Council
7 May 2020

M20/124 – M20/181

Minutes

Present:  Dame Margaret Hodge (Chair)  Professor Paul Layzell
          Ms Ann Ewing (Vice Chair)  Mr Jeremy McIlroy
          Professor Sarah Ansari  Mr Gerry O’Hagan
          Mr John Gregory  Mr Jack O’Neil
          Mrs Christine Goodyear  Professor Elizabeth Schafer
          Mrs Margaret Jack  Mrs Chris Shoukry
          Mrs Hazel Jessop  Mr Nick Perryman
          Ms Denise Keable  Mr David Williams
          Ms Sarah King  Ms Colette Wilson

Apologies:  Professor Bob Fitzgerald  Mrs Tina Harris
            Mr Hammad Chaudhry

Secretary:  Dr David Ashton, Deputy Principal (Operations) and Secretary to Council

In attendance:  Professor Ken Badcock, Senior Vice Principal (Academic Strategy, Partnerships and Resources)
                Ms Helen Ellis-Jones, Director of Human Resources
                Professor James Knowles, Senior Vice Principal (Education)
                Professor Katie Normington, Deputy Principal (Academic)
                Ms Mary White, Chief Financial Officer
                Mrs Pauline Martin, Executive Officer for Council, Minutes
                Mr Rob Cutting, Secretariat Assistant, Secondary Minutes

Observer  Professor Mandy Merck (UCU)

1. **Apologies**
   Received from Professor Bob Fitzgerald, Mrs Tina Harris and Mr Hammad Chaudhry.  M20/124

2. **Declaration of interests**
   None.  M20/125

3. **Minutes of the Previous meeting**
AGREED the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2020 (M20/13-M20/84) subject to an amendment to M20/52 regarding the Climate Emergency.

4. Matters arising
None.

5. Un-starring of items
None.

Major Business

6. Covid-19 Update
RECEIVED a presentation addressing the objective of ensuring a successful and viable institution that would survive the Covid-19 crisis and be in a position to benefit from the recovery phase by:

- Successfully completing the current academic year
- Addressing the medium-term challenges of the new academic year
- Ensuring College remained viable and able to build up in the recovery phase
- Using the new ways of working as a springboard to further innovation.

Current Academic Year

NOTED the current operations and mitigations in place for the current academic year, next academic year and to support colleagues.

DISCUSSED the range of support being put in place by the Careers service for student finalists during the economic downturn. This included a proposal to offer discounts on master’s courses defined as “enabling up skilling”.

AGREED that the definition of courses that met the criteria should be reviewed and should include a caveat regarding the minimum number of enrolled students. In view of the need to announce the details of the discounted master’s vocational programme as possible, the details would be reviewed by circulation to the Chair of Council, Chair of the Academic Quality Assurance Committee and Chair of Finance.

The National Context

NOTED the National context including:

- UUK submission to Government for a package of measures to support the sector
- London Higher Board addressing the London specific issues
- OfS consultation launched seeking views on protecting students from providers engaging in activities not in the interests of students or the sector
- Changes to OfS reporting requirements of financial forecasts and liquidity, noting that RHUL aimed at achieving 50 days liquidity over the long term and never 30 days, currently at 99 days and forecast 113 by year end
- Surveys conducted by the British Council and QS on student likely intentions for the next year.

NOTED that the financial forecast for this year was considered prudent with all income for the year recognised and costs being minimised due to continual detailed scrutiny.

NOTED the funding stream for Civic or local contribution was currently not being addressed and that local and regional engagement by HE providers needed to be redeveloped. This had been recognised by UUK.

The Flexible offer to students from Autumn 2020

NOTED the paper addressing the flexible offer for students 2020/21 (CL/20/20)
NOTED the development of a flexible learning offer for every course, including a September and January start option for key overseas recruiting programmes, to reduce uncertainty around the 2020/21 operating environment and improve student intake.

NOTED the implications for May communications with applicants, and for returners, to provide reassurance of our offer with further contingency planning for potential disruption through the year.

DISCUSSED the volume of work to address the changes required to term 3 exams and assessments and for the next academic year, restructuring of 1654 active course modules. Also, the resilience of IT systems, staff capability and support and support for students’ access to technology, including by working across the sector.

DISCUSSED that College was not planning a delay to the start of the academic year to January 2021 and was focussed on flexible delivery rather than moving to entirely online delivery.

AGREED the approach to the development of a flexible offering for students to maximise student admissions for 2020/21 and deliver successful outcomes.

**Staff Wellbeing**

NOTED the “Working Well Remotely Hub” set up on the intranet to help staff adapt to working away from campus. Take up was being monitored and the site would continue to be developed.

NOTED that 332 staff were currently furloughed under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme following Department of Education advice. Roles had been assessed and sources of funds checked for compliance with the Scheme. Furloughed staff retained work emails for social contact, which was encouraged, and for future return to work.

CONSIDERED other reasonable measures, including whether it was possible, acknowledging any security issues, for some staff on fixed term contracts to retain access to College emails for a period of time in order to continue to use the College library for research work.

**Operations Clusters**

NOTED the operations cluster around ensuring appropriate communications, continuing to support staff, providing robust and supportive leadership and maintaining compliance with external regulators.

NOTED a number of operations around returning to campus including a safe campus for working, managing movement around campus, policing and achieving an appropriate tone, establishing a safe campus for living and for generating income on campus over the summer from provision of campus services.

NOTED four further operations cluster; working at home, supporting education -IT, successful student recruitment and financial sustainability.

NOTED a further potential cluster around developing sharing across institutions, initially in relation to possible reciprocal access for students living at home to access the facilities of their local HEI.

**Student Admissions 2020**

RECEIVED a briefing on the current position of undergraduate and post graduate student recruitment for 2020/21 noting that the deadline for undergraduate choices of their first and reserve institution had been deferred to 18 June 2020. Consequently, there were 2,000 fewer choices made than at the same point last year.

NOTED that Undergraduate, conditional and unconditional, firm acceptances, at 21% of offers made, remained at a similar level to previous years. The closure of the scheme whereby a conditional offer became unconditional if the student made the College their first choice seemed to have made no difference to overall acceptance levels at this time.
NOTED postgraduate taught applications currently exceeding previous years.

DISCUSSED the introduction of a 5% above forecast student number control for 2020/21 admissions raised the importance of conversion to firm acceptances and to recruitment through clearing.

DISCUSSED the balance between achieving student numbers and maintaining, or improving tariff, the implications of further reductions in tariff on league table position, for teaching and ensuring progression.

CONSIDERED whether tariff could be varied to support widening participation and if so what adjustments or additional resources may be required to support progression and at what cost.

DISCUSSED that there was an economic imperative to achieving student numbers this year in order to mitigate against a likely shortfall in international students but that more information was required on the impact of pursuing this strategy.

AGREED to present information at the next meeting at the lowest level, department or subject level, of the balance between achieving student numbers and the impact on tariff and to consider how widening participation may be supported in the process.

NOTED the student recruitment process for 2021-22 and CONSIDERED what more could be done to increase applications for 2021/22 entry.

DISCUSSED that we could be more innovative in creating an offer to those returning to education after redundancy and, working through London Higher, developing the University of London Worldwide to raise our profile.

Finance Update

RECEIVED a recap of the forecast end of year cash position where the cash balance was improved by £16m to circa £45m as a result of mitigating actions taken for the current year.

NOTED the mitigations to achieve the financial priorities for 2020/21 and the critical milestones which would activate a review of plans:

- UCAS June deadline
- Confirmation and clearing
- September arrivals
- November student count
- January arrivals

NOTED the process and timing for 2020/21 budgeting during the period of uncertainty:

- Current scenario planning with a range of impacts and mitigation actions planning
- Three scenarios in development
- Interim budget presented to Council July 2020
- Monitoring and assessing student registration
- Final budget November 2020

NOTED the workstreams in the development of the recovery plan.

7. Governance Reform

RECEIVED a presentation addressing the implementation of recommendations from the Effectiveness Review Report, which included a draft purpose statement for Council, and proposals for:

- Reducing the overall size of Council
- Harmonizing the appointment process for members of Council
- The creation of four new strategic Council Committees
- Chair of Council’s objectives
- Actions to support Council effectiveness.
NOTED that implementation of the changes required:
- Amendments to Statutes, noting the process and estimated timeline
- Further analysis, development of content and communication
- Project management resource to implement the actions within the timeline and achieve the desired outcomes.

DISCUSSED a facilitated discussion session for Council with the Executive. Further input was requested from members by the end of May regarding the process for appointing Committee Chairs.

NOTED that the final proposals would be brought to Council for final consideration at the meeting on 2 July 2020.

RECEIVED a paper proposing a model for a revised Council Committee Structure (CL/20/23) following consultation with members.

NOTED Members were invited to consider the model and forward observations to the Chair of Council, Ann Ewing and Colette Wilson. A final proposal would be submitted to Council for approval at the meeting on 2 July 2020 in order to allow implementation by September 2020.

NOTED that two members left the meeting at 19.06, Professor Sarah Ansari and Chris Shoukry.

8. Appointment at Council

NOTED a paper from General Counsel providing advice to Council when considering the appointment of a second Vice Chair of Council (CL/20/21). The paper reviewed previous consideration of the matter by Council, at its meeting on 5 October 2016, the legal advice provided at that time and gave an interpretation of a current view. Three options were offered to Council for a way forward.

NOTED the Chair of Council proposed that the appointment of a second Vice Chair of Council had already been made in 2016 and advised that it was within Council’s power to make the appointment.

APPROVED by all members present, the appointment of Mr Nick Perryman as a second Vice Chair of Council. The role would focus on external relations.

Starred items for Report and Formal Approval

9. Reportable Events

None

10. Report of Decisions Taken by the Chair of the Governing body

None


NOTED the outcome of the consultation by circulation which agreed to appoint Dr David Ashton, Deputy Principal (Operations), as Secretary to Council.

12. RECEIVED the following Minutes

Finance Committee 8 January 2020
Council Executive 30 January 2020
Audit & Compliance Committee 3 February 2020
Finance Committee 13 February 2020
Council Academic Quality Assurance Committee 13 February 2020
Equality & Diversity Committee 25 March 2020 (Minutes not yet available)
Council Executive 31 March 2020
Finance Committee 22 April 2020 (Minutes not yet available)
Remuneration Committee 5 May 2020 (Minutes not yet available)

13. **NOTED the following Committees have not met since the last Meeting of Council**

- Health, Safety and Well Being Assurance Committee (next meeting 9 June 2020)
- Council Academic Quality Assurance Committee (next meeting 11 June 2020)
- Audit & Compliance Committee (next meeting 15 June 2020)
- Principal’s Pay Committee

14. **Sealing of Documents**

None

15. **Other Business**

None

16. **Date of next Council meeting**

Thursday 02 July 2020 5.00pm MS Teams

Dame Margaret Hodge DBE MP
Chair of Council

Date 4 June 2020