



COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held at 13:00 on 14 MAY 2021, via Zoom.

Present: Dr Emyr Roberts, Chair of Council (Chair); the Rt Hon Elfyn Llwyd, Deputy Chair of Council; Professor Elizabeth Treasure, Vice-Chancellor; Professor Tim Woods, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning, Teaching and Student Experience); Mr George Ashworth; Ms Samantha Blackie (until minute 68.2); Ms Kate Eden; Ms Meri Huws; Mr Morgan Lewis, UMCA President; Dr Louise Marshall; Mr Nathaniel Pidcock, AberSU President; Ms Rhuanedd Richards (from minute 61); Ms Fiona Sharp; Mr Mark Tweed; Ms Kath Williams; Dr William Williams; Professor Sir Robin Williams; and Professor Reyer Zwiggelaar.

In attendance: Mr Stephen Forster, Director of Finance and Corporate Services; Ms Jean Jones, Head of the Vice-Chancellor's Office; Mr Geraint Pugh, University Secretary; Mr Steve Thomas, Head of Communications and Public Affairs; Dr Rhodri Llwyd Morgan, Director of Welsh Language and External Engagement (for minute 65); and Mr Jim O'Rourke, Old College Project Manager (for minute 65).

55. MATTERS RAISED BY THE CHAIR

1. Condolences

Sympathies were expressed following the deaths of:

1. John Dawes, Honorary Fellow;
2. Miles Spink, who worked at the International English Centre; and
3. Sallie Jones, who worked on the Advanced Media Production project.

2. HEFCW Quality Assurance Visit

1. On 30 April 2021, the Chair and the Deputy Chair of Council had met with HEFCW officers as part of their triennial Academic Quality Assurance visit to the University. Due to current circumstances, the visit had been held virtually.
2. The Academic Quality Assurance Visit formed part of established processes followed by the Funding Council, which included the general Institutional Assurance Visit and Prevent Assurance processes held during autumn 2020. These would feed into the Institutional Visit scheduled for 08 July 2021, which would involve members of the HEFCW Council holding a join meeting with the University's Council.

3. Pro-Chancellor

1. The University had traditionally appointed two Pro-Chancellors. Following consultation with the Chancellor, Lord Thomas, it was felt that now would be an appropriate time to appoint a second Pro-Chancellor, to serve alongside Prof Dame Elan Closs Stephens.

2. The University Secretary would formally launch the process early next week by inviting nominations. These would be considered in the first instance by a Selection Committee, as set out in Ordinance, with a view to presenting a recommended appointment to Council for approval on 09 July 2021.

4. Briefing session

A briefing session on the Old College refurbishment project had been held for Council members in advance of the formal meeting. A recording of this session – which had been delivered by representatives of the architects and the company engaged to work on the interpretation aspects – would be made available via SharePoint for the benefit of those members not able to attend during the morning [**ACTION:** University Secretary].

5. 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 have 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.

56. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

NOTED

Several Council members were members of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS). While the governing body would consider the institution's proposed response to a consultation on the future of the pension scheme, it was not deemed necessary for any members to recuse from those discussions.

57. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RECEIVED

Minutes of the meetings held on 19 March 2021 (COU2021-116).

RESOLVED

That the minutes be confirmed as correct records.

58. 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 (COU2021-117).

NOTED

The updates provided in the decisions log.

59. DECISIONS TAKEN BETWEEN MEETINGS

RECEIVED

Report by the University Secretary (COU2021-118).

NOTED

1. The report detailed the instances since the last Council meeting where matters had been approved by members via correspondence, or by the Chair on behalf of Council.
2. The following had been approved by the Chair on behalf of the Council:
 1. Ordinance 6 – The Council: Chair of Council and Deputy Chair of Council

A minor revision had been made to a footnote in this Ordinance in response to an addition to the Camm Action Plan agreed by the Governance and Compliance Committee (GCC) on 25 February 2021. The footnote related to how the Deputy Chair of Council's role as 'Senior Independent Member' was defined. A copy of the revised Ordinance had since been published online.

60. CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence to report.

61. VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT

RECEIVED

Report by the Vice-Chancellor (COU2021-119).

NOTED

1. The report consisted of three key parts: a highlight report; a planning and student enrolment report; and a communications report.
2. Members congratulated the Vice-Chancellor on her election as the next Chair of Universities Wales – a position which includes being a Vice-President of Universities UK (UUK), thereby ensuring input on behalf of the University at both national levels.
3. The Vice-Chancellor had written to Elin Jones to congratulate her on being re-elected as Member of the Senedd for Ceredigion. Similar letters had been sent to those who had been elected on 06 May 2021 to represent the Mid and West Wales region, as well as those elected to represent constituencies in south-west Wales.
4. The First Minister had recently announced that Jeremy Miles MS would serve as the Minister for Education and the Welsh Language within the Welsh Government (WG). The Vice-Chancellor had since extended an invitation for Mr Miles to visit the University. The institution had also written to and would look to build relations with other ministers, including the Minister for Economy who was expected to have responsibility for research and innovation.
5. The Vice-Chancellor was anticipating a request to deliver a presentation on recent developments at the University as part of the virtual HEFCW Institutional Visit on 08 July 2021. Council members were therefore invited to propose topics for inclusion in such a presentation. Suggested topics included: civic engagement and partnership working during the pandemic, the mid-term review of the institutional strategy, and the

University's appreciation of the additional financial support provided to the sector by HEFCW and WG during the pandemic.

6. Applications for September 2021 entry from UK-domiciled students remained strong. The institution was now focusing on converting these applications into firm acceptances.
7. While the University was also seeing an increase in applications from international students, and a good increase in acceptances. The University was working with counterparts in the sector on a common approach to welcoming students from 'red list' countries wishing to study in the UK as, at present, there were significant barriers to them attending Aberystwyth University.
8. Members encouraged the Vice-Chancellor to consider opportunities to offer programmes relating to social care, building upon the proposed nursing training. The Vice-Chancellor advised that the institution continued to engage with the Hywel Dda University Health Board on various potential developments. The Vice-Chancellor agreed to investigate appropriate programmes for the University.

62. HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE

RECEIVED

Report by the Health, Safety and Environmental Manager (COU2021-120).

NOTED

1. The report provided a summary update on health and safety. A fuller report would be presented to GCC on 17 June 2021.
2. Members queried whether the number of incident reports logged since 01 January 2021 was accurate. The Director of Finance and Corporate Services confirmed that the figure in the report was correct, and reflected the increased use being made of the new internal reporting system. However, only a small percentage of the incident reports required any further investigation.

63. REPORT BY ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION

RECEIVED

Report by the AberSU President (COU2021-121).

NOTED

1. The report provided an update on developments at Aberystwyth University Students' Union (AberSU) since the last meeting of the University's Council.
2. Elections for the AberSU's officers for 2021–22 had taken place since the last Council meeting, and an all-female full-time officer team had been elected. All would assume their new roles on 01 July 2021.
3. Members sought additional information on the 'Aber Mams' project, which would link lonely or homesick students with a member of the local community to build friendships.

The relevant safeguarding considerations were currently being addressed, with the view to launching the scheme during the next academic year.

4. The AberSU Academic Affairs Officer had been holding focus groups with students to seek feedback on their experiences during the current academic year. This would enable the Union and the University to identify what aspects of the student experience had worked well during the current pandemic conditions and could be retained for the future. A summary of the feedback received would be shared with Council members [**ACTION:** University Secretary].

64. FINANCIAL UPDATE

1. Month 8 Financial Report

RECEIVED

Report by the Deputy Director of Finance (COU2021-122).

NOTED

1. The report set out the University's financial performance to the end of Month 8 (31 March 2021). A further improved position against the agreed budget for the year was now being forecast for the year. This improvement was largely attributed to the financial support from the Funding Council and WG to the sector in Wales.
2. The report had been considered in detail by the Resources and Performance Committee (RPC) at its meeting on 23 April 2021.

2. Budget 2021-22: Key Assumptions

RECEIVED

Report by Deputy Director of Finance (COU2021-123).

NOTED

1. The report set out the University's broad financial planning assumptions that would underpin the development of the full institutional budget for 2021–22. An earlier iteration of the report had been considered in detail by the RPC at its meeting on 23 April 2021.
2. While the University was hopeful that a more normal teaching timetable could be provided from September 2021, a level of on-going infection control costs was inevitable. The uncertainty over international student enrolment numbers for the autumn was also influencing the prudent approach to developing the budget, as was the loss of conference income at the start of the financial year, since there were no large-scale conferences booked for this summer at the University.
3. The financial forecasts agreed in June 2019 following completion of the Sustainability Implementation Plan had indicated that a surplus would be targeted in 2021–22. However, members were reminded that the revised forecasts agreed in July 2020 had taken account of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and had

indicated that a deficit budget would likely be required for the coming financial year.

4. In considering the proposals on 23 April 2021, RPC members had expressed a desire to achieve a budget outturn in 2021–22 which was as close to a break-even position as possible. Equally, HEFCW had advised the sector that it expected university budgets for 2021–22 to be realistic, with appropriate sensitivity analysis undertaken.
5. To achieve the best outcome financially for the coming year, careful prioritisation would be required to focus on student experience, potentially at the expense of other activities which the University would ideally like to support.
6. It was observed that, following that RPC meeting, reference to the need to boost research had been removed from the paper. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that this was due to RPC's request to achieve as near to break even outturn as possible in 2021–22, and that this was a major concern to her as the need to promote research was becoming critical.
7. The Vice-Chancellor and Executive were now developing the proposed budget for 2021–22 in detail. The proposed budget would be presented for consideration and approval during the next cycle of meetings.

65. OLD COLLEGE

RECEIVED

Report by Director of Welsh Language and External Engagement (COU2021-124).

NOTED

1. The report provided an update on the project's progress, with particular attention to: project scope and timeline, the latest project cost estimate; current match-funding position; and the financial implications of not proceeding with the project.
2. One potential contractor had withdrawn from the tendering process for the construction work, and another had requested an extension to the original deadline for tender submissions. A new deadline had therefore been agreed as 25 June 2021, which would apply to all remaining bidders.
3. The intention had been to convene a special meeting of RPC to consider the outcome of the tender process and agree a recommendation to the Council meeting on 09 July 2021. The revised tender submission deadline meant that it was likely that special meetings of both RPC and Council would need to be convened during July 2021 to consider the submissions.
4. Based on the latest estimated capital costs, should no further funding be secured from other sources, the University's contribution would need to increase to £10.07m to cover the funding shortfall.
5. As part of efforts to address the current shortfall in capital funding for the project, the University had been in discussions with the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), who had invited an application for an additional funding towards the increased costs. To apply for this additional support, the University would need to commit to covering any remaining

capital shortfall, thereby increasing the institution's contribution to a maximum of £8.77m. The outcome of this further application for HLF support would be known in advance of Council approving the appointment of a contractor.

6. The request that the University increase its maximum financial contribution to the project had been considered by RPC on 23 April 2021, where members had recommended that Council agree the increase.
7. Ceredigion County Council had advised the University that it was looking to develop a bid for c£20m from the Westminster Government's Levelling Up Fund to support local regeneration initiatives. The local authority was proposing that the bid include a possible second phase for the Old College refurbishment.
8. On 23 April 2021, RPC members considered in general terms the benefits and disadvantages of such a second phase for the Old College project – including whether there was a risk that this addition could disrupt the existing project and the funding secured to date. However, members agreed that the University submit an expression of interest in applying for Levelling Up funding in the first instance, with associated steps taken to establish the feasibility of a second phase.
9. Members were assured that a full due diligence exercise – including the production of a revised business plan – would be required to inform whether to commit to a full application for Levelling Up Funding. Further approvals would be sought from Council as appropriate, as any formal proposals for a second phase are developed.

RESOLVED

10. To increase the University's financial commitment to the Old College project to £8.77m, to enable the additional funding request to be submitted to the HLF [**ACTION:** Director of Welsh Language and External Engagement].

66. UNIVERSITIES SUPERANNUATION SCHEME

RECEIVED

1. Report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Services (COU2021-125); and
2. Draft response to the UUK Employer Survey (COU2021-132).

NOTED

3. An actuarial valuation of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) had been undertaken during 2020, during which the USS Trustee had assessed the fund's assets and liabilities to ensure it had sufficient funds to pay the defined benefits already earned, and also that contributions into the scheme covered the cost of the planned future service benefits.
4. Primarily due to the Covid economic downturn, the USS Trustee estimated that the scheme's technical deficit, set at £3.6bn at the 2018 valuation, had increased to £9.8bn – £17.9bn in the latest valuation. By law, the Trustee was now required to take action to improve its funding position and had set out a range of pricing scenarios which would involve increased employer and employee contributions, and revised covenant support measures by employers.

5. UUK had since launched a formal consultation with employers on options for tackling the USS's increasing costs, sizeable deficit, and high member opt-out rate. The University had since sought the views of staff who were members of the USS, to inform the institutional response to the UUK consultation.
6. The Director of Finance and Corporate Services' report had been considered by RPC on 23 April 2021 where members had recommended that the University's proposed response to the UUK consultation be presented to Council for approval. At that point, the internal survey of staff had not yet concluded.
7. The staff survey had closed on 09 May 2021. A summary of the results was contained in the report which had been circulated separately to Council members along with the proposed institutional response to the UUK consultation.

RESOLVED

8. To approve the University's proposed response to the UUK consultation, for submission by the UUK's deadline of 24 May 2021 [**ACTION:** Director of Finance and Corporate Services].

67. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

RECEIVED

Report by Head of Planning (COU2021-126).

NOTED

1. The report presented the institution's performance as at 31 January 2021 against the KPIs which had been agreed by Council to monitor the delivery of the institutional Strategic Plan.
2. The Council meeting schedule for the year meant that the report on the performance against the KPIs for the third quarter of 2020–21 had not yet been produced. The report circulated to members was therefore identical to that presented to the previous Council meeting.

68. GOVERNANCE MATTERS

1. Deputy Chair of Council

NOTED

On 31 July 2021, the Deputy Chair of Council, the Rt Hon Elfyn Llwyd, would reach the end of his term on the governing body. In accordance with Ordinance 6, expressions of interest had been invited from the independent members on Council to appoint a new Deputy Chair. One expression of interest had been received.

RESOLVED

To formally elect Meri Huws as Deputy Chair of Council from 01 August 2021, for the remainder of her term on the governing body [**ACTION:** University Secretary].

2. Independent Members on the Council and the sub-committees

RECEIVED

Report by the University Secretary (COU2021-127).

NOTED

1. Several current members will reach the end of their current terms on Council and the sub-committees on 01 August 2021. Some of these individuals were not eligible for reappointment for a further term, or had indicated that they did not wish to be considered for reappointment.
2. The Nominations Committee had met on 06 May 2021 to consider how to fill these vacancies on Council, as well as consequential vacancies for sub-committee chairs. The Nominations Committee had therefore agreed a series of recommendations to Council, as set out in the report.
3. In recruiting new independent members to the Council for the 2020–21 academic year, the Council had also appointed three individuals to serve on sub-committees in the first instance, with the intention that they become full members of Council when appropriate opportunities arise. Two of these individuals had indicated that they would be content to now be appointed to the governing body.
4. A procurement exercise was underway to appoint an executive search agency to work with the University on the recruitment of an independent member to fill a remaining vacancy on Council, as well as several vacancies which would arise on the sub-committees. The skills and experiences which would be targeted as part of this search were set out in the report.

RESOLVED

5. To approve the following appointments [**ACTION:** University Secretary]:
 1. Prof Sir Robin Williams for a further one-year term on Council, commencing 01 August 2021;
 2. Owen Evans and Sharron Lusher for initial terms of four-years each on Council, commencing 01 August 2021;
 3. Mark Tweed as Chair of the Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee from 01 August 2021, for the remainder of his term on that committee;
 4. Meri Huws as Chair of the Governance and Compliance Committee from 01 August 2021, for the remainder of her term on that committee; and
 5. Dr William Williams as Chair of the Investments Committee from 01 August 2021, for the remainder of his term on that committee.

69. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

RECEIVED

Members received reports on the following for information:

1. Covid-19: Decisions record (COU2021-128);

2. Summary Corporate Risk Register (COU2021-129);
3. Documents affixed with the Common Seal (COU2021-130); and

NOTED

4. The contents of the reports presented for information.

70. REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

RECEIVED

A composite report comprising the minutes of the following (COU2021-131):

1. Resources and Performance Committee (25 February 2021); and
2. Nominations Committee (06 May 2021)

NOTED

3. The reports received from the sub-committees.

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

1. Farewells

This has been the last Council meeting for Nate Pidcock, AberSU President, and Moc Lewis, UMCA President. Members thanked both for their contributions to the governing body during their terms as sabbatical officers and wished them well for the future.