

Ulster University

Council

15 November 2019

Minutes of a meeting of the Council of Ulster University held at the Coleraine Campus on Friday 15 November 2019.

PRESENT

Ms J Pyper (Chair), Professor P Nixon (Vice-Chancellor), Mrs H Bingham, Professor K Burnett, Mr D Clements, Mrs G Horgan, Mr A Langan, Mr P Lobban, Mr A McAnallen (Students' Union), Dr P McNaney, Mr P Sheridan, Mr R Sloan, Dr E Way

APOLOGIES

Mrs M Lindsay, Mrs H Quigley, Dr J Stuart

IN ATTENDANCE

Professor P Bartholomew (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Professor C Gormley-Heenan (Deputy Vice-Chancellor), Mrs F Kane, Mrs N Lamond, Mr R Millar, Mr E Mullan

PRESENT BY INVITATION

Mr P Hope, Mr J Poole, Mr B O'Hara (KPMG) and Mr M Kidd (Ernst & Young) (to assist with presenting the Financial statements)

Mr S Fitzpatrick, Mrs J McGowan, Mr G Robinson (to assist with GBD presentation)

OBSERVER

Ms M Joyce (Advance HE)

BELFAST CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT – UPDATE PRESENTATION

Mrs Lamond, assisted by Mr Robinson and Mr Fitzpatrick presented an update on the current funding position, building delivery and project overview.

Council noted that additional borrowing of £126m would be required to complete the project. The contract and funding timeline indicated that the Case Work Committee would conclude its work by 4 December with a special Council meeting required to consider proposals, scheduled to take place on 9 December.

The Council noted that substantial progress had been made on site from January with the total workforce now standing at approximately 400. Between 85-90% of the supply chain involved local firms. The building was due for completion in twenty months and it would be important for students and staff to have an enhanced working and teaching experience and the community to buy into the new campus.

The Chair informed members that the special Council meeting scheduled for 9 December would be the critical date for Council to consider whether the conditions of the loan were acceptable. Council's position would be that any additional funding should only be on the basis of a loan with 0% interest and that the University's autonomy should be protected.

Council noted the presentation and the current position.

19.47 MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 18 OCTOBER 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 October 2019 were approved subject to the word "findings" being replaced with "recommendations" under minute 19.44a), second paragraph relating to procurement issues.

19.48 MATTERS ARISING

Matters Arising minute 19.36 – Special Resolution

Mr Mullan informed Council that the changes to the Charter, Statutes and Ordinances, as a result of the dissolution of Court, had been presented to the Privy Council, along with the two Special Resolutions.

The forthcoming General Election and any change to Government would not affect the work of the Privy Council.

Industrial Tribunal – University Response to Recommendations minute 19.42

Mr Mullan informed members that both he and the Director of People and Culture would provide an update to the Governance, Nominations and Remuneration Committee at its meeting on 29 November 2019.

19.49 CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman mentioned the following matters:

- 1 The Chair reminded members to respond to the Secretary's office if they intended to go on the tour of the Belfast development, scheduled to commence at 10.00am on 3 December 2019.
- 2 Members would receive invitations from the Events Office to attend and process at one of the four Winter ceremonies. The ceremonies were scheduled to take place on the Coleraine campus (16 December) and in the Waterfront Hall (17 December). The Distinguished Graduate award would

be presented to Dr Adrian Johnston, Director of Catapult NI at the afternoon ceremony on 16 December.

- 3 Members would be invited to attend part of the Audit Committee meeting on 3 February 2020 afternoon (by video-conferencing) for a sector update presentation from Mike Rowley (KPMG).
- 4 The Chair reminded members to submit nominations for honorary degrees by 20 November 2019.

19.50 VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT GBD (C/19/33)

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

Industrial Action

The Vice-Chancellor informed Council that UCU would be undertaking industrial action in regard to the pension issue, pay and conditions. There would be a total of eight strike days before xmas, starting on 25 November. There would also be a possibility of further disruption after xmas. Members noted that it was indeed a national strike and that the University would be carefully managing the impact of the strike on staff and teaching.

Council agreed that it would be useful to have the Director of People Culture attend a future meeting of Council to give an insight into the relationship with the unions and negotiations that take place on a regular basis.

The Vice-Chancellor responded to a comment on the possible disruption, caused by the industrial action to the guided tour of the Belfast development by stating that there be no real issue as both staff and students have crossed picket lines during previous industrial action.

Professor Bartholomew responded to a question on when students would be informed of the possible disruption caused by the strike, by stating that a communication would be issued the week commencing 18 November to all students.

Leadership Forum

The Council noted that a successful Leadership Forum had been held on 24 October with the main focus on institutional priorities and recruitment as a top priority.

Strategic Priorities

The Vice-Chancellor informed Council the London Economics review of the economic impact of Ulster had commenced. He had met with Pat Loughrey to discuss his involvement in the new work being undertaken.

The Chair asked that a report be brought to the February 2020 meeting of Council indicating the full scope of the review.

Reputational Issues

The Vice-Chancellor reminded members that they had received a document on the known reputational issue currently facing the University. The University was actively managing the issues.

The Vice-Chancellor responded to a comment on the recent student suicides by stating that, whilst it was an area of concern it was not an area of focus for the media. The University, he said, was doing much work in the area of mental health and wellbeing, in common with the rest of the sector

The Chair asked, so as to reflect the view of Council, that student mental health issues generally to be added to the list of potential reputational issues.

Council noted the Vice-Chancellor's report.

19.51 COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL

a) Audit Committee (14 October 2019) (C/19/34)

Mr Langan presented the minutes and highlighted the following:

The Committee had received and endorsed the Strategic Risks for 2019-20 (minute 19.44) and noted the major risks included:

- Failure to attract/access investment as needed to deliver 5&50 strategy and to operate in a financially sustainable manner;
- Failure to ensure the timely and effective delivery of the full benefits of the expanded Belfast campus;
- Failure to protect and enhance Ulster's reputation locally, nationally and internationally; and
- Inability to develop and maintain a high-quality fit for purpose digital infrastructure to support teaching and learning delivery and which is resilient on respect to cyber security

The Committee had received the Annual Report on Academic Assurance (minute 19.45) which had been endorsed by Senate on 2 October 2019. The report provided Council and Audit Committee with the assurances in relation to the University's taught courses provision. The Committee had noted the four assurance statements which Council is required to make to the Department for the Economy. The Committee took reassurance from the report and that the supportive measures to assist schools were necessary were working.

The Committee noted that the information sources that informed the report were judged adequate to allow the Committee to advise Council regarding assurance statements as specified by the Department for the Economy.

Council endorsed the Annual Academic Assurance report.

The Committee had endorsed the External Audit Report (minute 19.47) and noted that on the basis of work carried out to date, EY expected to issue an unqualified auditor's opinion in respect of the University accounts. The University continued to give close attention to its pension liabilities and how they could be managed going forward. The Committee noted, in respect of the Greater Belfast Development, an extra £46m additional funding needed to be in place by December 2019.

The Committee had received its Annual Report for 2018-19 (minute 19.48) which, when finally approved would be presented to the Department for the Economy. KPMG were of the opinion that there was a satisfactory assurance on the adequacy of the University's arrangements for risk management, control, governance and value for money. The report noted that there had been a number of recommendations arising from the Deloitte report on Procurement which were not fully addressed.

The Committee noted that owing to outstanding issues associated with the Greater Belfast Development, it would not be possible to endorse its annual report and it had been deferred to the next meeting when the matters were expected to be resolved.

Council endorsed the minutes of the Audit Committee held on 14 October 2019.

b) Resources Committee (21 October 2019) (C/19/35)
To include Draft Financial Statements for year ended 31 July 2019

Mr Clements presented the minutes and highlighted the following:

The Committee had received the Financial Statements for year ended 31 July 2019 (minute 19.38). The Committee noted the importance of the pension issue and how GBD would be funded. The Committee had decided to defer the signing of the accounts until the Department had made a decision on the funding of GBD.

Mr Hope commented that he had had a conversation with the Department and informed them that the University would not be signing the accounts, but they would be provided with a draft version.

The Chair informed Council that there was no option but to defer the accounts until after the Special Council meeting on 9 December.

The Committee had received an update on NIGEMS (minute 19.35c) and noted that the self-financing option for the medical school was not financially viable. There had been progress in gaining GMC accreditation but until funding is secured, stage five of the process could not be completed.

The Committee had noted that the Student Roost (minute 19.35d) accommodation in Belfast had achieved 100% occupancy. Students were being encouraged to move from the Holylands into purpose accommodation in the future.

Council endorsed the minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 21 October 2019.

19.52 PROPOSAL TO LOCATE A SCHOOL ON COLERAINE CAMPUS (C/19/37)

The Vice-Chancellor presented the update on the proposed merger of three post primary schools, into a new Controlled Integrated School located on the Coleraine campus. Council noted that there would be no financial cost to the University. The University's role would be to facilitate and assist ongoing discussions where possible and reassure all parties that the University is there to assist the schools in the future. Members noted that the merger would take place whether or not the University was the chosen location for the school.

The Chair commented that the University's assistance would enhance its civic contribution in the local area.

Council congratulated the team for its contribution to the proposed merger and was fully supportive of the initiative.

Council noted the update.

19.53 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no additional items for discussion.