

COUNCIL

Open Minutes

Of the meeting held on Tuesday, 08 October 2019 in The Room, South Wing, High Wycombe Campus.

Present: Michael Hipkins (Independent [Chair]), Irene Kirkman (Independent [Deputy Chair]), Joanna Boardman (Elected PSE representative), Nick Braisby (Vice-Chancellor), Andy Cole (Independent), Anna Crabtree (Independent), Annet Gamell (Independent), Florin Ioras (Senate Nominee), Maggie James (Independent), Tim Marshall (Co-opted), Ken McCrea (Co-opted), Anthony Murphy (Independent), Cheryl Pitt (Elected academic representative), Susan Rosser (Independent), Bob Shennan (Independent), John Smith (Independent), Supriya Sobti (Independent), Megan Staples (Student representative), Tao Warburton (Students' Union President)

In attendance: Alexandra Bode-Tunji (Director of Human Resources), Gary Boon (Intranet Manager – Item 9), Julie McLeod (Pro Vice-Chancellor: Education), Louise Harvey (Head of PR – Item 9), Matt Hiely-Rayner (Director of Strategic Planning & Change – Item 4), Rod Mercer (Director of Finance), Ellie Smith (Academic Registrar and Secretary), Marcus Wood (Minute Secretary)

Apologies: None

Welcome

19.149 The Chair welcomed members, including newly appointed members, to the meeting which would focus on strategic issues. General business items would be considered at the forthcoming business meeting.

Report of Chair's Action

19.150 It was reported that Chair's Action had been taken to approve a four-year lease agreement for premises at Pinewood Studies, to support the work of the partnership with Creative Media Solutions (CMS) at Pinewood, supported by the recent award of £1.6m in Bucks LEP funding. Council endorsed the decision.

Sector and University Update

19.151 The Vice-Chancellor updated Council members on sector issues including:

- a) An OfS review of admissions processes, and a recent announcement by the Secretary of State advocating use of the wide range of powers available to the OfS

- b) Ongoing political uncertainty including Brexit, Augar and a likely UK election.
- c) Relaxed restrictions on graduate visa approvals and measures to enable a UK-wide increase in international student numbers.
- d) Broader concerns about the global climate and declarations of a climate emergency by some providers and which may be a future topic for debate by Council.

19.152 University updates included:

- The senior appointments of: Prof. Gavin Brooks as Deputy Vice-Chancellor from January 2020 from a similar position at the University of Reading; and Dana Cameron as Director of Marketing & Student Recruitment, following previous experience with UCAS as Assistant Marketing Director.
- Ongoing partnership activities with CMS at Pinewood Studios and the development of a Health and Social Care Academy to be based at the Aylesbury Campus from April 2020.
- The University's commitments to: the Advance HE Race Equality Charter to improve the representation, progression and success of minority ethnic staff and students within higher education; and a pledge of support for Gypsy, Romany and Traveller (GRT) communities convened with Baroness Whittaker and for a meeting to be convened at the House of Lords
- Funding bid activities via the SEM LEP and as a member of the government-backed Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

19.153 An update on the latest recruitment for September 2019 indicated that overall acceptances had increased by 11% versus the previous year although a full picture had not yet been produced. Of significant note was the 33% rise in Foundation Year numbers. However, while direct applications had increased by 85%, applications via UCAS had seen a 7% decrease.

League Tables

19.154 The Director of Strategic Planning updated Council on recent league table performances by the University, including the Complete University Guide, the Good University Guide and the Sunday Times. It was noted that Bucks had risen in all three league tables although due to the underlying metrics rises were small in some instances.

19.155 The new Strategy (see further below) set an ambitious target of 80th place or better in aggregate across league tables and work was ongoing to model scenarios that would enable this to be achieved. The University had adopted a three pronged approach, including: (1) optimised reports for staff, student and financial returns; (2) the creation of a League Table Strategy Group to promote positive changes which could have an immediate impact, including a review of the current degree algorithm; and (3) cultural change across the University to ensure that any league table rise could be sustained in the longer term.

19.156 Council noted the following in discussion:

- a) Broader activities, such as the achievement of a Times Higher Education award, would not directly impact league table position but would have a positive reputational impact
- b) 80th position had been determined based on a consideration of what was realistic within a three-year timeframe, on the previous achievement by other HE providers, and to support a sustainable position

- c) Targets for the first two years had not been set due to the way league tables draw on existing sources of information. Initial targets focussed on the 2021-22 academic year.

National Student Survey (NSS) 2019 Results and Actions for 2022

19.157 The Pro Vice-Chancellor: Education updated members on the University's performance in the 2019 survey. Overall, the University had achieved a 75% response rate with more courses meeting the initial course-level NSS requirements for publication of a minimum 10 students and a 50% response rate. The University had maintained its position within the upper quartile of the survey but still had ambitions to improve.

- There was a ~1-2% drop in overall student satisfaction in comparison to the previous year, but this was set against an overall drop across the sector as a whole.
- Internally, the drop was largely accounted for by a 7% drop in satisfaction on nursing courses following significant staff turnover encountered during the academic year which had since been addressed by the School. Aviation was another area with low satisfaction levels and provision was being reviewed carefully and focus groups are intended with students
- A number of courses had achieved 90%+ satisfaction, including some with 100%.
- An NSS 'heat chart' had been produced which identified broad themes around Assessment & Feedback and Organisation & Management, as well as those courses where action was needed.
- Scores had been separated out for Partners. The largest partner had seen an increase in response rates but overall satisfaction was still low which impacted on some league table performances.

19.158 As an outcome of the survey, the University had agreed a series of 5 cross-University principles as follows:

- a) Clear communications on staff availability
- b) Prompt responses to correspondence
- c) Feedback on written work to be provided within three working weeks (or an explanation to be provided as to why this was not possible)
- d) Clear deadlines for assessment to be provided on Blackboard at the start of that unit
- e) Personalised timetables to be provided prior to the start of the academic year

19.159 The University's Education Committee would be monitoring School and Partner NSS Action Plans during the year. Specific actions had already been identified for the Directorates of Student Success and IS&T to take forward some of the principles. The NSS working group would similarly be re-established this academic year to maintain focus. Targets had been agreed for 90% satisfaction for all courses and this had been integrated within PDR KPIs.

Access and Participation Plan: OfS Decision and Conditions for Approval (COU19-28)

19.160 Council noted receipt and provisional approval by the Office for Students of its Access and Participation Plan.

19.161 The OfS had recognised the University's focus as a widening participation organisation but had added extra targets around care leavers, attainment, the progression gap for areas of deprivation, and BAME students. It was noted that in some instances, the OfS wanted Bucks to deal with gaps which had not been deemed to be statistically significant.

19.162 An impact report on progress would be due by January 2022; however, the University was currently operating under its one-year Access Plan which would be reviewed in January 2020. Meanwhile, it was expected that there would be a yearly monitoring report against the 5 year plan with reports in Jan-20 and Jan-21.

19.163 Council formally accepted the OfS's provisional decision to approve the Access and Participation Plan and asked UET to ensure that it receives timely and meaningful reports on progress against the targets given its regulatory responsibility from the OfS

Action: Vice-Chancellor

Sale of Missenden Abbey (COU19-29)

19.164 Council noted the update provided in respect of the ongoing sale of Missenden Abbey.

University Strategy: Impact 2022 (COU19-30)

19.165 Council noted the process to date and consultation across the University to develop the strategy, most recently the October meeting of Senate.

19.166 Council discussed the Strategy and noted the following aspects:

- That the Strategy will be 'versioned' for different audiences and will be supported by a three-year operational plan with deliverables in each year.
- The number and appropriateness of Aims and Priorities which had been developed by management groups within the University and a desire not to restrict ambition.
- Value for money for students is a key OfS priority but it is not clear within the sector what this meant. The Augar report references highly skilled levels rather than student perceptions of value for money, while UUK has set up a working group to review.
- That Council members themselves would be happy to receive a straightforward plan with clear Key Performance Indicators against which progress could be measured.

19.167 Council welcomed and supported the document, and in particular the key concept of 'One University', but asked for a roadmap of timelines to be prepared for its next meeting.

Action: Vice-Chancellor

Launch of the Bucks Intranet 'BEN'

19.168 Council received a preview from the Communications Team of the University's Intranet, BEN or the 'Bucks Employee Network' which would be launched on 21 October.

19.169 BEN will act as a key engagement tool for the University and help to develop the concept of 'One University' and support cross-team working. Launch of BEN would also enable Blackboard to return to its intended use as a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

19.170 It was noted that Council members would receive logins for the Intranet in due course and there will be a Council specific section where from early 2022 Council papers will be uploaded.

Date of next meeting

19.171 The next meeting would take place on Monday 18 November at 4.00pm in Room S3.02 when Council would hold its annual joint-meeting with members of Senate to review the University's Annual Monitoring processes. The meeting would be immediately followed by a Council Business meeting.