

Ulster University

Council

16 February 2018

Minutes of a meeting of the Council of Ulster University held at the Belfast Campus on Friday 16 February 2018.

PRESENT

Mr J Hunter (Chair), Professor P Nixon (Vice-Chancellor and President), Mrs H Bingham, Mr D Clements, Mr A Langan, Mr P Lobban, Mrs M McKee, Mrs L McKeown, Dr P McNaney, Mr K McStravock (Students' Union), Mrs H Quigley, Professor M Stringer, Mrs E Way

APOLOGIES

Dr K Burnett, Mrs J Pyper, Sir Robert Salisbury, Dr J Stuart

IN ATTENDANCE

Professor A Adair, Mrs N Lamond, Mr E Mullan and Mr R Millar

PRESENT BY INVITATION

Professor I Montgomery (Global Engagement presentation), Mrs A Rankin (for minute 18.07)

The Chairman welcomed Mrs Way to her first meeting of the Council. Mrs Way would also be a member of the Audit Committee. Council extended a very warm welcome to Mr Langan, returning after his recent illness.

ULSTER: A GLOBALLY ENGAGED UNIVERSITY

Professor Montgomery (Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Global Engagement) informed the Council that his portfolio entails seeking opportunities, sustaining relationships with mature links and developing new markets and partnerships. The Council noted that the Global Themes included Social Renewal, Sustainability, Healthy Communities, Creativity and Culture and Business. The International Office now had the right professional structure in place to succeed in international markets and to ensure compliance. It would be important, he said to develop new programmes across faculties to attract overseas students and ensure that international agents were ahead of the game with pursuing new market leads. The University had achieved an increase of over 200% in market activity.

Professor Adair responded to a comment on academic staff international contacts, by stating that it would be important to ensure that we align our international activity across the University. Professor Adair also confirmed that the ownership of targets for the faculties lay with the Executive Deans. Professor Montgomery responded to a comment on international leads generation by stating the

University has excellent links with Invest Northern Ireland and they work together in developing leads.

Professor Montgomery informed Council that the University is not where he would like it to be in reaching its targets on overseas recruitment. However, with the right systems in place and the availability of high quality student accommodation near the Belfast campus, that should change. Professor Adair informed Council that the Associate Deans for the faculties are indicating that they would meet their targets on international recruitment.

The Chairman thanked Professor Montgomery for the detailed presentation and the key themes going forward. Professor Montgomery left the meeting.

18.01 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 NOVEMBER 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2017 were approved.

18.02 MATTERS ARISING

There were no items.

18.03 CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman mentioned the following matters:

- 1 The Chairman informed members that the Chief Finance and Information Officer had received a communication from the NI Charity Commission. It is in response to the recent media coverage of the serious allegations involving charity workers. It reminded the University of the requirements to have the appropriate policies in place for working with vulnerable beneficiaries and robust controls to ensure that such policies are effective.

Mr Mullan informed Council that the University did have an up to date Child Protection policy and policies for disabled student support workers. Mr Mullan continued by stating that there were other activities, such as widening access, Step Up programme and open days which may need to be reviewed, to ensure The University is compliant with the necessary policies.

- 2 The joint meeting of Council and Senate would take place on 7 March 2018 on the Jordanstown campus. It would commence with a buffet lunch from 12.00noon. Discussions were currently taking place to develop a programme for the session. The Chairman reminded members that the meeting presented an opportunity for Council and Senate members to share views and debate strategic topics. The Senate had been reconstituted in January and a considerable number of new Senate faculty members would be attending the session.
- 3 There had been two meetings of the Chairs of Council Committees since the last meeting of the Council. The Greater Belfast Development had been the main topic on the agenda.

- 4 The Chairman reminded members that as a result of his individual meetings with members last year, there had been an on line governance-training refresher course offered to members.
- 5 The Chairman informed members that several statements had been posted on line by a current Emeritus Professor. Senate would be reviewing the statements and decide if the actions by the individual fell short of the standard expected of an Ulster University Emeritus Professor.
- 6 The Chancellor's lecture would take place on Monday 5 March 2018 at 7pm on the Magee Campus. Invitations would be issued following confirmation of a guest speaker.
- 7 The meeting of Council on 4 May on the Magee campus would be preceded by a tour, of the new teaching facilities led by the Provost, Dr Malachy O'Neill.

18.04 VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT (C/18/01)

The Vice-Chancellor presented his report and Council noted:

Sustainable Funding

That the University had responded to the Department of Finance on the 2018-2020 Budgetary outlook. Further cuts to funding would have a critical effect on the University. The additional possibility of withdrawing support for Post Graduate Studentships would have a disastrous impact on PhD programmes. The University continues to argue against this with the Department for the Economy.

UCU Strike Action

That a national strike called By UCU in relation to changes to USS pension would consist of fourteen days of action, starting on 22 February for a two day period. Council noted that 88% of members of UCU who voted were in favour of the strike. UCU is advising members not to inform students or management that they are on strike. However lecturers were being encouraged to engage with students. The Vice-Chancellor assured Council that the strike would not be detrimental to students, who will receive communications, as will staff on efforts to minimise and mitigate against any disruption. Lectures will be rescheduled and final year students will have their own detailed plan to try and avoid adverse effects on their study. Council noted that the pay reductions as a result of UCU members taking strike action would be go to support the Student Hardship Fund.

Media Coverage

That following media coverage of issues related to the Greater Belfast Development, the Industrial Tribunal, industrial action and the actions of a current Emeritus Professor, there was the need to generate positive new stories with a pro-active institutional communication plan and protect the University's reputation.

Medical School

That following the second stage interviews, an offer had been made for the post of Foundation Dean/Professor. The Department of Health had completed its initial review of the Outline Business Case. Feedback received had been taken on board.

School Visits

That the Vice-Chancellor is visiting each school and had received good feedback from academic staff. The schools are all aware of the 5&50 and targets that needed to be met.

Development and Alumni Relations

That the £2m target for donations set for this year seemed likely to be achieved. The International Fund for Ireland had donated £5m to fund the George Moore Chair on Data Science, based in Magee.

The Chairman congratulated DARO for securing such a large donation.

Confucius Individual Performance Award

Council congratulated the Vice-Chancellor on being awarded the prestigious Confucius Individual Excellence Award. The award had been presented at a ceremony in Xi-an.

The Chairman thanked the Vice-Chancellor for his report.

18.05 REPORT ON STUDENT ENROLMENTS (C/18/02)

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor presented the report which gave a snapshot of the University's position as at 1 December 2017 and estimates for late faculty enrolments between 1 December 2017 and 31 July 2018.

The total number of Department of the Economy regulated full time students was 17 above the plan of 13,131. Regulated DHSSPS funded undergraduate students stood at 1,481 which was 12 below the plan of 1,493. The paper indicated an increase of 68 in the overseas student population relative to 2016/17 actual but a 107 shortfall against the 2017/18 plan. Full time research enrolments stood at 413 which was 23 above plan but just one above 2016/17 figure. The part time research figure of 154 was eleven below plan and 15 below 2016/17 figure.

The Vice-Chancellor responded to a comment from the Chairman on the future of the agreement with QAHE, by stating that the University needed to look at the business model and the returns we receive for the considerable effort made by the University to ensure the agreement worked. Each QAHE student brought approximately £2k to the University whereas one directly recruited international student brought approximately £10k to the University.

Council noted the enrolment paper.

18.06 COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL

a) Audit Committee (10 November 2017 and 05 February 2018) (C/17/03a & C/17/03b)

The Council had received a verbal report of the Audit Committee meeting on 10 November 2017 at its meeting on 10 November 2017.

Mrs Quigley presented the minutes of 5 February 2018 and reported that:

The Committee had agreed to add an additional Term of Reference (minute 18.04) to reflect its additional responsibility under Academic Assurance.

The full Academic Assurance annual report would also, in future be presented to meetings of the Council, having firstly been reviewed at the autumn Audit Committee meeting.

The Committee had received the Internal Audit Progress report (minute 18.05) and noted that seven internal audit reports had been concluded:

- Budgetary Control had received a Satisfactory audit opinion with no issues
- Review of processes to ensure compliance with Competitions and Markets Authority requirements had received a Satisfactory audit opinion with 2 priority two issues and 3 priority three issues
- Financial Ledger and month end close received a Satisfactory audit opinion with 2 priority three issues
- Financial Sustainability: Financial Planning/Management of Financial Resources had received a Satisfactory audit opinion with no issues
- Review of Department of Research and Impact – Administration/Compliance with funding conditions received a Satisfactory audit opinion with 2 priority three issues
- Sickness and Absence Management received a Satisfactory audit opinion with 1 priority two issue and 2 priority three issues.
- Role of Governing Body within updated Academic Assurance Framework had been a non-assurance report. It had focused on ensuring Council members were provided with the appropriate knowledge and assurance to comply with new requirements.

A total of five priority one recommendations had not been fully addressed. Three related to the Internationalisation Strategy. The restructuring of the international office and ensuring the right people were in post had led to the delay in addressing the issues.

The Committee had noted the report from the Resilience Committee (minute 18.06) and that a Risk Management Tool Kit had been developed which would allow staff to identify and assess scores at the strategic, portfolio, faculty and departmental level. The Committee also took comfort in the progress made with the University's ability to respond to a crisis and in business continuity planning. The Resilience Committee had approved a refreshed Crisis Management Plan.

The Committee had received a report on the Key Performance Indicators for the internal audit providers (minute 18.09) and noted that all but one of the 17 KPIs had

been met. The one where 90% had not been met (88.24%) related to client feedback. The questionnaire supplied to clients would be amended to include a n/a response, rather than only satisfied or dissatisfied being available. The Committee endorsed the recommendation that KPMG be advised that their performance for 2016/17 had been satisfactory.

Council endorsed the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 10 November 2017 and 05 February 2018.

b) Governance, Nominations and Remuneration Committee (30 November 2017 and 6 February 2018) (C/18/04a & C/18/04b)

The Chairman presented the minutes of 30 November 2017 and 6 February 2018 and highlighted the following:

30 November 2017 meeting:

The Committee had received and endorsed the Professoriate Executive report (minute 17.20) recommendations. The Committee also noted that there had been no significant equality issues that needed to be addressed.

The Committee had received the Analysis of UCEA Salary Survey Data and recommendations (minute 17.21). The patterns and trends that had emerged from the Senior Staff Remuneration survey for 2016 did not cause any immediate concern for Ulster. The Committee noted that the senior staff salaries remained appropriate and should not be reviewed again until October 2018.

06 February 2018 meeting:

The Committee had received an update on the USS Pension Scheme (minute 18.02) and noted that the revision to the scheme had been passed on a vote by the Joint Negotiating Committee that had been established to consider the future of the scheme. March would see consultations on the proposals with an intended commencement date of April 2019. The Committee noted that UCU had not agreed to the proposals and members at 61 universities, including Ulster would undertake 14 days of industrial action, commencing on 22 February.

The Committee noted that the Equal Pay Review Groups' report (minute 18.04) had been delayed. The group had considered the matter in respect of gender, community background, religious background and disability. The final report would indicate that there were no systemic issues but would highlight areas such as allowances for additional duties that would benefit from consideration.

The Committee had received the draft Higher Education Remuneration Code (minute 18.05) and noted that it had been circulated by the Committee of University Chairs (CUC). The Office for Students would publish the Remuneration Code when finalised. The Committee had agreed that the main recommendations contained in the report be implemented following the publication of the code, scheduled for April 2018.

The Committee had agreed that the current structure of the Committee should be retained but in line with good practice, a new independent member should be added with expertise in remuneration issues.

Council endorsed the minutes of the Governance, Nominations and Remuneration Committee meetings held on 30 November 2017 and 06 February 2018.

c) Resources Committee (11 December 2017 and 15 February 2018) (C/16/05 and verbal report)

Mr D Clements presented the minutes highlighting the following:

11 December 2017:

The Committee had noted the Decision of the Industrial Tribunal (minute 18.30a) and that the University had accepted responsibility for errors made during the Voluntary Severance Scheme 2015. Members were assured that owing to the underspend of the Strategic Investment Fund in the 2016/17 financial year; there was scope for the compensation payments without causing adverse impact to the budget. Members had asked for more information on how the mistakes had been made, even with the assistance of legal advice. The Committee recorded its regret that the issue had occurred and that it should not happen in the future.

The Committee had noted that mediation was ongoing with LSJV in relation to the Greater Belfast Development (minute 18.30b). The University was endeavouring to resolve any issues with the contractor.

The Committee noted that the structural changes within the professional services area (minute 18.30d) would be completed in 2018. Restructuring of Marketing and Communications was ongoing.

The Committee had received the Emerging Residential Strategy (minute 18.31) and noted the need for high quality, safe and appropriately priced accommodation in Belfast and to increase the provision in Coleraine. Work had commenced by private developers on approved sites on Greater Patrick Street. Members also noted that there had also been engagement with JH Turkingtons (accommodation providers on the Jordanstown campus), on its current arrangement with the University. Members had expressed the need for caution in that engagement.

The Committee had approved the proposed 3.3% uplift on Tuition Fees (minute 18.32). This is in line with the increase set by the Department for the Economy for full time undergraduate fees.

The Committee had received the Financial Outturn report to 31 October 2017 (minute 17.34) and noted that total income had been forecasted to be down against budget by £1.5m. Largely due to a shortfall in tuition fees. Faculties were showing a below expected spend, due to staff vacancies.

15 February 2018 – verbal report:

The Committee had received a PS5&50 Management Information Update that indicated the matching process within the faculties and the number of staff who had

been downgraded. A number of revisions had been made to the OSC Policy. These were being discussed with UCU.

The Committee had received a Proposed Nominations Agreement for Great Patrick Street student accommodation, whereby The University would enter into a two year nomination agreement with Student Roost. The agreement would secure the University's commitment to providing high-class student accommodation at all campuses. Funds currently available from widening participation and the Student Support Fund for accommodation bursaries for students from a lower socio-economic background would be re-allocated. The Committee noted that the maximum financial exposure for 2018 would be £910k and £1.7m in 2019. The Committee had been provided with an update on the strike action relating to USS pension reform which had been scheduled to take place between 22 March and 16 March 2018. Teaching would be disrupted, a Task and Finish Group had been established to deal with the effects of the strike action. The Committee noted that communications would be issued to all staff and students to assure them that the University would be taking all necessary steps to keep any disruption to a minimum. It would be important that ensure that the student experience remained unaffected during the strike period.

The Committee noted the funding update and that any further cuts to funding would have serious implications for the University. The University was continuing its negotiations with the Department of Finance on the budget allocation.

Council endorsed the minutes of the Resources Committee held on 11 December 2017 and noted the verbal report of the meeting held on 16 February 2018. The Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2018 would be formally presented to Council at its meeting on 4 May 2018.

18.07 BALANCED SCORECARD PROGRESS REPORT (C/18/06)

Mrs Rankin presented the interim position on progress made in achieving top level Key Performance Indicators. Members also noted the domestic league tables position. The paper indicated that the international student target had not been met.

The University had been ranked 103 out of 127 institutions in terms of staff/ student ratio. This would have a direct impact on student satisfaction survey. Council noted that the University was currently 108 academic staff down in comparison to its peer groups.

The Chairman mentioned that the significant number of student course representatives, currently standing at over 800, were key improving the University ranking under the National Student Survey.

The Chairman commented that the update contained a lot of green recorded but the priority must be to concentrate on the red issues and the actions or solutions for the delivery of KPIs in those areas. Members agreed that it was important to capture the journey and where we started, it would also be important to make the report simpler and easy to understand and Council did not need such detail as captured in the paper.

Council noted the comprehensive interim update. Mrs Rankin left the meeting.

18.08 GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION (GDPR) (C/18/07)

Mr Mullan presented the paper that highlighted the necessary steps which the University is required to take, to ensure compliance with the new General Data Protection Regulation. The more robust legislation will ensure a common approach to data protection across Europe. There will be an awareness campaign, to alert all staff to the new legislation and indicate the timetable for completion of each of the twelve key steps.

The Council noted that under the new procedures, there would be extended rights of data subjects and data portability. Consent will also be needed from individuals to permit the processing of their information. Individuals will also have the right to request their information to be forgotten and would require the data controller to erase and stop processing their information. There were limits to this right to be forgotten, as there may be clear business needs to retain certain information.

The Council noted the paper on General Data Protections Regulations and the approach taken by the University.

18.09 KEY UNIVERSITY STRATEGIES AND POLICIES (C/18/08)

Mr Mullan presented the paper and informed members that the paper was intended to provide information on which key strategies and policies the Council or its committees would receive for approval. The University also had a timetable for the review of policies, by the policy owner. The revised, top level policies would be presented to Council for approval. Council also noted that the University had procedures for developing and introducing new policies.

Members commented on the lack of a Communication Strategy, which would assist the University in being pro-active and managing media stories. Members also stressed the need for Strategies such as the Communication Strategy and PR strategy to be presented to Council in the future.

The Council noted the paper.