

Ulster University

Council

18 October 2019

Minutes of the meeting of the Council of Ulster University held at the Magee Campus on Friday 18 October 2019.

PRESENT

Ms J Pyper (Chair), Professor P Nixon (Vice-Chancellor and President), Mrs H Bingham, Professor K Burnett, Mr D Clements, Ms G Horgan, Mr A Langan, Mrs M Lindsay, Mr P Lobban, Mrs H Quigley, Mr P Sheridan, Mr R Sloan, Dr E Way

APOLOGIES

Dr P McNaney, Dr J Stuart

IN ATTENDANCE

Professor P Bartholomew, Ms A Cohen, Ms N Lamond, Mr E Mullan, Ms A Rankin (Minute19.38)

The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of the academic year and offered condolences to Marie Lindsay for her recent bereavement. Congratulations were also given to Professor Bartholomew and Professor Gormley-Heenan on their recent appointments.

19.35 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 JUNE 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2019 were approved subject to a minor amendment.

It was agreed that the reserved minutes would be included within agenda item 8 (minute 19.42).

19.36 MATTERS ARISING

Minute 19.28 Special Resolution for Dissolving of Court

The Chair requested an update on the status of this and Mr Mullan informed Council that the second resolution will be signed today and this will be included in wider changes going to the Privy Council for approval in relation to restructuring of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor/Deputy Vice-Chancellor roles.

19.37 CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chair mentioned the following matters:

- 1 The Chair had attended the Committee of University Chair's meeting at the beginning of October and there had been a focus on current challenges within governance for governing bodies. A high level of expectation has been put on governors from the Office for Students and this would be a theme for discussion at the upcoming UU Council planning day.
- 2 Council members had received a guided tour of the Library before the meeting and congratulations were noted for the Library team, stating that it is a valuable resource for the University and the city.
- 3 Members were encouraged to submit nominations for Honorary Degrees for individuals with a national or international reputation in their chosen field and who would assist and work with the University in attaining its strategic goals.
- 4 A tour of the new Belfast Campus development is being organised for 3 December from 10am and members were reminded to respond to Sharon Lowry if they wish to attend.
- 5 Members were reminded to submit travel claim forms within the ninety-day deadline.

19.38 PRESENTATION ON THE MaSN AND HOW IT RELATES TO THE ACADEMIC PLAN

Professor Bartholomew (Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic) and Ms Rankin (Director Strategy, Planning and Performance) delivered a presentation on admissions and how it relates to funding in Northern Ireland and how this influences the academic planning process.

Members discussed MaSN targets from previous years and were informed that the University fell short in 2018 and is predicted to again for 2019. On analysis of UCAS data, the University is now changing advertised tariffs to make them more realistic and hopefully improve application rates. Members queried whether this would dilute the quality of students but were assured that the amended rates would be in line with rates the University is already accepting, and that advertised tariffs do not contribute to rankings.

Members thanked Professor Bartholomew and Ms Rankin and agreed that this provided a sound basis for conversations around recruitment at the Council planning day.

19.39 TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP (C/19/26)

The Chair presented the Terms of Reference and informed members that Council is asked at its first meeting every year to consider and, if appropriate, re-adopt them. Members noted that each Council Committee is asked to approve their own Terms of Reference.

Members agreed to re-adopt its Terms of Reference but to review in six months following the completion of the Effectiveness Review and the publication of the new Higher Education Code of Practice. Members also requested that the Terms

of Reference for each Committee be brought forward to the next meeting for information.

19.40 PROGRAMME OF WORK (C/19/27)

The Chair presented the Programme of Work and reminded members the programme is flexible and where any issues do arise throughout the year, they will be added to relevant Council agendas.

Members noted the programme of work and requested that it be augmented slightly to include useful reports and presentations that have been delivered to sub-committees such as a presentation on the People and Culture report that is given to Resources Committee and the Academic Assurance presentation that was delivered to Audit Committee.

19.41 VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT (C/19/28)

The Vice-Chancellor presented his report to Council, drawing members' attention to the following:

Awards and Recognitions

Three members of staff have been recognised in Advance HE's National Teaching Fellowship Scheme this year: Dr Liz Doherty, Dr Malachy Ó Néill and Professor Colin Turner.

A PhD Researcher within the School of Geography and Environmental Sciences has won the UK 3MT People's Choice Award.

The University was named as one of ten UK Universities in the HR Excellence in Research Awards.

Council added their congratulations to all involved.

Industrial Relations

UCU and Unite strike ballots opened in September in relation to pay and pensions and it is likely that strike action on pensions will arise.

Strategic Review 2034 (SR34)

In response to feedback from staff, SR34 has been stood down and this has been communicated to Council members and staff. An economic review will still be undertaken in respect of funding from government.

Members agreed with the decision to stand down the review but expressed concern at the way they were informed particularly since proceeding with the Review had been a Council decision in the first place.

Greater Belfast Development

Members were informed that building is progressing at a considerable pace. One subcontractor ceased trading in August 2019 but this was managed well by Somague Sacyr. The University has met with Deloitte who have been appointed the Funding Due Diligence Consultants by DfE and the funding decision is expected in early November. Members expressed disappointment and concern over delays in the funding decision, especially considering the upcoming retirement of the Permanent Secretary.

Members were advised that the NI Audit Office (NIAO) has also reviewed GBD along with all capital projects. This report will be published soon and the headline is not expected to be favourable to the University. The report is expected to highlight the substantial difference between the original and current budget for completion which does not consider delays and issues that have occurred throughout.

Members requested a standalone discussion item on GBD during lunch prior to the next meeting to fully discuss the matter.

Graduate Entry Medical School

Members were advised that the University cannot proceed with a 2020 intake and the University continues to reassure stakeholders in the absence of an Executive.

Council thanked the Vice-Chancellor for his report.

19.42 INDUSTRIAL TRIBUNAL – UNIVERSITY RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS (C/19/29)

The reserved minute of the meeting held on 14 June 2019 was approved. Members reiterated that while this does not signify endorsement of the report Council has accepted the recommendations within the Independent Review. Ms Quigley formally rebutted the comments in the report that there was a failure of the Council as a whole. Members had clearly raised issues around course closures, the impact of student experiences, job losses and the overall impact of the reputation of the University. Members agreed that as the main source of Council information used to inform the report was minutes of meetings, Council and its committees need to ensure sufficient detail is contained within minutes in future.

Following the Independent Review, this paper had been prepared to provide an update on progress in respect of the recommendations given. The ten recommendations can be placed under four thematic areas:

- Organisational culture change
- Organisational governance and risk management
- Training for Leaders and Managers
- Apologising to those staff unlawfully dismissed and to the UCU

Of the outstanding recommendations, members highlighted ITR7 and emphasized that, although a Directorate report is issued to Resources

Committee, this should not just be reported on at Committee level. For ITR10, members noted that there is continuing progress with UCU but completion of this recommendation would be part of an ongoing and wider conversation.

Members noted the response and agreed this paper should be used to regularly update and feedback to UCU and should be reported back through JUCNC. Council should continue to monitor implementation of all the recommendations.

19.43 INTERNAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW OF COUNCIL – ONLINE SURVEY (C/19/30)

Mr Mullan presented the findings from the recent internal review of Council and its committees.

Members approved the summary of recommendations and agreed they will be explored further as part of the external effectiveness review, and wider leadership development work for SLT and Council.

19.44 COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL

a) Audit Committee (9 September 2019) (C/19/31) & (14 October 2019 verbal report)

Mr Langan presented the minutes and highlighted the following:

9 September 2019

The Annual Fraud Report highlighted that the University had been subject to a sophisticated cyber phishing attack on the Bank of Ireland Euro account for research grants. On 25 June several fraudulent emails, allegedly from University staff were exchanged and resulted in the processing of three payments from the Euro Bank account. The total had been 479,565.07 euros, to German, American and UK accounts. So far 43,856.83 has been recovered, Barclays have recovered three amounts, £57,219.26, 6618.54USD and 210.45 euros. A claim is currently with our insurers for 250k.

An update on the Whistle Blowing issue related to procurement section (minute 19.36) had been received and it was noted that Deloitte had not revised their draft recommendations following University representations. The University agreed to accept the recommendations and develop an action plan which had been requested by the Department by 20 September.

14 October 2019

The Resilience Framework report was received, and Mr Langan wanted to make Council members aware of the risk that staff are stretched to capacity. The Vice-Chancellor assured members that the Senior Leadership Team are aware of this and are encouraging their staff to review projects to determine whether or not they are business critical, therefore reducing focus to a smaller number of priority areas.

Council endorsed the minutes of the Audit Committee held on 9 September 2019 and noted the verbal update from 14 October 2019.

b) Resources Committee (22 July 2019) (C/19/32)

Mr Clements presented the minutes and highlighted the following:

The Committee had received the proposed budgets for the next four years, as required by DfE. The forecast had been based on the approved academic plan for 2019/20 (and a more prudent approach in future years), DfE grant letter, the contribution model for faculty salary and recurrent budgets, professional services 2018/19 budget inflated, approved strategic investments and research, self-financing and trading activities as advised by departments and a capital allocation of £19.8m. Members were informed that the original overseas projections had been overly ambitious and would take much longer to achieve. The Committee queried the logic in providing multi-year financial forecasts when the department only provide a one-year funding letter and stated that this should be challenged with DfE. A surplus of £10m had been reported originally but due to the pension deficit, this is now showing as a £40m deficit. Members agreed that the Department's decision on GBD funding should be pushed before the financial forecasts and accounts are signed for submission to DfE.

A request to approve submitting an offer on Northland House in Belfast, had been issued to members by correspondence. This was approved by Resources Committee and the offer has now been accepted. Council members were assured that this will be funded by a disposal elsewhere and will cover the University's capital contribution to the Belfast Region City Deal. Following a query over whether this could be accommodated within the existing Belfast build, members were informed that space was already at a premium.

Council endorsed the minutes of the Resources Committee held on 22 July 2019.

c) Governance, Nominations and Remuneration Committee (6 June 2019) (c/19/33)

Council endorsed the minutes of the Governance, Nominations and Remuneration Committee held on 06 June 2019.

19.45 DATES OF MEETINGS 2019-20 (C/19/34)

Council noted the dates and venues of Council meetings for the academic year 2019-20.

19.46 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Vice-Chancellor asked members to note the Chancellor will be coming to the end of his term in June 2020 and a celebration will be held at the Summer Graduation dinner. The process for nominating a new Chancellor will begin through GNRC.