

STUDENT EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE



Minutes of the meeting held on **Wednesday 1 March 2023**

Ex-Officio: Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience and Education) Professor Emma Sutton-Pavli (Chair), Associate PVC Student Inclusion (Professor Helena Gillespie), Associate PVC Employability and Opportunities (Dr Matt Aldrich), An Associate Dean (and member of their Faculty Executive) from each Faculty (Dr Chris Jones (HUM), Professor Simon Lancaster (SCI), Amanda Williams (SSF)), Director of Student Services (Dr Jon Sharp), Director of Student and Graduate Success (Becky Price), Director of Sport and Commercial Services (Phil Steele), the Activities and Opportunities Officer of the Union of UEA Students (Evie Drennan).

With: The Holistic Student Insight Manager (Johanna Hardy), the Head of Student Employability (Antony Cotterill), the Head of Widening Access and Participation (Sarah Ward) and the Graduate Success Administrative Assistant (Caitlin Dawkins)

Secretary: Associate Director of Graduate Success (Careers) (Evan Hancock)

43. MINUTES

Confirmed
the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2023.

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

45. MATTERS ARISING

From Chair's statement 6. Confirmed, the UEASU have provided their TEF submission to this meeting as a Section C paper.

From Chair's statement 7. Confirmed, the Associate PVC Student Inclusion and the Secretary composed and shared a summary document which was shared with Faculty representatives to disseminate. The Committee agreed this was an appropriate and useful format, and to progress with ongoing review.

From Minute 34. Complete, the Head of Postgraduate Research Service has disseminated the PGR SEC paper to the AD PGRs, and put as a section C paper in the Doctoral College Exec in March.

From Minute 35. Complete, the Associate PVC Employability and Opportunities received a positive response from the Welcome Academic and FPS Leads from last year to be involved with this year's Welcome.

From Minute 36. Underway, the Pulse will be used as a mechanism to gain insight into the sorts of areas the non-academic complaints report should include.

46. STATEMENTS BY THE CHAIR

1. Acknowledged the news received and significant impact of the Vice Chancellor's resignation. The Chair of Council has indicated the intention for the interim VC arrangement to be short-term with a remit to support the institution and lead on the accelerated SRP objectives over the coming 12-18 months. Work is also underway to appoint a substantive VC, and Council wants to assure the UEA community that they are working towards providing that longer term stability. It was noted the impact has been widespread with local and national interest and thanks given to the Comms team who are working hard to engage positively with this. The Chair wants to keep a close watch on the impact and hear from colleagues and the student community of any issues or concerns, with a focus on continuing to utilize (and particular thanks to the importance of) the student voice insight, SIZ feedback and student comms group mechanisms. The Chair is keen to hear what the next steps would be for the student communication and engagement process and will keep this as an ongoing conversation for the Committee. There are ongoing conversations with the Joint Consultative Committee with Union colleagues, the Finance Committee and there will be an extraordinary meeting of Council on Monday 6th March to consult and inform the next set of communications and actions before engaging with the wider community. To note, the voluntary severance scheme closed yesterday. The Chair asks for the SEE Exec, SEC and LTC to raise issues, risks and dependencies so this can be captured into high level objectives to inform Council for decision making processes and mitigations on the student experience.

The Committee heard that there has been a more positive response from student feedback about the most recent communications coming from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience and Education) compared to previous communications. It was noted that

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there were a range of opinions amongst the student community regarding the VC's resignation.

To be actioned

To bring to next meeting, a live draft document that captures the risks identified at the SEE Exec meeting.

2. There is a two-week suspension of industrial strike action and the UCU are going back out to ballot in order to seek a mandate to extend action beyond April, which is likely to have implications for the summer assessment period. There will be an additional strike action on the 15th March. Talks continue to find an acceptable solution.
3. The OfS have launched an open consultation to run from now until May on matters relating to sexual misconduct and harassment. The Director of Student Services and Director of Governance and Assurance will lead the response. The Committee is invited and highly encouraged to discuss across their departments and input into the document to inform the response. There will be a draft document circulated for contributions.

To be actioned

The Secretary will facilitate the sharing of the draft document.

The Committee heard that it is a part of the consultation to discuss the extension to off campus procedures as there is mixed practice across the sector. At the current time, the SU do not think they're submitting a separate response but will input into the UEA's.

4. The OfS are hosting a project looking at how to foster better relationships between HEI's and mental healthcare provisions. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience and Education) and the Associate Director of Student Services (Wellbeing) are members of the national group working in that project.
5. The Chair has approved the proposal that the Mental Health Charter submission for assessment is deferred until 2024/25 to allow for time, capacity and for the excellent work that had happened to be appropriately represented and captured, as the SRP may mean that the submission would not fully reflect all of the hard work put into this project. ET have supported this approach.

The Committee raised and supported the views that staff wellbeing is inextricably linked to the student experience and discussed that at the moment there is a danger of normalizing poor staff mental health, particularly through the ongoing communications that staff are receiving within relation to the current financial situation. It was

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noted that although the Mental Health Charter focuses on student mental health, it does have a discreet domain that is around staff wellbeing.

To be actioned

The Chair assured the Committee that these views have been noted and will advocate for better recognition of the impact on colleagues, and to be mindful of that in future communications. The Chair will share that representation to the Director of People & Culture, staff wellbeing lead.

6. The item on Non-Academic Discipline was removed by the author from today's agenda due to inaccuracies in the data. It will become a more substantive item at a future meeting with the Committee suggesting that it could use insight from the Student Voice on themes of student behavior. The Committee noted it would be helpful to have a substantive evaluation of how the change to the operational process has impacted on the outcomes. Relevant staff members will be approached to speak to this paper.

To be actioned

The Chair to take these recommendations to the Director of Governance and Assurance for discussion in discussion with the Secretary.

7. Student Union elections. This is the first election where the entire undergraduate group have not had a pre-covid election. The candidate and current vote numbers are low. There appears to be low confidence among the candidates compared to previous years. The Committee will welcome further insights and a discussion about engagement, representation, and any mechanisms for mitigations of issues that arise through the low engagement such as the Student Voice and SSLCs. The Chair noted that there are ongoing conversations with the interim Chief Exec of the SU and action has been taken regarding concerns around some of the communications related to the elections. The Director of Student and Graduate Success will coordinate via the Holistic Student Experience SLT to form a working group to have a broader view of the mechanisms of student representation.

47. CONFIRMATION OF CHAIR'S ACTION

No Chairs Actions taken.

*48. ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION PLAN MONITORING

Noted

the assessment of progress towards current APP targets

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Agreed

that the committee is assured that sufficient plans were in place to continue/accelerate progress as required against current APP targets

Noted

the changing regulatory landscape in terms of widening access and participation

Provided

input on the initial draft identified risks to equality of opportunity at UEA and agree the proposed approach for ongoing development. (A copy is filed in the Minute Book, ref. SEC22D025)

(The Committee heard that the recommendation to submit the new APP in 2024 has been agreed by the PVC for Student Experience and Education and the Chief Resource Officer. Waiting to submit in 2024 means that the additional workload does not fall in the next few months which is a period where relevant internal teams and stakeholders are already managing a series of additional tasks and uncertainty and it allows the current series of changes happening across UEA to be clearer, ensuring that any targets, outcomes and activities in the new APP are aligned to the new organisational structure. It was noted however that OfS have yet to officially confirm this will be their approach, so there is still the possibility to be asked to submit a new APP in 2023. Work continues on the current assessment of performance and identification of risks so to meet a 2023 deadline if this is required.

The OfS have not yet provided the formal data to allow for the annual monitoring of current APP targets, however there is an internal set of predictors from HESA data. This does not have to be submitted to OfS as they will inform the University if current targets are not being met in June. Targets monitored by the SEC include student continuation and retention; black students and students of mixed ethnicity drop-out rate is positively ahead of the milestone, mature student drop-out from that data has missed the milestone however more recent data shows a positive return, it was noted there has been positive qualitative feedback from students who received interventions and still seeing implications from the pandemic.

The Committee heard that previously there has been no correlation between entering through clearing and drop-out. There is currently a live pilot for contextual admissions, taking some students with lower prior attainment but contextual factors would not necessarily mean low academic potential. There might be more support with transitions for these students and also evaluation to understand the impact of contextual transitions on APP targets as it could raise the risk of not meeting targets.

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The Committee discussed and heard that there is not a high drop-out of carers and so far with the live data tracking there has not been an impact of the school strikes on dropout rates but this is something that will be continually monitored.

The Committee heard that the new APP will be based on translating the demographic gaps and qualitative insight into risks of equality of opportunity. Noting this is a first draft looking at a very initial set of risks based on data at the moment so the Committee is highly encouraged to feedback now and going forward.

The Committee endorsed the contextual admission focus on local risk area Great Yarmouth and heard that Outreach and IntoUniversity have a partnership with Trinity College. It was noted there might be some structural issues sector-wide in that other institutions are making offers to UEA's POLAR 1 students.)

Recommended

It was discussed that according to the OfS LGBTQIA+ students are not underrepresented in HE therefore are not covered by WAP, however should there be evidence to suggest they have a difference student experience then the Committee supported that the Director of Student and Graduate Success and the APP should capture that data and insight. This would also apply to intersectional students.

The Committee discussed how the risk of an impact in an EIA will not necessarily change a policy decision nevertheless if there are H&S incidents that ought to trigger a different mechanism such as the Access All Areas group. The risks identified as priorities for the APP will be used to develop a Theory of Change and what needs to be implemented at the University to mitigate for these risks. The Committee shared the aspirations of the APP to try and embed the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) in the University-wide decision making groups. It was noted there are adjacent regulatory processes to the APP for other kinds of risks.

49. STUDENT COST OF LIVING IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

Noted

the implementation and impact updates

Agreed

that the committee was assured that an appropriate approach was in place and by rate of progress to implement effectively

Agreed

frequency of updates on implementation that SEC would like to receive. (A copy is filed in the Minute Book, ref. SEC22D026)

(The Committee heard about the Equality Impact Assessment on Student Finance from DfE, and its statement that the proposed changes will have ‘a negative impact for students with and without protected characteristics.’

It was also heard that the UEA has submitted to a UUK’s call for evidence to inform a paper to an All-Party Parliamentary Group for Students inquiry into the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on students. The UEA has submitted, amongst other things, its summary of student insight and case studies to show the impact of the cost-of-living, the issues of access to NHS wellbeing support and lack of action taken by purpose-built student accommodation providers or private landlords in the local area.

As part of the cost-of-living implementation, the Citizen’s Advice Bureau have been invited onto campus, and online demand has been high. The uptake for the Zest Supper club have been increasing, however the forecasted financial losses for the University were noted. The Committee thanked and highly endorsed the achievement of the Supper Club noting it is beneficial for attracting students to the campus, and hopefully a positive contribution and investment to their experience and sense of belonging.

It was noted there has been a significant increase in Hardship fund requests from those on Placements.)

To be actioned

The next Cost of Living update to focus on the impacts of the implementation interventions and to consider library access data.

*50. REPORT ON NON-ACADEMIC STUDENT MISCONDUCT FOR THE FIRST PART OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2022/23

As noted in Statements above, this paper was withdrawn and SEC seeks to receive the content of this paper in a different format in future.

51. UEASU TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK

Received

the report. (A copy is filed in the Minute Book, ref. SEC22D028)

52. HOLISTIC STUDENT EXPERIENCE SLT MINUTES

Noted

the minutes of discussions and agreed actions. (A copy is filed in the Minute Book, ref. SEC22D029)

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53. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Reported

the date of the next meeting of the Student Experience
Committee was:

Wednesday 3 May 2023 at 2pm