. Written report was taken as read		
8	**Issues from the Student Reps (Student reps)**		
	• **Announcement about the No Detriment Policy has been published on Social Media and it was reported that students have not received an email communication about it. Student representative expressed a lack of communication.** Peter Green confirmed that the Faculty is proposing a		

	comprehensive approach of moderation and assured that the Faculty will put in place measures that mitigate and look after students • **Funding extensions do not cover all PGR students and it was noted that the time allowed in labs for PGR researchers is much less compared to other institutions.** • **The PGR access to offices on campus for wellbeing purposes is limited**. Chris Hardacre confirmed that access to campus has been reduced due to National Lockdown but access can still be facilitated.		
9	**Report from Senate (Philippa Browning)**		
	Philippa informed the Board that a special Senate meeting took place to discuss a motion for a Task and Finish group involving elected members of Senate to be set up that would discuss approaches to Teaching and Learning and Student Experience for the forthcoming Semester and facilitate an open consultation beyond the SLT. The motion was not passed.		
10	**Update from Head of Education (Andrew Horn) and Vice Dean for Teaching, Learning and Students (Peter Green)**		
	Summary from Andrew Horn as follows: • Thanked the Discipline Head of Education's for facilitating communication in to the Department following weekly Teaching, Learning and Student Experience committee meetings. • Highlighted that high quality material has been produced for Blended Learning and will look at ensuring best practice is shared for Semester 2. Overall high level of student engagement reported with blended learning • Noted that there is a high workload for academics, PS and technical colleagues and students feeling over whelmed with balancing asynchronous and synchronous activities. • Noted that Microsoft Teams is a good tool for collaborative working and could be utilised to build staff/student communities online. Currently working with the Student Union to explore this. • Opportunities include engagement with students to improve methods of communication in a Teaching and Learning environment. Will create a guidance for study schedules for both students and academics. Summary from Peter Green as follows: • The Flexible Learning programme is to look at providing staff and students with required software tools • It was acknowledged that there are restrictions on planning because the University is awaiting Government announcements which is causing uncertainty for staff and students however the Faculty have started to plan where possible. • A proposal regarding safety net for students has been discussed at TLG and an announcement is expected imminently by the University. Faculty will follow up with further details to ensure that the same level of measures used last year to protect students will be put in place. **Questions/comments raised included:** 1. **Student representative highlighted that there are variations in duration of lecture material and asked whether there was compulsory Staff Training in place?** The Teaching Academy have provided guidelines to all staff and the take		

	up by staff has been wide spread across the School. It was noted that the training was not compulsory and further guidelines on recommendations to staff is required. 2. **Student representative highlighted that delivery of Blended Learning has not met expectations to provide on-campus and off-campus opportunities.** Peter Green highlighted that material has been delivered online where appropriate but the student interaction element would be on campus post-pandemic. 3. **Student representative highlighted that uniformity of platform for teaching content is required and this should be made transparent for students.** Peter Green agreed and the Flexible Learning Programme will address this. 4. **Student representative highlighted a concern that the staffing resource to support student experience does not cover the entire student population and it was noted that there is a high staff workload. It was asked if additional staff could be employed given the University's financial position.** Chris Hardacre confirmed that the financial positon is still not known and savings are still required to take into account additional costs such as increased pension contributions. Investment in PS and Academic staff is taking place. Peter Green noted that student welfare areas have been strengthened. 5. **It was highlighted that the School restructure has resulted in fewer senior staff in the Discipline's in the Teaching and Learning Offices.** Peter Green confirmed that senior staff are at School level. 6. **It was suggested a smaller group should be responsible for Blackboard uploads following a style guide to ensure consistency.** 7. **Requirement to provide guidance for staff delivering Semester 2 Lectures.** Peter Green asked staff to get in touch with the e-learning team for assistance.		
12	**AOB**		
	Department of Material (Rob Sansom) It was reported that School closures has resulted in issues for staff with caring responsibilities. It was highlighted that the staff are considered as Key Workers but lack of School places and messages to work from home where possible has impacted staff. What guidance is available for parents or carers?		