

COUNCIL (STRATEGY MEETING)

Open Minutes

Of the meeting held on Tuesday, 06 October 2020 via Microsoft Teams.

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

In attendance: Professor Gavin Brooks (Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor); Dana Cameron (Director of Marketing and Student Recruitment (Item 6 only); Professor Elizabeth Cleaver (Pro Vice-Chancellor: Education and Digital); Dr Rachel Cragg (Pro Vice-Chancellor: External Engagement); Trevor Gabriele (Director of Finance); Matt Hiely-Rayner (Director of Strategic Planning and Change [Item 5 only]); Ellie Smith (Academic Registrar and Secretary); Dr Marcus Wood (Minute Secretary)

Apologies: Alexandra Bode-Tunji (Director of Human Resources)

Welcome

20.159 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. In particular, he introduced Karen Satterford, Emma Binnie and Jordan Penning as new members to the Council, and Professor Florin Ioras who had been renominated to Council by Senate.

20.160 The Chair further congratulated Dr Rachel Cragg on her permanent appointment with the University as Pro Vice-Chancellor (External Engagement).

Declaration of conflicts of interest

20.161 No conflicts were declared.

Resumption Arrangements

20.162 Council considered a presentation from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor summarising the University's governance arrangements following the coronavirus pandemic, as well

as planning for resumption of on campus activities and key deliverables to date. The University is actively using its membership of UUK and other mission groups, key contacts within other HEIs, as well as regular advice and guidance from the Department for Education to manage and direct its response. Council also noted recent developments including planned use of the High Wycombe campus as a regional Covid-19 test centre which underpinned the University's role as a key community partner.

- 20.163 It was reported that the University had, to date, a very small number of staff and students testing positive for the coronavirus; however, this was not comparable to the wider sector picture of spikes in positive cases as students returned to campuses. Council received assurance that the University was supporting both staff and students and continued to emphasise key safety messages in weekly communications. Most staff and students were following safety guidelines and legal restrictions and a process had been agreed to manage infractions. Scenario planning had been undertaken to manage any large outbreak of infections in the University's halls of residence.
- 20.164 Budgetary impacts of resumption arrangements were also discussed, and Council was assured that levels of expenditure were being carefully monitored - while prioritising the University's duty of care to staff, students and the local community. While there had been an adverse impact on some recruitment activities due to Covid-19, overall occupancy levels in halls of residence had increased following the University's revised accommodation offer.
- 20.165 Council also discussed post Covid-19 arrangements and noted University initiatives to support some activities in the longer term. This included the University's approach to agile learning which had been well received by many members of staff. While teaching would predominantly remain face to face, the University would ensure that digital learning remained an important part of future curriculum development.
- 20.166 Finally, Council welcomed an update on Students' Union activities following resumption, where activities were continuing under the guidelines to provide a positive experience for students.
- 20.167 Council commended the extensive arrangements and thanked all staff involved.

Data HE - Interim conclusions

- 20.168 Council considered a presentation from the Director of Strategic Planning and Change summarising interim conclusions from a review of the University undertaken by DataHE.
- 20.169 This noted a sector-wide change in the student demographic since 2010 and a 36% market growth since 2006. During the same period, however, the University's market share had contracted from 0.42% to 0.25% where it had stabilized since 2017. A review of the University's entry profiles had also shown a disconnect with the profile locally despite a very diverse demographic. Finally, a review of conversion activities had shown that the University was offering lower entry requirements than students' predicted grades and was disincentivizing applicants from putting the University as

their first choice. DataHE had recommended that the University should raise its entry tariff and offer in a tariff range.

- 20.170 The Vice-Chancellor identified the need for a future discussion with Council over the impact of raising the University's entry profile against its mission statement to widen participation; although he did not consider this to be incompatible as it was meeting the aspirations of potential learners.

Brand refresh

- 20.171 The Director of Marketing & Student Recruitment provided Council with an overview of the University's new branding refresh and unveiling of its logo. Work had been undertaken entirely in-house to develop a new brand identity that matched the University's values. It was intended to launch the brand in January 2021 with some further work required. Council warmly welcomed the work undertaken and congratulated those involved.

Student Support Arrangements: Survive and Thrive initiative on student mental health

- 20.172 Council received a presentation from the Head of Students and Wellbeing about 'Survive and Thrive' an initiative to help students at the outset of their studies and ensure that they receive the support they need. The initiative had been referenced in a recent speech to Universities UK members by the Higher Education Minister thanking them for their innovation and looking forward to the academic year.

Any Other Business

- 20.173 Consideration of one item of reserved business was deferred to a subsequent meeting due to the meeting overrunning.

Date of next meeting

- 20.174 The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 23 November 2020. The main item would be approval of the University's audited accounts, alongside other items of business arising from Council sub-committees.