

Council

25 February 2021

Minutes of the University Council meeting held on Thursday 25 February 2021 at 2.00pm (ending at 3.55pm) via video conference.

Present: George Garlick (Chair)

Phoebe Bastiani, John Duffy, Professor Phil Gilmartin, Frances Hanson, Professor Susan Lea, Vanessa Lee, Ursula Lidbetter, Professor Mark Lorch, Rosalyn Schofield, Matthew Swindells, Richard Thompson, Julia Whittaker, Denise Wilson.

In attendance: Louise Cook, Professor Becky Huxley-Binns, Professor Paul Hagan, Jeremy Hartley, Dr Chris Ince, Professor Lucy Mazdon, Dr David Richards.

Minutes: 44 - 62

Action by

44 Welcome, Apologies for Absence and Declarations

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Matt Jukes, Eve Kyte and Professor Andy Heyes.

The Chair welcomed Professor Paul Hagan, Dean of Faculty of Health Sciences, and Dr Chris Ince, University Secretary & Chief Compliance Officer, to their first meeting of Council.

45 Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

46 (23) Matters arising

Council received an action summary and noted that there were no outstanding actions.

47 Chair's Report

The Chair reported on (i) the amount of work conducted since the last meeting despite the continued uncertainty regarding a full return to campus due to Covid; (ii) work undertaken with the newly appointed University Secretary on the review of governance, and (iii) the briefing session that had been provided for Members on the USS pension.

Dr Ince left the meeting during consideration of the following item.

48 Appointment of University Secretary

The Chair sought approval for the appointment of Dr Chris Ince as the University Secretary and Chief Compliance Officer.

RESOLVED:

That the appointment of Dr Chris Ince as University Secretary and Chief Compliance Officer be approved.

49 Transformation Programme

The Vice-Chancellor advised of the work on Phase 3 of the Transformation Programme, which included two workstreams, Estates and Systems & Processes.

In relation to Estates, senior level consultation had been conducted across the University on immediate estate needs. A presentation had been given to the University Leadership Team and a Plan would now be developed. An Estates Strategy would be submitted to Council later in the year.

The Systems & Processes work was focussing on the student records system, SITS. This work would concentrate on the student journey and supporting the academic mission of the University. Dedicated SITS developers were being appointed and a detailed project and risk management approach to the work was being adopted to ensure that it remained on track.

There remained a low number of positive Covid cases amongst staff and students. Following the recent Government announcement, it had been determined that a small number of additional students would return to campus on 8 March but the majority of teaching would remain online. A further Government update was not expected until April. All who remained on campus were encouraged to take Covid tests twice weekly. The majority of staff were likely to continue to work from home until June. The University continued to work closely with Hull City Council.

50 (24) Management Report

A confidential report providing updates on activity within the sector and the University was submitted.

The Vice-Chancellor advised that it had been a busy time for the sector and highlighted a number of key developments from her report.

The Vice-Chancellor commented on recent senior appointments to the University and advised that the successful candidates for the posts of Executive Director of Human Resources and Academic Registrar would commence their employment shortly.

Members commented on the hardship fund and queried whether applications were being received from those most in need. The Chief Operating Officer reported that there had been 1600 applications for digital support and 175 applications for personal hardship. This funding was in addition to the rent waiver that was offered to students in University accommodation. Hull University Students' Union were involved in the process and the HUSU President commented on the referral mechanisms in place.

Members referred to the recent announcement regarding the replacement of examinations for GCSE and A level students with teacher assessments. The Vice-Chancellor advised that the implications of this were being considered and the PVC(E) reported that an extraordinary meeting of the Admissions Committee would be held to consider whether a review of Clearing or the University's offer making strategy needed to be undertaken to accommodate this change. The University had responded to the Ofqual consultation that had been undertaken in relation to this matter.

The Vice-Chancellor reported that the UCAS tracker showed that Undergraduate applications to the University were up 7.9% on last year which was ahead of both the University's comparators and the sector average. Post-Graduate Taught applications were up 10.9% on last year, although a large number of these were International Students so there remained a degree of caution around their ability to take up their places in the Autumn.

51 University Strategy

In accordance with minute 29 (10.12.20) the Vice-Chancellor gave a presentation on the reporting framework that would accompany the University Strategy 2030.

As previously, a KPI dashboard, mapped against the Strategy, would be submitted to each meeting of Council. In addition to the previously reported metrics a narrative section would also be included.

A review was scheduled to be conducted in Year 5 of the Strategy but this could be undertaken earlier if required.

The revised reporting arrangements would deliver quantitative and qualitative assurance to ULT and Council on progress towards meeting the objectives of the Strategy.

The University Strategy would be supported by the strategies relating to Education, Knowledge Exchange, International and Research. At each Council meeting it was proposed that there would be a progress report on one of the strategies. An end of year report would then be submitted to detail overall progress and provide an opportunity to reflect and to consider opportunities and risks and sector benchmarking. The Risk Register would be aligned to the Strategy and work was underway to ensure that the framework was in place by July. Everybody within the Institution had a part to play in the delivery of the Strategy and this would be captured as objectives forming part of the staff appraisal process.

Members commented on the RAG ratings and the need to discuss the comparisons with peers and/or the sector. The Vice-Chancellor reported that each variable would have a target for Hull which would be benchmarked against the sector. The PVC(E) commented on OfS requirements in relation to some of the education KPIs which would be explained further when they were presented.

Reference was made to Value for Money (VfM) and the Vice-Chancellor advised that the key metrics within the framework could be used in VfM assurance considerations.

The Vice-Chancellor advised that consideration had been given to implementing a subset of meta KPIs. This had been decided against but would be introduced if Council required it.

Members welcomed the new performance framework, particularly the provision of a narrative to support KPIs, and noted that the framework would be refined over time.

52 (25) Finance Report

The Director of Finance submitted a confidential report that provided a financial update as at 31.12.20 and projections for the 2020/21 outturn.

Details of the Annual Financial Return to the OfS were also included in the report, as was an update on the USS pension position following a briefing session for Members that had been held on 17.02.21.

The year to date position showed a deficit of £12.9m which was £3.8m favourable to budget and £7.5m favourable to last year.

Income had been impacted by Covid, with reductions in revenue from residences and catering. This reduced income would be offset by previously identified mitigating factors including vacancy management and the operational expenditure moratorium.

Cashflow as at 31.12.20 had been higher than originally budgeted due to the Student Loan Company making a 50% payment in October rather than the usual 25%, as part of its response to Covid.

The impact of the mitigating factors against the loss of income, together with higher than planned student numbers indicated a breakeven position at year end. The situation would remain under close review. The bank covenants continued to be met and trigger points had been implemented and reported to the Audit Committee.

The OfS financial return, which required Council approval, would normally be considered at the same time as the Annual Return but the deadline had been extended by the OfS due to the impact of Covid. An early submission had been made to the OfS. All validation questions had been answered and the OfS had requested sign off by the Accountable Officer.

The 2021/22 budget process had commenced and a detailed review was underway.

The Director of Finance commented on the UUK briefing that had been provided to Members on 17.02.21 regarding the USS pension. Further information was expected from the USS Trustee in the first or second week of March. A working group had been established to work through the USS Trustee consultation.

Members queried which of the budget sensitivities were likely to have the most impact. The Director of Finance advised that the EIB bank covenant was dependent on operating cashflow and was carefully monitored. A surplus would reduce sensitivity on that metric.

In response to a query regarding the impact of exiting the demographic dip in the number of 18-year olds, the Vice-Chancellor reported that whilst the number was expected to rise to 2030, it was felt that the current increase in applications to the University was as a result of the work being undertaken to increase market share.

The Chair of Audit Committee expressed her thanks to the Director of Finance and the Chief Operating Officer for their work in continued financial monitoring and planning.

Reference was made to recent media articles regarding cash payments being made at some institutions and the Director of Finance confirmed that it had been a policy at the University since June 2019 not to accept cash payments for accommodation or tuition fees.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report be noted, and
- (b) That the OfS Financial Return 2020 be approved.

53 Research Excellence Framework (REF)

The PVC(R&E) gave a presentation on progress towards REF 2021. The last REF had been conducted in 2014 and the main change was that all eligible staff now had to be submitted.

The University's target outcome was inclusion within the top 50. Analysis of the final Grade Point Average would be submitted when completed.

Work was on target for approval by ULT on 22.03.21 and submission by the deadline of 31.03.21.

54 (26) Annual Statements of Research Integrity 2019 and 2020

The PVC(R&E) submitted a report that provided the Statements for both 2019 and 2020. The Statements had been approved by the University Research Committee and by Chair's action on behalf of Senate. Following approval, the Statements would be published on the University's website in accordance with the requirements of the Concordat to Support Research Integrity.

There had been no significant changes between the two years.

RESOLVED:

That the Annual Statements of Research Integrity for 2019 and 2020 be approved.

55 (27) Governance Review

The University Secretary & Chief Compliance Officer submitted a report that set out the initial findings of an internal review of compliance against the CUC HE Code of Governance by the Governance Team. The Code had been revised in September 2020 and the University would need to be compliant by the end of the academic year.

The review had identified existing compliance, or planned work to achieve this, and a number of actions that would form part of a wider governance action plan.

An internal audit of compliance with the Code had also recently been undertaken and the outcome would be reported to the Audit Committee and the proposed new Committee in due course.

An initial finding of the review was a proposal to establish a Governance and Nominations Committee. Subject to Council's approval the Chair of that Committee would be a Lay-Member and consideration would be given to whether they could also undertake the role of Senior Independent Director. The first meeting would take place in late April.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the revised Member Code of Conduct be approved;
- (b) That the establishment of a Governance and Nominations Committee and the development of Terms of Reference be approved and expressions of interest in being a member of that Committee be submitted to the University Secretary; US&CCO / Members
- (c) That the revised CUC HE Code of Governance and the self-assessment that has been conducted be noted, and
- (d) That an action plan arising from the work conducted be submitted to a future meeting of the Governance and Nominations Committee. US&CCO

56 (28) Hull University Students' Union Report

The President of Hull University Students' Union submitted a report that provided an update on how the President Team had been representing and engaging students.

The President reported that due to Covid the HUSU elections had been deferred to March. There would be five President positions up for election in 2021, however, consideration was being given to reducing that number from 2022, subject to Board approval.

57 (29) University of Hull Performance Trends and KPIs

Council received a confidential report setting out performance against Institutional KPIs.

58 Office for Students

OfS matters were addressed in the Vice-Chancellor's report at minute 50.

59 Minutes/Executive Summary of Committees

(a) Transformation Sub-Committee – 10 December 2020
and 28 January 2021

The minutes of the Transformation Sub-Committee held on 10 December 2020 and 28 January 2021 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be noted.

(b) Audit Committee – 25 January 2021

The minutes of the Audit Committee held on 25 January 2021 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be noted.

(c) Finance and Investment Committee – 4 February 2021

The minutes of the Finance and Investment Committee meeting held on 4 February 2021 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be noted.

(d) Honorary Awards Committee – 8 February 2021

The minutes of the Honorary Awards Committee held on 8 February 2021 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the minutes be noted;
- (ii) That the Honorary Awards Committee terms of reference and composition be approved;
- (iii) That, subject to agreement by Senate, the nomination for an Honorary Award be approved.

(e) University Ethics Committee – 8 February 2021

The minutes of University Ethics Committee held on 8 February 2021 were submitted.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be noted.

60 Valedictions

None

All members

61 Dates of Meetings 2020/21

Date of Meeting	Deadline for papers
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Thursday 29 April 2021, 2.00 pm	<i>15 April 2021</i>
Wednesday 26 May 2021, Away Day	
Thursday 8 July 2021, 2.00 pm	<i>24 June 2021</i>

62 Any other business

There were no other items of business.

Signature of Chair

Date of signature
