



## **Minutes                      Meeting of the Council**

**Date:** 24 January 2024

**Present:** Martin Temple, Pro-Chancellor (in the Chair)

Claire Brownlie (Pro-Chancellor), Adrian Stone (Pro-Chancellor), Rob Memmott (Treasurer), Professor Koen Lamberts (President & Vice-Chancellor), Lily Byrne, Professor Graham Gee, Gemma Greenup, Dr John Hogan, Varun Kabra, Alison Kay, Professor Janine Kirby, Frances Morris-Jones, Dr Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid, Dr Phil Tenney, Professor Mary Vincent

**Secretary:** Jeannette Strachan

**In attendance:** Anna Campbell, David Swinn; Rob Sykes; Al Carlile, Alix Morgan

**Apologies:** Dr Brian Gilvary, Professor Sue Hartley, Phil Rodrigo

### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

1.1 The Chair welcomed Members and attendees to the meeting, in particular Frances Morris-Jones, who was attending their first meeting as a full member of Council.

### **2. Declaration of Conflict of Interests**

2.1 It was recognised that there would be a number of actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest arising from item 3, below, and, while Individual members were invited to declare any such conflict if they wished, the Chair acknowledged the matter as potentially affecting all staff and student members of Council. It was agreed that all members could participate in the discussions and decision-making process.

2.2 No further conflicts were declared.

### **3. Final Structural Proposals and the Case for moving to a Schools Structure**

3.a Council considered the final structural proposals and the case for moving to a Schools structure, which built on Council's previous discussions and additional engagement activities. It was noted that items 3.1-3.4, below, also related to these proposals directly. Similarly, a range of additional supplementary material for consideration by Council had been submitted to the University Secretary by a number of stakeholders and shared with Council members in advance of the meeting. Discussion points and questions relating to all of these items were addressed as part of item 3, which considered the matters in their entirety.

3.b The proposals before Council were the result of several months detailed work and intensive engagement across the University since October 2023, when UEB had announced its

intention to make changes to the University's academic structure by moving from academic departments to Schools, subject to Council's approval. Council again noted that UEB had worked with colleagues from across the University to explore the proposal and the initial working structure suggested in October 2023. Prior to detailed discussion and questions, Council received a further overview of the following:

i. Rationale for Change:

As previously discussed and as set out in detail in the related paper, the underpinning rationale for establishing schools was that the University's present academic structure was a barrier to achieving the University Vision and acting effectively as One University.

Due to the different sizes and financial positions, some departments were currently able to invest more than others in providing student support and this meant that students' experience depended in part on their programme of study, which was unacceptable. Moving to Schools was a key means of ensuring a consistent and high-quality student experience across all disciplines.

The research landscape continued to change and the current structure of 42 variably-sized academic departments and related units did not align with the trend toward larger-scale, multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary research. The proposed change in structure would enable the University to maximise opportunities for larger-scale interdisciplinary research of the kind which was increasingly attractive or even necessary for external funders.

A further driver of the proposed changes was to create a better and fairer place to work, in response to consistent evidence from colleagues that they encountered a number of challenges, including workloads. Similarly, colleagues' experiences of working for the University could be different depending on the department in which they worked.

The current academic structure meant that around 170 new academic leaders needed to be appointed every four years, and it was challenging to appoint, induct and support the number needed for the current model. Academic leadership was vital to institutional success and the reduction in leadership positions under a Schools structure would enable the University to successfully appoint high calibre academic leadership.

It was essential that the University was possessed of the requisite agility with which to respond to continued and increasing external challenges and pressures. As previously noted in related and other Council discussions, the cost of living crisis was continuing; the static cap on home student fees and international recruitment pressures meant that HE income was under pressure. It was also essential to the University's continued success and status as a university that the institution was set up in such a way that it could meet the requirements of the regulatory environment maintained by the Office for Students, as well as the many other legal and regulatory obligations to which the University was subject.

ii. Engagement with the whole University Community since October 2023:

Council received and noted an overview of the comprehensive engagement work that had been undertaken, as set out in detail in the related paper. Following discussions at Council's November 2023 meeting, the period of engagement on the proposals was extended by a month, to enable more detailed work and in response to concerns raised regarding the pace of the original proposed decision making process. It was noted that the University had engaged directly with well over 2000 members of staff through centrally managed activities, comprising a mixture of briefings, workshops and meetings. There had been at least another 2000 points of engagement through faculty-focused activity and 160 emails had been received via the dedicated new schools inbox and online FAQs page and each had received a response. Council was pleased to note the extent of engagement and the volume of material received, which UEB had treated proactively such that several changes had been made to the initial proposals that were published at the start of the engagement period. These changes included the proposed new structure itself, the timeline and other aspects of the work, for example the approach to the governance workstream.

iii. Information provided to Council to inform its decision:

The volume of material provided to Council in the meeting papers, both those listed on the agenda and the supplementary papers, reflected the extent of work undertaken and level of engagement since October. Council commended the openness with which the various submissions had been shared with Council such that it had as complete a set of information and evidence as possible to inform its determination of the matters in question.

iv. Major Strategic Risks and Mitigation:

Council noted that the related paper detailed the five key strategic risks associated with proceeding with the change in academic structures and attention was drawn to the fact that other risks would be actively managed through the project team's risk management processes. It was noted that the five strategic risks were highlighted because they were critical to the successful delivery and implementation of the new structure, and the realisation of benefits beyond the implementation period. Specifically, it was vital that cultural risks were effectively managed in order to avoid a situation where existing structures or inconsistent processes and ways of working were maintained or recreated such that intended benefits were not realised, particularly those relating to consistency and reductions in workload. Similarly, it was essential to ensure that the changes in structure did not have a destabilising effect on colleagues and morale, given that some colleagues continued to express concerns about the proposals. It was recognised that significant further engagement work would be required to address those concerns and the issues they represented; Council was pleased to note that UEB had committed to doing so. Council also recognised that the impact of an increasingly challenging external environment in a number of key areas over which the University, and the wider sector, had little to no direct control, may mean that future action was required to ensure that the University remained sustainable in the short and long-term and could evidence this,

including to satisfy the external auditor's annual audit opinion and going concern assessment. Whilst the proposed new school structure would facilitate greater institutional agility, in the event that the very serious or worse case scenarios crystallised during the implementation period any unavoidable institutional response was at risk of being conflated with the fundamental rationale for moving to Schools (see Minute 3.b.i, above).

v. Proposed Next Steps:

Council noted that, were it to approve the proposals, the implementation plan would be activated. Initially there would be a series of communications and further engagement with staff to confirm Council's decision. Coordinated implementation would then begin with cross-cutting work continuing and local implementation teams in faculties starting to work at pace on the series of activities in the coordinated plan.

- 3.c During discussion, in which Council was invited to comment and ask questions, including about any of the material shared with Council in advance of the meeting as noted on the agenda and in the additional submissions (see also Minute 3d, below), the following points were addressed:

Risks and Benefits:

- i. Whilst it was difficult to predict with confidence how any external risks may crystallise over the implementation period, if action was required in response then this would increase pressure on management and leadership capacity to effect the structural changes optimally. However, successful progress towards implementing the proposals would enable the University to respond to those changes more effectively and efficiently.
- ii. Council was pleased to have received the overall Equality Impact Assessment and related mitigations and controls, given the volume of questions on this point through the engagement period. Council was assured by the comprehensive assessment that had been undertaken and that relevant lessons learned and any further issues identified would be addressed through the implementation phase.
- iii. Whilst it was important and necessary that due consideration was given to the risks and mitigations relating to implementation, UEB and Council, and the wider University, would also need to retain focus on achieving the intended outcomes, i.e. by monitoring progress towards agreed KPIs. With respect to the latter, it was recognised that the extent of positive progress towards targets would be variable during the implementation phase but that, ultimately, a positive institutional trajectory against all targets would be sought. Council would continue to receive regular institutional performance updates, which would be contextualised with reference to the proposed structural changes. It was also noted that the changes were also intended to drive improved performance in other areas, such as the TEF, where inconsistencies across different departments had impacted the University's latest ranking.

- iv. Clarification was provided that UEB had considered and agreed principles for future planning and budgeting under the proposed new structure, which would include performance against KPIs and the development of new school strategies and action plans, as well as maintaining the control environment through the implementation phase.
- v. Further clarification was provided about plans to address challenges and risks around data and systems requirements and functionality under the proposed new structure, with an initial focus on core elements and IT Services and other colleagues were considering the identification and prioritisation of processes in order to focus resource appropriately. Whilst the extent of the challenge and overall level of work required was recognised, Council was assured by the University's approach.

#### Project Oversight:

- vi. Clarification was provided that UEB would be responsible for overseeing and managing the overall implementation across all Faculties. In doing so, it would be necessary to continue to work closely with each of the Faculties, given the variable extent of work required and the respective challenges. It was also confirmed that Council would receive progress updates throughout the implementation period in order to receive assurance and hold UEB to account. UEB would be supported by a dedicated Project Manager and team, with Faculty level Change Boards with additional resource to supplement Faculty Executive Boards.
- vii. Regular, e.g. at least quarterly, progress updates to Council, and with respect to matters within its remit to the Council's Audit & Risk Assurance Committee, would need to provide assurance that all elements of implementation were progressing positively and on time. Similarly, these updates provided an opportunity to explain how the University was managing potential risks to the control environment during this period that may result from significant changes in local leadership.

#### Leadership and Management:

- viii. On the basis of the strength of the existing cadre of Heads of Department, there was confidence in the University's ability to recruit strong leaders to each Head of School post but the need for care in the recruitment process was recognised. It was also recognised that the need to appoint and establish strong and effective academic leadership in a number of other key roles represented a further challenge but the risk that any recruitment difficulties or delays could jeopardise the successful implementation of the proposals overall was deemed to be very low. There were also key appointments to be made in senior positions other than the Heads of School and the University was working to develop a sufficiently robust and effective induction plan for these vital posts.
- ix. It was noted that the reduction in leadership roles meant that the University's promotion criteria and the Academic Career Pathway would need to be updated, which would address concerns about there being fewer career development opportunities in the proposed new structure. In addition, the outcomes of the

Governance workstream would inform work to implement new structures and related processes within new schools.

- x. Council noted the importance of professional services staff in implementing and driving changes to deliver the intended benefits of the proposals and clarification was provided about the University's plans to engage with these colleagues, both current departmental managers and more broadly. The importance of effective professional services leadership was also noted as a critical factor in the successful delivery of both the new structure and business as usual activities more generally.

#### The Student Voice:

- xi. Council again noted that the proposals to move to schools was not planned to result in any changes to programmes of study and clarification was provided about the student engagement activity that would take place during the implementation period:
  - a. It was important that the risk that any perceived lack of disciplinary identity might adversely affect student recruitment was actively managed, and that the achievement of a more fair and equitable student experience across the whole University was realised. Senate Education Committee had considered these matters during the engagement period and would continue to play a key role during the implementation period, with further input from the Students' Union.
  - b. Various workstreams had been or would be established to ensure that the Student Voice was adequately reflected during the implementation phase. A third meeting between the Vice-President for Education and student academic representatives from departments and faculties had taken place on 24 January 2024 and at least two such sessions had been scheduled each semester. It was reported that c.50 students had attended the most recent meeting out of c.600 who had been invited to do so. It was expected that these numbers would increase and, therefore, it remained vital that this forum remained available. The Governance workstream specifically included the Student Voice, with two academic leads actively engaging with the Students' Union and student academic representatives, and included relevant learning from the establishment of the School of Biosciences and, more broadly, how the Student Voice would be made sufficiently prominent in the operation of new Schools. It was recognised that there was a general lack of awareness and understanding of the proposals amongst the overall student population and there were significant differences in students' views across different departments. However, there was evidence that students recognised important opportunities in relation to wellbeing and student support, and in the improvement of and greater consistency in processes and systems. Nevertheless, the importance of communicating and demonstrating the benefits of new Schools to students was recognised as essential to building confidence.

### The Case for Change:

- xii. Members commented on the strength and compelling nature of the case for change and final proposals, which were noted to have been strengthened as further detail had been added following the engagement and consultation period. The level of engagement was particularly robust; the extensiveness of the process and the openness with which issues and risks were identified through it compared favourably to experiences in other sectors and Council commended this approach.
- xiii. It was notable that the tone of the debate within the University appeared to have evolved from the nature of the proposed changes themselves to how they would be implemented effectively such that the full benefits were realised. Council was pleased to note the level of maturity apparent in the institutional debate, which strengthened Council's level of assurance that the proposals were realistic and deliverable.
- xiv. Clarification was provided over the rationale for which Schools would be established in the first or second phase of implementation. This was driven by the need to move at sufficient pace, provide certainty to staff and manage the impact of delivering large scale changes whilst sustaining and delivering core activities simultaneously. It was also reported that all School Managers and Heads of Schools would be appointed at the same time and that those departments that would be forming new Schools in the second phase were already holding positive discussions about areas for closer collaboration prior the establishment of the respective new Schools themselves.
- xv. It was noted that some existing Schools were not changing as part of the proposals but that there would continue to be significant engagement with them through the implementation period to ensure that they were also able to realise the overall benefits sought through more consistent and efficient processes and structures.

### Consultation and Engagement:

- xvi. Clarification was provided about the extent to which the recent structural changes in the Faculty of Health could inform both the process of change and the achievement of benefits. It was noted that the context and drivers for those changes were different and that they were not yet complete, but that relevant insights and learning had informed the development of the wider proposals through the engagement period. In particular, the importance of providing staff with clarity over the timing of transitions, clear communications, regular staff liaison and discussion and wider information sharing were noted.
- xvii. It was recognised that the University would need to respond to concerns that had been raised about the proposals and their implementation, in order to generate increased confidence, support and advocacy amongst colleagues across the University. Effective leadership would be crucial factor and it was anticipated that as the benefits of change began to be realised, particularly decreased workloads and increased efficiency, greater equity and an improved and more consistent student experience, then support for the proposals would be further strengthened. Similarly, ongoing engagement with students, including continuing to seek students' input in

relation to student experience and outcomes, embedding the Student Voice more broadly, and feeding students' views into project delivery and oversight mechanisms, were essential.

- xviii. Ensuring that individual disciplines retained their identity in larger units was a key way of helping to address some of the concerns that had been raised through the engagement process. It was noted that the extent of these concerns was variable across different Faculties and in certain areas significant work would be needed to ensure that there was sufficient advocacy to help implement change and deliver the intended benefits. However, it was also noted that whilst the strength of feeling was particularly pronounced in some areas, some of the submissions to Council were lacking in substantive argument and the issues they raised were addressed satisfactorily in the related papers setting out the final proposals and case for change. As the benefits of change began to be realised, there would be an increasing body of evidence to demonstrate to colleagues that the changes were positive for the institution.
- xix. It would be important to reassure colleagues and students who had expressed concerns that Council had considered these carefully and that the University had appropriate plans in place both to address the challenges raised and continue to engage with staff and students throughout the implementation phase.

3.d Having considered the matter, including the items set out under Minutes 3.1 – 3.4, for ease of reference, and having also formally noted additional submissions to Council, as follows:

- A model and postcards relating to recent student project work from the Department of Landscape Architecture;
- Open letter regarding the formation of a School comprising the Departments of Chemistry and Physics & Astronomy and the School of Mathematics and Statistics from members of staff in the three units;
- Anonymised feedback from Department Managers provided by the Campus Trade Unions;
- A UCU report on the New Schools proposal, and covering email;
- Data from the Students' Union Student Voice Survey 2024 relating to the proposals;
- An open letter to UEB regarding the proposals signed by the Chairs or Co-Chairs of the Campus Trade Union branches and members of staff from across the University.
- Additional correspondence from a member of staff that was sent initially to some staff and student members of Council.

Council recognised the extent of the opportunity that the proposed new school structure represented to drive institutional performance, which was made more pronounced by the wider context of significant external challenges and pressures on the HE sector. Ultimately, taking into account Council Members' responsibilities, including as charitable trustees, Council recognised the need to consider whether the proposals were in the University's best interests as a whole.

- 3.e Council was invited to consider whether the proposals were in the University's best interests and, therefore, whether they should be approved. A vote was held, the outcome of which was as follows:

Of the 15 Members of Council present and eligible to vote, 14 Members voted in favour and one Member voted against. There were no abstentions. The one vote against was from the Student's Union President, who requested that their vote be recorded in the Minutes.

In addition, one Member had indicated their support for the proposals having had to leave the meeting shortly before the vote and it was also noted that one further member had indicated their support for the proposals by email in advance of the meeting.

- 3.f Council approved the proposals to establish new Schools for implementation across the academic years 2023-24 and 2024-25, as set out in detail in the related papers. Specifically, Council approved the new structure of the Faculties and their constituent academic units.

### **3.1 Extract of the Unconfirmed Minutes of the 13 December 2023 Senate**

- 3.1.1 Council received and noted the unconfirmed minutes, welcoming the detailed account of Senate's discussions as helpful in expanding on the verbal report of the meeting provided to Council on 14 December. The constructive nature of Senate's discussions and the number of Senate members who had contributed had been helpful in drawing out issues that were addressed through the Council meeting papers and other submissions and informing Council's deliberations on the proposals.

### **3.2 Responses to the Individual Senate Members Questionnaire**

- 3.2.1 Council received and noted the responses from Senate members to the anonymised questionnaire that had been shared with Senate after its discussions on 13 December. It was noted that the increased word limit had offered scope for members to comment fully, while the wide range of views reflected the extent of discussions during the Senate meeting itself. Although the rate of participation in the questionnaire was lower than expected, with each of the three questions having received responses from c.50% of Senate members, these responses provided a rich source of information, which would be valuable to inform further work to implement the proposed new structure and which had been taken into account in preparing the related papers at item 3. The range of views expressed emphasised the importance of ongoing, iterative communications to demonstrate how the University was using all feedback through the engagement period to inform the implementation of the proposed new structure. The care and attention with which Council had considered the views of Senate itself and those of individual members would be reported back to Senate.

### **3.3 Council Members Meetings with Members of Senate's Education and Research & Innovation Committees**

- 3.3.1 Council received a noted a summary of Council members' meetings with members of Senate's Education and Research & Innovation Committees respectively. Council commented on the value of these meetings and noted the supportive, open and honest nature of these discussions. The extent of challenge and breadth of questions that members

of Council had posed in these meetings was felt to be further evidence of the rigour and care with which Council had scrutinised the proposals.

### **3.4 Extract of the Unconfirmed Minutes of the 14 December 2023 Council**

3.4.1 Council received and noted the unconfirmed minutes.

## **4. Other Business**

4.1 There was no other business.

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