UNIVERSITY COUNCIL
19 March 2020

UNCONFIRMED MINUTES

Author: Alison Jones, University Secretary, 20 March 2020

Present: Mr Jonathan Thornton (Chair), Professor Bob Cryan, Professor Tim Thornton

Via audio conference: Bernard Ainsworth, Robert Cox, Mr Rhys Davies, Mark Fisher, Emmanuel Haruna, Professor Jill Johnes, Tonya Magennis, Baroness Kathryn Pinnock, Richard Quayle, Helen Thomson

In attendance: Alison Jones (via audio-conference), Andrew McConnell, Tracey Taylor

Apologies: Virginia Lloyd, Professor Isobel Pollock-Hulf

PRELIMINARY ITEMS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting that the majority of participants were joining remotely via audio conference facilities in view of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak. All members had agreed to this approach given the exceptional circumstances and it was noted that, should the next meeting need to be held remotely, this would be done by video conferencing which was currently being tested for meetings involving a large number of attendees.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1.1 There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES

2.1 Resolved: that the minutes and confidential supplement of the meeting held on 27 November 2019 be accepted as a correct record. The notes from the Strategy Session on 13 February 2020 were also received.

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 There were no matters arising.

4. CHAIR’S BUSINESS

4.1 The Chair had no specific items to raise.

5. VICE-CHANCELLOR’S BUSINESS

5.1 Coronavirus: the Vice-Chancellor briefed members on the University’s business continuity plans in respect of the Covid-19 pandemic, noting that the University had submitted a report to the Office for Students (OfS) on Coronavirus activity at the end of last week. It was reported that, following the Government’s announcement on 16 March 2020, students and vulnerable staff had been encouraged to study/work from home. As of 18 March 2020, all teaching had moved to online delivery and those members of staff who were capable of working from home had been
advised to do so, as appropriate. The University was currently focussing on processes to facilitate online assessments. On a related note, the decision had been taken to cancel the July graduation ceremonies and the intention to reschedule the ceremonies as soon as it was safe to do so was noted. Council expressed their gratitude to University staff for their extraordinary efforts in responding to the recent challenges and to ensure students were inconvenienced as little as possible. The opportunity to learn from this experience in informing the future teaching dynamic at the University was mooted.

5.2 In response to a query relating to the impact on September 2020 entry, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor confirmed that a statement had been issued earlier that day to the effect that applicants would not be disadvantaged by the impact of Covid-19 and that any recruitment decisions made would be consistent with the University’s brand.

5.3 **UCU strike action:** the Vice-Chancellor highlighted that the overall effect of industrial action taken between 24 February and 13 March 2020 was minimal across the University. It was noted that an accelerated complaints scheme was open to students, though actions to mitigate any disruption were still underway.

5.4 The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that discussions* continued to take place regarding plans to boost overseas recruitment.

5.5 The Chair highlighted that the usual University News presentation from the Vice-Chancellor had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting.

6. **UNIVERSITY SECRETARY’S BUSINESS**

6.1 Members noted reports and comments from the University Secretary on the following matters:

- the University’s response to the consultation on the new CUC Code of HE Governance;
- matters related to the Office for Students (OfS) including the twenty-five publications (representing guidance, information requests, funding notifications and consultations) since the previous Council meeting; and
- The clean report from the biennial Audit Committee Effectiveness Review.

**INSPIRING**

7. **NEW UNIVERSITY CHANCELLOR**

7.1 The Vice-Chancellor expressed his appreciation to the HSU for coordinating the 457 nominations for Chancellor (representing 131 individuals). Members observed that, at its meeting on 13 February 2020, the Governance and Membership Committee considered all 131 nominees particularly in terms of their profile, connectivity and availability. Further deliberations, including a review of the Committee members’ individual shortlists, the combined top ten from the Executive and the HSU shortlist, resulted in the Committee’s recommendation for the role of University Chancellor. The Vice-Chancellor outlined the
nominee’s background and details of their historic association with the University.

7.2 Council resolved unanimously to approve the appointment of the new Chancellor for an initial 5-year term of office with effect from 19 March 2020. Members were asked to keep the name of the Chancellor confidential pending an announcement on the rescheduled award ceremonies. It was agreed that the Vice-Chancellor and SU President would draft a form of the words regarding the appointment for the Chair of Council to review.

8. MID-TERM REPORT ON ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE

8.1 Members noted the mid-term report on academic governance from the period September 2019 to March 2020, key aspects of which included:

- the overall assessment that the University’s quality procedures for taught and research students were operating effectively to maintain standards and to assure and enhance the quality of its provision; and
- the following focus areas:
  - improving standards for postgraduate research students to ensure all aspects of the Quality Code are fully met over the next 12 months;
  - managing the balance between agility/flexibility and the risk associated with collaborative provision; and
  - business continuity planning in light of major disruptions.

9. DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT

9.1 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor briefed members on the proposal from the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) that HE providers should publish a Degree Outcomes Statement detailing their degree classification profile and the outcome of an internal review to ensure compliance with the UKSCQA’s expectations and the OfS ongoing conditions of registration on academic standards. Members considered the Statement,

[Redacted text]

as supported by its consistent investment in Gold-standard teaching and learning, a response to which remained outstanding.

Council resolved to approve the Statement, as recommended by Senate.

10. STUDENTS’ UNION (HSU) REPORT

10.1 The Chair thanked the HSU Officer Team for their report on developments since the last Council meeting.

The Chief Executive of the Students’ Union joined the meeting by audio-conference for the following item.
11. STUDENTS’ UNION CONSTITUTION

11.1 Members were updated on the proposal to change the charitable status of the HSU to a company limited by guarantee, noting that further work was required on two elements – the role of the University Trustee and the changing dynamic of the decision-making structures in relation to referenda student panels and general meetings. It was reported that the Governance and Membership Committee, the Council-delegated sub-committee and the Vice-Chancellor were content with the proposal and that a number of students’ unions were following this approach, which was considered best practice. In response to a member’s suggestion that the newly constituted HSU may not continue to benefit from software licences at an educational rate, the Chief Executive confirmed that they would look into any potential issues.

11.2 Council resolved to approve the proposal in principle, subject to clarification on the two outstanding matters and noted that the revised Constitution would be presented at the July 2020 Council meeting.

The Chief Executive of the Students’ Union left the meeting.

INNOVATIVE

12. RESEARCH MATTERS

12.1 Members received a detailed report from the Pro Vice-Chancellor of Research and Enterprise on the Knowledge Exchange Framework which aimed to increase efficiency and effectiveness in the use of public funding for knowledge exchange.

12.2 An update report on the University’s preparations for the final Research Excellence Framework (REF) submission in November 2020 was noted.

INTERNATIONAL

13. INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE TABLES

13.1 Council received a paper on the University’s steady progress in the two main international league tables – the Times World University Rankings and the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World Subject Rankings – together with actions being taken to engender further progress, particularly in relation to the international research metrics and reputation KPIs.

GROWTH AND EFFICIENCY

14. APPLICATIONS, ENROLMENTS AND RETENTION

14.1 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor reported that the recently published HESA performance indicators for continuation showed that the University was further ahead of benchmark. When considering the latest retention data, which showed a reduction in withdrawals and suspensions in the current academic year, despite the overall number of first year undergraduate students being 1.5% higher than last year, the University’s performance should continue on upward trajectory.

14.2 Members observed that, as at 9 March 2020, applications were slightly ahead of the previous year, however, firm acceptances were significantly behind. The trend towards delayed decision-making by applicants meant
that an increased number were still holding offers. In view of the current challenges presented by Covid-19, all efforts were being made to reassure applicants, including virtual Open and Applicant Visit Days. Members agreed that an opportunity existed for the University if it could demonstrate sufficient agility to establish a virtual offering and it was reported that work in this area was already underway, for example, the Huddersfield Business School was developing online tutorials for schools and colleges.

14.3 The increasing uncertainty of overseas recruitment for September 2020 was noted and though applications were positive at present, members were reminded that initial planning for a shortfall had been provided for in the financial forecast.

The Director and Assistant Director of Estates and Facilities joined the meeting by audio-conference.

15. ESTATES MATTERS

15.1 The Director of Estates and Facilities updated members on a range of estates projects, including:

- **Percy Shaw Building (formerly Queen Street Studios)** – the Committee was updated on progress with the refurbishment works.*
- **Relocation of the Faith Centre** – the amended design was being costed and would be brought back to a future meeting for consideration;
- **Technology Building** – noted the Estates and Finance Committee’s approval of works to the façade of the building at a cost of £1m. In response to a member’s suggestion that the Faith Centre should take priority over these works, the Vice-Chancellor confirmed that provision for this had already been made as part of the £7m included in the previously approved Capital Plan and that the delay in the design of the Faith Centre was attributable to it being a listed building in close proximity to the canal.*

15.2 Council was briefed on alternative options for accommodating growth in the School of Human and Health Sciences in view of the significant cost of remodelling the Harold Wilson, Ramsden and Richard Steinitz buildings* Members considered the pros and cons of each option, noting that the remodelling option meant the School’s provision would be spread across campus.* The Deputy Vice-Chancellor noted significant growth in undergraduate numbers in the School since 2017, together with its strong research profile and partnerships with local and regional NHS bodies.* The Director of Estates and Facilities assured Council that there was sufficient space on campus to accommodate the School’s growth for the next two academic years.

15.3 Following questions from members, the Director of Finance presented the affordability aspects, noting that whilst the University’s forecast surplus was slightly below target and potential losses in the investment portfolio due to the current position with the stock market could be realised, the University still operated from a position of financial strength with zero borrowings and sufficient cash reserves to fund the proposed scheme. Subject to collection of the last instalment of tuition fee income from the Student Loan Company, the vast majority of income for the year had been
collected at this point. It was noted that the next critical milestone would be September 2020 enrolments and more detailed information on this would be available by the next meeting.

15.4 In line with the Estates and Finance Committee’s recommendation, Council resolved to approve in principle that the University draft Heads of Terms for the agreed site, and to delegate authority to the Estates and Finance Committee to progress the acquisition*. Should the acquisition be successful, proposals for the new build would come back to Council for approval at a later stage.

16. IT PROJECT EXPENDITURE

16.1 Members were briefed on a proposal from the IT Strategy Group to migrate the University’s infrastructure services to a cloud-based solution, to improve resilience and security, as recommended by the Estates and Finance Committee and the Senior Leadership Team. The proposed expenditure of £13.9m over a 10-year period for the Data Centre II project was provided for within the Digital Strategy, as approved by University Council at its meeting on 4 July 2019 (but would result in some revenue-based expenditure as well as capital investment). Members considered the rationale behind the recommended option, including pros and cons, the investment profile and key risks, noting that significant costs would be involved simply to maintain the University’s current backup data centre. Council also noted that the move to the cloud presented a reliable, modern solution which would provide an agile platform in response to the changing environment. The opportunity to exploit new technology and engage more strategically with Microsoft who were keen to partner with innovative universities was also mooted.

16.2 Following assurance from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor that an appropriate exit strategy would be developed, Council resolved to approve the Data Centre II project.

16.3 The Chair noted that the Director of Estates and Facilities would be retiring at the end of March and, on behalf of members, congratulated him on his excellent legacy for the University and the region which was testament to his many years of outstanding service.

The Director and Assistant Director of Estates and Facilities left the meeting.

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

17. RISK MANAGEMENT

17.1 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor presented the revised Risk Register, following a detailed review of the local risk registers for all Schools and Services. Members considered the single revision to rebalance risk in the Inspiring section of the Register (due to improved performance in continuation) and the inclusion of a helpful key to better explain the rationale behind the likelihood and impact scores, following which they resolved to recommend the Risk Register, as recommended by the Audit Committee.

18. REGISTER OF DONATIONS

18.1 The updated Register of Donations was noted.
19. FINANCIAL REPORT

19.1 Council received the latest management accounts which were unchanged from those presented to Council in February, with the exception of a slight uplift in the forecast pension adjustment for the year. It was observed that the pay and non-pay savings necessary to balance the budget had not yet been achieved which, assuming the worst-case scenario for the remainder of the year, would negatively impact on the overall surplus.

GROWTH AND EFFICIENCY

20. HUMAN RESOURCES MONITORING REPORT

20.1 The Chair highlighted that the Human Resources Monitoring Report would be presented at the July 2020 meeting to coincide with the timing of the annual report from the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

21. HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT

21.1 Council received an update on health and safety matters since the previous meeting, particularly:

- progress with the review of fire safety management in response to correspondence from the DoE, including the engagement of an external consultant to provide independent challenge, approval of the updated fire safety policy, additional fire safety training and work on fire safety arrangements and enhanced audit reporting. It was reported that the University was committed to report back to the DoE by 31 March 2020;
- completion rates for mandatory online health and safety training; and
- a summary of recent RIDDOR reportable incidents.

OTHER COUNCIL MATTERS:

22. COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

22.1 Council resolved to approve the re-appointment of Mrs Virginia Lloyd as an external Council member for a further term of 3 years with effect from 1 August 2020.*

23. COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETING SCHEDULE

23.1 Council received the meeting schedules for the 2020/21 and 2021/22 academic years.

24. COMMITTEE MINUTES

24.1 The minutes of the following meetings were noted:

Audit Committee, 30 January and 5 March 2020
Estates & Finance Committee, 6 March 2020
Governance & Membership Committee, 13 February 2020
Summary of the Senate minutes, 11 March 2020

The Chair of the Audit Committee highlighted the useful presentations on succession planning, the wellbeing of academic staff and the University’s approach to business continuity and emergency planning at the above Audit meetings.
25. UNIVERSITY SEAL

25.1 The application of the seal since the last meeting was noted.

OTHER BUSINESS

26. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

26.1 There was no other business.

27. AVAILABILITY OF AGENDA, PAPERS AND MINUTES

27.1 Resolved: to exclude the following papers from the open version under Standing order 11.8.

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28. DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETINGS

Thursday 2 July 2020, 13.00 (venue tbc).

(* = Further details in the Confidential Supplement to these minutes, excluded under Standing Order 11.8)