

**MINUTES OF THE UNIVERSITY COUNCIL MEETING
HELD ON TUESDAY 17TH MARCH 2020**

Present: Canon Dr J. Turnbull (*President*), Mrs C. Bond, Dr D. Briggs, Sir Neil Cossons, Associate Prof. M. Degg, Professor C. Forsdick, Mr N. Jenkins, Ms E. Lewis (*SU President*), Mr G. Reay, Dr A. Seeney, Professor E. Simmons, Dr L. Smith, Associate Prof G. Southall, Professor A. Sutton and Mrs S. Verity.

Apologies for absence were received from:

Mr F. Ball, Prof. M. Clinton, Dr M. David, Mr I. Davies, Mrs J. France-Hayhurst, Ms K. Howell, The Rt Revd K. Sinclair and The Very Revd Dr T. Stratford.

In attendance: Mr A. Lee (*University Secretary*), Professor C. Haslam (*Senior PVC, Recruitment, Quality & Student Experience*), Mr R. Waddington (*Chief Financial Officer & Bursar*) and Mr A.J. Parker (*Committee Secretary*).

Note: Due to the Coronavirus pandemic external members of the University Council joined the meeting via Microsoft Teams, except for the President who was present in person.

	ACTION
<p>3193 DECLARATION OF INTEREST No interests were declared.</p>	
<p>3194 ATTENDANCE AND MEMBERSHIP The Vice-Chancellor was welcomed to her first meeting of the University Council.</p>	
<p>3195 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE UNIVERSITY COUNCIL The Minutes of the meeting of the University Council held on Tuesday 19th November 2019 were received and approved.</p>	
<p>3196 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES 3176 Vice-Chancellor’s Report: it was noted that any matters arising from the November 2019 meeting would be addressed in the Vice-Chancellor’s Report to this meeting (<i>see minute 3197</i>). 3179 Nominations & Governance Review Committee – Capital Programmes Sub-Committee: input from the Vice-Chancellor on the possible establishment of a capital programmes sub-committee would be sought in due course.</p>	

3197 VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT

The Vice-Chancellor's Report was received and discussed, focussing on the following matters:

(a) **Coronavirus**: A Cross-University Task Group had been established to determine the University's response. Microsoft Teams was being used to share documents and protocols to ensure centralisation of communications. Current measures included:

- staff travel overseas had been cancelled until the end of the academic year;
- student travel was permitted only for level 5 students where an updated risk assessment had taken full account of the virus and the student did not return to the University at the end of their placement;
- all face to face teaching would cease at the end of the day;
- academic staff developing online course delivery wherever possible;
- alternative assessment arrangements were also being developed.

There would be a significant cost to the University, including for commercial income forgone and some reimbursement cost to students who had paid for trips which the University had cancelled.

The University had repatriated some students studying in China and alternative study opportunities arranged. The Riverside campus may be used by the NHS to assist with training needs and final year nurses could also be asked to assist the NHS. It was noted that the situation was changing rapidly and the University was responding to Government and Public Health England guidance.

The University Council thanked the Vice-Chancellor for her update and acknowledged the challenging times in which the University and nation found itself.

(b) **Student Numbers**

- (i) **Retention** – Data at 6th March 2020 indicated 141 withdrawals and 109 interruptions to study from a population of 8830 undergraduate students. Withdrawals were predominantly at Level 4 and interruptions were evenly spread across all years. The main reason for withdrawal was attributed to 'personal reasons' and whilst the University's data did not lie outside sector averages, each Faculty had been asked to identify retention trends and proposed solutions. Additional support would also be offered ahead of the summer reassessment period.

- (ii) Student Recruitment 2020/21 – Undergraduate UCAS applications were currently 8% down on 2019 and 18% down on 2018. An external consultant had been engaged to work with Marketing, Recruitment and Admissions (MRA) to improve this position, including by activating a new Clearing Campaign, targeting 450 students. A new Transfer to Chester Campaign would also be launched after Easter.

International recruitment was an area of potential growth with 600 students recruited in 2019/20, exceeding the target of 430. Applications for 2020/21 were also currently strong, although the effect of the Coronavirus was presently unknown.

Postgraduate applications had increased by 30% compared to the previous year. Offers had increased by 48% and, most importantly, acceptances had increased by 35%. The main increases were within the Faculties of Medicine and Life Sciences and Social Science. Additional part-time numbers, postgraduate students and degree apprentices would continue to be sought during the remainder of this academic year to address the overall shortfall.

- (c) **Rationalisation of Provision:** An exercise had been undertaken with the Deans' Group and Registrar to reduce the number of options in the Combined Honours programme. Analysis showed that of 190 options and 1700 applications, some 90 options elicited only 287 applications. The majority of these would be removed from the 2020 recruitment cycle, potentially losing some 30 students, although this was considered an acceptable risk due to the resulting timetable improvements and reduction in administration. A negative impact on languages provision, often a component of a joint programme, was noted and the Faculty of Arts and Humanities would seek to develop a University language programme to provide credit bearing and non-credit bearing courses to a wider range of students.

At University Centre Shrewsbury, Single Honours in English and in History would potentially close to new entrants in 2020 pending discussion with offer holders. At Warrington, the March nursing intake would be deferred to September to coincide with the introduction of the new bursary scheme. Two sports coaching courses at Warrington had also been withdrawn. The CABAN partnership with Bangor for teacher training would cease in 2021 and partnership provision generally would be reviewed.

- (d) **Staffing:** Academic staff:student ratios had been updated and shared with the Deans' Group to inform decision making. Currently most ratios indicated more generous staffing than elsewhere in the sector. Small group sizes were a factor in some cases and areas for potential savings or redeployment were being identified. Other staffing matters were being reviewed during the course of the Business Planning meetings, with SMT continuing to scrutinise any requests for additional staffing.

3197 VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT (CONTINUED)

(e) **Student Satisfaction:** The National Student Survey (NSS) 2020 launched in January and would remain open until April. The Chester Students' Union (CSU) continued to promote the campaign through social media. To date participation was 7% greater than at the same point last year. The CSU had completed its feedback from the "Dear VC" campaign and a joint University and CSU Executive Group would monitor the implementation of the resultant action plan. Action areas ranged from accommodation, catering and social space to course assessments and tutor support.

MRA and the International Centre supported the collection of on-campus student reviews for the "What Uni" awards and the number achieved far exceeded last year. As a consequence, the University has been shortlisted for a national award.

The University Council was pleased to note that Eleanor Lewis had been re-elected as CSU President for a second term.

(f) **Estates Matters:** Were covered separately, see minute 3198 (b), (c) and (d).

3198 MAJOR INITIATIVES

(a) Medicine

Professor Haslam presented and reported that the new Executive Dean of Medicine, Professor John Alcolado, would take up post from 1st May 2020. Professor Alcolado had reviewed the University's previous application for funded Medicine places and had identified areas to strengthen a future application. At present there was no clear indication from government as to likely timescales associated with a second round of publicly funded medical places, although speculation indicated late summer/early autumn.

Discussions continued with local NHS Trusts to finalise placement agreements and with regional interest groups. Negotiations also continued with the proposed sponsoring institution, especially in relation to contract length and price. Other options were also being explored and it was envisaged that a recommendation would be made to the University Council at its July meeting.

The Vice-Chancellor also reported that she had initiated the scoping of a philanthropic campaign to support the construction of a new, purpose-built University of Chester Medical School building. The campaign would be supported by the University's Development and Alumni Relations Office but will target donors beyond alumni.

3198 MAJOR INITIATIVES (CONTINUED)

(b) University Centre Shrewsbury

Professor Sutton presented and provided an update on developments at University Centre Shrewsbury (UCS). Further work was required on the draft Partnership Agreement proposed by Shropshire Council before it could be finalised and the Vice-Chancellor had, therefore, arranged to meet the Acting CEO, Mr Andy Bagley, the previously CEO having recently left post. In addition to the Partnership Agreement, a re-negotiation of the lease of the Guildhall would be required, the current lease expiring on 29th June 2022.

The current headcount at UCS was 464, 66% of which came from within a 20-mile radius. Increasing recruitment was the key priority and targeted marketing activity in the Midlands would be undertaken. Student number data were noted and future data would include ethnicity. Changes to the curriculum portfolio aimed to attract more traditional and non-traditional students, together with developments in in-service professional and vocational learning and training. UCS was well-positioned to support the sustainability agenda and the feasibility of embedding sustainability and digital skills across the curriculum would be explored.

The first cohort of Social Work apprentices started in January 2020 and following a recent successful visit from the Nursing & Midwifery Council it was envisaged that undergraduate nursing provision would be offered from September 2020. Retention and outcomes data were good, together with high levels of graduate employability.

The University Council welcomed the detailed update and acknowledged that in order for UCS to become financially viable student numbers need to increase to some 500 FTE.

(c) Warrington

Discussions continued with both the Chief Executive of Warrington Borough Council and the incoming Chair of the LEP concerning HE provision in the borough. An interim Warrington Project Manager had been appointed to review the campus and two Open Staff meetings had been held to outline the scope of the review. The project workstreams included academic provision; external and internal stakeholder management; communications; estates & facilities and HR, legal and governance. Change was necessary, with decision required swiftly. It was intended to deliver recommendations by September 2020.

(d) Thornton Science Park

The University Secretary reported that the University had been notified on 13th March 2020 that it had been unsuccessful in its appeal against the local authority's decision to refuse change of use. As such, the University would be required to cease use of the site for undergraduate and postgraduate education; commercial and research operations at TSP would continue. Timescales for relocation had yet to be clarified

3198 MAJOR INITIATIVES (CONTINUED)

and there was a possible challenge to the outcome which would be discussed with Leading Counsel. Partial costs had been awarded against the University although these had yet to be quantified.

Initial contingency plans had been devised but would require further scrutiny by SMT to ensure optimum use of any alternative site/building. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that staff and tenants at TSP had been informed of the outcome and students would be notified later that day.

The University Council noted with disappointment the outcome and agreed that a possible challenge should be pursued if deemed appropriate by Leading Counsel. The University Council also extended its thanks to all those involved in the University's appeal and especially those who had attended the appeal hearing as witnesses. The Secretary confirmed that the outcome would be an OfS 'reportable event'.

3199 REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

(a) Planning & Resources Committee

The Executive Summary, including the advice and recommendations, of the Planning & Resources Committee meetings held on Tuesday 14th January 2020 and Tuesday 3rd March 2020 were received and discussed.

The University Council noted the following main items:

(i) Student Recruitment 2020/21 (minutes 08/20, 14th January and 30/20, 3rd March)

The current position is summarised in the Vice-Chancellor's report (item 3197(b) above). Members were keenly aware that even achieving the forecast 2,700 number would not result in a surplus for 2020/21 without additional income and/or cost saving. The current estimate was 2,500.

(ii) Chester Students' Union (minutes 07/20, 14th January and 28/20, 3rd March)

(1) The Committee welcomed appointment of four new external trustees and a new Chief Executive, Matt Webber.

(2) The CSU financial statements for the year ended 31st July 2019 were noted and recorded a loss of £117,000 and reserves reduced to £91,000. The likely outturn for 2019/20 will be breakeven. The CSU would develop a short and medium-term strategy, aimed at doubling current reserves in the next 3-5 years.

3199 REPORTS OF COMMITTEES (CONTINUED)

- (iii) Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards (minute 12/20, 14th January)

The annual report for 2018/19 was received in the form previously approved by University Council detailing structures, processes and action planning to assure and enhance quality and standards.

- (iv) Student Welfare, Safeguarding and Mental Health (minute 13/20(a), 14th January)

(1) The Committee considered the results of student exit interviews, initiatives to support and engage students to aid retention and further technological and peer-to-peer support approaches. Staff mental health first aid training continued.

(2) Prevent: The OfS had published a comprehensive report on implementation of the duty. The University would review its compliance in light of the report.

- (v) Management Accounts and Financial Position

A re-forecast would be undertaken following completion of the February 2020 management accounts. The University Council acknowledged the current challenging financial position.

- (vi) Thornton Matters (minute 38/20, 3rd March)

(1) The planning appeal matters were covered under minute 3198 (d).

(2) The search for a development partner continued. Publication of an OJEU notice had been delayed by the need to address property title restrictions.

- (vii) Equality Matters – Equality Annual Report 2018/19 (minute 34/20, 3rd March)

The report detailed the range of activity and mechanisms intended to promote equality, diversity and inclusion, together with the staff and student data by which they are measured. Key amongst the data were the student attainment gaps which OfS would monitor closely as part of the Access and Participation Plan.

- (viii) Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Policy 2019/20 (minute 36/20, 3rd March)

Future consideration of this matter would be undertaken in the summer term. The revised Transparency Statement and Policy were recommended for approval to ensure compliance for the time being.

3199 REPORTS OF COMMITTEES (CONTINUED)

(ix) Medicine, Shrewsbury and Warrington Initiatives

These matters were considered under minute 3198 (a), (b) and (c).

(x) Property Matters (minute 37/20, 3rd March)

The Committee recommended grant of an easement to Cheshire West and Chester Council in respect of a sewer to be laid under the Riverside Lower Car Park to facilitate the Northgate development. The University had been professionally advised under the Charities Act as to the appropriate consideration for the grant and on planning issues. The University would be financially compensated by CWaC.

IT WAS RESOLVED to approve the following:

- (1) Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Transparency Statement and Policy
- (2) Grant of easement to Cheshire West and Chester Council in respect of a sewer to be laid under the Riverside Lower Car Park
- (3) Assignment of lease of First Floor of Building 49, Thornton Science Park from Livingston Gunn Projects Limited to Gutteridge Haskins and Davey Limited

(b) Audit & Risk Management Committee

The Executive Summary, including the advice and recommendations, of the Audit & Risk Management Committee meeting held on Tuesday 11th February 2020 was received and discussed.

The University Council noted the following main items:

(i) External Auditors (KPMG) (minute 04/20 (c))

Whilst the proposed fee was higher than anticipated, the Committee agreed that the re-appointment of KPMG for 2020/21 was in the best interests of the University.

(ii) Risk Management (minute 06/20)

- (1) The Committee reviewed the Risk Register which had been updated to reflect minor nomenclature and reporting line changes. The Committee recommend approval of the Risk Register to the University Council.

3199 REPORTS OF COMMITTEES (CONTINUED)

- (2) The Committee agreed the risk review schedule and the process of risk 'deep dives'. Most risks would be reviewed by the Planning & Resources Committee with a risk assurance template submitted to the Committee. The Committee reviewed additional assurance material in relation to risk S3 'the University contravenes legislative requirements or engages in improper conduct of business'. The Committee acknowledged the on-going work undertaken by management associated with ensuring continued compliance with the OfS conditions of registration and on 'reportable events' requirements. The Committee's risk assurance template for risk S3 was noted.

The Vice-Chancellor reported that she would review the risk review process to ensure that it did not become overly bureaucratic. The University Council agreed that implementation of the revised process would be deferred for the time being.

- (3) The Committee received updated information on the KPI Dashboard which would be reviewed by the Vice-Chancellor and linked to the development of the new Corporate Plan.

(ii) Internal Audit Reports, RSM (minute 07/20 & 08/20)

RSM confirmed that progress to date was in line with the agreed internal audit plan for 2019/20. Two internal audit reports had been undertaken, both of which reported 'substantial' assurance. The Committee continued to receive and review implementation of both internal and external audit recommendations and challenge management where recommendations are not fully implemented within agreed timescales.

(iii) Annual Good Practice Checklist 2019/20 (minute 09/20)

The Committee considered its annual good practice checklist review and confirmed that it was able to respond positively to all questions within its remit.

(iv) TRAC & TRAC (T) 2018/19 (minute 10/20)

Ms Catharine Carter provided a summary of the TRAC & TRAC (T) return for 2018/19. Management continued to utilise the results of the returns to inform business planning and budget setting.

(v) Value for Money

The Committee approved the Value for Money Strategy and noted that the Procurement Value Survey 2018/19 indicated total gross savings of £1.65M and total collaborative spend of £8.27M.

IT WAS RESOLVED to approve the Risk Register

(c) **Human Resources Committee**

The Executive Summary, including the advice and recommendations, of the Human Resources Committee meeting held on Tuesday 18th February 2020 was received.

The University Council noted the following main items:

(i) Executive Dean Appointments (minute 04/20 (a))

The Committee were informed that Professor John Alcolado had been appointed Executive Dean of Medicine and Professor Kurt Allman as Executive Dean of Business & Management.

(ii) Annual Staff Sickness Absence Report 2018/19 (minute 07/20)

The annual report for 2018/19 was received and discussed. Key findings included:

- An overall increase in the core staffing level of 2.2%.
- The number of working days lost had increased by 1.6%.
- The average number of working days lost had reduced slightly to 7.2 days (7.3 days in 2017/18 and 8.5 days in 2016/17). The UCEA (post 92) average figure was 6.7 days.
- Of concern was the increase in working days lost amongst academic staff which had risen by 11.4%. Further work would be undertaken on this increase.
- Mental health related matters accounted for the highest percentage of working days lost.

The HR department continued to monitor progress against the Sickness Absence Action Plan and to develop initiatives to support staff. Work continued on the Healthy University Charter which would link with Universities UK (UUK) 'Whole University Approach' #stepchange framework on supporting mental health in higher education.

(iii) Equality Matters (minute 08/20)

The Committee received the Gender Pay Gap Report 2018/19 which showed an increase in the mean gender pay gap from 14.8% to 15.4%, whilst the median gender pay gap continued to reduce from 14.5% to 13.9% compared to the previous year. The University continued to actively support reducing its gender pay gap through initiatives such as the Athena Swan award and the Aurora programme.

3199 REPORTS OF COMMITTEES (CONTINUED)

- (1) The Committee received the annual report on Equality 2018/19 and additional information pertaining to the ethnicity of the local demographics in which the University operated. Efforts continued to improve participation and access from BAME students. Reducing attainment gaps of BAME students formed part of the University's Access & participation Plan (APP) which would be monitored by the OfS.
 - (2) The Diversity Festival 2020 ran from 2nd to 14th March 2020. In excess of 90 events were provided for staff, students and members of the public. The University Council extended its thanks to all those involved in the organisation of the event and, in particular, Kathryn Leighton HR Manager – Development and Diversity.
- (iv) Health, Safety & Environment Matters (minute 12/20)
- (1) The University's incident management team benefitted from a presentation delivered by the Chief Operating Officer of Chester Zoo on the lessons learnt following the major fire at Chester Zoo in December 2018. Updates would be made to the University's plans.
 - (2) The University has established a Coronavirus Task Group chaired by the Vice-Chancellor to review and respond to Government guidance and to assure business continuity so far as possible.
 - (3) The University Policy for Health & Safety at Work and the Annual Health, Safety Wellbeing and Sustainability Report and were reviewed and are recommended to the University Council for approval.

IT WAS RESOLVED to approve the University Health and Safety Policy.

(d) **University Mission Committee**

The Executive Summary, including the advice and recommendations, of the University Mission Committee meeting held on Tuesday 18th February 2020 was received.

The University Council noted the following main items:

(i) Mission, Vision and Foundational Values (MVFFV) (minute 02/20)

The Committee continued to invite and receive presentations from departments across the University on how the MVFFV is 'lived out' in practice and informs their activities. Details on the work of the Chaplaincy was received at the meeting with helpful input from the Christian Union President and the Catholic Society President.

3199 REPORTS OF COMMITTEES (CONTINUED)

The Committee acknowledged the important role played by the Chaplaincy in creating a sense of community and belonging.

(ii) Chaplains on Campus (minute 03/20)

(1) The Committee received the 'Chaplains on Campus: Understanding Chaplaincy in UK Universities' report which presented key findings from research with over 400 university chaplains, managers and religious or belief organisations and some 200 students. Key statistics within the report included that university chaplains:

- annually contributed some £4.5M of volunteer labour to the HE sector; and
- gave around 3,500 hours of free labour each week.

(2) The Committee's discussion focussed on possible methods of recording and measuring the impact of Chaplaincy, although it was acknowledged that effectiveness was often expressed in ways that are hard to measure.

(iii) Dean of Chapel's Report (minute 07/20)

A review of faith spaces/quiet rooms across the University had been undertaken by Chaplaincy. Generally, provision required improvement and some locations were inappropriate. The matter had been raised with the SMT and additional resources would be allocated.

A review of the faith spaces users' guidelines had been undertaken. The University Secretary would review to ensure that recent guidance on the Prevent initiative was incorporated.

(iv) Chester TWIN (minute 09/20)

(1) The trustees of Chester TWIN (a separate charity) proposed to dissolve the charity and transfer remaining funds to the University. The Committee agreed to merge the existing University Mission Awards (UMAs) with Chester TWIN to create a single University Mission Fund (UMF). The new fund would be administered via the Development & Alumni Relations Office (DARO) who were raising the profile of philanthropic support amongst alumni and saw the UMF as having great appeal.

(2) A new working group had been established to oversee allocation of funds to worthy applicants. The Mission Committee would maintain governance oversight.

3199 REPORTS OF COMMITTEES (CONTINUED)

- (3) Since the meeting, the Chester TWIN trustees resolved to dissolve the charity. The remaining funds (£14,887) had been transferred to the University and an application to close the charity submitted to the Charity Commission.

3200 STUDENT UNION PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The Student Union President's Report was received and discussed. Of particular note was the success of the #MeAndMyPAT campaign which sought to raise the profile of the Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) system and encouraged students to meet their PAT regularly throughout the year. The results of the CSU elections were announced on 13th March 2020, with the sabbatical team for 2020/21 as follows:

President: Eleanor Lewis

Vice-President (Education): Jack Rankin

Vice-President (Activities): Daniel Forrester

Vice-President (Shrewsbury): Adam Kerr

Vice-President (Warrington): Sam Derbyshire

The current sabbatical officers would leave office on 30th June 2020 and the handover process would commence after the Easter break. It was also reported that the transfer of commercial and sporting activities to the University had been a success and allowed the CSU to focus on representing and supporting students.

3201 MINUTES OF MEETINGS

The Minutes of the following meetings were received:

- (a) Planning & Resources Committee held on Tuesday 14th January 2020 and Tuesday 3rd March 2020
- (b) Audit & Risk Management Committee held on Tuesday 11th February 2020
- (c) Human Resources Committee held on Tuesday 18th February 2020
- (d) University Mission Committee held on Tuesday 18th February 2020
- (e) Senate held on Wednesday 11th December 2019

3202 OFFICE FOR STUDENTS (OfS)

An updated list of OfS publications was received and noted. The University had submitted a 'nil' return following a request to submit information of COVID-19 cases.

3203 CHARITY COMMISSION

It was noted that the Charity Commission Annual Return had been submitted.

3204 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no items of any other business.

3205 DATES OF OTHER UNIVERSITY EVENTS

The dates of the Valedictory Ceremony, Graduation Ceremonies and Open Days and Evenings were noted. The Valedictory Ceremony in St Thomas' Church would not take place as usual due to the current Coronavirus situation, although student achievement would still be acknowledged.

3206 DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Next meeting: **Tuesday 14th July 2020, 9.30 a.m.**

Future meetings – all 9.30 am:

Tuesday 24th November 2020

Tuesday 23rd March 2021

Tuesday 6th July 2021

At present the University Council 'Away Day' on Tuesday 28th April 2020 was still being planned. Details would be issued in due course.