

COUNCIL (STRATEGY MEETING)

Open Minutes

Of the meeting held on Tuesday, 09 February 2021 via Microsoft Teams.

Present: Dr Michael Hipkins (Independent [Chair]); Irene Kirkman (Independent [Deputy Chair]; Emma Binnie (PSE representative); Professor Nick Braisby (Vice-Chancellor); Anna Crabtree (Independent); Annet Gamell (Independent); Tamsin Grainger (Students' Union President); John Hathaway (Senate nominee); Professor Florin Ioras (Senate nominee); Tim Marshall (Co-opted); Ken McCrea (Co-opted); Anthony Murphy (Independent); Jordan Penning (Student); Dr Cheryl Pitt (Academic representative); Karen Satterford (Co-opted); Bob Shennan (Independent); John Smith (Independent); Supriya Sobti (Independent)

In attendance: Professor Gavin Brooks (Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor); Professor Rachel Cragg (Pro Vice-Chancellor: Education and Digital); Trevor Gabriele (Director of Finance); Julie Griggs (Interim Director of Human Resources); Nicholas Roussel-Milner (Director of Information Systems and Technology – Item 2a only); Ellie Smith (University Secretary and Clerk to the Council); Dr Marcus Wood (Minute Secretary)

Apologies: Andy Cole (Independent); Dr Susan Rosser (Independent);

Welcome

21.01 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and noted two apologies for absence. As this was a strategy meeting, normal items of business would be considered at the next full meeting.

Update from the Vice-Chancellor

21.02 One item was considered under Reserved Business. The Vice-Chancellor provided a further verbal update as follows:

- a) Lord Wharton of Yarm has been appointed as the new Chair for the Office for Students. Any change in direction for the OfS resulting from this appointment would become clear in due course.
- b) The Secretary of State for Education has given direction to the OfS to use its 'full range of powers' in consideration of quality matters and the setting of minimum standards. This includes the removal of institutions from the Register of HE Providers. He has also given universities a 'final warning' to guard free speech or face legislation, advising that they should not pressure or force staff to drop specific texts and should support individual academics.
- c) The University is planning a return to campus for students in March following an anticipated loosening of the current lockdown restrictions due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. An extensive accommodation rebate has been announced. The University has also supported the opening of a vaccination centre at its Aylesbury campus for local residents.

- d) An update on senior staffing changes since the previous meeting including: The departure of Professor Elizabeth Cleaver, being replaced by Professor Rachel Cragg as Pro Vice-Chancellor: Education and Digital; the appointment of Julie Griggs as Interim Director of Human Resources replacing Alexandra Bode-Tunji; and the appointment of Richard Whan as Interim Director of Estates, Facilities and Services.

Digital Strategy

- 21.03 Council considered a presentation from the Director of Information Systems and Technology setting out the University's new Digital Strategy and providing an overview of current and future projects within the Directorate. A copy of the presentation and strategy were saved with the minutes.
- 21.04 Council welcomed the update and the following updates were noted in discussion:
- Resources were in place to support rollout of the strategy following investment in technology by the University in recent years
 - Work is aligned to the overarching education strategy and with work under the Curriculum 23 change programme. In particular this will include raising students' digital literacy to support their future employment prospects while retaining predominantly face to face delivery where appropriate
 - The University is monitoring carefully levels of digital literacy among staff to ensure the strategy can be delivered
 - The University will be 'digital by design' and is learning lessons from experiences of other institutions
 - The University is responding to concerns about student digital poverty and in particular is working with the Library to ensure there are sufficient learning spaces for students to work individually or collaboratively

Racial harassment in higher education

- 21.05 The Interim Director of Human Resources updated Council members on the findings from a UUK report on measures to tackle racial harassment in higher education. 25% of students have experienced some form of racial harassment while at university leading to mental health issues generally. Although the number of incidents of reported racial harassment at Bucks are low the University was taking the report seriously.
- 21.06 Council noted actions ongoing to build and promote a culture of inclusion at Bucks, including: the formation of a BAME staff network; a formal proposal for a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee to be considered by the Governance Committee at its next meeting; and ongoing work, including a survey of staff, to support an application for Advance HE's Race Equality Charter.
- 21.07 A copy of the presentation was saved with the minutes.

Sector Updates

- 21.08 Council received an update on the following areas:
- **Sector consultations by the OfS, Department of Education, and UUK since January 2021.** Attention was drawn to a more risk-based approach being adopted by the OfS for reportable events and the availability of further guidance on what and how to report.

- **An OfS review of universities' compliance with consumer law**, including how governing bodies receive assurance of ongoing compliance with ongoing condition C1 (guidance on consumer protection law). Evidence is being collated to inform a report to Council in April, which may subsequently be provided to the OfS. The University is in a good position to respond and no significant compliance risks can be anticipated.
- **Tuition grant funding 2021-22**. Although there are significant reductions in headline funding for some areas, in the context of some concerning comments from the Secretary of State in respect of media studies programmes, closer analysis has shown changes in parameters which when modelled are income neutral / slightly favourable to the University. Capital funding distribution is also changing to a bidding rather than a formula process.
- **A Government response to the independent review of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF)**. The response broadly agrees with the changes proposed, which included a change to the name and ratings system used, but has recommended against the introduction of subject-level TEF. The timeframe for the new framework is September 2022. Work will be undertaken internally to gather evidence for a submission.
- **Ongoing sector discussions around the 'unit of resource' for funding of higher education**. This suggested reform of the teaching grant formula to enable resources to be strategically targeted. Any funding settlement would need to recognise an uplift in research funding.
- The Government has indicated that it is **not the right time to conclude in full the Augar review**, which included recommendations for minimum entry thresholds for study, student number controls and withdrawal of funding for Foundation Year students. A consultation is planned instead for the Spring to conclude in the summer in advance of the public spending review.
- Publication of the recent **Skills for Jobs White Paper**, dubbed the FE White Paper, which could encourage closer engagement between HE and FE providers

21.09 A copy of the presentation was saved with the minutes.

Date of next meeting

21.10 The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 13 April 2021 where business items would be considered.