

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held at 13:00 on 04 FEBRUARY 2022, via Zoom.

Present: Dr Emyr Roberts, Chair of Council (Chair); Ms Meri Huws, Deputy Chair of Council; Professor Elizabeth Treasure, Vice-Chancellor; Professor Tim Woods, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning, Teaching and Student Experience); Ms Kate Eden; Ms Mared Edwards, UMCA President (until minute 40); Ms Kylie Evans; Professor Simon Green; Ms Sharron Lusher; Dr Louise Marshall (from minute 41); Ms Rhuanedd Richards; Mr Mark Tweed; Professor Sir Robin Williams; and Professor Reyer Zwiggelaar.

In attendance: Mr Stephen Forster, Director of Finance and Corporate Services; Mr Steve Thomas; Head of Communications and Public Affairs; Ms Jean Jones, Head of the Vice-Chancellor's Office and Ms Kath Williams, Interim University Secretary.

Apologies for absence had been received from Mr Owen Evans; Ms Sabina O'Donoghue, AberSU President; Ms Fiona Sharp; and Dr William Williams.

32. MATTERS RAISED BY THE CHAIR

1. Welcome

Kylie Evans, Scholarships Manager attending as non-academic staff member during Kath Williams' secondment to the role of University Secretary.

2. Condolences

Sympathies were expressed following the death of:

1. Dr David Falla, former warden of Padarn Hall and lecturer in the Department of Physics;
2. Emeritus Professor Chris Harding, Department of Law and Criminology and former head of department.
3. Joseph (Joe) Francis, 3rd year student in the department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies;

3. Congratulations

Dr Louise Marshall was congratulated on her recent appointment, along with Dr Jenny Mathers and Dr Gareth Hall, to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) advisory groups.

4. Council membership

Ms Fiona Sharp had informed the Chair of her intention not to seek a second term on Council when her term finishes at the end of April, due to other commitments. Steps

were being taken to fill the vacancy for an Independent Member on Council, as well as other Committee vacancies, and a recommendation would be presented in due course.

5. Informal briefing session

An Informal briefing session on Recruitment and Marketing had been held for Council members in advance of the formal meeting. The session had been led by Professor Tim Woods, Professor Anwen Jones and Mr Robin Halley. A copy of the presentation would be made available via SharePoint [**ACTION:** University Secretary].

6. Meeting Conduct

In order to ensure an effective online meeting, members had been asked to provide advance warning should they wish to discuss any item marked with an asterisk on the agenda. There had been no such requests, and the items in question would therefore be approved or noted in accordance with the recommendation set out on the coversheet.

33. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

NOTED

No conflicts of interest were declared in relation to the business to be considered during the meeting. However, under item 37.7, the Vice-Chancellor reported on pension-related matters and noted an interest by staff members present at the meeting.

34. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RECEIVED

Minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2021 (COU2122-064).

RESOLVED

That the minutes be confirmed as a correct record.

35. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

RECEIVED

A log setting out the progress made in taking forward decisions and actions agreed at the most recent Council meeting, and outstanding actions from previous meetings (COU2122-065).

NOTED

1. The updates provided in the decisions log. It was agreed that historical closed actions should not be included in the paperwork for future meetings. (**ACTION:** University Secretary).

36. CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence to report.

37. VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT (Minute Redacted)

RECEIVED

Report by the Vice-Chancellor (COU2122-066)

NOTED

1. The report consisted of three key parts: a highlight report; a planning and student enrolment report; and a communications report.
2. Despite relatively high numbers of Covid-19 cases among the student body, members were advised that there was a perceptible change in the nature of the response to the pandemic, including the change to the local Incident Management Team meeting pattern, from weekly to fortnightly, which it was noted was in line with developments nationally. Every effort was being made to maintain in-person teaching.
3. In addition to the recruitment figures reported at the briefing prior to the formal meeting, there were additional applicants for the Vet School and Nursing programmes, including, currently, 350 applications for the 59 places available on the Nursing programme. However, concerns were expressed regarding the on-going challenges in recruiting to the PGCE provision both in AU and Wales and the strategic attention needed at national level to address this. Given also that it was unlikely that European numbers would recover, future KPIs would express those applications under international applicant figures.
4. The results of REF 2021 were expected at the same time as the next Council meeting. There was an expectation that there would be a negative impact on the results for AU, given the institutional challenges faced during the relevant period, highlighting the need for the University to invest in research and innovation.
5. Members' attention was drawn to the University's bid to UNESCO for City of Literature designation, drawing on the impact of the University, the National Library of Wales and the Books Council of Wales.
6. In recent months the UCU has been balloting their members for industrial action relating both to pay and, separately, pension issues. The first ballot took place in October/November; with a re-ballot on the same issues undertaken in December/January for institutions, like AU, where turnout had been between 40% - 50%. The results of the latest ballot were communicated to AU in January noting that the required turnout had not been met and therefore strike action or action short of a strike would not be taken by AU members.
7. An oral update was provided regarding proposed changes to the USS Pension. Council was advised of a 2-week consultation period by Universities UK on a proposal to increase the employers' pension contribution by 0.2% until 2025, taking the University's contribution to 21.4%. If the proposal was not supported, the University's contribution would go to over 23% in 2022 and further increase to over 24% the following year. The reasons for the proposed increase to 2025 related to proposed pension reforms including a 2.5% cap on inflationary increases for entitlements which built up from April 2022. It was suggested that the cap was not instated until 2025 on new benefits earned. The Vice-Chancellor recommended supporting the UUK proposal on the additional 0.2% pending closure of the final 2020 pension valuation.

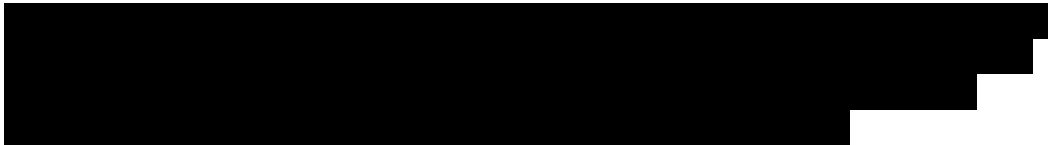
8.



RESOLVED

9. To support the increase of 0.2% on employers' pension contributions until 2025 and respond accordingly to the Universities UK consultation. (**ACTION:** Vice Chancellor).

10.



38. HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE

RECEIVED

Report by the Health, Safety and Environmental Manager (COU2122-067).

NOTED

1. The report provided an interim summary update on health and safety activity.
2. New line management arrangements were highlighted. Members were also advised that the Health, Safety and Environmental Manager would be advising on the on-going Health Surveillance requirements attached to the new healthcare and Vet School provision.

39. REPORT BY ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION

RECEIVED

Report by AberSU President (COU2122-068).

NOTED

1. The report provided an update on developments at AberSU since the last meeting of the University's Council.
2. AberSU continued to offer events such as Re-Fresh during the second Semester, and continued to focus on student wellbeing matters, including supporting over 250 students resident in Aberystwyth over the Christmas holiday period. The programme of events was also subject to timely risk assessment and a managed response to Covid-19 rates.

3. The outcomes of the 2020 Redbrick survey were highlighted and AberSU's high ratings in a range of areas. However, members would welcome further consideration of the student well-being figures and discussion of issues affecting student retention. [**ACTION** – AberSU President].

40. STRATEGIC MATTERS

1. Key Performance Indicators

RECEIVED

Report by Head of Planning (COU2122-069).

NOTED

1. The report set out progress against the Key Performance Indicators at the end of Quarter 2.
2. Members' attention was drawn to the detailed commentary on some of the measures. It was noted that the target KPI for ECS completion should be 100% and that evidence from the staff survey suggested that a higher proportion of staff than indicated in the formal KPI were having regular one-to-one meetings with their Line Manager. It was also noted that the system for supporting ECS conversations was under review by the Head of Organisational Development and Learning.
3. Clarification was sought regarding the KPIs for employability, and it was recognised that progress was less than satisfactory. A variety of mitigations were noted including new training modules for students such as LinkedIn Learning; the development of tailored packages for different schemes; and strategies to embed a different culture within academic departments to seek buy-in for embedding employability enhancement opportunities within the formal curriculum. It was also noted that this KPI would improve as Vet School and Nursing cohorts graduated, and that the further development of the healthcare provision to include Postgraduate pathways would also impact positively on employment outcomes.
4. The further developments in healthcare were likely to lead to additional space requirements on Penglais Campus, thus emphasising the need to complete the Estates Strategy. The Vice-Chancellor apologised on behalf of the University Executive for the on-going delay in bringing forward that strategy, noting that some further work was required to ensure it appropriately reflected the University's strategic objectives, including growth of the institution.

41. FINANCIAL MATTERS

1. Management Accounts

RECEIVED

Report by the Deputy Director of Finance (COU2122-070).

NOTED

The report set out the University's financial performance to the end of Month 5 (31 January 2022).

1. This was an interim report for M5 given that the full quarterly report (Q2) was scheduled to be published later in the month in time for the next Resources and Performance Committee.
2. The position showed little change from M4 with the institution on track to achieve the budgeted surplus of £0.1m. Attention was drawn to the budget exceptions and in particular the reductions in student income against budget of £1.7m. Savings had been identified in-year to offset this shortfall within which budget-holders were required to work. Some additional mitigation was noted following receipt of HEFCW's revised remit letter which included up to £2m for capital projects and a proportion of a £10m increase in-year in QR funding. Further detail regarding this additional funding was expected. Members' attention was drawn to the improved cashflow position against budget.
3. Clarification was sought and provided regarding the University's forward purchasing strategy to mitigate against rising energy costs. It was noted that 80% of the costs had been forward purchased and the additional 20% accounted for in the budget.

RESOLVED

4. To note the position as at M5.

42. OLD COLLEGE

RECEIVED

Report by Director of Welsh Language and External Engagement (COU2122-071)

NOTED

1. The report, which remained confidential, provided an update on the project's progress for Council's consideration and set out the detail involving a Phase 2 proposal, supported by the Levelling Up Fund (LUF), to purchase the adjacent Cambria Building.
2. Members were updated regarding Phase 1 of the Old College project: contractors had been appointed and value engineering conversations were on-going. Members were advised that, given wider financial pressures, the full scope of the Phase 1 plans were unlikely to be realised by the end of that first phase of the build. However, Council was also assured that any value engineering decisions would be made on the basis that the business case, as presented, was safeguarded and that any conditions tied to specific external funding streams would be maintained. Fundraising was reported to be on-going with a view to reducing the University's contribution below the maximum of £13.5m as agreed by Council.
3. Members' attention was drawn to the Minute from Resources and Performance Committee (RPC2122-022 19.1), which summarised the consideration given at that meeting regarding Phase 2, and the conditions and on-going assurances sought as part of the recommendation made. The discussion at RPC also concluded that decisions regarding the Old College developments and the sources and conditions of funding needed to be appropriately communicated, in particular to the student body, and that on-going engagement with student representatives was essential.

4. Assurances were sought regarding the complexity of the additional phase and the incorporation of the Cambria Building project alongside the existing project. It was recognised that the additional phase added a level of complexity but that there was well-established collaboration between the teams and stakeholders, internal and external to the University, which provided a firm basis from which to proceed with Phase 2. Council also wished to be assured that any value engineering decisions would not be detrimental to, nor compromise, the original vision for the building. It was suggested that whilst Council would not intervene with regard to the operational management of the build, access to the project decision log would provide a level of on-going transparency and confidence regarding the integrity of the development.

RESOLVED

5. To note progress with the Old College project Phase 1, including the management of costs.
6. (By unanimous VOTE) to formally approve the acceptance of the Levelling Up Funding (LUF) as outlined, enabling progression of Phase 2 of the Old College project. It was noted that two Members who had submitted apologies in advance of the meeting had confirmed support in absentia. As noted in the RPC minutes, acceptance would be subject to the following conditions: receiving on-going assurances regarding: the conditions of the LUF funding and signing of a formal agreement between Ceredigion and AU regarding any future financial liability should there be any; the rigour of the procurement exercises for each additional element of the Phase 2 project; on-going careful management of the capital spend and costs with inflationary increases in mind. (**ACTION:** Director of Welsh Language and External Engagement).
7. To note that consideration be given to the level and nature of communications, with the student body in particular, regarding the Old College development. (**ACTION:** Director of Welsh Language and External Engagement).
8. To ensure that decisions in response to the value engineering process for Phase 1 of the Old College project were appropriately recorded and that the decisions log was included in the Schedule of Business for Resources and Performance Committee and onward to Council for information. (**ACTION:** Director of Welsh Language and External Engagement).

43. QUALITY ENHANCEMENT REVIEW – SELF-EVALUATE ANALYSIS

RECEIVED

Report by Professor Tim Woods, Pro Vice-Chancellor (COU2122-072)

NOTED

1. Following a Special Meeting of Senate on 12 January 2022, and notification to Council at the September 2021 away-day and November meetings, regarding the Quality Enhancement Review; Members were further advised that the self-evaluation document and supporting evidence had been submitted ahead of a visit by an external panel in April 2022. AberSU would also be submitting its own self-evaluation document separate to that written by the University. Following submission of that documentation preparations for the visit would begin. The external quality assurance team would meet ahead of their visit to request additional evidence should that be required,

notwithstanding that 326 items of evidence had already been submitted. It was reported that the visit would take place over 3 days from 25 April 2022 with scrutiny of evidence and interviews with key colleagues across the University happening over two and a half of those days. The final outcome, preceded by sight of a draft report for factual accuracy, was expected 10 weeks after the visit.

44. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

RECEIVED

Members received reports on the following for information:

1. Summary Corporate Risk Register (COU2122-073); and
2. Documents affixed with the Common Seal (COU2122-074);

NOTED

3. The contents of the reports presented for information.

45. REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

RECEIVED

A composite report comprising the minutes of the following (COU2122-075):

1. Governance and Compliance (12 November 2021);
2. Senate (12 January 2022); and
3. Resources and Performance (28 January 2022).

NOTED

4. The reports received from the sub-committees.

46. ANY OTHER BUSINESS, MEETING REVIEW, AND FUTURE BUSINESS

1. Farewell

On behalf of Council, the Chair thanked Fiona Sharp for her contribution to the governing body during her term, and especially as Chair for Resources and Performance, and wished her well for the future.