

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

COUNCIL

Minutes of a 'Teams' meeting held on
Wednesday 30 September 2020

Present:

Gary Dixon (Chair)

Janet Arthur	Alison Goodall
Huw Barton	Martin Hindle
Craig Brown	Ian Johnson
Nishan Canagarajah	Azam Mamujee
Martin Cullen	Andrew Morgan
Sophie Dale-Black	Mia Nembhard
Sandra Dudley	Vijay Sharma
Mehmooda Duke	Richard Tapp
Cathy Ellis	Carole Thorogood

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

Apologies for absence were received from Edmund Burke and Sarah Davies.

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

20/M68 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of personal interest in any of the items dealt with under the Unreserved Business section of this meeting.

20/M69 **THE COUNCIL 2020-21**

Council received details of its membership for the academic year 2020-2021. Huw Barton, Head of the School of Archaeology and Ancient History, was welcomed to his first meeting in one of the four places on Council filled by Senate.

The Chair of Council recorded his congratulations and appreciation for the contribution of Sarah Davies, who would be standing down from Council with effect from 1 October 2020, following her appointment as Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of the College of Science and Engineering.

19/M70 **RESPONSIBILITY OF MEMBERS AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

Council received the following documents concerning the powers and responsibilities of Council, the conduct of Council business and the role of members, as routinely presented to Council at the first meeting in the new academic year:

- a. Powers of the Council
 - i. Extract from the Statutes (Section 5)
 - ii. Extract from the Ordinances (Section 9)
- b. Statement of Council's Primary Responsibilities
- c. Standing Orders
- d. Charity Commission guidance on acting in a charity's best interests

On a related matter, **Council noted** that the new *CUC Code of Governance* had finally been published. Council would need to consider its implications in due course, once officers had examined it in detail to try to assess its requirements. It was frustrating that promised guidance from the CUC on how institutions might achieve and demonstrate compliance with the *Code* had not been published with it, and would follow at an unspecified later date. As the University had pointed out in its written response to the CUC consultation on the draft new *Code*, the importing of some principles from the corporate sector was not particularly helpful, as they did not take account of the different regulatory and operating contexts of HEIs and corporate entities.

20/M71 **UNRESERVED MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Council considered the unreserved minutes of the 'Teams' meeting held on 8 July 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/M72 **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. With regard to the latter, Council specifically recorded its congratulations to Professor Sarah Davies, Professor Iain Gillespie and Professor Paul Monks for their appointment to senior positions inside and outside the University.

The President and Vice-Chancellor expressed the belief, which was strongly and warmly endorsed by Council, that the University was responding and communicating exceptionally well during the ongoing impact of Covid-19, particularly the challenges for student recruitment (see also minute 20/M64), planning for the start of term (see also minute 20/M73), the Leicester local lockdown, and the confusion and uncertainty caused by the continued policy changes of central government.

With regard to the National Student Survey (see also minute 20/M74), an announcement from the OfS that this would run in an as yet unspecified 'modified' format in 2021, pending the outcome of a root-and branch review of the future process, was causing much concern within the sector, with some lobbying for the NSS to be suspended during 2021 to allow for the impact of Covid-19 and to ensure a proper focus on the major review.

20/M73 **PREPARATIONS FOR THE START OF THE NEW ACADEMIC YEAR**

Council received a summary presentation on the University's preparations for the start of the 2020-21 academic year, with two detailed supporting reports on the academic planning and Covid-19 operational aspects.

Council took considerable comfort and reassurance from the evidence of the meticulous planning and preparation that had been undertaken, across the University and with local partners, to try to ensure that the new academic year was able to launch as safely, responsibly and enjoyably as possible in the unprecedented circumstances of Covid-19. Overall it seemed that a very positive start had been achieved, albeit with a very different feel and atmosphere on campus. Communication with students, and their feedback, was going very well, and University officers commended the exceptionally positive support and engagement provided by the Students' Union.

A large proportion of early teaching would be delivered online only, but the balance between face-to-face and online teaching would be reviewed constantly throughout the year, in accordance with the four planning tiers of the Department for Education, as circumstances evolved. Postgraduate research students would be encouraged to come onto campus, where safely possible, for socially-distanced laboratory work.

Council noted that some other universities were beginning to report clustered outbreaks of Covid-19 amongst their students, mostly asymptomatic, with mass-isolation arrangements being implemented as a result. Equivalent contingency arrangements were in place at Leicester, designed as far as possible to enable a same-day response if any issues were identified. The University was implementing its own screening programme for staff and students to focus on identifying asymptomatic cases, and to try to reduce the burden on local NHS testing, for at least ten weeks in the first instance. The necessary data to support this initiative was held by the NHS and did not present any GDPR management issues for the University.

20/M74 **NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY**

Council considered a comprehensive report from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) on the University's approach to the NSS 2020, with a summary of the results and key follow-up actions for 2021 (but see also minute 20/M72).

Council noted that the NSS 2020 outcomes for the University as a whole were stable against the sector, with an overall satisfaction score of 82.60% against a benchmark of 83.02% in 2020, compared with a score of 83.98% against a benchmark of 84.27% in 2019. The University maintained its rank among mainstream HEIs (63/125 in 2020; 60/127 in 2019), with an improved position against the Russell Group (11/23 in 2020; 15/23 in 2019) and its top 6 key UCAS competitors (3/7 in 2020; 4/7 in 2019).

Council noted that although the satisfaction gap between BAME and White responders had closed marginally from 2019, this was driven by a slight decrease to 86.5% in White satisfaction; BAME satisfaction was unchanged at 78.9%. To place this in context, an overall satisfaction rate of 86.5% would rank 22 out of the 125 mainstream HEIs, while 78.9% would rank 101.

Council was pleased to note that Biosciences, Physics and Astronomy, Sociology and Languages and Area Studies were all placed in the top 20% of mainstream providers offering those subjects, with overall satisfaction scores between 90.3% and 96.2%.

Council was concerned and disappointed to note, however, that Psychology, Economics, and Business and Management were all placed in the bottom 20% of mainstream providers, the latter two subjects with overall satisfaction scores of 73.7% and 69.2% respectively. Council indicated that it was not acceptable that the ongoing poor performance of these two very large subject areas in the NSS was continuing to suppress the overall satisfaction score for the University as a whole. This was fully acknowledged by the Executive Board, and the Head of College was working closely with the new Head of School to address the challenges. The University now expected an overall satisfaction score of at least 85% to be achieved in all subjects.

Council noted that it was a feature of the NSS methodology that neutral responses (ie 'Neither Agree nor Disagree') to questions were automatically counted as negative responses. This had the potential to skew the results in some subject areas, for example, where large numbers of distance learning students were giving neutral responses to irrelevant questions about their 'on-campus' experience.

An NSS Action Plan for 2021 had been agreed and was being implemented but would be reviewed as necessary in the light of any OfS announcement on a 'modified' 'survey (see also 20/M72).

20/M75 AUDIT COMMITTEE

Council received and noted a report of a virtual meeting of the Audit Committee held on 16 September 2020. There were no matters that required the approval of Council on this occasion.

20/M76 ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Council received a report of a virtual meeting of the Standing Committee of the Alumni Association held on 23 April 2020. There were no matters that required the approval of Council on this occasion, but Council was pleased to note that a virtual Annual General Meeting of the Alumni Association was due to be held on Saturday 3 October 2020.

20/M77 EQUALITY, DIVERSION AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE

Council received and noted a report of a virtual meeting of the Equality, Diversion and Inclusion Committee held on 28 July 2020. There were no matters that required the approval of Council on this occasion.

20/M78 HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING COMMITTEE

Council received and noted a report of a virtual meeting of the Health, Safety Wellbeing Committee held on 6 July and 18 August 2020. There were no matters that required the approval of Council on this occasion, but Council commended the tremendous amount of work that had been done, with input from the Committee, to ensure a safe start to the new academic year.

20/M79 NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

Council received the annual report of the work of the Nominations Committee during the 2019-20 academic year. The report brought together in summary form the various matters dealt with by the Committee in the course of the year, most of which had already been the subject of specific recommendations presented to and approved by Council/Court.

20/M80 TRANSFER OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS/TESOL

Council noted that Senate, under its powers relating to the organisation of the colleges and their respective subjects and academic units, had approved the transfer of Applied Linguistics and TESOL from the School of Arts to the School of Education, within the College of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities. The decisions of Senate on such matters were required to be reported to Council.

Council noted that the move affected seven members of staff, who agreed with and supported the move, which had no implications for their terms and conditions of employment.

20/M81 **STUDENTS' UNION ELECTIONS**

Council noted that Ordinance 22(8) required that the conduct of the election of Officers of the Students' Union be subject to inspection by a person appointed by Council.

Council approved the appointment of Graham Wynn, in his capacity as Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), as Observer for the elections to be held during 2020-21.

20/M82 **RESEARCH INTEGRITY**

Council considered the 2020 annual statement on research integrity, as required under Commitment 5 of the national *Concordat to Support Research Integrity*. The statement had already been considered, endorsed and approved by the University's Ethics and Integrity Committee and the Research and Enterprise Committee.

Council noted the full and comprehensive range of work that was being overseen by the Research Integrity Working Group, and the related activities that were being promoted and delivered across the University, to support and strengthen the understanding and application of research integrity issues within the institution.

Council approved the publication of the annual report on the University's research integrity webpages.

20/M83 **UNIVERSITY SEAL**

Council received and noted details of the affixing of the University Seal to the document(s) as listed in Appendix C/20/M83App, attached to the signed copy of these minutes.

20/M84 **DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

Council noted the dates and times of scheduled Ordinary meetings, and an Awayday, in the remainder of 2020-21, all to commence at 4pm unless stated otherwise:

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

CHAIR

Total duration of meeting: 1 hour and 55 minutes

