

Meeting:	Taught Academic Council
Location:	1 East Meeting Room
Date & Time:	Wednesday 31st October 2018 at 12.15 pm and 13:15 pm
Present:	
Jack Kitchen	Education Officer
Jiani Zhou	Postgraduate Officer
Ryan Myles	Academic Representation Coordinator
Amy Young	Engagement & Quality Co-ordinator
Item	
1.	Register Attendance Registration was completed.
2.	Matters arising There were no matters arising to discuss.
3.	Education Officer and Postgraduate Officer Updates Written updates from both officers were distributed prior to the meeting.
4.	<p>Q&A with Professor Peter Lambert, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching)</p> <p>Academic Representatives were given a brief overview of the current state of the Higher Education sector by Professor Lambert.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are national issues affecting universities such as value for money and grade inflation. • £9,000 per year tuition fees were introduced five years ago, with the promise that this would be followed by an inflationary increase yearly however, this has not happened. Some courses, especially in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths), are more expensive to run compared to others. This has meant that costs for universities are rising, but income is not. • Student expectations of their experience go up every year. • There is greater government intervention in higher education now. The Teaching Excellence Framework was originally one line in the Conservative Party manifesto and there is a greater push from the new regulator, the Office for Students, on value for money. • The University of Bath is in a good position, it is well placed for learning and teaching and this is seen through national survey results. <p>Academic Representatives were invited to ask the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) questions by the Education Officer.</p> <p>Q: Students are often told about the benefits to them of Curriculum Transformation, but what will be the benefits for the University?</p> <p>A: Curriculum Transformation is an opportunity for the University to take a step back and reflect, with the intention to stop doing what doesn't work and learning from what does. We want to make our courses more cohesive, so students leave the University with a course identity, not just having studied a collection of units.</p> <p>Q: How does increasing student numbers fit into Curriculum Transformation and the University's finances?</p> <p>A: In 2014/15, the government removed student number caps for every university. The University increased its student numbers since then. However, there are two factors that constrain further expansion: the campus is geographically surrounded by land owned by the</p>

National Trust and the University's infrastructure cannot handle any more students. The University is now focusing on increasing its online provision, offering degree apprenticeships and more blended learning postgraduate courses.

Q: Natural Sciences is a complicated subject as it takes advantage of the modular system, how will Curriculum Transformation affect Natural Sciences?

A: Natural Sciences is an extremely complicated instance. The underpinning idea behind Curriculum Transformation is to give a course identity. We will start by asking students and staff what a Natural Sciences degree at Bath is, and then course designers will bring together those attributes. This is a real challenge and might mean constraining choices, but it will give the course an identity.

Q: The Robotics degree in the department of Electronic and Electrical Engineering overlaps with the department of Computer Science in many units. Depending on which department delivers the unit, the other group tends to feel left out. Architecture and Civil Engineering students have similar experiences. How do we solve this issue?

A: It's true that two different disciplines will have two different approaches and perspectives. It's important that when the department are considering this degree scheme they think at a higher level and set a course identity for robotics.

Q: A more specific issue is that when given an assignment, Robotics students will answer it as engineers but Computer Science students will answer it as computer scientists. The problem here is that those doing the marking are computer scientists will mark as if everyone is a computer scientist.

A: It's important to raise these issues with your Director of Studies as soon as possible and explain how you feel this will have a negative impact.

Q: Given that there's limited capacity to increase student numbers, and international students pay higher fees, wouldn't it be better if the university focused on recruiting more international students?

A: We have to be careful with international student recruitment. Many countries where our international students come from have a changing Higher Education market. Many of our international students come from China and India, and we cannot guarantee students will continue to come in the future.

Q: As an international student, there is not as much funding available for me as a taught student and in order to qualify for PhD funding I need to be a UK or EU student.

A: Unfortunately, this is a national issue due to routes of funding and UK Government policy. If, however, you or students you know are experiencing financial difficulties you should contact the hardship fund (<https://www.bath.ac.uk/guides/applying-for-the-university-of-bath-hardship-fund/>).

Q: The University of Bath is publicly very proud of the fact it's a STEM focused university, while also having a wide range of other degrees on offer such as politics. It's also generally known that degrees such as politics are more profitable than STEM subjects. Is the University of Bath considering opening up more degrees or subject areas?

A: Yes, but we need to look at this in the broader context of research strengths, employability and academic interests of the university. It would be bad to judge a degree or subject on its financial merits alone.

Q: I think that Online Unit Evaluations should be mandatory, when only 20% of people will fill one out.

A: This is a tricky one as we used to do them on paper and get 100% response rate. Now they're online, the best way to encourage students to complete them is to set aside time in class. Every lecturer has to report on their unit evaluations, so I'd agree I'd like to see a higher response rate which makes the survey more representative. If you have any ideas on how to improve its promotion, please do let me know.

Q: In Chemical Engineering we aren't able to submit our lab reports until we have completed the online unit evaluation.

A: This sounds promising in Chemical Engineering as a way of encouraging students to give feedback.

Q: Often when we have five deadlines in one week, the last thing a student would want to do is fill out an evaluation form.

A: Longer term we want to move away from relying only on the Unit Evaluation system, working closer with reps and Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs).

Q: Why do we do OUEs before exams?

A: There's lots of different methods of doing evaluation, but we want to avoid students giving feedback on teaching based on how they feel coming out of an exam. Different units also have exams and/or coursework at different times – it is very difficult to find a consistent date which suits all units.

Q: In relation to funding issues in the sector, what is the university's strategy to meeting this challenge and how will it impact student numbers?

A: There are so many possibilities at the moment, one of which is that the government might re-introduce student number caps. The 2017 General Election gave us an idea of some different ways the sector might go in the future with the political parties outlining different funding and participation models. We've just had the Universities minister resign over Brexit. The University of Bath will look to expand in areas with minimal impact on campus such as online provision, degree apprenticeships or blended learning Masters degrees.

Q: Where does the money from international student fees go?

A: The government told us they were aiming for a free market for fees with universities being allowed to charge what they wanted based upon the perceived worth of a degree, but this is no longer the case. International students pay higher fees, but they also cost more per head. The heightened international student fee is common across the sector and the university is trying to balance being competitive with the sector whilst remaining financially viable to run the course.

Q: In semester two last year we had snow and then weeks of escalating strikes. There was a lot of confusion about how it was dealt with, students unsure whether scaling was being used and generally being unhappy with the way it was dealt with. Do you think the response was satisfactory last year and how will we learn from it for future years?

A: There is a very real threat again of strike action over pay and the issue of pensions hasn't gone away. I took responsibility for central university communications over the strikes and worked closely with the previous Education Officer, Chloe Page, to reassure students. Academic Registry also conducted a comprehensive audit into the impact of the strikes. The University was aware that strikes could potentially impact students' ability to graduate, and staff undertook comprehensive mitigation activities to ensure that standards for degrees, especially those with professional accreditation, were being met. Academic Registry identified a very low risk to student outcomes as a result.

If there is a next time we will communicate more about the actions taken, and I'll work with Jack closely on this.

Q: I am also a departmental representative and a conversation we had both at the SSLC and the Departmental Learning, Teaching and Quality Committee (DLTQC) was that there is guidance available for Panopto but that it doesn't mandate the lecturer to use Panopto even if it is in someone's Disability Access Plan (DAP). Are there any intentions to change this policy?

A: This is another tricky one as the Trade Unions representing academic staff argue that forcing staff to use lecture recording goes against an individual's rights. We can get academic

staff to increase the number of lectures recorded by students asking their lecturers to do so, making the use of Panopto easier, through more intuitive and easy to access technology.

Q: Are you pushing for use of Panopto to become mandatory?

A: It's hard to, as contractually staff aren't obliged to use it.

Q: In the department of Social and Policy Sciences staff are reluctant to record lectures due to the nature of the topics they will discuss.

A: The new technology will make pausing the lecture recording easier.

Q: Panopto recordings now only release 24 hours after the lecture, whereas last year they were immediate.

A: I will look into this and get back to you.

[Following the meeting it was confirmed that the Panopto Project Board (which included the SU President and Education Officer at the time) agreed on a default 24-hour release. This was because there had been some events recorded that should not have been released to students (e.g. student discussing a personal issue with a member of staff in a break in a double lecture which was picked up by microphones). Having a default 24-hour delay allows sufficient time to address issues before released to students. Members of staff can change it from the default should they wish to, and AV has provided instructions on how to do this. A new version of the scheduling software is being developed which will allow staff to choose when they release recordings when they are booked, but staff will need to understand the potential risks associated with immediate release of recordings.]

Q: Is intellectual property a valid argument that staff can use?

A: Intellectual property is a complicated issue, as many academic staff believe that they own the materials they create, and don't wish them to be shared outside of the University.

Q: We've spoken before about the library being overcrowded and now the Virgil Building is busy too. I can't see how Curriculum Transformation will solve this, so surely it will only get worse?

A: We are constantly reviewing our use and allocation of space, and seek every opportunity to maximise student study space whilst not neglecting our other space commitments, such as staff offices and research spaces.

Q: Are there any plans for more university spaces in town?

A: This is dependent on resourcing but the university owns buildings in town and we are looking at how we use Carpenter House. The aim is to not remove study space.

Q: How do we fix institutional racism?

A: We need a strong reporting system at the university and then to deal with racism in a robust manner. We operate a zero-tolerance policy; which students agree to when they register. Staff and students can use the Report and Support tool to report discrimination, misconduct, harassment or assault (<https://www.bath.ac.uk/campaigns/report-and-support/>).

Q: Seminars have been delivered by doctoral students previously and it sometimes doesn't work out well as they don't understand the material. How do you feel about undergraduates being taught by doctoral students and not staff?

A: You shouldn't be taught by someone who doesn't understand the material, however it is common practice across the UK to have Postgraduates who teach.

Q: When do the first new degrees that have gone through curriculum transformation start?

A: Transformed Undergraduate degrees will begin from 2020/2021 and Postgraduate Taught degrees will begin from 2019/20.

Q: What is the future of evaluating student performance and attainment?

A: We want to give greater responsibility to departments to choose which assessments to use and look at a variety of assessment and teaching styles.

Q: Lots of students come to the University of Bath because of its high ranking position in league tables, how does the university plan to ensure its reputation doesn't go down any further?

A: I would question the negative effects of rankings as the University of Bath is still ranked 10th or 11th in most tables, it's only the National Student Survey where we have dropped. This was in part due to strikes, the NSS boycott and the controversy surrounding the former Vice-Chancellor's pay.

Q: Is there a risk that Curriculum Transformation could ruin the university?

A: No: what we're doing is taking the best of what we do and providing staff and students the time and space to build on that.

The meetings ended at 13:05 and 14:05.