

Ulster University

Council

15 February 2019

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

PRESENT

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

IN ATTENDANCE

Professor A Adair, Mrs F Kane, Mrs N Lamond, Mr R Millar,

PRESENT BY INVITATION

Professor P Loughrey, Professor I Montgomery, Mrs A Rankin

The Chairman welcomed Ms Horgan, the newly elected academic member of staff, to her first meeting of the Council. Ms Horgan would also be a member of the Resources Committee. The Chairman also extended a warm welcome to Professor Loughrey, who would assist with the presentation of the Sustainability Review paper.

ULSTER: A GLOBALLY ENGAGED UNIVERSITY

Professor Montgomery (Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Global Engagement) informed the Council that since the Global Engagement unit had been established two years ago interest in the University from the international market had increased significantly. The University had a significant student market in China and was developing markets in Pakistan and India. The Council noted that the University had an international student population of 3% with aspirations to reach 20% of the total student population by 2034. Coventry University had around 27% of its student population as international students. With the increased international student numbers would come the need for an enhanced student experience for international students.

Professor Montgomery responded to a question on the QAHE partnership, by stating that the 450 students enrolled brought a net income of 900k per year to the University.

Council noted that a new application system for international students had been introduced. The projections for overseas applications for September were forecasting a 110% increase for the University Ulster Business School. Of key importance is the quality of provision and value of partnerships, and that

appropriate and proportionate due diligence had been undertaken before partnerships contracts were agreed.

Members commented that it would be important for the University to be ready to enter new partnerships in an ever increasingly competitive international market.

Members noted that the total budget for international recruitment for last year had been £4m, including staffing costs.

The Vice-Chancellor responded to a comment on the suitability of overseas partnerships where they may have a reputational effect by stating that it would be important to carry out due diligence on potential partners and to take assurances from our agents and ensure we do not compromise our standards and quality.

The Chairman thanked Professor Montgomery for the update and wished him and his team well for the future.

19.01 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 09 NOVEMBER 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on 09 November 2018 were approved.

19.02 MATTERS ARISING

Health, Safety and Well-Being Policy (minute18.40)

The Chairman informed members that the wording around Council's oversight of health, safety and well-being had been strengthened. The policy had been signed by the Chairman, Vice-Chancellor and the Chief Operating Officer.

19.03 CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman mentioned the following matters:

- 1 The Chairman reminded the meeting that he had previously commissioned an independent report into the recent Industrial Tribunal decision on staff redundancies. The report would be completed in late February and it would provide a critical assessment of the University's handling of the redundancy issue. The University had taken steps to improve industrial relations as a result of the tribunal and the new Industrial Relations Strategy, when complete, would assist in developing better relations with the trade unions.
- 2 The joint meeting of Council and Senate would take place on 6 March 2019 on the Jordanstown campus. It would commence with a buffet lunch from 12.00noon. A programme for the session was currently being developed. The Chairman reminded members that the meeting presented an opportunity for Council and Senate members to share views and debate strategic topics.
- 3 The second Induction Session for new and existing members was scheduled for morning of 6 March, prior to the Joint Meeting of Council and Senate.

- 4 The closing date for receipt of interest in the vacant non-academic staff position on Council was 15 February 2019. To date there had been no expressions of interest.
- 5 Members would receive a formal invitation to the UUSU Learning and Teaching Awards, due to take place on 24 May at 7pm in the Europa Hotel, Belfast.
- 6 The President of the Students' Union would also be issuing an invitation to members to attend a lunch prior to the May Council meeting in Magee. The lunch would be an opportunity for Council to meet existing and incoming student sabbatical officers and see the recently refurbished Students' Union premises.

19.04 VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT (C/19/01)

The Vice-Chancellor presented his report and Council noted:

Graduate Entry Medical School

The Vice-Chancellor and QUB Vice-Chancellor had issued a joint letter to the Permanent Secretary at the Department of Health. The letter reinforced the commitment from both universities to meeting the healthcare education needs of Northern Ireland and that a joint approach to the provision of medical school expansion was being explored. Both Vice-Chancellors had met with the Permanent Secretary to discuss potential approaches, although uncertainty in relation to Brexit was hindering developments.

Magee Business Plan

The University had been asked to refresh its Business Plan

Education and Training Inspectorate

The University's Postgraduate Certificate in Education had been highly commended by the Inspectorate

Foyle College Lands Acquisition

The University has now completed the purchase of two sites of the former Foyle College. It was the final stage of a binding option agreement put in place a few years earlier. The new Estates Strategy, due for completion in late 2019 would determine future purposes for the sites.

City Deals

A Heads of Terms document for the Belfast Region City Deal had been circulated to partners. When agreed and signed it would allow full business plans to be prepared for the projects proposed under the Deal and release the investment. The University is reviewing this document and will provide Belfast City Council with comments. The University continues to work with Derry and Strabane District

Council to refine the projects already under discussion for a City Deal for the North West region.

Greater Belfast Development

The relationship with Somague was now conducive to good working relationships and this was evident in progress that was being made. Block BC was now due for completion in 2020 Council noted that discussions were ongoing in respect of any additional funding that would be required.

The Chairman thanked the Vice-Chancellor for his report.

19.05 APPOINTMENT OF PRO-CHANCELLORS (C/19/02)

The Chairman presented the paper and informed members that Council would be required to make two recommendations to the meeting of Court on 20 March 2019.

- Mr Hunter continues as Chairman until 30 June 2019 to allow for continuity; and
- Mrs Pyper be appointed as Pro-Chancellor from 3 December 2018 to 2 December 2022. Mrs Pyper would assume the chair on 1 July.

The external members of Council had also received a letter asking to declare an interest in the position of the second Pro-Chancellor and Deputy Chair of Council. The closing date for expressions of interest was 20 February 2019. The appointment would be from 1 July 2019 for a period of four years.

The Council endorsed the recommendations to Court on the extension of the term of office of the current Chairman and the appointment of a Pro-Chancellor.

19.06 SUSTAINABILITY REVIEW (C/19/03)

The Vice-Chancellor presented the paper and informed Council that the Review would explore how the University could remain in a strong, sustainable position up to 2034, and beyond, in an uncertain financial and political context. The review would be concluded within the current calendar year, with updates to each meeting of the Council and a final report presented to the November Council meeting.

The Project Steering Group would have an independent chair, Professor Patrick Loughrey, current Vice-Chancellor of Goldsmiths University in London and a previous Distinguished Graduate of Ulster University. Professor Loughrey would be stepping down from his current Vice-Chancellor role at the end of May.

Professor Loughrey informed the Council that his focus would be on ensuring the viability of campuses and programmes. It would be about ensuring that the University would thrive in the long term and ensure each campus uniqueness was sustainable.

The Vice-Chancellor responded to a comment on campus viability, by stating that the review should produce recommendations that would enable the University to plan for the medium to long term future. The Vice-Chancellor also confirmed that

he would be content to have student representation on the Project Board. He continued by stating that the review would also consider how to maximise the resources available to the University, including an examination of the best fit for Schools within faculties.

Open communication to staff and students was important, particularly in respect of the nature and purpose of the review. A communication plan would be progressed by the communications team

The Vice-Chancellor responded to a comment on the lack of trade union representation in the process, That he was unsure if the unions would engage

Council approved:

- subject to any refinement, the draft Project Initiation Document, the terms of reference of the project and the membership of the Project Steering Board and Project Board
- The appointment of Professor Patrick Loughrey as external advisor
- The engagement of consultants to provide strategic objective advice, including advice relating to the delivery of corporate strategies, business structures and performance measurement. Resulting in proposals based on insights, intelligence, research and expertise.

19.07 REPORT ON STUDENT ENROLMENTS (C/19/04)

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor presented the report. their provided an outline of University's position as at 1 December 2018 and estimates for late faculty enrolments between 1 December 2018 and 31 July 2019.

The total of DfE regulated full time students stood at 12,752 enrolments, 149 below the plan of 12,901. Regulated DHSSPS funded undergraduate numbers stood at 1,617 nursing and allied health profession students. This is 87 above the 2018/19 plan of 1,530 and 136 above the 2017/18 plan of 1,481.

The total number of non-regulated enrolments stood at 7,581 with an increase in home student population of 140 relative to the 2017/18 actual but a 523 shortfall against the 2018/19 plan. The overseas population stood at 323, a shortfall of 118 on the 2018/19 plan.

Council noted that work needed to be undertaken to ensure students were attracted to Ulster University to achieve the MaSN but not at the expense of quality and standards. Unregulated student numbers would also need to be significantly increased going forward.

Council noted the enrolment paper and the issues contained in it.

19.08 COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL

- a) Audit Committee (3 December 2018 and 04 February 2019 (C/19/05a & C/19/05b))

Mr Langan presented the minutes and highlighted the following:

3 December 2018

The Committee had received the Progress Report (minute 18.49) and noted that three reports had been completed:

- Payments to Creditors had received a Satisfactory internal audit opinion with no issues
- Student Accommodation had received a Satisfactory internal audit opinion with five priority three issues and one priority three issue from the previous year.
- Review of Specific Faculties – Ulster University Business School had received a Satisfactory internal audit opinion with three priority three issues

The Committee had also noted that there had been two priority one recommendations not fully addressed at the time of follow up work.

The Committee had received an update on the Internal Audit Strategy (minute 18.50) and noted that following one more session with the auditors it would be ready for consultation. The Committee agreed that specific areas for review would be agreed with University management.

The Committee had received an update on risk associated with the Greater Belfast Development (minute 18.53). The main area of concern remained funding and raising additional funds. Members had raised concerns at the Department's timescale for considering the economic business case.

4 February 2019

The Committee had received the Progress Report (minute 19.05) and noted that two reports had been concluded:

- Management and staff expense claims had received a Satisfactory internal audit opinion with one priority three issue
- Preparations for Assessment under Research Evaluation Framework (REF) had received a Satisfactory internal audit opinion with no issues.

The Committee had commended the internal auditors for their attention to clearing outstanding issues from previous audit reports. The Committee had been pleased to note the progress made on a significant number of long-standing audit recommendations.

The Committee has received the Updated Draft Internal Audit Strategy: Excerpt for discussion (minute 19.06). The strategy included key risks as identified by the University and key areas of focus as determined by the internal auditors, both within the University and the sector. The Committee also noted the risks associated with Data Futures and the University's statutory obligation to HESA. The University, in future would be required to submit more detailed student information approximately 8/9 times per year and not twice as is the current practice. The installation of Banner 9 would assist with the preparation of the required reports in the future.

The Committee had received the Greater Belfast Development Risk Update (minute 19.11) and noted that funding confirmation remained a major issue. The other risks relate to multiparty alternative dispute resolution process conclusion, timely progress of the preferred delivery position and operational completion for 2021 academic year. The risk associated with the remaining campus delivery had been reduced owing to agreement in principle with Somague/Sacyr on disputed matters.

The Committee had received and endorsed the Key Performance Indicators for the internal auditors (minute 19.12). The questionnaire which captured feedback from staff who had been audited would be amended to ensure a more user friendly version.

Council endorsed the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 3 December 2018 and 04 February 2019.

b) Governance, Nominations and Remuneration Committee (29 November 2018) (C/19/06)

The Chairman presented the minutes of 29 November 2018 and highlighted the following:

The Committee had received and approved the recommendations included in the Analysis of UCEA Salary Survey (minute 18.36). The senior staff salaries used at the University remained appropriate and would not be reviewed until November 2019.

The Committee had received the recommendations from the Vice-Chancellor on Senior Officer Salary Review (minute 18.37). The Committee had welcomed the performance assessment of senior staff, introduced by the Vice-Chancellor. The introduction of a more robust transparent Performance Management Framework would ensure performance would be assessed more rigorously. The Committee had approved the application of the National Pay Award for 2018 increase and the Vice-Chancellor's recommendations on salary progression.

The Committee had received the CUC survey of Vice-Chancellors Salaries (minute 18.40). The Committee had noted the appropriateness of the comparators being used within this for the University.

The Committee had received the assessment of the Vice-Chancellor's performance (minute 18.41). There had been substantial progress on all institutional targets except for Global Engagement. The civic contribution agenda had made significant progress but there was still room for improvement. The area of equality in both staff and student surveys needed continued focus and improvement should be brought by the Vice-Chancellor and his senior team. The Committee agreed that the Vice-Chancellor should be awarded incremental progression on the basis of his performance during 2017/18.

Council endorsed the minutes of the Governance, Nominations and Remuneration Committee meetings held on 29 November 2018.

c) Resources Committee (8 November 2018 and 14 January 2019) (C/19/07a and C/19/07b))

Mr D Clements presented the minutes highlighting the following:

8 November 2018:

The Council, at its meeting on 9 November 2018 had received a verbal update on the Resources Committee meeting held on 8 November 2018. The main item had been the Financial Statements which had been subsequently endorsed by Council.

The minutes were presented to Council for formal endorsement.

14 January 2019

The Committee had received an update on the Student Roost accommodation (minute 19.02a)). The rent had been reduced to £110 per week and a marketing plan would be launched towards the end of January. Room allocations were now under the control of the University. The aim would be to increase the number of nominations to tenancy agreements and deals were being out in place with existing tenants to encourage continued tenancy.

The Committee had received a presentation on the Digital Strategy (minute 19.03). The Committee noted the challenges and risks the strategy presented, including cost and the view that they were IT projects and not University wide projects. The Committee noted that information technology underpins the University's strategic vision.

The Council noted that funds were not currently available to complete the strategy in full but that it would be progressed over time

The Committee had received the masterplans for Magee and Coleraine (minute 19.04) and noted that there had been a strong focus on outward engagement. The strengths of each campus had been harnessed and extensive engagement would take place with local stakeholders and councils. Marketing and Communications would be working to maximize this engagement.

The Committee had received a Greater Belfast Development update (minute 19.06) and noted that progressed had been made on site and that a more positive relationship existed with Somague/Sacyr. Options had been proposed for the continuation of the relationship with Somague/Sacyr. The Committee had agreed that option 3a be endorsed. The option would see the University negotiating an agreement with Somague/Sacyr and include settlement of all claims associated with Basement Defects. This would result in additional costs of £86.4m and a revised completion date of December 2019 for Blocks BD and 2020 for Block BC.

The Committee had received and endorsed the Tuition Fees for 2019/20 (minute 19.07) and noted that the full time undergraduate fee set by DfE would be £4,275. This represented an uplift of 2.8%. All fees would be uplifted by this percentage and rounded to the nearest £10 with the exceptions as detailed in the minute.

Council formally endorsed the minutes of the Resources Committee held on 8 November 2018 and 14 January 2019.

19.09 BALANCED SCORECARD PROGRESS REPORT (C/19/08)

Mrs Rankin presented the update on progress made in achieving top level Key Performance Indicators. Members also noted the domestic and global league tables position. The update indicated that the University had been 82 short of its overseas target of 518.

The future year targets are a reflection of the pressures on funding, particularly the Student Staff ratio which stood at 16.3 in 2017/18 with a five year target of 14.6. If the forecasted growth in non-MaSN academic plan is not delivered, it would have significant adverse impact on almost all the Balanced Scorecard Metrics.

The Vice-Chancellor responded to a comment that more time might be needed to be given to the item in future, by stating that this was a mid-year review and the important reflection time would be September.

Members commented that while it was important to concentrate on the red issues, it was important to highlight the successes.

Council noted the progress against the Balanced Scorecards for 2017/18 and approved the targets for 2018/19.

19.10 STUDENTS' UNION CONSTITUTION (C/19/09)

Mrs Lamond assisted by Mr McStravock presented the paper which indicated the proposed changes to the Articles of Association. The revisions reflected the changes to the Students' Union structure. The Union would move from an unincorporated business to a private limited company with impending charity registration. The articles also highlighted some changes to recruitment of members to the Trustee Board.

The Student Body had accepted the changes at its annual student meeting on 10 December 2018. Final approval would be sought at the Students' Union Board of Trustees on 25 February 2019, prior to being lodged with Companies House.

The Council endorsed the changes to the Articles of Association.