

## Minutes

Meeting:	<b>Academic Board</b>
Date/Time:	11 March 2025, 2:30 pm- 4:00pm online
Chair/Members:	Dr David Orford – Independent Member & Chair (DO) Zahid Bhatti – CEO (ZB) Nabeel Sheikh – Director of Admissions & Marketing/Interim Chief Operating Officer (NS) Nosheen Naqvi- Director of Studies (NN) Amreen Khalid – Independent Member (AK) Maryam Khan – Independent Member (MK) Dr Paul Turner – Independent Member (PT) Sally Bee – Independent Member (SB) Dr Ravjeet Kour – Director of Internal Communication & Affairs (RK) Abdullah Mushtaq – Director of Operation (AM)
In attendance:	Prof. Simon Jones – Non-Executive Director (PSJ) Trevor Gordon - Non-Executive Director (TG) Dr Robert Hyland – Associate Dean for Partnerships and Chair of the Quality Assurance Committee (RH) Dr Sheku Kakay – Associate Dean – Head of Quality Assurance (SK) Dr Maxine Pryce-Miller– Associate Dean for Health & Social Care, Interim Associate Dean Business Management (MPM) Dr Cristiana Shepherd – Registrar and Controller of Examinations (CS) Shazina Taimoor – Head of Administration, Human Resource & Operations (ST) Yasmeen Mansur – Quality Assurance Manager (YM) Syed Fakhar Abbas – Deputy Programme Lead, Business & Management (FA) Saqib Ayub – Centre Manager, Manchester (SA) Funmi Ekisola – Clerk to the Academic Board (FE)

### **Actions shown in bold.**

#### 1. Welcome

DO welcomed all to the meeting and ensured that online and in-person members and attendees could hear and see one another clearly. He also reminded members that due to Ramadan, the college closes at 4.00pm and therefore, the meeting should aim to conclude by that time

#### 2. Permission to Record

Permission to record the meeting for the production of the minutes was sought and granted

#### 3. Conflicts of Interest / Fit & Proper Person declaration

No conflict of interest was declared.

#### 4. Apologies

Apologies were received from NN and MK.

#### 5. Minutes of the previous meeting 17<sup>th</sup> December 2024

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2024 had been circulated prior to the meeting. The minutes of the last meeting were approved unanimously

#### 6. Review of RAG rated Committee Action Tracker

All actions on the action tracker had been attended to

#### 7. Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the last meeting or the action tracker.

#### 8. Partnerships

##### a. LTU update

###### 1. Artificial Intelligence-

SK informed the meeting that LTU has clarified its policy on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and has recognised that modules and assessments should not attempt to restrict the inevitable growth of this technology. He also stated that LTU has created statements that will be added to module Moodle pages to provide clear guidance on AI usage.

###### 2. Sexual Misconduct (E6 Compliance)

SSS continues to hold monthly meetings with LTU to discuss changes to the E6 conditions. SK reported that SSS has developed a policy that meets the E6 requirements, which has undergone review by multiple stakeholders, including academic managers and members of the academic board. Also, a process map, a reporting form, and a clear statement for the E6 condition has been developed. SK informed the board that the next step is to finalize the version that will be published on the SSS website.

DO asked if LTU was using Turnitin, MPM answered that LTU does not have the Turnitin version that has AI embedded in it, so the college relies on formative assessments and staff to track use of AI in assessments. DO further asked when LTU was going to have it and if SSS could get the AI version of Turnitin. MPM informed members that LTU is working on it with no clear timeline on when it will be done

##### b. External Partnership

RH presented Partnerships' work so far.

###### 1. Southampton Solent University

The Partnership team are developing a relationship with the university for television studies and media studies. This partnership has reached significant milestone and will be progresses to completion

###### 2. University of Derby

The Partnership team are developing a relationship with the university for Early Childhood Studies and Education Studies. This partnership has progressed to the final university approval stage, but has been paused due to concern over concerns about OfS registration. The Partnership team has confirmed to the university that SSS application is being progressed. The partnership team are confident that with the OfS registration, SSS will be considered low risk and obtain approval to commence the courses.

RH highlighted the impact of OfS registration on several potential partnerships and urged the Academic Board to expedite fulfilling the conditions of registration. This will ensure that SSS will be rated as low risk, this will be the lure for potential partner universities.

#### 9. Office for Students – update on OfS registration application CEO

ZB informed the meeting that on 5 February 2025, UKCAB's lawyers wrote to OfS requesting an extension of time to fulfil the conditions set out for SSS. On the same day, OfS acknowledged receipt of the extension request.

RK inquired from ZB about the timeline for obtaining OfS registration in the light of University of Derby's reluctance to partner with SSS. AM clarified that while OfS registration strengthens a provider's position, it is not a legal or regulatory requirement for forming partnerships. AM expressed confidence that the partnership with University of Derby will sail through without the need for OfS registration.

SK then updated the meeting on a QAA meeting he attended, where members were informed that any provider with over 300 students from August 2026, will require OfS registration for QAA registration. In response, ZB assured the meeting that SSS is actively working to meet OfS registration conditions and that the Executive team is targeting an April timeline for securing registration. ZB also confirmed that there are no contractual limitations in the LTU agreement regarding the number of students SSS may recruit.

RK sought further clarification from ZB on the estimated timeline for fulfilling the OfS registration conditions and ZB reconfirmed the April 2025 deadline.

##### a. Staff/Student ratio- meeting the OfS standard

MPM presented the Staff/Student ratio strategy for SSS, outlining the OfS guidelines, SSS current staff/student ratio per cohort and per course and areas requiring improvement. She explained that while some cohorts are compliant, additional lecturers need to be recruited to bring the non-compliant cohorts within the acceptable OfS ratio guidelines.

RK inquired about the teaching delivery and pattern at SSS. MPM clarified that while SSS cannot have seminars in the traditional university seminar format, lecturers teach using PowerPoint presentations. However, the strategy is to transition towards smaller class groups, hands on teaching and interactive sessions. This approach aims to make lessons more engaging and responsive to student needs.

RK further asked whether there is an action plan to ensure bring the staff/student ratios within the required standards and how many new lecturers need to be recruited. MPM confirmed there is a plan in place and she is working with HR to ensure that SSS is adequately staffed with lecturers. ZB added that there has been a realignment of lecturer job

descriptions, and the executive team has made lecturer recruitment a top priority. SK shared that the quality assurance team recently collated and analysed the workload data per lecturer per campus and shared with the teaching and learning team for review.

RK then asked whether the Teaching and Learning team uses a work allocation model. MPM responded that she is currently developing a Work Allocation Model Policy and Guidance, which will be shared appropriately once finalized.

#### 10. Finance and Audit Update

ZB presented the audited accounts for the year ended 31 December 2023, which have been filed with Companies House, as the charity operates as a company.

He reported that the charity is in an excellent financial position and that its financial standing has further improved in the first quarter of 2025. Additionally, he confirmed that the charity has no external liabilities, except the reoccurring internal obligations, reinforcing its strong financial health. PSJ commended that UKCAB is well managed stating that most educational institutions are struggling financially

**FE to share the statement of financial activities with the members of the Academic Board**

#### 11. Report of Committees from Quality Audit Committee

DO having served as the Interim Chair of the Quality Audit Committee and in conjunction with the chairs of the other four sub-committees, identified four key items for discussion at the Academic Board meeting and these as follows:

##### a. Update from Quality Assurance on the Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy- E6 condition

SK informed the meeting that the Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy, has been drafted and the team is strategizing on ways to disseminate the information in catchy bite size portions to impact knowledge on all staff.

##### b. Appointment of a mental health nurse with experience on learning disabilities

The need for a mental health nurse was highlighted during the Quality Audit Committee meeting.

**DO to discuss the appointment of a mental health nurse up with ZB, and give feedback before the next meeting**

##### c. Standardization of departments for clear understanding of roles and responsibilities

The Quality Assurance department, in collaboration with Heads of Departments, will:

1. Develop clear job descriptions for all staff.
2. Define departmental functions and jurisdiction.
3. Standardize reporting structures and processes to foster collaboration.

This initiative was previously put on hold following the Dean's departure, but SK emphasized the need to reactivate it.

#### d. Update on Complaints and Resolution

At the previous Academic Board Meeting (December 17, 2024), the board was notified that there was a student versus staff complaint that had been taken to the appeal stage by the staff member. The appeal was on the terminology of the complaint finding, which the complainant wanted the language of the finding amended.

The appeal process was begun on January 7 as the complainant was out of the country. The appeal has been investigated and processed through several email exchanges with all parties, and two in-person meetings were held on January 22 and February 12 (delayed at the complainant's request as the complainant wanted an external support to accompany them). The appeal was upheld on February 24 2025 and the case was closed on February 25, 2025.

There have been two further student complaints that were raised and resolved informally by the student support team and were not escalated to the complaints panel.

All complaints and outcomes have been logged on the 2025 complaints log, all have been closed and there are no ongoing complaints.

#### e. Any item the Academic Board would like to see addressed by the sub-committees

DO invited board members to suggest items for the sub-committees to address

RK inquired about the transition of academic misconduct matters from the student experience team to the teaching and learning team. MPM confirmed that the transition has been completed, and the teaching and learning team now handles academic misconduct cases.

## 12. CEO Review

ZB informed the board that changes to the governance framework of UKCAB and SSS will be shared once they are finalized by the charity lawyers, He reiterated that UKCAB operates as a single financial entity, meaning there are no separate financial statements or accounts for individual projects.

ZB also shared the following key updates with the Board

1. New University Partnership & Course Offerings
  - SSS is in discussions with a university to introduce two new courses for prospective students.
  - An MOU has been secured, and once Vice Chancellor approval is granted, an official announcement will be made.
  - These courses will be delivered from the London campus
2. Departmental Restructuring
  - Pending Academic Board approval, a reshuffling of departmental heads is proposed, particularly within
    - ✓ Partnership
    - ✓ Student Academic Support department.

- Additionally, structural improvements will be implemented in the Registrar & Controller of Examinations department to enhance operational efficiency.
3. CEO Transition
- ZB announced his decision to step down as CEO, with NN appointed as the new CEO.
  - This transition aims to strengthen SSS's governance structure and align it with higher education and OfS requirements.
  - ZB will remain as Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

TG inquired about NN's background and ZB confirmed that NN is a founding trustee who has been instrumental in the growth of the organisation and is well positioned to lead SSS

**FE to share NN's profile with Academic Board members and arrange a meeting between NN and Academic Board members.**

### 13. Quality Assurance Plan

SK provided an update on quality assurance plan for the year. He highlighted the accomplishments in the last three months, action plan in the next three months and OfS pending actions for the next three weeks.

Accomplishments in the last three months include:

Implementation of the Self-Assessment Report	Disciplinary Panel – staff and students
OfS Conditions Template – Indicators and Measures	Student & Staff complaints panels
Implementation of the Quarterly Review Report	Appeals Panel
Implementation of Collaborative Operational delivery Plan	Policy Review Panel – Associate Deans
	Working collaboratively with the LTU QAO

Pending in the next three months include:

Internal Moderator	Staff satisfaction Survey– with HR
QAA Mock Assessment	Quality Assurance Tracker
Developments of staff recognition Awards	Academic Staff Appraisal Template
Peer Review (staff) and Peer Mentoring (students)	Monthly/Quarterly Quality Assurance Bulletin
Research Seminar Coordinator	

DO asked if plans are in place on which staff will be meeting the OfS team. SK responded that when QAA assessors identify the campus they want to visit, concrete plans will then be activated for execution.

On the OfS Quality Plan, SK listed the following accomplishments. These include:

1. Student Protection Plan
2. Value for Money policy
3. Draft Organogram

4. Fit and Proper Persons policy
5. Risk Management Framework
6. Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct policy
7. Ethics policy - reviewed

OfS Quality Plan pending and must be resolved in the next three weeks include:

1. Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) compliance
2. Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) Compliance
3. Values – UKCAB/SSS
4. Committee of University Chairs (CUC) - Code of Governance
5. OfS Registration Application Form: Annex F

TG & MPM informed SK that the Sexual Misconduct policy must be a stand-alone policy and not merged with Bullying and Harassment policy. TG asked SK whether, in developing the required policies, he and his team are benchmarking against Russell Group universities rather than drafting the policies from scratch. He also advised that the policies be concise and not overly lengthy to enhance clarity and usability.

Additionally, TG clarified that Peer Review (staff) and Peer Mentoring (students) are distinct processes and should not be combined into a single framework.

These comments were noted and taken into advisement by SK.

Contributions from PT, CS, ZB, RK & MPM were also discussed and addressed.

These contributions centred around

1. Caveat on reliance on LTU report

Concerns were raised regarding data quality issues in the LTU report, emphasizing that SSS should exercise caution when relying on the report's findings.

2. Internal Moderators
3. Collaboration between quality assurance and the registrar's office
4. Clarification on the E6 condition Harassment and Sexual Misconduct policy
5. A one size fit all appraisal form would not be effective. Departmental heads must be involved in defining KPIs that will be incorporated into appraisal forms, ensuring a bespoke approach tailored to each department.

**CS to present SSS generated data to the Academic Board at the next Academic board meeting**

#### 14. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed at the meeting

#### 15. Date of next meeting

DO thanked all Academic Board members and the senior leadership team for attending the meeting. There being no further business, the meeting closed at 4.07 pm

Date of next meeting is Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> May 2025 at 14.30 online via Microsoft Teams

All papers to be considered at the meeting to be sent to the Clerk on/before Monday 12 May 2025

#### Action Table

Action	Owner	Deadline
Share the statement of financial activities with the members of the Academic Board	FE	31/03/25
Discuss the appointment of a mental health nurse up with ZB, and give feedback before the next meeting	DO	12/05/25
Share NN's profile with Academic Board members and arrange a meeting between NN and Academic Board members.	FE	31/03/25
Registrar & Controller of Examinations to present SSS generated data to the board at the next Academic Board meeting	CS	12/05/25