

# ULSTER UNIVERSITY

## COUNCIL

15 June 2018

Minutes of a meeting of the Council of Ulster University held at the Coleraine Campus on Friday 15 June 2018.

### PRESENT

Mr J Hunter (Chair), Professor P Nixon (Vice-Chancellor and President), Mrs H Bingham, Dr K Burnett, Mr D Clements, Mr P Lobban, Mr K McStravock (Students' Union), Mrs J Pyper, Mrs H Quigley (left meeting after item 18.18), Professor M Stringer, Dr J Stuart, Mrs E Way

### APOLOGIES

Mr A Langan, Ms M McKee, Mrs E McKeown, Mr P McNaney and Sir Robert Salisbury

### IN ATTENDANCE

Professor A Adair, Ms N Lamond, Mr E Mullan

#### 18.17 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 04 May 2018 were approved.

#### 18.18 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

##### 1. Minute 18.13 - Vice-Chancellor's Report – Health Sciences Relocation

In response to a query the Vice-Chancellor informed Council that consultation on the proposed relocation had been completed. He commented that the suggestion had originally been a response to the work of the Budget Review Group following reductions in Government funding. The dominant view from the consultation had been that the subjects should not be split up.

The Vice-Chancellor recognised that the context had changed somewhat in the intervening 3 years and that he had asked the senior team to consider all aspects of provision on the North-West campuses.

#### 18.19 CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

##### 1. Chairs of Council Committees meeting – 7 June 2018

The Chairman informed Council that the Committee had considered and endorsed a proposal for the University to a member of Magna Charta Universitatum. Following a brief summary from the Vice-Chancellor, Council approved.

## 2. Additional Council meeting – late August/early September

The Chairman reminded Council of the possible need to hold a meeting of Council towards the end of August/early September to consider a revised contract in relation to the Belfast Development.

## 3. Industrial Tribunal Review

Council noted that a report would most likely be completed by early July.

## 4. Joint Meeting of Council and Senate 16 May 2018

The Chairman commented that the Joint Meeting where the topic had been Widening Access and Entry Tariffs, led by Professor Brian Murphy, had been extremely useful.

## 5. Summer Graduation ceremonies

The Chairman encouraged members to respond to an invitation to process during the forthcoming graduation ceremonies.

## 6. Annual Accountability Meeting

Council noted that the annual accountability meeting would take place on Tuesday 19 June at DfE. Council would be represented by Mrs Pyper.

## 7. Events

The Chairman informed members that he had attended the Impact Excellence Awards and the student organised Learning and Teaching awards. He commented that both had been excellent events.

## 18.20 VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT (C/17/13)

The Vice-Chancellor presented his report to Council, highlighting in particular the following:

### Review of Post-18 Education in England

Ulster had submitted evidence to the review which had been commissioned by the Prime Minister. Northern Ireland is not included in the review but any recommendations may have an impact on us. An invitation has been extended to the Chair of the review to visit NI, to discuss the system here in more depth.

### Political/Civil Service Engagement

Engagement continues with senior civil servants on a range of key strategic issues, sustainable funding and GBD. Regular contact is continuing with Noel Lavery, DfE

Permanent Secretary, particularly in the context of the autumn statement. The Vice-Chancellor commented that the funding position was extremely difficult. However, he said discussions were ongoing in respect of a number of areas including city deals. He commented that he and relevant members of the senior team continue to engage with politicians at all levels. The Vice-Chancellor had recently given evidence to the All-Party Parliamentary University Group at Westminster and DUP leader, Arlene Foster, MLA had visited the Magee Campus.

The Vice-Chancellor informed Council that he had met with Professor Ian Greer, the incoming Vice-Chancellor of QUB and had agreed that the two institutions would explore areas of collaboration.

It was agreed that Council should receive a fuller briefing on city deals at an appropriate time.

A brief discussion followed on the assumptions that underpinned the strategic plan. The Vice-Chancellor commented that he intended to commission a mid-term review, with a report coming to Council in June 2019. The topic would be picked up at the planning day in September, with some time spent considering the changing landscape.

#### Greater Belfast Development

Discussions are continuing with Somague in respect of a revised contract for delivering the expanded Belfast Campus. Whilst work had recommenced on site, including all safety checks, this was an interim arrangement. The intention is to agree a revised contract by the end of the summer.

#### Brexit

Universities UK and Irish Universities Association held a joint meeting in London on 10 May to discuss the implications of Brexit on universities and the sector. Discussions included bilateral UK-IE student and staff mobility and bilateral research collaboration.

Work has also commenced on a draft paper outlining an agreed Brexit position among UI members. An update will be provided at a future meeting.

#### Graduate Entry Medical School

Professor Dubras has taken up the post of Foundation Dean of Medical Education. Feedback on the Outline Business Case, submitted to the Department of Health, is being addressed. The completion of the revised Business Case is dependent on information from the Medical School Places Review Group report which is being compiled. The report is expected at the end of June.

Support is being maintained from stakeholders through engagement from the Vice-Chancellor, Professor McKenna and Dr O'Neill.

## General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

The new regulations replaced the old Data Protection Act 1998 and applied to all EU member states. The University had established a working group to consider the implications. Full information on the new regulations is available on the web pages of the Office of the University Secretary.

The University solicitors, Carson McDowell had visited the University and found that a significant amount of work had been completed to achieve compliance.

## Academic Excellence

The Academic Excellence plan sets out a clear statement of what academic excellence means for academic staff, in how we deliver high quality teaching and world leading research that have a civic impact both locally and internationally. Academic colleagues are being consulted on the plan with the aim of achieving three key outcomes:

- A performance expectations framework for research and teaching
- Review of current practices and policies to align to academic excellence
- ; and Development of an institutional policy and practice framework, including rigorous definitions of teaching excellence, research excellence and civic contribution that will support academic staff.

## League Tables

The Guardian League Tables had been published on 29 May. Ulster is ranked 93<sup>rd</sup> out of 121 UK universities. An improvement of three places from last year. It is the result of an increase of 7.6 points in overall teaching score, going from 49.6 to 57.2 in 2019.

Ulster ranked in the top 10 for Pharmacy & Pharmacology, Biosciences, Hospitality, Event Management and Tourism and Art.

Overall 20 subjects rose in the rankings with the biggest gains seen by Nursing and Midwifery and Politics.

Ulster had again been included in the Top Young Universities Rankings (previously known as the Top 150 under 50), released in 6 June.

Although members welcomed the improvement some commented that further significant improvement was needed. The Vice-Chancellor commented that both student staff ratio (SSR) and the fact that Ulster spends considerably less on infrastructure than the rest of the UK were significant factors. Until those were improved significant improvement would be difficult. Members agreed that this was a matter that the Department should be concerned about.

Members thanked the Vice-Chancellor for his report.

## 18.21 COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL

### a) Audit Committee (21 May 2018) (C/18/13)

Mrs Pyper presented the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 21 May 2018. She directed members to the following points:

- i. The Committee had received three Internal Audit Reports and an update on the audit plan (minute 18.13).

- **Monitoring and reporting of progress of the delivery against 5&50 Strategic Plan had received a Satisfactory Audit Opinion with no issues.**

The Committee had noted that the 5&50 had a good framework which was now in place. The Committee noted that targets needed to be monitored and adjusted as the landscape changed

- **Review of compliance with Copyright Laws and Regulations had received a Satisfactory Audit Opinion with two priority three issues.**

The first issue related to training and awareness – The monitoring of the completion rate for the online Virtual Learning Environment course needed attention. There was also a lack of formal notification that the Copyright Policy had been updated and highlighting the key changes

The second issue centred on the monitoring and compliance with the Copyright Licence.

- **Follow-up Review: Data Protection and Information Governance**

- Access to sensitive personal information (priority 1 issue). Student Administration had removed access to the SPAIDEN general person identification from all faculty staff. November will witness the introduction of Banner 9 and the University will restrict access further for Student Administration staff
- Retention of Staff and Student records (priority 2 issue). Banner 9 will improve the ability to delete student data. However, student data must also be retained in line with the University's retention and disposal policies and to allow the delivery of core business. Faculties have been asked to provide feedback on whether the current policy is appropriate.
- Monitoring of staff mandatory Data Protection training (priority 2 issue). The University has prepared and delivered GDPR presentation to raise awareness of the key components and requirements.
- Monitoring of IT Assets (priority 1 issue). The new system to track IT assets remains in progress within the faculties. From next year ISD plan to migrate a

new asset tracking system, this will allow to further understand entitlements within ISD across the University.

ii. The Committee had noted that from February 2018, a total of 43 'not fully addressed' issues had been reviewed. Four had been priority one issues and are in progress. All outstanding issues will be followed up by the end of October.

iii. The Committee welcomed the progress made with the Internationalisation Strategy, which had been a priority one issue. The building blocks were in place to move the strategy forward. However, it was recognised that fundamental targets had changed and asked that a report be brought forward early in the next academic year.

iv. The Committee had received the HE Financial Statement Benchmarking (minute 18.14) and noted a fall in the average operating surplus as a percentage of total income, from 4.6% to 3.6% for pre-1992 institutions and from 4.5% to 2.4% for post 1992 institutions. The Committee noted that the income from non EU tuition fees was at the lower end but there are now opportunities to grow in that area.

v. The Committee had received the External Audit Plan (minute 18.15) and noted that the plan would be to provide a report that offered a true and fair view of the financial statements. The audit would concentrate on areas such as GBD and other capital projects, pension obligations, research grants, funding position, fraud risk and compliance with recommended accounting practices. The Committee would receive a report to its October meeting.

vi. The Committee had noted the annual paper on University Gifts (minute 18.16) and owing to the relatively small number of reported gifts, the University Secretary agreed to re-issue the policy and stress the importance of staff reporting gifts to heads of academic and administrative departments as well as to the Office of the University Secretary.

vii. The Committee had received a confidential update on the Greater Belfast Development Risk Management (minute 18.19). The five risks associated with the development are, contractor capability, financial risk, risks to delivery of 5&50, cultural and technical readiness and reputational risk. It was important to manage the risks associated with the development and ensure that all internal controls were in place.

viii. The Committee had agreed that risks relating to the Greater Belfast Development should be a standing item.

Council endorsed the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 21 May 2018.

b) Resources Committee (4 June 2018)(C/18/14)

Mr Clements presented the minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 4 June 2018 and drew Council's attention to the following:

- i. The Committee had noted that the meeting between the University and QAHE (minute 18.17a)) had been scheduled for 22 June. New Postgraduate Taught Programmes were being introduced at QAHE. Members were assured that the issues that had previously put the University at risk had been resolved. Following the meeting on 22 June, an update would be presented to the Committee.
- ii. The Committee had noted Somague had resumed work in the Greater Belfast Development (minute 18.19a)). A deadline under the agreement with the administrator for Lagans, for the end of August to agree commercial terms. A preferred bid for consultants to review the economic business case had been selected and negotiations are currently underway.
- iii. The Committee had noted that applications for University accommodation were down 15% (minute 18.19c)) compared to last year. Significant work was underway to encourage students to choose the purpose built accommodation at Belfast instead of Holylands, including a reduction of £21 per week.
- iv. The Committee had received and endorsed the financial forecasts 2018/19-2020/21 (minute 18.20). The Committee noted the current cash pressures over the forecast period. For 2018/19 income is due to increase by 2.3% compared to the 2017/18 projected outturn. Real time Expenditure is forecast to increase by 3.2% as a result of a reduction in DfE capital grants. The increase does not include the potential increase in pension contributions. The Committee noted that the current Financial Strategy would be reviewed. In the context of revised academic structures. The forecast presented had been based on the assumptions as detailed in the minute.
- v. Members noted that although applications from overseas students had increased, the number of students actually taking up places at the University had yet to be determined.
- vi. A midpoint review of the strategic plan had been suggested to ascertain if a revised planning process was required, in light of the lack of increases in government funding. Council agreed that this would be discussed further in the context of the planning day in September

Council endorsed the minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 4 June 2018.

- c) Governance, Nominations and Remuneration Committee 3 May 2018 (C/18/15) and 7 June 2018 (C/18/15a))

3 May 2018

The Chairman presented and drew members' attention to the following:

Council had received a verbal report of the meeting at its 4 May meeting. The minutes are presented for formal approval. The main items covered had been:

The Committee had received and endorsed the results of the Equal Pay Review (minute 18.10). There were no systemic issues but that a number of areas, such as allowances for additional duties, and some gender issues within grade, would benefit from further attention.

The Committee had received and approved, subject to proposed amendments, the Delegated Authority Framework (minute 18.11). The Chairman asked that the document be amended to create flexibility and allow exceptional issues to come to Council. Mention should also be made of Council responsibility for academic assurance. The full report is attached to the minutes of 3 May 2018.

The Committee endorsed the proposal for an Internal Effectiveness Review of Council and its Committees (minute 18.12). The review would take the form of a questionnaire and be undertaken before the end of the current academic year.

The Committee had noted the update on the HE Remuneration Code-Consultation on Proposed Guidelines (minute 18.13) implementation. The recommendations as attached to the 3 May minutes were being progressed with a view to implementation during 2018/19. Mr McAlister outlined proposals to introduce strategies that would see a fresh approach to recruitment and performance management. It would commence with SLT with something in place for the coming year.

The Committee had received a paper on the Development of an Appropriate Pay Multiple (minute 18.14) and that Ulster was currently slightly above the mid-point of the recommended range. The Committee endorsed the proposal to benchmark, based on turnover, against the four categories of staff.

7 June 2018

The Committee had received a paper on the Internal Effectiveness Review of Council and its Committees (minute 18.19). The review would improve governance within the University. The review would firstly take the form of a questionnaire and would ask members questions on the role of the governing body within the University. The questions would cover topics such as structure and processes, membership, communication and performance measurement. There should also be a comment box after each section of the questionnaire and a section on the Effectiveness of Committees. The Chairman would also talk to each member over

the summer with a final report containing recommendations to be presented to the Committee in October.

The Committee had also noted that the HE Remuneration Code (minute 18.20) had been finalised and is attached to the minutes. The University is progressing the recommendations from an earlier meeting.

The Committee also received a paper on Pro-Chancellor Appointments (minute 18.21). The paper indicated that the current Chair of Council and at present the only Pro-Chancellor is required to stand down in March 2019. A nomination is required to be brought to Court in March 2019 on a suitable replacement. The recommendation is that consideration should be given to appointing an external search agency to assist with the process of appointing a new Chair of Council and Pro-Chancellor. This would not exclude the current appointed members from applying.

The recommendations are:

- The appointment of a new first Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Council be advertised and consideration be given to the appointment of an external search agency to help with the process
- The vacant post of second Pro-Chancellor be filled from within the membership of Council and if no suitable applicant is identified, it too should be advertised
- The interview panel for both positions should be constituted from the Governance, Nominations and Remuneration Committee

Council endorsed the minutes of the Governance, Nominations and Remuneration Committee meeting on 3 May 2018 and 7 June 2018.

## 18.22 REVIEW OF HONORARY DEGREE PROCESS (C/18/16)

**Mr Mullan presented a paper outlining** the current process for nominating a distinguished individual to be offered the award of an Honorary Degree. The paper included information on the current nomination form, list of degrees available to confer on the individual and a brief summary of the process at other Universities.

The paper also introduced the possibility of a Community Award to individuals or community groups. This would reinforce Ulster's role as a Civic University. The criteria for such a nomination process would need to be carefully looked at, as the sector is quite competitive.

The proposals are:

- The assumption that every ceremony will include the conferral of an honorary degree be dropped.
- For those ceremonies with no honorary graduate, consideration be given to a key note speech delivered by visiting dignitary or presiding officer.
- One honorary degree only should be conferred at each campus and faculty ceremony

- Executive Deans should be charged with bringing forward agreed nominations from faculties for outstanding individuals in respective fields.
- Criteria for nominating be strengthened to emphasis links with the University's strategic objectives in the current 5&50 plan.

Council endorsed the proposals.

#### 18.23 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS (C/18/17)

Mr Mullan presented the calendar of meetings for the coming year. The Calendar indicates when Court, Council and Senate, their sub-committees and faculties boards will meet during the 2018-19 academic year.

Council noted the Calendar of Meetings and that it will be circulated to secretaries of committees in the next few days.

#### 18.24 STUDENTS' UNION ACTIVITY REPORT (C/18/18)

Mr McStravock, Student President presented the annual report on Student Union activity to Council

He commented that the year-end report highlights the activities of the Students' Union over the year in relation to societies, student engagement and awareness campaigns. The Students' Union encourages students to get involved with their activities as it increases and enhances a range of skills for students. He pointed out the following in particular

- The Course rep programme goes from strength to strength with 800 in place and 45 senior reps in place.
- The fifth annual Students' Union Learning and Teaching awards recognised and rewarded the staff and students who work to create an outstanding student experience. The awards are student led and the winners are selected by a panel of student representatives who consider nominations put forward by students.
- The end of year online survey, undertaken in May 2018 had a total of 1.034 responses. The results will be key in understanding what matters to students and how their University experience can be made more rewarding for them. 80% of students surveyed agreed that being involved in the SU helped their sense of belonging at Ulster. 70% agreed that SU contributes to a sense of community on campus.
- To assist with student engagement an app had been launched where students can vote, on student issues, contact student officers, keep in touch with clubs and societies and keep up date to date with events.

The Chairman thanked Mr McStravock for presented the report, commenting on the excellent work carried out by the Students Union.