



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Minutes Meeting of Council

Date: 19 October 2020

Present: Mr Pedder, Pro-Chancellor (in the Chair);
Mrs Hope and Mr Mayson, Pro-Chancellors;
Professor Lamberts, President & Vice-Chancellor;
Mr Bagley, Mr Belton, Professor Brazier, Ms Brownlie, Ms Eyre, Dr Forrest,
Ms Hague, Professor Hartley, Professor Kirby, Dr Layden, Dr Nicholls,
Mr Wray, Professor Valentine

Secretary: Dr Tony Strike

In attendance: Mr Swinn; Mr Weir; Ian Wright (item 9); Ms S Jamdar (Shakespeare Martineau) (item 11); Mrs T Wray (items 12 and 13); Dr R Rothman (item 13); Professor Vincent (item 14).

Apologies: Mr Sutcliffe, Treasurer; Mr Sly

Welcome

The Chair welcomed Members and attendees to the first Council meeting of 2020-21.

1. Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

- 1.1 It was noted that Mrs Jones, who was attending the meeting, held a conflict with respect to item 15.
- 1.2 It was noted that University staff members and Mr Nicholls held a conflict with respect to item 9. It was also reported that Ms Eyre, Mr Weir and Ms Brownlie were trustees of relevant organisations.
- 1.3 No other conflicts were declared.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

(Meetings held on 13 July 2020 and 25 August 2020)

- 2.1 The Minutes were approved as an accurate record, subject to a correction to the attendance list of 13 July.

3. Matters Arising on the Minutes

- 3.1 Council received and noted the matters arising on the Minutes. Particular attention was drawn to the following:
 - (a) CLOSED MINUTE
 - (b) Minute 9, Planning Round Outcomes and Actions: New Key Performance Indicators were being developed and would be presented to Council in November for consideration and agreement.
 - (c) Minute 12, Leadership, Management and Governance Arrangements during Covid-19: An internal audit of the University's arrangements for decision making during

the pandemic had commenced and the findings would be reported to Audit Committee, with onward reporting to Council.

- (d) Minute 13, Academic Assurance and the Student Experience: Senate would receive further updates on actions taken in relation to Education and Research at its October meeting, to be reported to Council in November when Council would also receive the Senate's Annual Academic Assurance Report.
- (e) Minute 17, Legal Practice Course: The University had signed the formal agreement with ULaw at the end of July and the decision had been publicised.
- (f) Minute 28, Annual Report of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee: A provisional future item on Council's role in setting and demonstrating an open and inclusive culture had been added to the Council business plan.

4. Health and Safety Update

- 4.1 Council received and noted the update from the Director of Health and Safety, which focused on managing risks relating to Covid-19. These were discussed in more detail under item 6, below. The Annual Health & Safety Report would be provided to Council in November.

5. Approval of Category C Business

- 5.1 Council considered Category C business, which are covered in Minutes 19-24, below.

6. President & Vice-Chancellor's Report

- 6.1 Council received and discussed the President & Vice-Chancellor's report, in which he provided information on key current and forthcoming developments in the policy environment and against each of the themes in the University's Strategic Plan. Points noted in particular included the following:

- (a) Covid-19: Return to Campus and Blended Learning & Teaching: The Department for Education had published updated guidance regarding the reopening of higher education buildings and campuses, including around the provision of information to students, institutional plans to control and manage local outbreaks, and set out four tiers of restrictions in relation to teaching provision (as distinct from the new national levels). The guidance had also confirmed that there was no requirement to test all staff and students. Although there was no evidence that face to face teaching was driving transmission, the University had temporarily suspended non-clinical face to face teaching between 9-18 October due to the numbers of students self-isolating. Campus, services and facilities, such as student support, the libraries and cafes, had remained open and research activity continued as planned.

During the transition period the University had put in place increased risk mitigation measures and carefully considered its approach following the Government's introduction of a regional tiered approach to restrictions. When face-to-face teaching resumed on 19 October the University was at DfE tier 2. UEB had discussed the University's approach to face to face provision, taking into account further guidance and discussions with Sheffield's Director of Public Health and his team. The University was adopting a flexible approach for Faculties to work with departments to develop an appropriate blended offer, consistent with DfE Tier 2 status in the context of the nationally imposed restrictions on South Yorkshire. Faculties and departments had been asked to pay particular attention to: the safety of our staff and students; the wellbeing of our students; the pedagogical benefits and student experience; and learning outcomes. It was noted that student feedback indicated the value placed on being able to access safely a proportion of in person educational delivery and campus-based activities. On

behalf of the Students' Union, Ms Eyre and Mr Weir commended the University's approach, including the provision of student welfare and support services and the strength of the University - SU relationship, including open and constructive engagement with the Executive.

- (i) Communications: Senate had in detail reviewed arrangements for students' return to campus at the beginning of the academic year and the current arrangements on 14 October and would provide assurance to Council, including that national guidelines were being followed. Heads of Department had received an extensive briefings to ensure a shared understanding of what was required to protect students' health, education and their student experience. These measures were supported by wider communications to University staff and students to explain the University's approach and the rationale for decisions taken.
 - (ii) Staff and Student Cases: It was reported that during the period 24 September - 18 October, there had been a total of 1114 positive student cases. There had also been 44 staff cases, of which only 11 had been on campus in the 48 hours prior to becoming symptomatic. No staff cases could be traced back to students and there was no evidence of student to student transmission on campus. Similarly, PHE had confirmed that there had been a single instance of staff to staff member transmission, over the summer and before the start of the new academic year. Clarification was provided that it had not been necessary to lockdown any University accommodation and that students' behaviour was generally good; there had been no reports of students' being fined for breaching restrictions or of any hosting of mass events. With respect to testing, it was noted that the University continued to liaise closely with government and local authorities about local testing capacity and was following local Public Health advice, which included that asymptomatic testing was not necessary.
- (b) Industrial Relations: The majority of staff who were furloughed had now been brought back to work. Consideration would be given to whether the University should access the new Job Support Scheme. With respect to staff wellbeing, a risk assessment approach was taken which also sought to identify and mitigate key areas. The risk assessments had been shared with Trade Union colleagues and communicated to staff and managers. Subsequently, an Institutional Wellbeing Risk Assessment had been developed and refined further as circumstances changed. The University had also undertaken a period of wider staff engagement and undertook three phases of staff surveys to consider staff perceptions of support for remote working, wellbeing and other practical support, the return to campus and future working practices.
- (c) Student recruitment: The University's overall undergraduate recruitment position remained strong, despite the uncertainty around the impact of Covid-19 and the disruption created by changes to A Level grades. Current figures for Home UG and Overseas UG enrolment were in line with expectations following the Confirmation, Adjustment and Clearing process. However, significant uncertainty remained around the PGT cohort, especially overseas students. Applications had remained positive but the delay in the commencement of teaching would mean that PGT figures would not become available until November as those students began to arrive and enrol. Uncertainty around a range of measures in relation to Covid-19, including the local and national position, continued to affect expected registrations. Whilst positive steps, for example organised international flights and a change of start dates were helping boost expected numbers, the University continued to forecast PGT student registrations below target numbers this year. Members noted the additional risk that the continuation of the pandemic and local and national restrictions may adversely affect student retention.

During discussion, clarification was provided about the extent of the University's Access and Widening Participation activities. Although the University compared favourably with many of its peers, significant effort continued to be directed towards improving access for all underrepresented groups. The Sheffield City Region had particular characteristics in relation to low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR4) and lower socioeconomic status (IMD). Closing this participation gap had been challenging for high tariff providers. Council discussed the local intersections of disadvantage. For example, access is more of an issue for males from both white and BAME disadvantaged backgrounds than it is for females. Notably the gap for white males is higher than for males from BAME ethnic groups. This suggests that the combination of being white, male, and from a disadvantaged background makes access particularly difficult. It was recognised that this was a complex area, involving wider structural and societal issues that applied from pre-school through to tertiary education. Council agreed to add a more detailed briefing on Access and Participation to the annual business plan.

- (d) Student Support: Student Support Services continued to be fully available online, with the University Health Service open on campus. Mental Health and Disability Services were offering online appointments in a safe, secure way. Student Support was contacting all students who were self-isolating to check on their welfare and offer practical and emotional support. For students staying in University accommodation, additional support included daily checks and support for access to services and goods.
- (e) Research – UKRI Covid Allocation: UKRI had provided the University with an additional sum to fund grants finishing between April 2020 and September 2021. The funding aimed to enable the delivery of outcomes and outputs which had been disrupted by the pandemic and to protect the research base by enabling contract extensions for staff funded from UKRI grants.
- (f) Success and Achievement: Despite the ongoing challenges of responding to the impact of the pandemic, the University continued to achieve significant successes and achievements, as set out in the related report. For example, attention was also drawn to the success of the Students' Union in being awarded the Whatuni Student Choice Award for Best Student Union, for the fourth consecutive year.
- (g) Research: University representatives would be attending a BEIS-UKRI workshop on trusted research in November.

7. Closed Minute and Paper

8. Closed Minute and Paper

9. USS Valuation 2020 – Proposed Consultation Response

(Mr Wright in attendance for this item)

- 9.1 Council considered the University's proposed response to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) Technical Provisions Consultation. This had been drafted through the University's dedicated working group, had received input from UEB and was endorsed by Finance Committee on 12 October. The consultation formed part of the broader work that the USS Trustee was undertaking on the 2020 valuation of USS. The valuation process as a whole, which would entail a series of further consultations, was anticipated to be completed by 30 June 2021. Attention was drawn to the challenges of the present consultation in terms of its timing, current operating environment and financial uncertainties, and the fact that different elements of the overall valuation process had been disaggregated. A valuation methodology that was acceptable to all the parties involved would be critical. It was noted that whatever

changes were ultimately agreed between UUK, UCU and the USS Trustee would need to satisfy the Pensions Regulator.

- 9.2 Members noted elements of the response that addressed proposed measures to support the employer covenant, recognising the University's previous response to the USS Trustee's proposals for debt monitoring and pari passu. The importance of seeking agreement over the methodology used to determine the USS valuation itself was noted.
- 9.3 Council approved the proposed institutional response, which would be submitted by the 30 October 2020 deadline.

10. Capital Report

- 10.1 Council received an update on progress of projects in the capital programme, including projects recently considered by ECSG, UEB and Finance Committee in accordance with the Council Scheme of Delegation. It was noted that that the current University Estates Strategy ran to January 2021 and, in view of the current operating environment, an interim two year strategy would be prepared so that further thought could be given to longer-term estates needs.
- 10.2 Clarification was provided over the timescales for the reconstruction and completion of the Social Sciences Hub. It was recognised that the University was not liable for the initial construction defects, but was working with the contractor to resolve issues and Council noted the actions taken by the University.

11. Council Effectiveness Review

(Ms Jamdar in attendance for this item)

- 11.1 Council considered the external report on the Council Effectiveness Review and received an update from the Chair of the Council Task and Finish Group that had overseen the review and discussed the findings and recommendations. The focus of the review had been on regulatory compliance and assurance, in the context of Council's full responsibilities, and had also considered its ability to respond with agility to the impacts of Covid-19. It was pleasing to note that the report concluded that the University was well managed and well governed, its governance was undeniably effective and fully compliant with sector guidance. Furthermore, a number of areas of good or sector leading practice had been identified. Therefore, the recommendations were intended to support Council's consideration of how it might further enhance its effectiveness, including the use of examples from across the HE and other sectors.
- 11.2 Council discussed the findings and recommendations, the context and rationale for them and ways in which they might be addressed. During discussion, Members noted the following:
- The importance of ensuring that Council was able to hear and take into account the views of all types of students.
 - Some of the recommendations could be grouped together when considering how they may be addressed, e.g. those relating to the practical operation of Council.
 - The potential to use connections between lay members of Council and members of UEB to help frame issues in the most useful way to Council.
- 11.3 With comments and feedback, including a further input from the Task and Finish Group, being sought on the priorities for action a detailed implementation plan would be presented to Council in February 2021. With respect to the optional deep dive review that was available to the University, a number of options had been proposed and these would be reviewed later in 2020-21 and a recommendation made to Council.

12. One University - A Vision for our Future 2020-2025

(Mrs Wray in attendance for this item)

- 12.1 Following its discussions at the July meeting, Council considered the University Vision and received a presentation from the President & Vice-Chancellor, in which he demonstrated the visual elements that would be used to present the Vision and underlying pillars and supporting stories in a dynamic and engaging online environment. The Vision, institutional values and priorities, would provide the University's strategic framework within which decisions would be made both at corporate level but also guide decision-making by individuals, groups and departments.
- 12.2 Attention was drawn to the importance of the One University theme, which had been a strong feature of the wide-ranging stakeholder consultation events and represented a key feature of distinctiveness. The use of stories to support each strategic Pillar would provide evidence of success and excellence, demonstrate key aspects of differentiation and support external engagement and communications. It was noted that a comprehensive communications plan had been developed for staff, students and other stakeholders that recognised the challenge of longer-term strategic thinking at a time of ongoing short-term challenges as colleagues continued to ensure that the University responded effectively to the impact of Covid-19. The University would develop additional narrative and further supporting strategies and policies.
- 12.3 Clarification was provided that tangible progress against the strategic priorities would be expected in the first year and strategic indicators and priorities gained traction across the University through the annual planning round. UEB had also discussed the draft institutional key performance indicators that Council would be invited to approve in November.
- 12.4 Council welcomed the Vision, particularly the level of ambition, identification of key differentiators and the use of inspiring supporting stories. Council approved the Vision and would receive further updates on progress in due course.

13. Sustainability Strategy

(Mrs Wray and Dr Rothman in attendance for this item)

- 13.1 Council considered the draft University Sustainability Strategy and noted an accompanying summary of the institutional approach to sustainability. The Strategy had been developed following targeted academic and student-focused consultations during 2019 and subsequent task and finish groups, led by expert academics relevant professional services, all of which was overseen by a Sustainability Steering Group. It was noted that the strategy brought together a number of existing actions alongside new activity and targets for environmental, economic and social sustainability, including ambitious but attainable targets for carbon neutrality. A detailed implementation plan would support delivery of the strategy, with regular periodic reviews and progress updates to UEB. Council noted that the University had used academic expertise, including the University Research Institutes, to produce a robust evidence base for the strategy; that professional services and other colleagues were closely engaged in the development and were actively considering its implementation; and that the Sustainability Strategy aligned with and was integral to key aspects of the overarching Vision (see Minute 12, above), particularly the One University pillar, and consistent with institutional values and identity, whilst also linking to other specific areas such as the research strategy and reputation.
- 13.2 During discussion, it was recognised that sustainability would be a key consideration for the post-Covid recovery, and that it would be important to ensure that actions were embedded in business processes, with clear responsibilities and accountabilities. Clarification was provided that, although the level of ambition was at least as high as many other universities, additional work was underway to further clarify and confirm the baseline data against which targets had been set and, therefore, there was scope to

revise targets upwards. With respect to leadership and accountability, it was noted that the supporting delivery plan and ongoing monitoring would ensure that senior leaders took ownership of appropriate actions, supported by additional planned engagement and communication activities. It was also reported that the Strategy had been developed with extensive input from and the support of the Student's Union Sabbatical Officers.

- 13.3 Council approved the Strategy, noting the University's wider role in supporting sustainability initiatives in society and existing regional initiatives such as the SCR Combined Mayoral Authority" Net Zero initiative, in which the University was actively involved. Council agreed to receive further updates in due course.

14. National Student Survey Results Update

(Professor Vincent in attendance for this item)

- 14.1 Council received and noted a detailed briefing on the University's NSS results, building on the update received at the 25 August informal meeting. Although overall satisfaction for the University was down from 88% last year to 85% this represented a satisfactory outcome given the circumstances in which the survey had been conducted; total satisfaction was 2% higher than both the Russell Group and Universities UK average. The University ranked fifth in the Russell Group for Overall Satisfaction and 32nd nationally. Attention was drawn to areas of variation across different subjects, with particular strong or less positive outcomes noted. All departments would be asked to produce action plans in response to their particular results through the Annual Reflection process and linked to the annual planning round, with a focus on aspects of the survey which fed into the Teaching Excellence Framework and the need to ensure effective business continuity plans to minimise disruption to students. With respect to the TEF, it was noted that subject level assessments would not be made during 2020-21 and that the system as a whole would be subject to a recently announced review.
- 14.2 It was noted that the NSS was part of a suite of metrics used to evaluate institutions' performance with students regarded as customers in a market. However, students were active and engaged learners, and it was important to consider student satisfaction in this wider educational context.

15. Closed Minute and Paper

16. Closed Minute and Paper

17. Brexit

- 17.1 Council received and noted an update from the University's Brexit Co-ordination Group, which summarised the University's preparations and readiness for the UK and the EU not reaching an agreement on their future relationship, including the risk of having no trade agreement or a limited trade agreement without a higher education sector deal. The University's preparations continued to be informed by a dedicated risk register, and four priority areas had been identified: arrangements for students on programmes with a year abroad; research funding; immigration; and data protection.

18. Report of the Council Nominations Committee

- 18.1 Council received and noted the Report, which provided an update on the progress of identifying and recruiting new lay members of Council and Council committees. A recruitment exercise over the summer had resulted in a strong field and further discussions were planned with a number of interested individuals. Council would receive a further update and recommendations in due course.

19. Report of the Estates Committee

19.1 Council received and approved the Report.

20. Governance Matters

20.1 Update on Office for Students Regulatory Requirements

Council received and noted the update, including changes to the ongoing conditions of registration and associated OfS requirements, as well as the University's OfS Conditions Compliance Register.

20.2 Procedure for Reportable Events

Council received and noted the procedure.

20.3 Procedure for Managing Conflicts of Interest in Decision Making

Council received and noted the procedure.

21. Student Union Constitutional Review

21.1 Final report by the Student's Union on the 2015 Constitutional Review

Council received and approved the Report.

21.2 Proposal for Quinquennial Review 2020-21

Council received and approved proposals for Council's periodic review of the Students' Union Constitution, the terms of the review, and the establishment of and membership of a Council Task and Finish Group, chaired by Ms Brownlie, to oversee the process. It was noted that such a review was a requirement under the Education Act 1994, and that the Student's Union had endorsed the approach proposed.

22. Council Business Plan 2020-21

22.1 Council received and noted the Business plan which would be updated regularly to inform future agenda planning.

23. Use of the University Seal

23.1 Council received and noted a summary of the application of the University Seal since the previous Council meeting.

24. Public Availability of Council papers

24.1 Council received and approved recommendations concerning the publication on the web of papers presented at the meeting, in accordance with previously agreed proposals on the disclosure of information. It was noted that a number of papers were confidential and would not be made publicly available.