

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

COUNCIL

Minutes of a 'Teams' meeting held on
Wednesday 25 November 2020**Present:**

Gary Dixon (Chair)

Janet Arthur	Alison Goodall
Craig Brown	Martin Hindle
Edmund Burke	Ian Johnson
Nishan Canagarajah	Azam Mamujee
Martin Cullen	Andrew Morgan
Sophie Dale-Black	Mia Nembhard
Sandra Dudley	Vijay Sharma
Cathy Ellis	Richard Tapp
Stephen Garrett	

In attendance: Neil Cox (Assistant Council Secretary); Alex Erdlenbruch (Chief of Staff, President and Vice-Chancellor's Office); Geoff Green (Registrar and Secretary); Kerry Law (Chief Marketing and Engagement Officer); Martyn Riddleston (Chief Operating Officer); and Graham Wynn (Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education).

Apologies for absence were received from Huw Barton and Carole Thorogood.

UNRESERVED BUSINESS20/M92 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Vijay Sharma declared a personal interest in the business recorded under 20/M104 (Re-appointments to Court).

20/M93 **WELCOME**

Stephen Garrett, Head of the Schools of Engineering/Mathematics and Actuarial Science, was welcomed to his first meeting, replacing Sarah Davies in one of the four places on Council filled by Senate.

20/M94 **UNRESERVED MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Council considered the unreserved minutes of the virtual meeting held on 30 September 2020. **Council approved** them as a correct record. There were no matters arising that were not dealt with elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting.

The Chair formally recorded that, since the previous meeting, **Council's approval** had been obtained by correspondence for:

- a. a permanent increase from 24 days to 27 days (pro-rata for part-time staff) in the annual leave entitlement of staff with University of Leicester contracts of employment, effective from 1 January 2021. This would bring Leicester more into line with the rest of the HE sector and its announcement allowed a timely recognition of the exceptional work being undertaken by staff in response to the Covid-19 pandemic;

- b. Council's nominations for members of the interview panels for appointments to the posts of Registrar and Secretary and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise).

20/M95 **PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR'S BUSINESS**

The President and Vice-Chancellor introduced his written report for Council which provided an update on recent developments and news in the HE sector generally, and at Leicester, as well as key student and staff achievements.

The President and Vice-Chancellor reaffirmed his belief that the University was continuing to respond and communicate exceptionally well during the challenges of Covid-19, which included the ongoing confusion and uncertainty caused by the frequent policy changes and new restrictions from central government, and their often late announcement. The University was seeking to ensure that students received the best possible experience that could be achieved under the current restrictions and was engaging closely with the students and their representatives; their feedback was generally positive and any concerns were being dealt with as constructively as possible.

Students were raising questions, including at national level, about the possibility of tuition fee and accommodation fee refunds in some circumstances, as a response to the impact of Covid-19. The current view from UUK was that any decision on this should be taken collectively by the whole sector, not by individual HEIs on an ad-hoc basis, and not before spring 2021 when the wider picture and its implications would be clearer. The financial impact of any such steps could be severe, and would probably be strongly resisted, given the likely absence of both contingency funding within institutions and government bailout support (see also minute C/20/M91).

With regard to the impact of Covid-19 on the University's capital programme, **Council noted** that the Space Park and Freeman's Common projects were both running broadly to schedule and presented no current significant risks to the University, either operationally or financially. The new multi-story carpark at Freeman's Common had been subject to some early delays but was now complete.

Reflecting on his first full year at Leicester the President and Vice-Chancellor emphasized how much he was looking forward to the ongoing work with Council, staff, students and the local community in shaping the University's second century. His written reports to Council were compiled carefully, with support from the Executive Board, but he would welcome members' feedback on anything they would like to be incorporated in future.

20/M96 **COVID-19 UPDATE**

Council received a comprehensive update from senior management on the University's latest operational response to the Covid-19 pandemic, including in relation to the in-house screening programme, the second national lockdown, and arrangements for students to travel home for Christmas.

Council noted that infection levels at the University had been relatively low, and well contained. Most of the positive cases reported had been amongst students, with an initial spike in positive cases at the start of term, but not on the scale seen at some other universities. The daily number of new cases had since reduced and had now plateaued, with the rolling seven-day average now below 4 for all new student and staff cases. Positive feedback had been received on the University's 'life in lockdown'

programme, and feedback on the 'Ignite' programme was now being sought from staff and students, to help inform planning for semester 2.

20/M97 **REMUNERATION ANNUAL REPORT**

Council considered the University's second remuneration annual report. As a requirement of the *Higher Education Senior Staff Remuneration Code*, published by the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) in 2018, the report sought to provide assurance to the governing body that the Remuneration Committee had effectively discharged its responsibilities during the 2019-20 financial year. **Council noted** that the *Code* also required institutions to publish a readily accessible annual statement on their approach to remuneration, and stated that ideally this should be the same as the remuneration annual report to the governing body.

Council approved the University's Remuneration Annual Report 2019-20, for publication on the University's website.

20/M98 **PREVENT DUTY ANNUAL RETURN**

Council considered a report which set out the necessary information and evidence that it required in order to sign off and submit to the OfS the Prevent Duty accountability return for 2019-20.

Council noted a comprehensive summary of key examples and evidence which demonstrated the University's due regard for the responsibilities of the Prevent duty, linked to a number of suggested questions and indicators (some of which related to Covid-19) provided specifically for this purpose by the OfS.

Council approved the Prevent Duty accountability return for 2019-20, for submission to the OfS.

20/M99 **STUDENTS' UNION ANNUAL REPORT 2020**

Council considered the annual report of the Students' Union for the 2019-20 academic year, presented by the President of the Union.

The President drew Council's attention to the successes and challenges of the Executive Team in working with the University to pursue their collaborative priorities for the year, including student mental health, the black awarding gap, decolonisation of the curriculum, student costs and sexual harassment. With regard to the latter, the 2019-20 officer team had continued the extensive programme of work passed on by the 2018-19 team, and in partnership with the University good progress had been made in a number of high profile areas, although there was still much work to be done and the continued development of disciplinary and victim support processes remained a priority. New harassment policies had been launched by the University in September 2020 and these were due to be the subject of external review and benchmarking in Spring 2021. The Registrar and Secretary would provide a further policy progress update to Council when this review had been completed [ACTION: GEOFF GREEN].

With regard to the Covid-19 pandemic the officer team had obviously needed to adapt their plans for the year in order to provide the additional and unexpected support students needed from them. Close collaboration with the Registrar and Secretary and the PVC Education had achieved important adaptations in a number of areas including assessment, mitigating circumstances and welfare provision. Further work was

needed and ongoing to support students in the transition from school to university learning, and in the early development of appropriate study skills. The pandemic had affected the Union in other ways too, including the financial impact of the closure of the campus and the loss of externally generated commercial funds, and the need to maximise the visibility of and participation in the 2021 sabbatical elections, in whatever format they were able to take place.

Council commended the comprehensive and constructive style and content of the report, and the positive working relationship that had been maintained between the Union's Executive Team and University management during the particularly challenging period of the Covid-19 pandemic.

20/M100 **STRATEGIC CHANGE**

Council considered a paper, which had also been shared with Senate, regarding the programme of pre-change engagement with specific groups of staff to help inform the future strategic direction for their Departments/Schools, as announced to staff and copied to Council in October 2020. The paper provided details of this pre-change engagement and outlined the possible governance process that might subsequently be required in terms of noting, recommending and approving any planned changes arising from this engagement. No decisions had been taken at this stage and Council would be updated accordingly as any such plans were developed. Such plans would be formulated in order to support the delivery of the University's long term strategic objectives, and would feature a consistent detailed analysis of their teaching, student experience, research and financial impacts, underpinned by appropriate KPIs.

Council noted the details set out in the paper.

20/M101 **STAFF VOLUNTARY SEVERANCE SCHEME (VSS)**

Council considered a proposal to extend for a further period the VSS that was previously approved by Council on 8 July 2020. The original 'window' for the scheme was open from the beginning of September to the end of October 2020, and it had provided a number of anticipated exits that were now in the process of being reviewed. However, the view from managers and staff, in particular following feedback from the pre-change engagement activities referred to under 20/M100, was that there would be a further demand for voluntary severance consideration if the scheme was extended into the New Year, on the same terms as used previously, and with the 'window' for applications to be open from 1 December 2020 to 26 February 2021.

Council approved the extension of the staff voluntary severance scheme, on the basis outlined above.

20/M102 **SENATE**

Council considered a report of a meeting of Senate held on 3 November 2020.

Council received and noted an annual assurance statement for 2019-20, prepared by the Learning and Teaching Committee and approved by Senate, regarding the University's compliance with OfS ongoing conditions of registration regarding the management of academic standards, student outcomes and the student learning experience. It was no longer necessary for governing bodies to make a declaration to the OfS that they had received and approved such a statement, as this requirement

was unexpectedly withdrawn in 2019, but it had been decided to prepare the report and present it to Senate and Council anyway, as a demonstration of continued good practice and assurance in this area.

20/M103 **HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING COMMITTEE**

Council considered reports of two meetings of the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee held on 21 September and 22 October 2020 respectively.

Council approved the Committee's revised terms of reference and membership details for 2020-21.

20/M104 **RE-APPOINTMENTS TO COURT**

Council considered a report from the Nominations Committee which made recommendations for the re-appointment of a significant number of Full and Associate members of Court. Most members currently serving in these two groups had an appointment end date of 31 December 2020, which was the standard end date applied to these appointments when the membership of Court was last comprehensively reviewed in 2015. These members had mostly enjoyed a longstanding and supportive relationship with the University, and the Nominations Committee had agreed that it was important for these relationships to be maintained. Most of these individuals had already indicated their willingness to continue, subject to Council's formal approval.

Council approved a recommendation of the Nominations Committee for the Full and Associate members as listed in Appendix C/20/M104App, attached to the signed copy of these minutes, to be reappointed to Court to serve for a further three years, until 31 December 2023.

20/M105 **REGISTER OF INTERESTS**

Council received and noted the Register of Interests as recently updated for 2020-2021. Members were reminded that any changes to their registered interests should be notified to the Governance Office (Neil Cox or Vicky Harrison) as soon as they occurred, rather than waiting for the annual call for updates.

20/M106 **COURSE FEES**

Council received and noted a summary statement of tuition fees charged by the University in 2020-2021. The setting of course fees at individual programme level was a management process based on a comprehensive market analysis, including reviews of headline course fees advertised at competitor universities. A 46-point fee scale was potentially available, but in practice a large majority of programmes were priced in the middle third of the fee range.

20/M107 **UNIVERSITY SEAL**

Council received and noted details of the affixing of the University Seal to the document(s) as listed in Appendix C/20/M107App, attached to the signed copy of these minutes.

20/M108 **DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

Council noted the dates and times of remaining scheduled meetings and an Awayday in 2020-21, all to commence at 4.00pm unless stated otherwise:

Tuesday 2 March 2021 - Special meeting, one hour only, to commence at 4.30pm

Wednesday 17 March 2021 - Ordinary meeting

Monday 10 May 2021 - Ordinary meeting

Tuesday 8 June 2021 - Council/Executive Board Awayday, from 9.30am-4.30pm

Tuesday 6 July 2021 - Ordinary meeting

Council noted the possibility that additional meetings might be inserted, but only if deemed essential, depending on how the flow of business and Covid-related issues developed during the Spring Term.

CHAIR

Total duration of meeting: 1 hour and 50 minutes