

## **COUNCIL (BUSINESS MEETING)**

### Open Minutes

Of the meeting held on Monday, 06 July 2020 via Microsoft Teams.

**Present:** Michael Hipkins (Independent [Chair], Irene Kirkman (Independent [Deputy Chair]), Nick Braisby (Vice-Chancellor), Andy Cole (Independent), Anna Crabtree (Independent), Annet Gamell (Independent), Tamsin Grainger (Students' Union President), Florin Ioras (Senate Nominee), Tim Marshall (Co-opted), Ken McCrea (Co-opted), Anthony Murphy (Independent), Cheryl Pitt (Elected Academic Representative), Susan Rosser (Independent), John Smith (Independent), Supriya Sobti (Independent)

**In attendance:** Alexandra Bode-Tunji (Director of Human Resources), Gavin Brooks (Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Elizabeth Cleaver (Pro Vice-Chancellor: Education & Digital), Trevor Gabriele (Director of Finance), Ellie Smith (Academic Registrar & Secretary), Marcus Wood (Minute Secretary)

**Apologies:** Joanna Boardman (Elected PSE representative), John Hathaway (Senate Nominee), Bob Shennan (Independent), Megan Staples (Student representative)

### **COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

#### **Welcome / Chair's comments**

- 20.85 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting, including in particular the newly appointed Pro Vice-Chancellor: Education & Digital, Professor Liz Cleaver, and the incoming Students' Union President, Tamsin Grainger, who were attending their first meeting of Council.
- 20.86 The Chair reported that he continued to attend information meetings with UET in respect of lockdown arrangements. These had been opened up for all independent and co-opted members to attend.

#### **Declaration of conflicts of interest**

- 20.87 No conflicts of interest were declared.

#### **Minutes of the previous meeting**

- 20.88 The Open minutes of the Business meeting of 16 March 2020 were approved as an accurate record.

20.89 The Open minutes of the Strategy meeting of 2 June 2020 were approved as an accurate record.

### **Matters arising / Status of Actions**

20.90 The status of actions was noted as per the action sheet. Further comments were noted as follows:

- Minute 19.163 Access and Participation Plan: This remains under close scrutiny via a workgroup assembled.
- Minute 19.167 Impact 2022 roadmap: Further planning is underway for 2020/21 and priorities are being identified.
- Minute 19.200 Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement: To be picked up outside the meeting
- Minute 19.232 Risk Register: Noted that the next iteration of the register would reflect Student Connect and Payroll concerns
- Minute 19.239 Papers / Acronyms: Paper coversheets would be refined as part of the rollout of new committee software and this would be taken into consideration
- Minute 20.58 Financial Accounts Note 6: This was discussed under Reserved Business.

### **Chair's Actions taken since the previous meeting**

20.91 No decisions had been taken.

## **UNIVERSITY BUSINESS**

### **Vice-Chancellor's Report (COU20-13)**

20.92 Council considered the report. The Vice-Chancellor drew particular attention to the following:

- a) Excellent outcomes from the recent Graduate Outcomes survey. Data are still being analysed but are showing a favourable comparison with the sector where it was believed that the University was now a top 10 University for employability and the best modern University for London and the South-East region. For graduate employability, the University is now placed in the middle of the ranking despite its lower entry tariff for applicants.
- b) Volatile student recruitment levels with a number of applicants still to respond to confirm their acceptance – similar to the sector as a whole.

It was also reported that the OfS has issued a new Condition of Registration, Z3, which restricts the use of unconditional offers to specific circumstances. This will require careful consideration and recruitment practices are being reviewed. The condition will not apply retrospectively.

- c) Greater clarity on the operation of Student Number Controls (SNCs). The University had worked intensively with UUK, the Minister for Higher Education and with the OfS and how number controls worked in respect of partners and had received assurance that numbers could not be taken away from an institution by a partner choosing a new validating partner. A new Pro Vice-Chancellor appointment would ensure effective management of partnership activity.

- d) As numbers have become clearer and cost savings have been quantified, the University is projecting a small surplus for the year. Planning and forecasting have been particularly difficult due to the impact of lockdown. The financial picture will be considered by Resources Committee and at the additional Council meeting. In the meantime, the University is in discussions with UUK over use of the Government's coronavirus job retention scheme.
  - e) More details of the Government's proposed financial support package for higher education institutions have been made available. However, this was clearly intended for research intensive institutions rather than teaching-focused institutions such as Bucks.
- 20.93 Council also noted a recent ministerial report criticizing so-called 'low value' courses. This represented a key change in Ministerial approach and may indicate increased focus on further education, technical education and Level 4 / Level 5 higher education provision. This would be at the expense of Level 6 degree provision. The current sector approach was being robustly defended by UUK.

#### **Students' Union President's Report (COU20-14)**

- 20.94 Council considered the report and congratulated the Students' Union on its activities and achievements where it was working to support the University.
- 20.95 It was noted that the SU was unlikely to be engaging in competitive sport until January 2021 due to coronavirus. However, the SU was working with teams to ensure training and team bonding activities could continue under social distancing measures. Societies were also ensuring covid-safe trips and talks.
- 20.96 An update was received on the plan presented to UET to refurbish the SU space. The Vice-Chancellor explained that the University was supportive; however, this was a large request, entirely of the University which would stretch the overall capital budget and may need to be prioritised elsewhere due to covid. However, the proposal may factor into a larger view of estate usage.

#### **Minutes from University Committees (COU20-15)**

- 20.97 The minutes were received. Council noted that:
- The deadline for Research Excellence Framework (REF) submissions has been deferred to 31 March 2021 and the University's submission will be reviewed in November. The current staff census date will remain as at 31 July so there is limited potential for change.
  - A *No Detriment Policy* has been approved to safeguard student attainment following the coronavirus outbreak. These emergency regulations require reconfirmation at each Senate meeting or they will expire.
  - Discussions are ongoing through the Education Committee over the development of new Grading Descriptors. The Committee is also monitoring implementation of the Access & Participation Plan and the sector-wide challenge to reduce the BAME attainment gap.
  - The Research and Enterprise Committee is tracking engagement from non credit-bearing programmes. The Committee has also discussed a roadmap for a submission for Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP) which will be presented to Senate and Council in due course.

20.98 Council asked for greater visibility over the development of new programmes. A report would be produced for the Autumn meeting.

**Action Secretary**

20.99 Council extended congratulations to Professor Margaret Greenfields over her nomination by the Social Policy Association to the REF Panel C which demonstrated the strength of her research.

**Degree Outcomes Statement (COU20-16)**

20.100 Council considered for approval the draft statement to be published on the University website and which had been drawn up in accordance with guidance provided. Following initial publication the statement would be updated for Council and republished annually.

20.101 Council noted the BAME attainment gap being reported and asked that this figure be reviewed in line with the University's Access and Participation Submission and other metrics to ensure alignment.

20.102 Subject to review of this section, the Statement was approved.

**OIA Statement 2019 (COU20-17)**

20.103 Council noted the statement which demonstrated very few cases being escalated to the OIA and supporting the internal consideration of cases within the University. A slight anomaly had been identified over the proportion of cases not upheld and then sent to the OIA which would be reviewed.

20.104 It was noted that the number of cases this year would be higher due to two group complaints with a delivery partner currently being dealt with by the OIA and how group complainants were measured. Further comments were considered under reserved business.

**Student Code of Conduct (COU20-18)**

20.105 Council considered the draft *Student Code of Conduct* being presented for approval to replace the current *Student Disciplinary Procedures*. This had been widely consulted upon across the University, including with the Students' Union.

20.106 Council made the following observations:

- Whether the reference to 'making offensive comments to or about members of the University' was sufficiently focused. It was agreed to add examples e.g. discriminatory comments
- Whether the requirement for making an allegation within 10 days was restrictive was a loophole that could be exploited or where the incident took time to come to light. It was noted that this was based on sector practice but cases would also be considered exceptionally based on merit.
- Whether there was a need to review anonymity in the light of whistleblowing. Council was reminded of the University's *Raising Issues of Concern (Whistleblowing) policy* and of the need to ensure that allegations could be fully investigated.
- Whether a flowchart listing alternate routes might be helpful.

20.107 Council approved the document as it currently stood to ensure that it could be implemented from September 2020, but asked for the considerations above to be further reviewed.

**Action: Academic Registrar and Secretary**

### **Use of the University Seal**

20.108 The Secretary confirmed that the Seal had not been used since the previous meeting.

## **AUDIT COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes of the meeting of 9 June 2020**

20.109 The minutes were received. Attention was drawn to:

- Consideration of the Strategic Risk Register, including the impact of Covid-19 (minute 20.44ff.): The Committee had chosen not to reflect this in scoring and had instead commissioned a separate report. The next report would include covid-19.
- Satisfactory assurance rating for the University's student mental wellbeing support arrangements
- Compliance with the UUK / GuildHE Code of the University's management of student housing following the three-yearly audit undertaken. Some issues had been identified at Hughenden Student Village and Windsor House which were being taken forward.
- The decision to replace the planned audit of Business Continuity Planning with IT Resilience and in particular the transfer to remote delivery of programmes during lockdown.

20.110 Council asked about the insurance implications for the cladding in use at Hughenden Student Village (minute 20.58). It was reported that in accordance with the local fire officer and Buckinghamshire Council the top floor would not be used as the block was slightly above the 18m height limitation. The University was taking legal advice over the responsibilities for the changes needed.

## **GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes from the meeting of 26 May 2020**

20.111 The minutes were received. Attention was drawn to the procurement of electronic committee software to support Council activities. It was noted that the Chair and Deputy Chair of Council had attended an online demonstration of the software chosen. It was intended to provide Council members with IT equipment to enable access.

### **Membership elections / appointment**

Note: The Deputy Chair of Council absented herself from the following item due to a declared conflict of interest

20.112 Council approved the reappointment of Irene Kirkman as Deputy Chair of Council for a further period of two years following the outcome of the recent election, which was unopposed.

20.113 Council approved the appointment of Emma Binnie as the elected PSE representative to Council following the outcome of the recent polling of PSE staff members. The appointment would run from 1 August 2020 for a four-year period.

20.114 Council approved the co-option of Karen Satterford to Council for a four-year period. It was noted that Mrs Satterford was a former Chief Executive of Wycombe District Council and also had previous experience working on environmental issues, including the development of green policies. The co-option followed discussions with the candidate with the Vice-Chancellor, Chair of Council and the Academic Registrar. It was considered that the co-option would benefit Council by increasing knowledge and experience of local government.

### **Review of Committees**

20.115 Council received an update on committee arrangements for the following academic year:

- A Student Experience Committee had been proposed to provide greater consideration and scrutiny by Council of Students' Union and student-related items, including mental health and student survey outcomes. Terms of Reference were being drafted but membership would include the Students' Union President, the Students' Union Council member, as well as finance representation while the meeting would be chaired by an independent member of the Council. Council welcomed the move and noted similar examples at other higher education institutions that might help inform the terms of reference.
- A preliminary review of the allocation of members to committees had been undertaken but would require further consideration due to the new sub-committee, the Search Committee to lead on the appointment of a Chancellor, and changes within UET membership. The Secretary would contact members over the course of the summer but would seek to retain some continuity while making the best use of members' strengths.
- The draft Calendar of Meetings for 2020/21 would also be finalised. Changes to the calendar would include the joint meeting with Senate and an additional meeting of the Remuneration Committee. Where helpful, additional meetings would be conducted by video-conferencing means while retaining a balance of online and face to face meetings (covid-19 requirements notwithstanding). It was noted that a benefit of the committee management system chosen was the ability to support members attending a meeting either in person or online.

### **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

#### **Reports / Updates from Subsidiary Companies**

Note: This item was considered under Reserved Business

#### **Feedback from sector events attended by Council members**

20.116 The following was reported:

- The Chair had attended webinars with the Minister in relation to online learning
- A recent Civitas leadership webinar had involved the Vice-Chancellor as a panel member talking about the importance of communication. Council noted that University communication during the pandemic had been strong with 250+ staff members attending the recent all staff briefing.

**Date of next meeting**

- 20.117 The date of the next meeting was confirmed as the extraordinary meeting on 28 July 2020 to include consideration of deferred items. This would also include the opportunity to thank departing Council members for their contributions.
- 20.118 In closing, the Chair advised that he would be arranging 1:1 meetings with members to be held shortly.