

## Council

29 April 2021

Minutes of the University Council meeting held on Thursday 29 April 2021 at 2.00pm  
(ending at 3.30 pm) via video conference.

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**Present:** George Garlick (Chair), Phoebe Bastiani, John Duffy, Frances Hanson, Professor Susan Lea, Ursula Lidbetter, Rosalyn Schofield, Matthew Swindells, Richard Thompson, Julia Whittaker, Denise Wilson.

**In attendance:** Professor Becky Huxley-Binns, Professor Paul Hagan, Jeremy Hartley, Professor Andy Heyes, Dr Chris Ince, Professor Lucy Mazdon, Dr David Richards, Sarah Wilson

Minutes: 63 - 83

### Action by

- 63 Welcome, Apologies for Absence and Declarations**  
Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Professor Phil Gilmartin, Professor Mark Lorch, Matt Jukes, Vanessa Lee and Eve Kyte.
- 64 Minutes of last meeting**  
The minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
- 65 Matters arising**  
There were no matters arising not covered on the agenda. The actions relating to the Governance & Nominations Committee would be covered under minute 79 (e).
- 66 Chair's Report**  
The Chair reported there had been a number of meetings of the Committee of University Chairs (CUC), focusing around the USS pension scheme, which was covered later on the agenda.
- 67 Transformation Programme**  
The Vice-Chancellor reported on Phase 3 of the Transformation Programme, which focused on systems & processes as well as the University's estate. There was a clear plan of work and milestones that had been presented to the Transformation Sub-Committee,

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along with a risk dashboard. The Phase 3 “Plan on a Page” would be circulated to members.

Secretary

A full report on the Estates strand of activity would come to Council in July.

The main activity on the systems strand was around the student records system with the removal of a number of legacy systems that would be incorporated into the main system.

Key processes under review were around assessment and student progression.

The Vice-Chancellor updated the Council on student recruitment. Home undergraduate applications were 7.8% up on the previous cycle, ahead of sector and the benchmark group. Offers were 3% up on the previous year, also ahead of both groups; as was conversion of offers to acceptances. However, overall firm acceptances were down across the whole sector as students waited later in the process than normal to make decisions, as they hoped to visit institutions before making final decisions. There had been very positive feedback on the University’s virtual open days and on campus visits were now commencing.

PGT applications had increased but were predominately from overseas applicants, so there was a risk around how many of these would be able to start study this year.

Council discussed the benefits and impact that were expected from Phase 3 of the Programme. Many of these were around improved efficiencies and effectiveness. This would be considered in more detail at the next Transformation Programme Sub-Committee.

Council noted the governance structure underpinning the work that included dedicated project management support and measures to ensure cost control across the work.

## **68 Management Report**

The Vice-Chancellor presented the Management Report and highlighted the latest sector developments, the University’s Covid response, the work of the Teaching Excellence Academy, the University’s REF submission and the HE-BCI return.

The Vice-Chancellor reported on success in the recent THE Impact 2021 global rankings, measured against the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The University was ranked in the 201-300

group out of over 1100 institutions in the rankings. It had been placed in the top quartile in five areas and the second quartile in the areas where it had submitted.

Council noted that there were now 1175 students resident on campus. The testing centre remained in place and, following the change in lockdown restrictions in April, there were increased activities available onsite including sports and outdoor catering. It had been disappointing that the guidance had not changed in April to allow more students to return to teaching on campus, especially for final year students. It was hoped this would change at the May lockdown review even if there was limited teaching after this date.

Council thanked all colleagues involved in the University's REF submission, which had been led by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (RKE). PVCs and Deans would be looking at the Academic Careers Framework and academic workload model to ensure that staff were aligned to realising the University's strategic ambitions going forward and any changes that were required.

Council discussed the factors that attracted students to apply for study or staff to work at the University. Research across the sector showed that, in general, students were attracted to the course then other factors including reputation, facilities and location. League table performance was more important to overseas applicants. Factors for staff included seeing an institution perform well and knowing that their work would be valued. Facilities, the potential to collaborate and the academic environment were also important to research active staff. The University was developing a People Strategy to attract, develop and retain staff.

## **69 International Strategy**

Council agreed this agenda item would be used for a more detailed consideration of the KPI Reporting, Presentation and Targets.

The Vice-Chancellor presented and highlighted the changes that had been made to the presentation of the data dashboard following feedback from Council at its last meeting. A detailed report on benchmarking would be included in the July report to Council, including proposed changes to establish an aspirational comparator group. A first iteration of "meta" KPIS and targets would also be developed and presented for Council to consider.

Council noted that as well as developing an aspirational group there was value to retaining the existing comparator group, to show how progress was being made.

## **70 Finance Report**

### *Finance Report*

The Finance Director presented the Finance Report, which included the Q2 Forecast and the year to date performance through to the end of Period 7.

The Q2 Forecast showed a £0.4m deficit for the year, which was £3.5m better than budget and over £6m better than the prior year. Income for the year was £179m with changes due to increased student recruitment but decreased income from residential and catering accommodation. This overall decrease in income had been offset by savings on pay/non-pay costs and changes due to the timings of estates disposals. Capital investment remained in-line with the agreed budget.

Cash at the end of the year was expected to be at around £36m, which was broadly in line with expectations. Liquidity remained around 80 days, well above the OfS reportable event threshold of 30 days. Council noted that all bank covenants were being met.

Financial performance through to Period 7 was slightly better than forecast and the Period 8 draft report showed a further improvement beyond this.

Council noted the overall financial impact of Covid-19 and how the impact on income had been offset by the measures put in place.

Discussing the savings made on non-pay costs and how this would change post Covid, Council noted that reduced activity on campus was a major factor in reduced expenditure. This had given insight on how the University might change the way it operates in the future and contain operational costs. It was noted that some costs will return or go up. Expenditure on maintenance and other related areas hadn't been stopped but there had been some minor delays, so there was no expectation of increased future costs from any delays. The fire risk assessment works in the capital plan had been progressed as a rolling programme and will complete this academic year.

The forecast assumed no further increases in residential income, so all potential loss of income has been provided for. There would be some positive movement as further students had returned to campus accommodation.

Council noted that there was no agreed approach from Government on how student complaints or fee refund requests were managed and these went through the institution's own complaints process to be addressed. No specific refunds had been made to date and the approach taken was in line with guidance issued by the Office for the Independent Adjudicator.

The Vice-Chancellor reported that the sector was working collaboratively around how students can safely return to campuses. It was hoped the Government would review its approach around universities, which have shown no significant impact on Covid transmission. She had written an article for the local press on this matter.

Council noted that the sector was still waiting for a response from the Government on the Augar Review.

#### *Pensions*

The Finance Director updated Council on the actuarial valuation of the UPAS pension scheme. Council would receive more information in late 2021 or early 2022.

There had been significant activity around the USS Pension Scheme. The report from the scheme actuaries had presented requirements to keep the existing benefits and the consequent implications for contribution rates and covenants required from employers. Current contribution rates were 30.7% and any of the scenarios increased these to over 42%, with an additional cost to the University of £4-10m pa.

There was already a planned increase in October 2021 and the University has budgeted £1.5m for its additional costs. It would need to consider how any future increases, if they happened, impact on financial forecasts or associated financial scenario planning.

UUK had issued a consultation in early April, looking at options to address the situation including strengthening the covenant and possible benefit reforms. These aim to keep the contribution levels at the October 2021 levels.

The University had run a number of sessions for employees with support from an external firm, a briefing session for senior leaders and further communications were planned to staff, including input to inform the university's response to the UUK consultation. FIC

had also established a USS Pensions Sub-Group to look at the issue in more detail.

The University's current opt-out rate from the USS was 9.6%, around 110 members, but this was up to 20% in some other institutions. The USS agreement means that universities cannot offer another competing scheme for this group of staff.

**71 Student Tuition Fees 2022/23**

The PVC(Education) presented the proposed student fees, and principles for setting fees, for the 2022/23 academic year. These had been considered in detail by relevant staff and proposed fees for the year and flexibility to make some decisions once further information was known. This included the intention to revisit the recommended fees for international PGT fees following further analysis of the impact on recruitment of the 2021/22 reduction.

**RESOLVED:**

That the fees set out in the paper and the flexibility requested in setting certain fees at a later date be approved.

**72 Hull University Students' Union Report**

The HUSU President reported on recent activity within HUSU and noted that a written report would be circulated after the meeting.

Secretary

The recent Presidential election had seen the re-election of three officers and two new officers joining the team for 2021/22. Turnout had decreased without activities on campus to promote the elections and lessons had been learnt around conducting online campaigning that would help in future years. Council congratulated the winners on their election.

Council noted the planned reform of the presidential team, to reduce from five to four sabbatical posts from the 2022/23 academic year. HUSU was reviewing its standing orders and how the roles interact with the University but no changes to the Constitution were expected.

There was ongoing work around a range of activities including sexual violence & consent training, sustainability, women in sport, addressing the degree awarding gap, women in leadership, work with the TEA, improving the approach to mitigating circumstances, on campus events and the HUSU Awards.

**73 Degree Outcomes Statement**

Council approved the Degree Outcomes Statement, which was the first the University had been required to complete. This would be published externally and updated annually.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Degrees Outcomes Statement be approved.

**74 Ferens Education Trust**

**RESOLVED:**

That the appointment of Professor Kelly to the Ferens Education Trust be approved.

**75 University of Hull Performance Trends and KPIs**

Council received a confidential report setting out performance against Institutional KPIs. The presentation had been considered under minute 69.

**76 EDI / Race at Work Charter**

Council noted the report.

**77 Office for Students**

The University Secretary & Chief Compliance Officer reported that there were no specific issues for the University and there had been no reportable events since the last meeting.

**78 Almanac 2021/22**

Council noted the Almanac for the 2021/22 academic year.

**79 Minutes/Executive Summary of Committees**

(a) Transformation Sub-Committee – 25 February 2021

The minutes of the Transformation Sub-Committee held on 25 February 2021 were submitted.

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes be noted.

(b) Senate – 17 March 2021

The minutes of Senate held on 17 March 2021 were submitted.

**RESOLVED:**

That the 2018/19 and 2019/20 Institutional Reports be approved.

(c) Audit Committee – 22 March 2021

The minutes of the Audit Committee held on 22 March 2021 were submitted.

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes be noted.

(d) Finance and Investment Committee – 15 April 2021

The minutes of the Finance and Investment Committee meeting held on 15 April 2021 were submitted. Council noted the creation of a sub-group to look at the USS Pension issues.

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes be noted.

(e) Governance and Nominations Committee – 21 April 2021

A report from the Governance and Nominations Committee held on 21 April 2021 was received.

**RESOLVED:**

(i) That the updated Terms of Reference & Membership be approved.

(ii) That the creation of a role of Senior Independent Council Member, to be held by the Chair of Audit Committee.

**80 Chair's Action**

(a) Nominee to sit on Redundancy Appeal Panel

Council ratified the appointment, which had been approved by Chair's Action.

**81 Valedictions**

None

**All members**

**82 Dates of Meetings 2020-21**

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



**83 Any other business**

There were no other items of business.

Signature of Chair

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Date of signature

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