



COUNCIL (STRATEGY MEETING)

Open Minutes

Of the meeting held on Tuesday, 05 October 2021 at Missenden Abbey.

Present: Maggie Galliers (Independent [Chair]); Irene Kirkman (Independent [Deputy Chair]); Professor Nick Braisby (Vice-Chancellor); Emma Binnie (PSE Representative); Anna Crabtree (Independent); Emily Crawshaw (Student); Honor Fletcher (Students' Union President); Annet Gamell (Independent); Sadie Groom (Independent); Anthony Murphy (Independent); Ze'ev Portner (Academic Representative); Dr Susan Rosser (Independent); Karen Satterford (Independent); John Smith (Independent); Supriya Sobti (Independent); Jackie Westaway (Independent)

In attendance: Professor Gavin Brooks (Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor); Professor Rachel Cragg (Pro Vice-Chancellor: Education and Digital); Ian Harper (Director of Commercial and Business Development); Ellie Smith (University Secretary and Clerk to the Council); Dr Marcus Wood (Minute Secretary)

Apologies: Andy Cole (Independent); Professor Florin Ioras (Senate Representative); Trevor Gabriele (Director of Finance); Bob Shennan (Independent)

Welcome and Chair's Introduction

21.129 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and expressed her thanks to the University and Council for her recent appointment to the Council as Chair. Warm welcomes were also extended to Emily Crawshaw, Sadie Groom, Ze'ev Portner, and Jackie Westaway who were also attending their first Council meeting.

21.130 The Chair drew attention to the recent return to Campus for students following the removal of restrictions during the summer, the well-run Freshers Fair for new students, and the successful graduation events held to celebrate the achievements of students who completed their studies during 2019/20. Graduates of the 2021 cohort would attend graduation events during the week commencing 18 October 2021 and members were encouraged to attend if possible.

21.131 The Chair also noted the regular catchups with UET members where members had received a positive picture of both recruitment numbers and the University's financial position.

Declaration of conflicts of interest

21.132 No conflicts were declared.

Update from the Vice-Chancellor

21.133 The Vice-Chancellor updated Council members on recent activities:

- Student recruitment was reported to be encouraging within a challenging market. The situation was complicated by the Government's decision to make changes to A-level exams which had led a number of students across the sector to defer decisions on where to study. The University had exceeded its budget target for recruitment and was approaching its growth target, with over a week left until enrolments closed. So it was possible the University could still meet this stretch goal.
- The outturn for 2020/21 had exceeded expectations, although this highlighted that accurate forecasting remained a challenge. This was complicated by the University's long recruitment cycle which included mid-year intakes and apprenticeship programmes (where apprentices are recruited through the year).
- Part-time and postgraduate recruitment were also reported to be strong, while international recruitment had trebled, albeit from a low base. Recruitment from the EU was 30% down but still compared favourably against a sector-wide 40% reduction.

University Strategy 2022 onwards

21.134 Council received a presentation from the Vice-Chancellor outlining plans to start working on the new strategic plan once the current Impact 22 strategy ends. The developing strategy would be further discussed at the February Council Strategy meeting and in committees for approval by Council in July 2023 ahead of launch in Autumn 2023.

21.135 Initial proposals for the new strategy suggested that the University should:

- Build on Impact 22 rather than see a change in overall direction
- Continue to expand the University although emphasis would shift to quality and geographical reach
- Retain focus on vocational and technical skills in line with the University's mission, including enterprise and knowledge exchange activities
- Extend the academic portfolio, particularly to include more STEM (Science, technology, engineering and mathematics) courses
- Be developed against an uncertain political situation with key announcements on Foundation Years, tuition fee caps, entry tariffs to HE programmes and government concern over perceived 'poor quality courses' anticipated alongside the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review where HE funding would not be prioritised.

21.136 Council discussed the emerging strategy and noted the following considerations:

- Generation Z and Generation Alpha applicants would be more values driven and less likely to demonstrate 'brand loyalty'. Work-life balance and environmental sustainability would be important considerations
- Concern about potential dissonance between being aspirational and picking up those 'left behind'. Widening participation may need to have a more international dimension, covering areas of deprivation globally
- Applicants should be able to demonstrate their suitability for higher education beyond exam grades with other forms of attainment considered

- The curriculum of the University should offer a ‘climbing frame of opportunity’ rather than a simple ‘ladder of progression’
- A breadth of applicants into higher education should be embraced
- The University should be a true anchor for the region and should focus on its local and national reputation
- The academic portfolio should expand beyond the current limited ‘footprint’ reviewing options in areas currently unavailable (medicine, veterinary, dentistry and English provision) and using international market opportunities especially in business
- Postgraduate and research provision should be important considerations for branding the quality of the overall academic offering

21.137 Council further noted the need for extensive consultation on the strategy, especially with students.

Estates Developments: The heart of the High Wycombe campus

21.138 The Vice-Chancellor unveiled plans to redevelop the High Wycombe campus to provide a ‘heart’ by developing a social learning place in the main building and Rose Garden spaces. Plans would include a café, refectory, and exhibition space, as well as space for students to engage with student services and other facilities. Such spaces were important considerations for applicants and would deliver overall return on the ~£9.3m investment. Consultants had been engaged and Council reviewed preliminary visuals and initial costings produced to develop the campus over a three-year period although it might be possible to significantly shorten this timeframe.

21.139 Council welcomed the plans but noted the need for further assurance on the environmental impact of proposals, how changes would be visible externally (especially from the Flyover), as well as the need for more consideration of how plans would impact on the wider estates plan and in particular the Uxbridge and Aylesbury campuses.

21.140 Plans should be formalised as part of a wider Estates Plan, while the proposal should be presented to Resources Committee for the affordability aspects to be scrutinised.

Action: Director of Finance

21.141 The Governance Committee should also consider whether a co-option should be used to bring planning / property development expertise on to Council.

Action: Chair of Governance Committee / University Secretary

Apprenticeships Update

21.142 The Director of Commercial and Business Development updated Council on recent developments with apprenticeship programmes and other Ofsted-regulated provision. It was emphasised that apprenticeships are an important, strategic aspect of the University’s mission and the University had 762 apprentices registered on 14 programmes and had just enrolled a further 250 of the 500 expected in the coming academic year. A major new contract had also recently been won by the University following a tendering process.

21.143 Council members would receive assurance via a Self-Assessment Report (SAR) prepared annually and submitted to the Education Committee. This would also lead to a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) being prepared. Regular updates on provision would be further provided via Education Committee and through the Quality and

Standards report submitted to Council as part of the Annual Monitoring process. See further below.

- 21.144 Attention was drawn to an anticipated upcoming review of provision by Ofsted and plans in place to manage such inspections (which were typically conducted at short notice). A 'mock inspection' had been conducted in August which had given overall assurance and highlighted in particular the important role played by Apprenticeship Partner Managers (APMs) in supporting programmes. Some areas had also been identified for further work, including the monitoring of attendance and observation of learning and actions had been developed to strengthen these areas. It was noted that the Chair and Deputy Chair would meet with Ofsted as representatives of Council as the governing body during a future review visit.

Joint Senate / Council and assurance over quality and standards

- 21.145 The University Secretary updated Council on feedback received through the Governance and Effectiveness Review which indicated that the current Joint Senate / Council meeting was not widely considered to be effective. The intention of the meeting had been to provide Council with assurance over quality and standards of provision at the University, especially compliance over the 'B' conditions of registration. It was proposed instead to remove the joint meeting and replace it with transparency over the reporting of quality and standards issues through Audit and Student Experience Committees throughout the year with annual reporting to Council. This would enable ongoing assurance of standards rather than focus on an annual event.
- 21.146 Council considered and broadly welcomed the proposal but noted the need for greater time to be spent reviewing minutes received in relation to dependancies. Issues should also be drawn out from minutes to map to the relevant Condition of Registration via an updated paper cover sheet. Subject to these comments, Council agreed to remove the planned Joint Senate-Council meeting and update members of Senate accordingly.

Action: University Secretary and Clerk to the Council

- 21.147 Council also asked for greater transparency on the reporting of partnership activity. It was noted that the University Partnerships Board reports to the Education Committee, but arrangements would be reviewed. Council also asked for greater consideration of the environmental impact of the University's partners and whether they sign up to the University's standards. It was agreed that this should be built into the Partnerships Report completed as part of Annual Monitoring.

Action: Pro Vice-Chancellor: Education and Digital (Chair of University Partnerships Board)

Date of next meeting

- 21.148 The date of the next meeting was confirmed for 23 November where business items would be considered. The meeting would take place in person in G5.05 at the High Wycombe with support for members to attend virtually if needed.