

## SCHOOL OF NATURAL SCIENCES

UNAPPROVED MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SCHOOL BOARD  
HELD ON TUESDAY 23 March 2021 AT 2-4PM, ZOOM

## DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Item No.	Item	Action By	Date Due
1	<b>Chair's business</b>		
	<p>The minutes of the last meeting were approved as an accurate record with an amendment to Item 5 Issues from the Departments. The motion was raised as a proposal for discussion by staff members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chair provided clarification around the voting rights of the Board, although the Board had previously voted in favour of PS holding the right to vote on Board matters this change had not yet been agreed by the University.</li> <li>Recognition of Covid memorial day today – 23 March</li> </ul> <p>Matters arising: All actions have been done.</p>		
2	<b>Head of School Report (Chris Hardacre)</b>		
	<p><u>Budget planning process</u></p> <p>Two phases, Phase 1: has been undertaken - tuition fees, student numbers, pay and capita, Phase 2 is ongoing - research, OOE and overall position</p> <p>Contribution target not yet set, so discussions on OOE and staffing has been a little tricky. Discussions with the Board of Governors and the Finance Director are ongoing. Challenging budget round.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of new posts may be limited.</li> <li>Discretionary spend may be reduced</li> <li>Economies of scale across the School are being considered</li> </ul> <p><u>Campus management</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thank you to staff as across the Faculty there has been extremely good compliance, still some breaches, and issuing of sanctions, but no onsite transmission to date</li> <li>29 March - Hoping Government 'stay at home' instruction will end</li> <li>12 April – potential for more UG/PT students on campus</li> <li>Visitors to campus can access onsite Covid tests, will need an email from the dept to access this service</li> <li>Business travel requests – restrictions remain, meaning essential travel only</li> </ul> <p><b>Questions/comments raised verbally and in chat function include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>End of the "stay at home" instruction, what this means for academic staff?:</b> This will be a University decision rather than FSE, and will be communicated soon</li> <li><b>Students travel:</b> Yes can be facilitated</li> <li><b>Increase in maximum occupancy:</b> Yes can apply to get to max capacity</li> </ul> <p><u>Admissions</u></p> <p>If we don't take into account grade inflation – numbers are reasonable</p>		

	<p><b>Faculty Contribution Model</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• April - Release of FCM in 'beta-mode' to seek feedback</li> <li>• June – FCM available to use for PDR process, use for 22/23 duties allocation</li> <li>• Comments made reflected a desire to see the overall framework (abstract detail) before it is applied to individuals</li> <li>• Comments referenced concern and worry about the formulae and how this will be affect academic staff</li> <li>• Suggestion from one colleague that the HoS had disregarded an instruction by the School Board to bring a paper detailing the formulae – this was disputed as inaccurate with a response that the HoS had provided what was asked. The Chair recalled that it had been agreed that the details of the scheme would be brought to the Board, but that this had been overtaken by the Covid crisis.</li> </ul> <p>Vote on FCM motion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We propose that the details of the formula and the model are discussed and approved by the School Board before it is applied to individuals</li> <li>• Votes cast: 72 of 152 in attendance</li> <li>• Results: Yes: 66 92% No 6 8%</li> </ul> <p>Agreed to hold extraordinary School board meeting to discuss. FCM formulae to be circulated ahead of meeting, allowing time for Easter holiday and departmental forum discussions</p> <p><b>Action 1:</b> Circulate FCM formulae</p> <p><b>Action 2:</b> Schedule an extraordinary School board</p> <p>NB. Chris suffered with connection issues during delivery and responding to questions.</p>		
<b>3</b>	<p><b>Items from the departments</b></p> <p><u>No-Confidence-Motion-16.12.20.pdf (ucu.org.uk) – raised via by Mathematics Department Fora for consideration at Jan 2021 School Board.</u></p> <p>Chair shared onscreen a proportion of the written motion previously circulated in January. A link to the motion was shared with the March agenda. It was explained that this originated as a UCU motion, had been circulated widely and is understood to have been discussed at other school boards.</p> <p>The motion was not read out, the Chair assumed all members had read it in advance. The Chair invited any member to speak to it or against it. A debate was not held and dept fora had not voted on the motion although it had been discussed.</p> <p>Comments from department forum chairs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Chemistry</b> was discussed at forum with strong views expressed: clearly unhappy with the way the University has been run over last year. But no vote took place so can't say comments are representative of the views of Chemistry</li> <li>• <b>Mathematics</b> not been discussed at forum, discussion deferred to School Board</li> <li>• <b>Earth and Environmental Sciences</b> not been discussed at forum</li> <li>• <b>Physics and Astronomy</b> not been discussed at forum</li> <li>• <b>Materials</b> not been discussed at forum</li> </ul> <p>Comments:</p>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledged some aspects are dated (given time lapse), but feel there is a constant trend of management not listening to staff, indicated through feedback in surveys over time, shows decreasing confidence in SLT management</li> <li>Noted that the colleague from Mathematics whom had originally proposed the motion had stated to the dept fora chair that s/he was happy to drop the motion</li> </ul> <p>The Chair proposed to continue with a vote as the motion was an agenda item. The motion could not be read out by the Chair due to viewing availability whilst voting.</p> <p><u>Vote on motion</u> Do you support the motion?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>First vote - academic only <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Votes cast: 71 of 169 in attendance</li> <li>Results: Yes: 55 No: 17</li> </ul> </li> <li>Second vote – All staff (academic and PS) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Votes cast: 97 of 169 in attendance</li> <li>Results: Yes: 76 No: 21</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p><u>Survey on the Impact of the Pandemic on parents and carers - raised by Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences</u> Rob Sansom, brought the above to the Board's attention and asked people to identify any other ways in which colleagues have been impacted that haven't been considered.</p> <p><b>Questions/comments raised verbally and in chat function include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Were PS staff included?</b> – Yes we did also want to acknowledge equivalent impacts on PS staff, while recognising the focus of this particular letter relates to academic concerns.</li> <li><b>Feel PS staff particularly affected, and have no route back to campus, feel suffer because of this</b> – Sam Ryder responded to clarify that PS and all staff have route to wellbeing access and discussions are ongoing to facilitate a PS return to campus.</li> <li><b>Is it solely childcare or other caring responsibilities?</b> -</li> </ul> <p><u>Items from other Department Forums</u> None raised</p>		
<b>4</b>	<b>Items from the Faculty Committee Reps and Senate Report</b>		
	<p>The Chair reported from Senate. There was a vote at Senate on the proposal from the Board of Governors to appoint the Chancellor instead of being elected by alumni and staff. Senate members voted and did not support the proposal. There was also a vote on the proposal from the Board of Governors to appoint PS staff representatives to sit on the Board of Governors instead of being elected by PS staff on General Assembly. Senate also voted against this proposal</p> <p><b>Simeon Gill:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Elections for Faculty Committee members are currently open</li> <li>Important opportunity for PS voices to be heard</li> <li>Example of matters discussed: Faculty governance, contribution model, campus management, size/shape</li> <li>It was highlighted that availability of the Faculty Committee Minutes would enhance communication</li> <li>Encourage staff to press for minutes to be available, so easier to communicate</li> </ul>		
<b>5</b>	<b>Head of Education Report ( Andrew Horn)</b>		
	<i>A report by Andrew Horn had been received and circulated.</i>		

	<p>Andrew showed a presentation, highlighting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mitigating circumstances submission now online</li> <li>• Many lessons learnt</li> <li>• 700 online exams – interesting scheduling task</li> <li>• Online marking, good for academic colleagues, but created more work for PS colleagues; need to look at reallocating resource to support this.</li> </ul> <p><b>Questions/comments raised verbally and in chat function include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Just an aside from the perspective of a student who has been anxiously waiting for results along with my peers since about 1:30 today, I think in future it would be better to be more realistic/allow more time between the exam board and results being released as many students are so nervous they are not able to focus on anything</li> <li>• <b>Students have waited 2 months for the marks to be released, a concern raised by reps in a teaching review meeting earlier today. Will this time be reduced for future exams?</b>– Andrew acknowledged it had taken a long time, explained there had been some complications, will hopefully do it a lot faster in S2 and in the future. Has been a system of moderation and scaling, details of which will be available to students</li> <li>• <b>Why isn't more resource devoted to sorting out the bulk download and uploading or marked scripts? Marking via BB is so painful</b> – this is something that should be considered</li> <li>• <b>I got the impression that the Education office (at least in my dept) was overwhelmed at the time of the exam marking, which has undoubtedly slowed things. PLEASE can more "central resource" be allocated to depts. for S2</b> – Regarding resources for exam marking and processing, we now have a much clearer picture of how to improve the processes, resource the bottlenecks and streamline the paperwork.</li> <li>• <b>If, in 2021-22, pen and paper campus exams are permitted, does that mean there will definitely be no remote learning or will students have to come to Manchester just to take their exams?</b> – My understanding is that the remote option would be until the end of December, and that if there were on-campus exams in January, there would be an expectation that students would return/attend for them.</li> </ul>		
6	<p><b>First Steps to Flexible Learning (led by Dan George, Associate Vice President Blended and Flexible Learning and Stephen Pettifer, Academic Lead for Digital Learning)</b></p> <p><i>A paper 'First steps to flexible learning' and presentation had been received and circulated</i></p> <p>Steve Pettifer gave presentation overview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening to opinions and views - Students and staff both want to get back on to campus to teach but have also valued the flexibility to work online</li> <li>• Main aim is around a change of mindset rather than setting a particular way of teaching</li> <li>• Consider a framework to support and encourage to do things in the best way, not assume the old way is the best way</li> <li>• What has been done over the last year isn't blended learning – blended learning is bringing together the best of online and in-person teaching</li> <li>• For September, we need to plan for a scenario that isn't totally back to how we were pre-Covid-19.</li> <li>• Blended at Programme level</li> </ul>		

	<p>Steve requested feedback: Questions to respond to: What is good? – What is bad?</p> <p><b>Questions/comments raised verbally and in chat function include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need to understand how we teach Mathematics and transmit mathematic ability before making radical changes. There are issues comparing the success of the Open University's Blended Learning teaching with producing mathematicians as the input if different.</li> <li>• Blended workload in S1 was huge, correct tools to deliver would minimise this</li> <li>• <b>Will sit-down with pen and paper Jan and June exams continue under blended learning? There are many problems with online exams and tests.</b> – Yes online exams is Covid response rather than a flexible working approach</li> <li>• <b>Staff have invested a huge amount of time in preparing this year's online materials, with the (implicit?) promise that these can be used as part of future blended learning offerings. Will this be the case?</b> – Yes</li> <li>• <b>How do you see the decision making at programme level working? Will this be democratic or decided by a few people such as DoE?</b> – the FLP won't be involved in department decisions</li> <li>• <b>Have students been asked their opinion on blended learning? If so, what was the feedback?</b> – difficulties of separating blended learning from Covid learning</li> <li>• <b>How will the student workload be monitored in relation to the study budget? Last semester students reported spending far longer than the allocated budget</b> – Note: question posed in the chat and not directly answered</li> <li>• <b>One major difficulty students are facing is struggles with wi-fi/ not having laptops that can run certain programmes or to remotely access University computers</b> – Note: question posed in the chat and not directly answered</li> <li>• <b>FSE Teaching College has been extremely proscriptive throughout the pandemic. Under normal conditions it was left to staff to decide how best to deliver their content to meet the ILOs. Are there plans to return to allowing staff to decide what is best for them rather than this new inflexible and proscriptive approach to deciding how staff teach- which ironically caused much of the workload problems with staff in this academic year?</b> – Note: question posed in the chat and not directly answered</li> </ul> <p>Agreed to discuss more at departmental forums and provide feedback. The feedback opportunities include an open meeting and an online document to comment on, details will be circulated soon.</p>		
<b>7</b>	<p><b>Items from the Student Reps (led by Student reps)</b></p> <p><u>Student Survey Results: 'How are SoNS finding semester 2' (Alannah Williams)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 400 responses but not distributed in Mathematics, Materials, or FBT.</li> <li>• Students feel not much has changed from semester 1.</li> <li>• Feel workloads have increased from semester 1</li> <li>• Feel semester 2 has more structure than semester 1</li> <li>• 50% of respondents said communications have not improved since semester 1, although 20% (mainly from DESS) said they had felt these had improved</li> <li>• All deadlines seem to be concentrated in one period</li> <li>• Students want to thank staff for efforts they have made</li> <li>• Consider: Easing level of exams, i.e. shorter, less questions, another light content week</li> </ul> <p><b>Questions/comments raised verbally and in chat function include:</b></p>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank you for this and a reminder of the School student open meetings, for students to raise and discuss concerns</li> <li>• This was a huge amount of work by the student reps many thanks for putting this all together</li> <li>• Suggestion to bring this together with the work that Fran Moss, TLSE Student Experience Manager, is doing.</li> <li>• <b>Agree with the students that there has been an unacceptable delay regarding results, feels students have been treated badly, from SLT downwards, he shares the feeling that students are being treated as numbers</b> - the delay is largely due to the implementation of the assessment pledge, which has several components that impact the marking moderating and exam boards, including a Faculty Exam Board. The results from FSE are actual marks rather than raw, unmoderated marks that the other faculties are releasing. Our students can be confident in the fairness of the whole process, which is the point of the pledge.</li> <li>• <b>Clearly everything is well intentioned, but if our processes yield a 2-month gap between assessment and returning marks, then we should explain to students that this is a consequence of our well-intentioned attempts at being fair. Once again, our communications let us down.</b> A good point - we have tried but clearly not done as well as we can. Hopefully all colleagues and student members can spread this message.</li> <li>• As a physics rep, I can confirm that comment is in line with a lot of the feedback we have been receiving this year</li> <li>• This was a huge amount of work by the student reps many thanks for putting this all together</li> <li>• The thing about having something between academic advising and counselling is an interesting point, however it may put people in an awkward position because not all advisors have training in dealing with problem cases</li> <li>• Someone had to contact the Chemistry education office to find out that our results are not being released today after we were promised they would be. This is not fair on students who have had such a turbulent exam season!</li> <li>• <b>It's probably true that the quantity of "content" hasn't changed compared with previous years. However there are clearly big problems with student workload. Is anyone clear what the source of the problem is, and how we fix this to improve the satisfaction for our students?</b> - the feedback we have collected seems to point to that a 1h video does not take 1h to do when the lecturers go through slides quickly and often require pausing. This usually brings the lecture content to 2 hours per course or more, but then the addition of synchronous sessions adds even more workload. There is then an issue of many courses demanding several hours of reading before the several hours of questions can be started. This neglects issues faced from COVID directly and technological hurdles, however this is probably the largest contributor based on what we have received.</li> </ul> <p><u>Funding extensions for international students – the funding sources are vast and varied, but can anything be done to appease concerned internationally-funded students with looming deadlines? (James Bird)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• James couldn't talk to this point due to connection issues</li> </ul> <p><u>Compensation for the impact of the move to the Royce Hub building, by means of funded extension (James Bird)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chris: UKRI – have been extended via UKRI phase 2 funding</li> </ul>		
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comment from James in chat: I raise the issue on Royce-funded extensions as a more broad issue on the move to new buildings. Many more will be involved in the move to MECD, and I feel that there are many lessons to be learned - especially with regards removing researchers from labs before the new ones are ready.</li> </ul>		
<b>8</b>	<b>Head of Research Report (led by Kevin Taylor)</b>		
	<p><i>A report by Kevin Taylor had been received and had been circulated.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank all those who worked on REF: DoR; Impact and output champions; and PS colleagues</li> <li>• More than 70 people across the Faculty have been directly involved and even more who have helped indirectly - everyone that has worked on REF will receive a thank you email</li> <li>• 717 eligible staff across six Units of Assessment - together submitting almost 1700 outputs</li> <li>• 44 impact case studies and narratives of more than 81,000 words across 6 environment statements</li> <li>• As of Monday there were no validation errors. We will be submitting this week</li> </ul> <p><b>Questions/comments raised verbally and in chat function include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thanks to you as well Wendy. Amazing job.</li> <li>• Yes, well done Wendy, you and the team did an incredible job</li> </ul> <p>Chris Hardacre: Kevin is stepping down from his role as Head of Research, on behalf of the School would like to thank you for all your work and wish you well in the future.</p>		
<b>9</b>	<b>Head of EDIA Report (led by Giles Johnson)</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Out of time – so not discussed</li> </ul> <p><b>Questions/comments raised verbally and in chat function include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Can we move this meeting to outside school runs?</b> The School has core business hours, and this meeting falls within them but a suggestion that we vary the times of the Board should be considered.</li> </ul> <p>Bring attention to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manchester Gold mentoring scheme available for all staff:  <a href="https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/staff-learning-and-development/academicandresearch/personal-skills-and-development/mentoring/manchester-gold/">https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/staff-learning-and-development/academicandresearch/personal-skills-and-development/mentoring/manchester-gold/</a></li> <li>• Trans awareness sessions next week:  <a href="https://app.manchester.ac.uk/training/profile.aspx?unitid=9233&amp;parentid=4">https://app.manchester.ac.uk/training/profile.aspx?unitid=9233&amp;parentid=4</a></li> </ul>		
<b>10</b>	<b>Student Experience Programme Engagement: Your Views Matter. (led by Steve Olivier)</b>		
	<p><i>An SEP presentation had been received and circulated.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Out of time – so not discussed</li> <li>• Steve recommend staff engage with the feedback opportunities available</li> </ul>		
<b>11</b>	<b>Head of School Operations Report (led by Sam Ryder)</b>		
	<p><i>A report by Sam Ryder had been received and circulated.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Out of time – so not discussed</li> </ul>		
<b>12</b>	<b>AOB</b>		

<b>13</b>	<b>Date of Next Meeting</b>		
	The next meeting would be held on 5 May 2021 at 2pm (venue TBC)		