

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

COUNCIL

Minutes of a 'Teams' meeting held on
Wednesday 13 May 2020**Present:**

Gary Dixon (Chair)

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| Janet Arthur | Alison Goodall |
| Edmund Burke | Martin Hindle |
| Nishan Canagarajah | Ian Johnson |
| Martin Cullen | Azam Mamujee |
| Sophie Dale-Black | Andrew Morgan |
| Sarah Davies | Oge Obioha |
| Sandra Dudley | Vijay Sharma |
| Mehmooda Duke | Richard Tapp |
| Cathy Ellis | |

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

Apologies for absence were received from Craig Brown and Carole Thorogood.

20/M26 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

20/M27 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Council considered the minutes of the virtual meeting held on 23 April 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.

20/M28 **COVID-19**

Council received a comprehensive update from senior management on the University's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

a. Operational matters

Council noted that the key operational development since the update at the last meeting was the establishment of a Lockdown Exit Group, chaired by the Chief Operating Officer and reporting to the Executive Board. Student input to the LEG and any sub-groups would be an important element of its work.

The LEG was looking at a phased approach to reopening the campus, in line with government guidance and with an overriding focus on safety precautions. Depending on a detailed assessment of specific buildings it was hoped that some research facilities might start to re-open during June, with more following during July and August. Appropriate social distancing measures would be applied in all cases, and it was hoped that this might enable some 'physical' staff meetings to begin to take place in a carefully managed way.

With regard to teaching, this was planned to continue as on-line only until government guidance or appropriate social distancing measures allowed some face-to-face teaching to resume. The University would be actively exploring the wider use of flexible dual delivery and remote/distance learning teaching, which would allow students to rotate between on campus face-to-face learning and online study. This would continue as a regular feature beyond the Covid-19 emergency phase, but it would also help to present an enhanced option to offer holders in the current recruitment round.

On other matters, **Council was pleased to note** that access to the student hardship fund had now been extended to PGT and non-funded PGR students, and over 100 awards had already been made. PGR extension fees had been waived, and all PGR suspension requests were being dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Careers guidance and 1:1 consultations for students were available online and would continue over the summer, and the University was engaging with employers to explore the possibility of offering digital placements and internships.

b. Scenario modelling and financial impacts

Council received an update from senior management on the University's ongoing programme of work to model a range of possible scenarios for the longer term implications of Covid-19, and the associated financial impacts. **Council noted** that the sector as a whole was in an extremely challenging and unpredictable situation, with no additional funding on offer from government and great uncertainty as to the prospects for student recruitment and intakes in September 2020 - with any drop in undergraduate recruitment having consequences for the next 3-4 years - and the ultimate end date of lockdown restrictions.

Council noted that the best-case scenario of a return to 'normal' campus operations in September 2020 was now looking very unlikely. A return in spring 2021 might still be possible, but the worst-case scenario of no return before September 2021 also needed to be taken very seriously for planning and budgeting purposes. **Council agreed** that the long-term health and sustainability of the University was of paramount importance, and this should not be put at risk by short term decisions that were not properly informed by robust evidence, data and analysis. The definitive impact on student recruitment, for example, could not be assessed with any confidence before September 2020. The immediate priority therefore was to be as supportive as possible to staff and students, and to continue the good progress that was being made in delivering the required in-year savings to balance the loss of income already suffered in 2019-20.

With regard to post-doctoral research associates and staff employed on externally funded research projects, both of which groups were in a particularly uncertain position, the University had been in intensive discussions with UKRI and other funding bodies on possible support options, including furloughing. A specific communication aimed at these groups would feature in a forthcoming Covid-19 staff update from the Chief Operating Officer (*post-meeting note: this was issued to staff on 18 May 2020*).

Council acknowledged that difficult decisions lay ahead, but **agreed** that it was essential for these to be taken at the right time and in the right way, with due

regard to good governance and transparency, to best safeguard the future interests and sustainability of the University when it eventually emerged from the Covid-19 crisis. The long-term strategy would still seek to enhance Leicester's position as a world-leading research-intensive university delivering an exceptional educational experience for its students and financially resilient in the short-medium term.

Council noted that the President and Vice-Chancellor was due to speak with the Secretary of State for Education later in the month, to discuss the government's approach to student number controls, and to try to make the case that the University's prudent approach to its student number forecasts submitted in 2019 should not now be used to penalize its prospects in any allocation of additional student numbers. With the addition of a significant predicted drop in international student recruitment the University was facing a substantial loss of income, possibly between £25m-£50m, and it was essential to do everything possible not to run out of cash, to avoid any form of intervention by the Office for Students/Government.

c. Academic planning

Council considered a report which summarised the action taken by the University to manage its learning and teaching activity in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The report sought to provide assurance to Council that in taking these actions the University was taking due account of the maintenance of the quality, standards and academic integrity and consistency of its awards.

Council was pleased to note that a broad range of measures were in place to protect the interests of students (and staff), without compromising on academic standards, for the completion of the 2019-20 academic year. Such measures included extension of submission and assessment deadlines, particularly to ensure that finalists were able to graduate as planned in July; possible deferral of end-of-year assessments for students who did not have an appropriate environment for studying, including IT access problems; and the operation of a safety net policy to ensure that students were eligible to achieve the award and degree classification they were on track for before the disruption to their studies. This would apply to all programmes, except where this was not possible due to the standard national requirements of a professional body.

Looking ahead to the 2020-21 academic year the University was already preparing for a changed landscape that could still include ongoing social distancing requirements, and periods when on-campus teaching was not possible. Planning was underway for dual delivery to enable the University to offer students a high quality and engaging experience – as much of it as possible on-campus - with sufficient flexibility to switch between modes of delivery at short notice.

Council was assured that in developing its response to Covid-19 the University had taken full account of its regulatory obligations to the Office for Students and the Quality Assurance Agency, and recent guidance issued by those bodies. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the Registrar and Secretary were working closely with the Students' Union to ensure that the Student Voice was taken into account as appropriate.

20/M29 **AUDIT COMMITTEE**

Council received and noted a report of a virtual meeting of the Audit Committee held on 28 April 2020. There were no matters that required the approval of Council on this occasion.

20/M30 **FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Council received and noted a report of a virtual meeting of the Finance Committee held on 6 May 2020. There were no matters that required the approval of Council on this occasion.

20/M31 **EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE**

Council received a report of a meeting of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee held on 11 March 2020. **Council noted** that this was the first meeting of the Committee to be chaired by the President and Vice-Chancellor. The Committee had already identified a need to become more strategic and focussed in its approach, so that key priorities such as narrowing the gender pay gap and expanding the diversity of the workforce could be pursued to better effect.

Council agreed that it would be helpful for all members to be provided with further information about the University's new framework for dignity and respect, particularly in relation to any new awareness, briefing or training materials that were being developed for use across the University [ACTION: HEAD OF DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION].

20/M32 **DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Chair referred to the fact that members had been canvassed on whether there was still a preference for 'Ordinary' meetings of Council to commence at 4.00pm during the next academic year, or whether the start time should be brought forward to earlier in the day. The Chair reported that the responses indicated a very clear preference to remain with the 4.00pm start time, so meetings would continue to be planned for on that basis.

Council therefore noted the dates and times of:

- a. the remaining Awayday and Ordinary meeting(s) in 2019-20:

Tuesday 9 June 2020 – Council/Executive Board Awayday - **Council noted** that it was likely that this would be a morning-only event consisting of an Ordinary meeting at 9.30 am followed (possibly) in the second half of the morning by a strategic session on a non-Covid topic. This would be confirmed shortly.

Wednesday 8 July 2020 at 4pm

- b. **provisional** dates of Ordinary meetings and Awaydays in 2020-21, all at 4pm unless stated otherwise:

Wednesday 30 September 2020 **ORIGINALLY TUESDAY 29 SEPTEMBER**

Wednesday 25 November 2020

Wednesday 17 March 2021

Monday 10 May 2021

Tuesday 8 June 2021 - Council/Executive Board Awayday (all day)

Tuesday 6 July 2021

Council agreed that additional meetings might be arranged, but only if essential, to provide Covid-specific updates on an interim basis.

CHAIR

Total duration of meeting: 1 hour and 30 minutes

Note to these minutes: supporting papers for some of the business recorded under these minutes were presented to Council on a separate reserved section of the agenda for the meeting, due to the commercial and/or personal sensitivity of their detailed contents.