

THE COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2021

Present:

The Chair of Council
The Treasurer
The Vice-Chancellor
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor
The Pro Vice-Chancellor
Independent Members

Ms L McGillivray
Mr M Williams
Professor D Richardson
Professor N Ward
Professor F Lettice
Mr S Blease
Mr J Clayton
Mr M Davies
Miss G Maclean
Dr K Skoyles
Ms J Wheeler
Mr A Wood
Dr L Bohn
Professor R Chakraborty
Mrs D Mailey
Ms E Payne
Mr H Williams

Members appointed by Senate

Member appointed by the Support Staff
Student Representatives

With: The Chief Resource Officer and University Secretary (Mr I Callaghan), the Chief Operating Officer (Ms J Baxter), the Director of Finance, (Mr J Brown), the Assistant Registrar (Ms L Williams) and the Assistant Head of Corporate Communications (Mrs S Lawson).

In attendance: The Pro-Vice-Chancellors of Faculty (Professor S Barrow, Professor F Bowen, Professor D Edwards and Professor M Searcey), Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Student Experience and Education (Professor E. Sutton) and Director of Governance and Assurance (Dr A Blanchflower).

Apologies: Mr S Evans

39. MINUTES & ACTIONS

Confirmed

the minutes of the Council meetings held on 27 November 2020 and 5 January 2021 and reviewed the actions log.

Noted that Minute 32, bullet point 2 should read "Programme Director" for Bryan Thomas.

40. MATTERS ARISING

None

41. APOLOGIES

Mr S Evans

COU-M2
25.01.2021
Min. 42

42. STATEMENTS BY THE CHAIR

The Chair thanked all Council members for their valued contributions to the University during this difficult period, when many were also working and some had caring responsibilities. Their contributions were noted and were appreciated.

Dr Andrea Blanchflower had recently been appointed as Director of Governance and Assurance and was attending today's meeting.

43. STATEMENTS BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

All covered in the report by the Vice-Chancellor in minute 47.

44. DECLARATIONS OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST (IF ANY)

Gillian Maclean reported that her employer is Lotus, in the event there was any conflict for the Engineering discussion.

45. CONFIRMATION OF CHAIR'S ACTION

1. It was confirmed that the Chair had signed an authority to sign and seal, on behalf of the University, the deeds, documents and papers in respect of the lease transaction connected with the INTO UEA Building. These were signed and sealed on 18 December 2020 and exchanged early in January 2021.

46. MEETINGS SINCE THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING

- Learning and Teaching Committee (25 November 2020)
- Estates Committee (11 January 2021)
- Learning and Teaching Committee (20 January 2021)
- Audit Committee (22 January 2021)

Gillian Maclean advised that Audit committee had noted that the Council effectiveness review was still outstanding. It was also appropriate that Audit Committee and Council should receive an update on last year's internal audit reports on IT security and Health and Safety.(the same report should be suitable for Audit Committee and Council.

It was confirmed that Governance Committee was the appropriate Committee to manage the Effectiveness Review and the CRO has this on the agenda for the next meeting. In respect of the internal audit reports, these are due for review during this academic year. Currently there is an interim Director of Safety Services and a significant focus of her work is the University's response to Covid. However, the internal audit report was high on her agenda.

Stephen Blease indicated that he had particular suggestions for the Effectiveness review, and it was agreed that these would be submitted to the CRO for inclusion on the Governance committee agenda.

ACTION: CRO to ensure that Council effectiveness review and outstanding internal reports are completed in a timely fashion.

47. REPORT FROM THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

Considered

a summary of events that have taken place since the last meeting of Council:

1. COVID-19

COO reported that there are currently 25 live cases (22 students off campus, 2 staff cases and 1 student case). One flat in isolation. Important to note that there had been no instances of transmission of virus within teaching, research or office spaces. Currently a steady scenario that is manageable. Nearly 5000 lateral flow tests have been undertaken but levels of testing are now low.

Government has requested that all students should be tested twice a week: an offer rather than a mandatory requirement. This can be managed at present and it will be encouraged. For full student return, this would require 30k tests per week which would require significant planning. All students are supported well through isolation. The extra bandwidth around student mental health given PVC-SEE appointment is welcomed. There have been issues around Placement students but these are being resolved. PCR test will be provided on a test and release basis.

Also noted that Sportspark may be able to offer childcare for UEA staff during half term and possibly NNUH staff. An external organisation would be operating a vaccination training centre at the Julian Study Centre.

2. Research and Innovation update

Civic universities – PVC FMH will be speaking at a national event. Pace of progress has been affected by Covid but is ongoing.

REF – additional mitigations have been published. Overall deadline is 31 March, but some parts of our submission can be submitted up to 6 weeks later under specific caveats. FMH may be looking at this.

Brexit and EC funding – for research, we will have access to calls. Lots of success with EC funding and Horizon 2022 funding. Some support from UKRI. £300k for PGR extensions.

Sunrise coast bid. Council noted that this looked very impressive.

3. Teaching and Learning update

Noted that the paper dates from Christmas break. All evidence to date suggests that students are doing well and continuing to engage fully. Semester is now in 3 chunks. 4 weeks online for most, from 1 -26 March will be a question mark, then Easter break and then 4 weeks after Easter. Considerations include will students be able to meet their learning objectives and progress; staffing issues and workload pressures; wider student experience – and accessing facilities on campus; regulatory factors e.g. what are DfE and OfS requiring us to do; financial aspects. All must be borne in mind as we decide what should be done in 2nd period of semester from 1 March onwards. Aiming to decide by

1 Feb so staff and students have 4 weeks' notice. There are different scenarios being planned for staff and student return to campus.

Lizzie Payne indicated that students may not be doing well even if handing in work on time. Students are participating but that is not measure of doing well. PVC SEE indicated that despite all the difficulties students are still able to progress. And she continues to meet with SU and other colleagues to maintain student opportunities. Where students face difficulties there is support, Residential Life teams are on campus. Therapies are available for those who need it. It is very hard for students – but hopefully the interventions such as safety net will ease the pressure.

Jeannette Wheeler queried the introduction of a new timetabling system. PVC ACAD outlined that this is major piece of work that is underway. Large parts of functionality will be available next academic year.

4. Financial update

Summary report.

The Council noted the latest financial position; the review of mitigations being undertaken to manage the financial loss as a result of the pandemic during 2020/21; that the next voluntary severance scheme (VS2) has been rolled out, with closing date for applications 31 March 2021. Flexible working scheme extended. Also noted that further scenarios around admissions will be produced. There will be challenges in delivering the budget and difficult decisions to be made. The prolonged nature of the pandemic restrictions is having an affect on all stakeholders.

Dir FIN reminded Council that the deficit was £17.5m, with headroom of £1.5m around banking covenant.

Council approved the University budget at the meeting of Council in November 2020. At that stage, the impact of COVID-19 on recruitment and retention of students was known and the approved deficit for 2020/21 was approved at £12.493m. Given the risks associated with the ongoing pandemic, a number of what if scenarios were calculated against the long-term plan in order to test resilience. With the level of forecast headroom and mitigations yet to be actioned, all scenarios demonstrated financial sustainability for the period, with scenario 4 replicating the impact on the University of the lockdown earlier this year.

- Scenario 1 – Impact on one semester
- Scenario 2 - Local /National lockdowns
- Scenario 3 – Increased attrition after semester one
- Scenario 4 – Re-run of full lockdown

Noted that we need to avoid the risk of an actual banking covenant breach. At present there remains sufficient headroom even if the rent rebate cost £5m and no further mitigation action was taken but a failure to achieve the covenants could have significant consequences.

- The University has worked closely with the campus trade unions to deliver the initial financial mitigation plans. On the one hand, the plans are approved, and the unions are supportive of the decision to make the rent rebate offer to the students. However, they have asked for a discussion of the latest financial position and continue to point out that staff have agreed to forego contractual increments and restoring these should also be a priority if at all possible.
- There are also further financial risks. In common with all HEIs we are under pressure to consider fee remission (which we are robustly defending), and we anticipate lower than expected February starts
- There is a risk to the admissions position in September 2021. UCAS has extended the application deadline to 29 January. Thereafter we will commence modelling several scenarios for 2021/22 considering likely student numbers against the £12m provision held in the long-term financial plan to cover impacts on recruitment as a result of the pandemic.

Up to 8 weeks rent rebate would be provided.

Government's restructuring fund continues to be available but this support comes with potentially significant strings attached.

In all of our planning we continue to aim to minimise the risk of compulsory redundancies.

Andy Wood was concerned that £1.5m is not much headroom for a business the size of UEA and it was hoped that there was ongoing dialogue with lenders and that covenant waiver letters could be provided. Dir FIN indicated that banks have been very supportive. They will offer waivers if needed but this can lead to repricing loan which is expensive. UEA continued to enjoy a comfortable relationship with its lenders and the underlying fundamentals of the business remain strong. Our income streams are still intact i.e. student fees and research income, but commercial trading had suffered.

Lizzie Payne asked whether university would be supportive of the concept of interest rate loan deductions for student debt. The VC indicated that the S10 group of universities will be writing to government. To be noted this will only help students with loans, not international students. We will be clear that universities have provided learning outcomes, but the wider student experience has been disrupted. VC may also write to campus trade unions and local MPs about this issue.

Hamish Williams thanked all the staff working in this area for their hard work. The SU intended to lobby government on university financing.

VC indicated that UEA owns much of its own accommodation and we do rely upon this income as part of the financial plan. Some HEIs can delay their estates plans but this is not an option for us in respect of the Campus Development Plan.

5. INTO UEA LLP: it was confirmed that exchange had taken place on the transaction and work was due to commence in February.

Minister's Letter

Last week universities received another letter from the Minister Michelle Donelan regarding announcements made by the Department for Education including:

- The Skills for Jobs White Paper – including lifelong learning loan entitlements. New Institutes of Technology. UEA's role as a civic partner will be important. How we deal with regional colleges. We have been looking at a new governance opportunity with East Coast College (confidential) and this will be considered further in the light of the White paper. East Coast has strength and facilities in engineering (particularly offshore) and Health Sciences which would be complementary to UEA's interests. Financially and educationally this college is in a good place. May be further information soon on this opportunity.
- The Interim Conclusion of the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding
- The Review of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) and the Government's response to that review. No subject level TEF. Possibility of 4 overall TEF ratings in future rather than current 3.
- The Secretary of State's guidance to the Office for Students on reform of the recurrent and capital grants for 2021/22 to be prioritised to high value, high priority areas and available on a bid basis. Potentially some opportunities for UEA.
- The consultation on whether to adopt a Post-Qualifications Admissions (PQA) system. Two scenarios will be looked at

There is a focus on high value, high priority subjects, which in the VC's opinion is unfortunate. The UK also needs to invest in creative subjects. (Council could listen to UEA lecturer Rebecca Stott on catch up). Jeremy Clayton noted that high cost, high value teaching funding could also be an opportunity as well as a threat.

PVC ACAD indicated that the review of TEF had suggested that Subject level metrics will still be monitored even though not a separate assessment.

The impact of the withdrawal agreement on UEA. The UK will no longer be part of Erasmus but will be part of an outward scheme called Turing. We will still be part of Horizon Europe although not of decision-making body. This shows how important it is to be part of the Aurora network, for the benefit of institutional collaboration and students.

VC updated on VC Taskforce on Racism and tackling harassment of all forms. VC will be part of a major national meeting next week. Last week VC took part in the launch of pledge for access to HE for gypsy, Romany, travellers and others. UEA has adopted the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism. We will be identifying and signing a pledge on Islamophobia.

Reported

four people linked with the University have received awards in the New Year's Honours List:

1. Honorary Graduate Mr Robert Champion - Commander of the Order of the British Empire - Founder, Bob Champion Cancer Trust. For charitable services to Prostate and Testicular Cancer Research.

2. Alumna Kirsty Hamilton - Officer of the Order of the British Empire - For services to the Green Energy, the Finance Sector and Climate Change.

3. Professor Kristian Bowles, Clinical Professor Medicine Haematology, Norwich Medical School - Member of the Order of the British Empire - Consultant Haematologist and Associate Medical Director of Research and Innovation, Norfolk and Norwich University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. For services to the NHS during Covid-19.

4. Alumnus Dr Benjamin Cowell - Officer of the Order of the British Empire - Director General, Historic Houses Association. For services to Cultural Heritage, particularly during the Covid-19 Response

48. RECRUITMENT OF CHAIR OF COUNCIL

Received

a confidential update from the Deputy Chair of Council in respect of the search process for a Chair of Council (A copy is filed in the Minute Book, ref. COU20D028)

Thanks were offered to the panel for their hard work. Good progress has been made. Interviews and presentations have been received by 4 candidates. Preferred candidate has met with the VC. Still a number of issues to be worked through. A recommendation will be made before the next Council meeting (by email as not everyone can attend VC briefings). The plan would be for the member to join as an independent member possibly as soon as the next meeting. There would then be a period of handover before they take over for start of academic year.

Noted that the quality of candidates was not affected by university's position on remuneration. The field as a whole was excellent and all the candidates were appointable. Despite Perrett Laver's best efforts, the field of candidates was not diverse in respect of all protected characteristics. The Governance Committee will look at this issue closely for the future. Perrett Laver indicated that a more diverse field of candidates was likely if the role were remunerated. They are also working on an "apprentice board member" scheme and the University may elect to take part in this. Council indicated that they thought the Apprentice board scheme would be useful.

ACTION: CRO for Governance committee.

Andy Wood indicated that the recruitment industry is still catching up with the diversity needs of institutions. We should not rely on traditional routes for new independent member candidates. We might pursue via our own alumni candidates.

49. STRUCTURE OF THE EXECUTIVE TEAM

Noted

that at the meeting of Council on 27 November 2020 a proposal was put forward to recruit a Provost (this recruitment linked to the current role of Deputy Vice-Chancellor which becomes vacant on 1 August 2021)

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25.01.2021
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Received

an update from the Vice-Chancellor on the role description for the post of Provost together with the current role description for the Vice-Chancellor.

Noted that the new PVC Student Experience and Education job description had now been drafted and agreed. The VC outlined that whilst Executive Team job descriptions did not need governing body sign off, he had shared details of the developing role of Provost with Council at the last meeting for information. Since then he had met with chair of Council and chair of SORC to discuss and finalise the Provost role. The aim is for the VC role, once stability is regained post pandemic, in future to be more outward facing. The VC explained that now he is in 7th year as VC and as such one of the more experienced VCs in the country, it is appropriate for him to take on a more external role. He reported that he is aiming sit on the UKRI Board and would continue to take a lead role nationally in helping universities to develop mental health and wellbeing strategies as well as leading in anti-racism.

His own job description was being reviewed and it was important that it is updated to reflect the outward facing nature of the role. The new Provost role will be more internal facing.

Mark Davies asked whether the appointment of the Provost dealt with the issues Audit Committee had identified about bandwidth for the executive team and capacity for ET members to deal with the challenges facing the university. The Chair indicated that the VC has the responsibility for defining the roles of executive team members and that care was needed to balance executive control and Council's oversight.

*50. PENSIONS

This minute is confidential and attached as a separate sheet.

*51. ADMISSIONS 2021/2022 AND FUTURE YEARS

This minute is confidential and attached as a separate sheet.

52. ENGINEERING

Received and considered

a confidential report from the PVC (Science) and PVC (RIN) in respect of the School of Engineering and Productivity East. (A copy is filed in the Minute Book, ref. COU20D030)

PVC SCI outlined the history of Engineering at UEA, had grown from small numbers 10 years ago, with a step change when PVC SCI and PVC RI bid successfully for the Institute of Productivity. The new head of engineering has focused on research and teaching. Productivity East will bring in more equipment and further developments next academic year.

PVC RI updated on Productivity East and it was noted this has been affected by Covid. Progress has been affected by lockdown and spandrel panels. Grant from LEP meant finances have to be drawn down by end of March – but as long as committed to purchase and have orders in place this is still ok – so should be able to still draw down funding. New courses were being developed at Masters level linked in with CMP. CPD will be developed. Some capacity issues due to Covid issues.

Soft launch event with funders in April/May but depends on Covid. Bigger launch in September to introduce Engineering and the I of P – possibly a marquee. Series of research seminars are being developed. Most of staff recruited to support the project for September.

Council noted that the integration of subjects very impressive.

It was confirmed to the SU representatives that the IoP had been funded via external LEP money.

*53. CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

This minute is confidential and attached as a separate sheet.

54. ANNUAL TRAC RETURN

Reported

Audit Committee considered the annual TRAC return at its meeting on Friday 22 January 2021.

Dir FIN outlined the Transparent Approach to Costing and it was noted that:

- the work of the TRAC oversight group in ensuring the TRAC return has been prepared in accordance with the guidance and statement of requirements and that it has been reviewed for reasonableness.
- that submission is further underpinned by Internal Audit review in February 2020 providing 'substantial' assurance to the processes in place.
- In previous years Finance committee have reviewed the report each year but this year it was required for Council to have final signed.
- Gillian Maclean confirmed that internal audit had looked at the process by which the figures are derived and had no issues with the process. This provides significant assurance by Internal audit every 3 years.

Agreed that the summary report would be circulated so members could raise questions as needed. After 2-3 days it would be signed by the VC.

The VC outlined that the broad conclusion for the sector as a whole is that money flows from international fee income (20-25%) to supplement funding for research.

Approved

a recommendation from Audit Committee that the annual TRAC return be signed and submitted by 1 Feb 2021.

COU-M10
25.01.2021
Min. 55

55. ITEMS FOR REPORT

Received
the following Item for Report.

1. Sealings (A copy is filed in the Minute Book, ref. COU20D032)

56. DATES OF MEETINGS

Reported

1. that the date of the next Council meeting is: Monday 15 March 2021, 9:30am
2. that the dates of future Council meetings are:
 - Monday 10 May 2021, 9:30am. This is a Strategy Day and will finish at 5:30pm.
 - Monday 28 June 2021, 9:30am

The Chair concluded the meeting by thanking all members and staff who had attended the meeting, including those not presenting. Thanks were offered to all for their support at this difficult time.