**UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER**

**COUNCIL**

**Minutes of a Meeting held on**

**Tuesday 2 July 2024**

**Present:**

Gary Dixon (Chair)

Lauren Bartlett Liz Blyth

Nishan Canagarajah Martin Cullen

Mehmooda Duke Cathy Ellis

Catherine Morley Rishi Madlani

Kevin Nagle Henrietta O’Connor

Gabrielle Provan Jacqui Shaw

Richard Tapp

**In attendance:** Paul Gowdridge (Chief Financial Officer); Geoff Green (Registrar and Secretary); Liz Jones (PVC Education); Kevin Joyce (Governance Officer); Liam Davis, (Chief Executive Officer, Students’ Union) for minute 24/M40; Emma Stevens (Director of HR) and Nic Junkin (Assistant Director of HR) for minute 24/M42

**Apologies:** George Acquah, Jack Chambers, Sophie Dale-Black; Kerry Law, Mark Purnell, Jade Thomas

24/M34 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of personal interest pertaining to any of the items dealt with in this meeting.

24/M35 **MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

**Council approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 8 May 2024 as a correct record and noted the responses to the matters arising from that meeting.

24/M36 **CHAIR’S BUSINESS**

The Chair reminded Council members of the difficulty facing all Higher Education institutions (HEIs) in the current economic climate and thanked all University staff for their hard work in 2023/24 during this very challenging financial environment.

The Chair reminded members that the process for appointing a new Chair of Council at the end of the 2024/25 academic year had commenced.

The Chair recorded its appreciation to Mark Purnell and Jacqui Shaw whose terms as Senate members of Council were ending on 31 July 2024.

The Chair recorded thanks to Alison Benson, Assistant Secretary to Council, who was leaving the University on 1 August 2024.

24/M37 **PRESIDENT AND VICE CHANCELLOR’S BUSINESS**

The President and Vice-Chancellor introduced his written report for Council, which provided a comprehensive update on recent developments in the HE sector generally, and at Leicester specifically, including student recruitment and financial performance during 2023/24 .

It was reported that Professor Andre Ng had been awarded £3m from the British Heart Foundation (BHF) to support world-class cardiovascular disease research over the next five years, with money pledged by both the University and University Hospitals of Leicester taking the total investment to around £7m.

It was reported that June marked the University Staff Health and Wellbeing Month, with 30 events delivered across the month, supporting the strategic aims and aligned with staff feedback. The University had introduced new events such as mehndi drawing for mental health, a men’s health webinar, and rag wreathing. These were in addition to the return of activities including ‘meet the guide dogs’, the Staff Benefits Roadshow, and the staff BBQ and rounders tournament.

It was reported that the current 2024/25 student recruitment and admissions position was one of overall stability, with the growth of firm acceptances across the University and within each College. Postgraduate taught international recruitment remained a challenge with demand dropping significantly in comparison to the same point last year. There were a number of factors attributed to this decline, ranging from UK government immigration policy to inflation challenges in some markets, with the sector as a whole being impacted.

It was reported that the £5.9m deficit forecast for 2023/24 was likely to be reduced to approximately £3.8m due to a reduction in bad debt provision and commission costs. Cash continued to be managed tightly with a reliance on donations and property sales completion before the end of 2023/24. It was noted that the University was planned to defer payments to HMRC in the last quarter of 2023/24, which was not required for the Office for Students (OfS) liquidity compliance, but to support operating cash performance and to retain banking covenant compliance.

In response to a comment regarding the current financial challenges in the sector, the President and Vice-Chancellor highlighted that the Executive Board (ExB) was already driving forward a number of initiatives to help reduce costs as part of the wider Financial Performance Improvement Plan (FPIP).

In response to a question about the recent Pro-Palestinian student encampment, the President and Vice-Chancellor commented that the encampment had ended with a positive outcome. Members of the University leadership had met regularly and constructively with protestor representatives to discuss various topics. The Registrar and Secretary thanked the Students’ Union (SU) for their continued support during the encampment.

**Council noted** the report.

24/M38 **FINANCIAL PLANNING**

**Council considered** the 2024/25 budget which had previously received scrutiny from the Finance and Infrastructure Committee (FIC).

Reported that the budget had been revisited due to a change in a number of indicators and the financial uncertainty in the sector. As a result, it focussed on 2024/25 only with the draft 5-year plan to be presented later in 2024.

It was reported that the number of contingencies reflected the uncertainty levels, particularly those relating to international student recruitment. Together with managing tuition fee volatility and property sales deferred, the budget reflected consideration of multiple student recruitment scenarios and balancing prudent assumptions with necessary contingency.

**Council noted** that the budget had been endorsed by the FIC and many of the initiative included in the FPIP were tracking well.

**Council noted** that the proposed reduction in staff costs did not include a plan for compulsory redundancies, however several other cost reduction options were being considered.

**Council noted** that there would be a communication plan implemented for the 2024/25 budget in due course.

**Council approved** the 2024/25 budget.

24/M39 **STRATEGIC THEME UPDATE: RESEARCH-INSPIRED EDUCATION**

**Council considered** a presentation by Liz Jones (PVC Education) onthe progress made against the strategic theme of Research-Inspired Education which had received prior consideration by ExB and Senate .

**Council noted** the progress reports for each of the strategic aims outlined within the paper along with the risks related to the delay to infrastructure development, staff resource and associated capacity.

**Council noted** that performance was being measured via the Key Performance Indicators relating to the Research Inspired Education strategic theme.

**Council noted** the emerging priorities for 2024-25.

**Council noted** the report.

24/M40 **STUDENTS’ UNION ANNUAL REPORT**

*Liam Davis, Chief Executive Officer, Students’ Union joined the meeting*

**Council considered and noted** a presentation on the Students’ Union key achievements in 2023/24.

It was highlighted that the SU had three core student facing departments which were:

* Opportunities – Sports and society focussed
* Voice – Student led opportunities
* Support – Student support service

It was highlighted that the SU membership had increased by 45% from 2 years ago and not 90% as stated in the paper.

It was highlighted that the SU was about to enter into consultation on a new strategic plan which would be delivered to the new board of trustees in June 2025. The plan would include a new data and insight team to analyse external datasets and strengthen decision making.

**Council noted** that the SU Board had approved, in principle, the governance recommendations to the Student Voice structure, which included reducing the number of full time Executive Officers from 6 to 3 and a PGR Officer who had been recommended to sit on University Council.

**Council noted** the new Students’ Union executive team for 2024/25.

**Council noted** the report.

*Liam Davis, Chief Executive Officer, Students’ Union left the meeting*

24/M41 **APOLLO PARTNERSHIP (RESERVED)**

**Council received** an update on the recent developments of the Apollo Partnership.

**Council approved** the proposals.

24/M42 **STAFF PULSE SURVEY**

*Emma Stevens (Director of HR) and Nic Junkin (Assistant Director of HR) joined the meeting*

**Council received** a presentation outlining the 2024 Pulse Survey results.

**Council noted** that, taken as a whole, the results demonstrated a significant positive shift since the last staff survey in 2022, reflective of progress made to date in many areas. The overall response rate (56%) had been encouraging and scores had increased in all areas except in relation to bullying and harassment, where the score had declined by 3%. The engagement score was now tracking ahead of its strategic KPI, with a 7% increase.

**Council noted** that the results had been presented to the Executive Board, the Joint Negotiation and Consultation Committee (JNCC), the Staff Survey Board and the People, EDI and Wellbeing Committee. All actions would be maintained and progressed by the action leads and action trackers updated accordingly.

**Council noted** that a deep dive was being carried out in relation to the decrease in bullying and harassment score. The results and actions would be reported back to Council via the People, EDI and Wellbeing Committee. **[ACTION: Forward Business]**

*Emma Stevens (Director of HR) and Nic Junkin (Assistant Director of HR) left the meeting*

24/M43 **RISK MANAGEMENT**

**Council** **considered** the latest Strategic University Risk Register (SURR), updated for the summer term 2024. **Council noted** that this had received prior scrutiny from the Audit and Assurance Committee.

**Council noted** that two additional strategic risks had been discussed at the University Risk Committee and it had been agreed to continue monitoring these, but not add them to the risk register. These risks were ‘Risk of Class Actions’ and ‘Risk of failing to maintain a statutorily compliant estate’.

**Council noted** that a new action summary had been included to report progress against the risk mitigations.

**Council noted** the report.

24/M44 **FOURTH COLLEGE NAME AND STRUCTURE**

**Council noted** that Senate had approved the naming of the new college of the College of Business and that the brand “University of Leicester School of Business”(ULSB) would be retained for communications, particularly with potential and current students.

**Council noted** that the College of Business would comprise four Schools:

* 1. School of Accounting and Finance
  2. School of Economics
  3. School of Management
  4. School of Marketing and Strategy

The new college had been approved to launch on the 1 August 2024, with the inclusion of the new naming structure.

**Council noted** the report

24/M45 **COUNCIL/EXECUTIVE BOARD AWAYDAYS 17/18 SEPTEMBER 2024**

**Council discussed** possible topics for the Council/ExB Awayday to be held Tuesday 17 and Wednesday 18 September 2024.

The following topics were captured and would be reviewed and prioritised.

* Post-General Election Update
* Student Recruitment/Financial Sustainability (Planning implications)
* International Strategy
* Showcase of Research Institutes
* Student Voice (Postgraduate taught/student employability)
* Sustainability Strategy

24/M46 **NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE [RESERVED]**

**Council noted** a report of the Nominations Committee meeting held on 10 June 2024.

**Council noted** that the committee memberships for 2024/25 were being finalised and that the Governance Office would contact members by correspondence over the next few weeks to confirm committee memberships.

**Council noted** the process for Chair of Council recruitment.

24/M47 **SENATE**

**Council noted** a report of Senate held on 12 June 2024.

24/M48 **FINANCE AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE [RESERVED]**

**Council noted** a report of the Finance and Infrastructure Committee meeting held on 18 June 2024.

24/M49 **AUDIT AND ASSURANCE COMMITTEE [RESERVED]**

**Council noted** a report of the Audit and Assurance Committee meeting held on 11 June 2024.

**Council noted** that the external auditors had produced guidance notes related to some institutions in the sector who had recorded material uncertainty. As a result, the auditors would expect the University to carry out more stress testing in relation to the risks related to Going Concern in 2024/25.

24/M50 **PEOPLE, EDI AND WELLBEING COMMITTEE**

**Council noted** a report of the People, EDI and Wellbeing Committee meeting held on 20 June 2024.

24/M51 **DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

**Council noted** the dates of meetings scheduled for 2024-2025:

Tuesday 17 September 2024 1pm/Wednesday 18 September 2024 all day - Council/ExB Awaydays - exact timings and agenda to be finalised

Wednesday 16 October 2024 - Ordinary meeting 4pm

Wednesday 4 December 2024 - Ordinary meeting 4pm

Tuesday 4 March 2025 - Ordinary meeting 4pm

Wednesday 7 May 2025 - Ordinary meeting 4pm

Tuesday 1 July 2025 - Ordinary meeting 4pm

CHAIR Duration of meeting: 2 hours