

## HE EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE COMMITTEE

### Minutes of the hybrid meeting held on 23 November 2023 at 4.00pm

**Present physically:** C Higgins, Chair R Hetherington, Co-opted  
C Chua, Vice Chair (part)

**Present virtually:** J Gazzard (part) N Savvas, CEO  
M Searcey

**In attendance:** C Shaw, Group Sixth Form Principal  
E Lees, Executive Dean University Studies  
F D'Costa, Registrar  
J Robson, Group Sixth Form Principal  
J Rundell, Academic Skills Advisor HE (part)  
L Hunt, Head of Student Experience  
L Moody, Group Principal Strategic Growth and Partnerships  
S Appleby, Head of Higher Education Curriculum Delivery  
S Gales, Governance Professional

#### **Apologies:**

#### **Absent:**

The agenda was discussed in the following order: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14

#### **1. Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair**

The Committee recognised C Higgins as the Chair and C Chua as Vice Chair of the HE Educational Excellence Committee for 2023/24 as appointed by the Corporation on 12 July 2023.

#### **2. Declaration of Interests and Apologies for absence**

C Higgins and N Savvas declared their roles as Trustees of Suffolk Academies Trust. J Gazzard declared his role as a Member of Suffolk Academies Trust and as an employee of University of Cambridge's Institute of Continuing Education. C Chua declared his role as an employee of University of Cambridge's Judge Business School. M Searcey declared his role as an employee of University of East Anglia. No other conflicts of interest in relation to the items of the agenda were declared.

No apologies for absence were received.

The Committee welcomed M Searcey, J Rundell, C Shaw and J Robson.

#### **3. Committee Terms of Reference and Skillset**

The Committee received and considered the Terms of Reference and Committee Skillset provided.

The Committee asked to keep the line about QAA in both the Committee Skillset and Committee Terms of Reference, but to remove the line about 'HE strategy, partnerships and relationships' from the Committee Skillset.

The Committee **agreed to recommend to the Corporation** the Committee Terms of Reference and Skillset, subject to the amendments above.

#### **4. Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 15 June 2023**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2023 were **agreed** as an accurate record, subject to the removal of the word in item 5.

#### **5. Matters Arising from the meeting on 15 June 2023**

The matters arising from the previous meeting were either complete.

#### Action

Gov. Prof.

6. **Risk Register Extract**

The Committee received and considered the Risk Register extract provided.

The Committee discussed WSCR029 (relating to compliance with OfS conditions) and noted the mitigations implemented should reduce the risk

The Committee discussed WSCR003 (relating to HE enrolments) and WSCR060 (relating to growth of student numbers) and noted WSCR003 is primarily financial (e.g. enrolments compared to budget) 'in-year' and recognised the US team had done much to improve the accuracy of data and forecasting and were happy the 'in year' risk is reduced to yellow.

However WSCR60 is the risk of longer-term forecasting/projections; a sector-wide issue which has been worsened by economic pressures, many out with our control.

E Lees outlined how we are supporting students and working with employers in relation to WSCR060 to mitigate this risk. The Committee **recommend to the Audit and Risk Management Committee** that WSCR060 should be rated higher.

Otherwise, the Committee reviewed the risks and **felt assured** by the mitigations proposed.

FA Risk

7. **2022/23 Self-Evaluation Document (inc. NSS results)**

The Committee received and considered the paper provided, and E Lees summarised the key points.

The Committee commended the team on quality of the document, and the substantial progress over the past year.

The Committee spent time discussing the challenges and action plan to address these, and the Institutional MRE Action Plan, which were deemed appropriate.

The Committee discussed the role of the external examiners and plans to strengthen this at University Studies. Committee members fed back that this is a sector-wide issue and discussed possible strategies to help develop external examiners.

The Committee noted references throughout the report to incomplete data issues and queried what the issue is and what actions are being taken. E Lees and F D'Costa answered this, and said the systems were now in place to obtain these data, but in this draft did not want to include inaccurate data.

8. **Recruitment and student numbers for year started and year ahead**

The Committee received and considered the paper provided, and E Lees summarised the key points.

The Committee discussed the reduced Higher National Certificates/Diplomas enrolments and queried if this is a national/regional trend. L Moody answered this and outlined the planned strategies to increase uptake and aspirations through engagement with sponsoring employers.

9. **KPI Report**

The Committee received and considered the paper provided, and F D'Costa summarised the key points.

The Committee commended the progress to create a KPI dashboard and improve data reporting and integrating with group -wide data management.

10. **Student Experience inc. Voice, Conduct and Complaints**

The Committee received and considered the paper provided and L Hunt summarised the key points.

While noting that the number of formal complaints was small compared with the entire student population, the Committee discussed the formal complaints to ascertain if there were common themes or trends to the complaints, and to understand the actions taken and lessons learnt. L Hunt and E Lees answered this.

J Rundell presented on the Get Ahead (study skills support) programme offered to students. The Committee commended the integration of this programme into the curriculum rather than as an 'add-on', and the inclusion of mechanisms to monitor usage and success.

The Committee noted the uptake reported over the three-year course period and queried why students would access the Get Ahead programme in successive years. J Rundell answered this and explained how it builds on pre-existing study skills as well as provides a refresher of the foundations.

The Committee commended the Get Ahead programme and queried how this links to their induction. E Lees answered this, stating that it is also available for students throughout their learning, whenever they need support.

The Committee queried the proportion of student uptake/engagement with Get Ahead and the initial student feedback / impact. J Rundell estimates one third of students have engaged so far and confirmed we are now working to speak to students to gather feedback.

The Committee thanked J Rundell for the presentation and outstanding work.

J Rundell left the meeting at 4.35pm

11. **Access and Participation Plan inc. Investment Monitoring**

The Committee received and considered the paper provided, and E Lees summarised the key points.

It was pleasing that staff were engaging better with the issues and recognising how the spend can be used most effectively.

12. **Curriculum Development**

The Committee received and considered the paper provided, and S Appleby summarised the key points.

The Committee commended the progress and proposed courses.

The Committee discussed the historic issues with staffing of Counselling and queried if this has been resolved. E Lees answered this.

E Lees informed that we have an Institutional Review in the coming weeks and will be discussing with UEA whether we could provide more flexible modular course structures to better serve our very different demographics.

The Committee asked the Group Sixth Form Principals to feed back on their experience of working with University Studies and the likely impact on student progression. C Shaw and J Robson answered, and assured the Committee there was increasing engagement by staff and students, and that further progress will be made now group-wide processes are in place.

13. **Office for Students Compliance Review (2022/23 and 2023/24)**

The Committee received the paper provided but E Lees noted the report is currently draft and needs updating.

The Committee queried if we remain OfS Compliant. F D'Costa assured the Committee that we are.

14. **Any Other Business**

- **OfS visit to University Studies – 23 November 2023**

The CEO informed there was a first-hand experience visit from the Office for Students today and fed back that they were very impressed. The Committee commended the team for the successful visit.

J Gazzard left the meeting at 5.39pm

- **UEA Institution Review – 28 November 2023**

E Lees informed UEA will be conducting an Institutional Review next week. C Higgins will be attending to representing the Corporation and Committee.

The Committee queried what the outcome of the Institutional Review will be. E Lees confirmed UEA will produce a findings report, and potentially an action plan. E Lees noted the findings could influence their partnership/validation agreement terms.

E Lees to share the papers sent to UEA with the Chair and CEO.

E Lees

- **HE delivery within the Community**

The Chair fed back on intelligence that there appears to be unmet HE demand in the community, specifically Sudbury, and queried if we have plans to utilise our Centres to deliver HE. E Lees and L Moody answered this. The Chair to introduce connection to E Lees and L Moody.

Chair

- **AI Policies**

The Committee discussed the need for policies to govern how AI is used by students, staff and more broadly as part of delivery of our strategy. E Lees and C Shaw discussed how University Studies and the Group are working positively with UEA on AI use, and also engaging with the wider Group[ re the AI strategy.

- **Edmunds Lecture Series**

L Hunt invited Committee members to attend the lecture this evening.

- **Review of the meeting**

The Committee fed back their thoughts on the meeting and noted the discussion was insightful and inclusive.

The meeting closed at 5.58pm