

The University of Leeds

THE COUNCIL

7 October 2021

(via MS Teams)

MINUTES

Present

The Pro-Chancellor (in the Chair), the Vice-Chancellor, Mr E Anderson, Mrs L Barber, Ms V Blake, Ms A Burton, Mr T Clark, Mr S Elsworth, Ms H Grantham, Ms M Hodgkinson, Professors P F Jones and Kelsall, Mr I Moffatt, Dr Y Oade, Ms L Okhai, Mr M Pelan, Mrs J Sheriff, Mr T Smith, Dr M Taylor-Batty, Mr S Thompson;

and, *in attendance*, Professors Grabill, Plant and Yu (Deputy Vice-Chancellors), the Secretary, the Chief Financial Officer, the Director of Communications and Ms C Cho; and, *for the business recorded at CLMM 21/41-43*, the Director of Risk Management.

Welcome

The Pro-Chancellor welcomed Professor Jeff Grabill, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Student Education, to his first meeting of the Council. 21/1

Procedural matters

The Pro-Chancellor reminded members of the Council's policy on the disclosure of personal interests (see CLM 87/2). He went on to stress that, although most of the Council's decisions were made public, the proceedings themselves were to be regarded as confidential. 21/2

The Council was also reminded, in the main, discussion at meetings would be confined to papers 'starred' in advance of the meeting, and of associated practical arrangements. 21/3

Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council on 22 July 2021 were confirmed as a correct record. 21/4

Matter arising on the minutes

CLM 20/373 Big Leeds Conversation

Arising on CLM 20/373, members were provided an update on the next steps in the Big Leeds Conversation initiative. The comments collated through the online discussion forum had helped inform the development of statements on the University's mission, vision and values, on which the University Executive Group and the Leadership Forum were being consulted. Those statements would then be put to the University 21/5

community as part of the next round of consultation in early November before they were finalised for Council's consideration thereafter.

CLM 20/395 Student accommodation

- 21/6 Arising on CLM 20/395, in response to a question, it was explained that the current thinking was to bring to the Council a discussion paper on the University's portfolio of student accommodation in the first half of the academic year, but no later than January 2022.

Vice-Chancellor's report (CL/21/1)

- 21/7 The Council received (as CL/21/1) a written report from the Vice-Chancellor, which updated the Council on higher education policy and funding matters and reported on issues of interest to the life and work of the University, supplemented by an oral update.

National issues

- 21/8 Members' attention was drawn to recent political developments including the previous month's Cabinet reshuffle and reports that significant changes to the student loans system were being considered in Whitehall. The Government had also confirmed its intention to accelerate the introduction of a post-qualification admissions system, under which students would receive an offer of a University place after their A-Level (or equivalent) grades were confirmed.
- 21/9 The Vice-Chancellor highlighted a report, produced by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) and Universities UK International (UUKi), which had confirmed the valuable financial contribution made by international students to the economy while studying in the UK. She emphasised, however, that their contribution went further than that, and that the University valued hugely their cultural, social and intellectual contribution.
- 21/10 The Council was advised of the significant developments related to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) since it had last met. The USS Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) had agreed in August to accept the employers' proposal for scheme changes intended to avoid the steeping rises in employee and employer contributions to USS which would otherwise have started to come into effect from 1 October 2021. The JNC decision had been accepted by the USS Trustee. Details were also provided about the way in which Universities UK (UUK) intended to work with the University and College Union (UCU) to take forward the major governance review of USS, and to explore meaningful reform of USS for the future. It was reported that the UCU opposed the agreed arrangement and had announced that it would ballot its members on industrial action.
- 21/11 The Vice-Chancellor commented on the UCU's reaction and the lack of any alternative proposals put forward by that body. She observed that the JNC proposal would buy the parties time to develop a more sustainable solution. In response to a member's comment around alternatives put forward by the UCU during the JNC negotiations, the Vice-Chancellor observed that there

appeared to be a different understanding of what had taken place in those talks, and that while there might have been other options discussed only one had been put forward formally to the JNC.

In response to a question, it was explained that it was too early to predict the potential outcome of the USS governance review; but the importance of, and need for, such a review was emphasised. 21/12

University of Leeds

The Council was advised of the steps taken by the University in response to the Government's lifting of all remaining Covid-19 restrictions in July. The University continued to proceed cautiously, with the health and safety of its members remaining at the front of its thinking. 21/13

Replying to a question, the Vice-Chancellor observed that there was a good sense that life on campus appeared to be returning to some form of normality, albeit there remained some Covid safety rules in place. A student member reported that there had been good engagement with Freshers' Week events on campus, which had exceeded expectations. It was noted, however, that footfall on campus was lower than before the pandemic and that there had been a fall in the number of students accessing on-campus facilities. 21/14

Noting the continued cautious approach that had been adopted on the delivery of student education in the new academic session, members discussed the complexity and challenges of delivering student education in a hybrid way. It was reported that the University Executive Group would be reviewing imminently the approach to be taken for semester two. 21/15

In addition, comments were made about the level of mask wearing in classrooms and other shared spaces. 21/16

It was reported that the Office for Students (OfS) had confirmed that it was satisfied with the University's progress against the targets set out its 2019-20 Access and Participation Plan. The inference to be drawn from this was that, while the University did not meet all of its targets, in the view of the regulator sufficient progress had been made given the context of the challenges faced by the sector over the last eighteen months. The University had also been notified that the enhanced monitoring requirements to which the University was previously subject would be removed, which indicated improvement against the University's internal and external access and participation commitments. 21/17

Congratulations were offered to the following colleagues: 21/18

- Professors Adrian Favell (Director of the Bauman Institute), David Hesmondhalgh (Professor of Media, Music and Culture), Helen Steward (Professor of Philosophy of Mind and Action), and Simon Armitage (Poet Laureate and Professor of Poetry), all of whom had been honoured with Fellowships by the British Academy in recognition of their contribution to the humanities and social sciences.

- Professor Cath Noakes, Professor of Environmental Engineering for Buildings and a member of the Government's scientific advisory group SAGE, who had been made a Fellow by the Royal Academy of Engineering.
- Dr Alison Voice (School of Physics and Astronomy), who had been awarded a National Teaching Fellowship.
- the School of Biomedical Sciences' Capstone Experience Team, led by Dr Dave Lewis, which had received Advance HE's Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence.

21/19 The Vice-Chancellor paid tribute to Professor Anne Neville, who had been awarded the Clifford Patterson Medal and Lecture by the Royal Society. The award was in recognition of Professor Neville's outstanding research career in the field of engineering, a career which had been cruelly curtailed by illness.

21/20 Reflecting on both her institutional and personal priorities for the next year or two, the Vice-Chancellor advised members that she had delegated some operational responsibilities to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Hai-Sui Yu. Under that arrangement, while the executive deans would continue to take their strategic lead from her, they would be responsible to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for the operational management of their faculties.

21/21 She also advised the Council that Professor Neil Morris, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Digital Transformation, would be leaving the University at the end of October 2021. In response to a question, the Vice-Chancellor reassured members that the University would continue to pursue its digital transformation strategy, albeit that a review of the profile and job description of that executive role would be undertaken to ensure that there was no overlap with the portfolio of the new Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Student Education.

Provisional financial results, 2020-21 (CL/21/2)

21/22 CLMM 21/22-24 are confidential to members of the Council.

21/23

Taught student recruitment, 2021 entry (CL/21/3)

The Council considered (as CL/21/3) an update on taught student recruitment for 2021 entry: the University expected to exceed its planned numbers across all taught cohorts, even after accounting for some attrition in the numbers before the December census date. The report included a summary of the significantly greater than anticipated effect on recruitment of the scale of A-level grade inflation arising from the move to a revised form of teacher assessed grades. Details were also provided about the reasons behind the more pronounced and concentrated effect on a limited number of disciplines in Leeds, together with the actions to be put in place to mitigate any future unintended over-recruitment risk. 21/25

Recruitment from Low Participation Neighbourhoods (LPN) exceeded set targets, a significant achievement, reflecting the considerable work in all disciplines, when set in the context of the size of the University's overall UK undergraduate cohort. While good progress had been made to achieve the targets set in the University's Access and Participation Plan and to improve the LPN access ratio, it was accepted that there was more work to be done in this area. Consideration was also given to the impact that the A-level grade inflation had had on LPN applications. 21/26

During discussion, members discussed in particular the factors that had contributed to the unplanned over-recruitment, and the lessons that could be learnt from what had taken place. It was noted that a proposal was to be brought to the UEG on a new approach to the University's offer-making and admissions strategy. Members also discussed the impact of such an increase on the student experience, and on the ability of the University estate to accommodate the increased intake. 21/27

Another matter touched upon during discussion was the proposed introduction of a post-qualification admissions system and the way in which the Curriculum Redefined initiative could enhance the University's ability to attract prospective students. 21/28

National Student Survey results, 2021 (CL/21/4)

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Student Education introduced, as CL/21/4, a paper setting out the University's results from the 2021 National Student Survey (NSS), together with comparative performance in relation to the Russell Group and the sector as a whole. 21/29

As alluded to in the Vice-Chancellor's report in July, members were advised that the results were disappointing: Leeds had achieved a score of 76 per cent for 'Overall satisfaction', a drop of 6 percentage points from the previous year, alongside a decline in scores for all categories of the survey. 21/30

School-level performance had also been disappointing, with some achieving lower than expected scores; and Leeds University Union had also experienced a fall in its score.

- 21/31 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Student Education observed that although the NSS scores for the current year had been poor, he was more concerned about the decline over the previous five years despite actions that had been put in place to arrest that fall. He went on to provide the Council with an account of the proposed institutional-level action plan in a number of key areas: assessment and feedback; Library and IT resources; student voice; learning community and wellbeing; and school level engagement. Actions highlighted included the execution of the Curriculum Redefined programme, learning lessons from areas of good practice, and drawing together the expertise from across campus to effect change.
- 21/32 In response to a question, it was explained that instead of relying on the NSS results to draw out issues and concerns, a new module experience tool was to be introduced to gather mid-module formative feedback to enable a quicker response to address any issues identified.
- 21/33 During discussion, observations were made about the factors that might influence students' response to the NSS survey, including improving their sense of belonging to and association with the University; the need for good and timely communication with students about actions being taking in response to any concerns they might have raised; and students' perceived inconsistency of the way different schools worked and the effect this had on their educational experience. In respect of student communications, the Director of Communications reassured the Council that steps were being taken to develop an effective student engagement strategy, in consultation with LUU and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Student Education. The point was also made that it would be pivotal to effect changes across the University, lifting the entire institution to the level of the best schools, rather than taking a piecemeal, school-by-school approach. In addition, while recognising the generosity of spirit of students at Leeds, a member cautioned against setting unachievable goals and raising students' expectations unnecessarily, thereby putting added pressure on staff.
- 21/34 In conclusion, the Council wholly endorsed the approach being proposed to address the issues that had been identified by the NSS results, noting in particular the focus on feedback and assessment as a priority. It also thanked the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Student Education for the clarity and candour of his analysis.

Proposed amendments to Statutes I and II (CL/21/5)

- 21/35 The Secretary introduced a paper, CL/21/5, which set out a proposal to amend Statutes I and II of the University's constitution to reflect the Council's in-principle decision in July 2021 that all members of the Council, excluding the *ex-officio* members, should in future be appointed on the recommendation of the Nominating and Governance Committee.

Members were advised that, if the amendments were endorsed by the Council, the Senate (in November) would then be given the opportunity to comment on them. The Senate's comments would be reported to the Council at its meeting on 25 November, at which point the Council would be invited to confirm or otherwise those amendments. 21/36

During discussion, members rehearsed the rationale for the changes, including the importance of ensuring diversity on the governing body, a goal which the student members supported; and the need to focus on the quality of governance, with Council members having the right balance of skills and knowledge to make decisions. Members were also reminded that the charity sector had been moving away from the practice of electing trustees. With regard to the appointment process, the suggestion to include a student member on any appointment panel convened was noted. 21/37

A few members repeated concerns about the removal of the democratic process to elect Council members, and about the risk of Council appointing members in its own likeness under the new arrangements. With regard to the first concern, it was observed that elected members were not there to represent the constituency from which they had been elected. In respect of the other concern, it was noted that the skills-based selection process to appoint members would guard against that risk. 21/38

A member recounted that the election process had motivated him to come forward and engage with University governance. In his view, the election process had leant credibility to his role on Council, which would be diminished if that process was abandoned. 21/39

While noting the reservations expressed by a small minority of its members, the Council endorsed the change proposed to the appointment of Council members, and the amendment to the constitutional instruments as set out in the Annex to CL/21/5. 21/40

Risk appetite framework (CL/21/6)

The Council was joined by the Director of Risk Management, Mr Paul Griffiths, for consideration of a proposal (as set out in CL/21/6) on a new risk appetite framework that would replace the existing risk appetite statement. The intention was to use this framework as a reference point when making key risk-based decisions at the University. It was noted that the framework had been received strong endorsement by both the Audit and Risk Committee and the Strategy and Investment Committee. 21/41

Members welcomed the new framework, noting that it brought a more contemporary and dynamic feel to the process of identifying risks and opportunities. It would also provide the University executive with clear boundaries and the confidence to be bold in implementing the University strategy. Members thanked University officers, and the Chief Financial Officer and Mr Griffiths in particular, for all their work on the matter. 21/42

21/43 The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the risk appetite framework, as set out in CL/21/6.

Report from the meeting of the Strategy and Investment Committee (13 September 2021) (CL/21/7)

21/44 The Council considered as CL/21/7 a report of the meeting of the Strategy and Investment Committee held on 13 September 2021.

21/45 The Committee had considered a number of matters, including details of the Vice-Chancellor's institutional priorities for 2021-22 and beyond; the student number position and impact upon the University of the grade inflation in the current year's A level results; and an update on the establishment and mobilisation of the Transformation Office. It had also endorsed the adoption of the new risk appetite framework.

21/46 The Council was advised that the Committee was reviewing its terms of reference to facilitate the striking of a better balance between the different elements in the Committee's role. The aim was to put the revised terms of reference to the Council in November.

Minutes from the Audit and Risk Committee (29 July and 16 September 2021) (CL/21/8)

21/47 The Council received (as CL/21/8) the minutes of the meetings of the Audit and Risk Committee held on 29 July and 16 September 2021.

21/48 The Committee had noted the internal auditors' progress against their 2020-21 annual plan. There had been no issues of concern or high risk arising from the three internal audit review finalised in the preceding quarter; and the Committee had been satisfied that appropriate action was being taken in response to the auditors' concerns. The Committee had also approved the auditors' strategic audit plan for 2021-24. In respect of the update on progress made in implementing internal audit recommendations, the Committee had expressed its disappointment that there remained a relatively high number of recommendations which remained outstanding, and the Council concurred with the Committee's repeated wish to see every effort made to complete recommendations by their due dates.

21/49 The Committee had considered a summary of the University's key data returns and details of the management and quality assurance processes in place for them. The Committee had agreed that there was a good level of assurance about the University's processes for data assurance.

21/50 The Committee had received details of the ongoing work to improve the University's information security architecture. It had welcomed the progress being made and the good level of focus being maintained by the IT Services team on making improvements as quickly as they could. While content with the steps being taken, given its importance, the Committee would continue to keep the matter under close review through the receipt of regular updates.

Other matters considered by the Committee had included an update on the Joint School with Southwest Jiatong University, which was part of its continued oversight of that collaboration; information on the positive outcome of the UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) compliance review of the University in the summer; and details of the new risk appetite framework, which the Committee had wholly endorsed. The Committee had also undertaken an annual review of its own effectiveness and had been broadly satisfied with the way in which it was operating, albeit that some improvements were being considered. 21/51

Treasury report (CL/21/9)

The Council received a paper, CL/21/9, on the conduct of the University's treasury management operations during the financial year ending on 31 July 2021, which included a commentary on treasury performance and endowment management, and specified the amounts of outstanding bank loans. 21/52

Annual Report of the Gift Acceptance Committee (CL/21/10)

The Council received (as CL/21/10) the annual report of the Gift Acceptance Committee, which had responsibility for reviewing proposed gifts to the University of £150k or more, including a summary of all gift acceptance cases drawn up in respect of offers over £75k during 2020-21 and their outcomes. A total of 10 cases had been considered by the Committee. Named gifts were as also set out in the paper. 21/53

Council nominees of other bodies (CL/21/10)

Having considered the proposals set out in CL/21/10 on the appointment of Council nominees onto other bodies, the Council **RESOLVED** that: 21/54

- Yvette Oade be appointed to membership of the Health and Safety Committee to fill the vacancy left by Edward Ziff;
- Helen Grantham be appointed to the chair of the Remuneration Committee *vice* Liz Barber;
- Seb Elsworth be appointed to membership of the Remuneration Committee;
- Dr Michael Byde, interim Director of Student Operation, be nominated as the University's Trustee on the Chaplaincy Trust with effect from 1 October 2021; and
- Emeritus Professor John Barnard be re-appointed as Chair of the Brotherton Collection Advisory Committee for a one-year period with effect from 1 August 2021.

Matters for Report (CL/21/12)

The Council received a paper (CL/21/12) setting out a number of matters for report including those summarised at CLMM 21/56-61 below. 21/55

Obituaries

The Council recorded its great sorrow at the deaths which were reported in CL/21/12.1. 21/56

Distinctions

21/57 Warm congratulations were offered to the recipients of honours and distinctions reported in CL/21/12.2.

Membership of the Council

21/58 The Council noted its membership for 2021-22 as detailed in CL/21/12.3.

Professorial and senior appointments

21/59 Details of recent professorial and senior appointments were given in CL/21/12.4-5.

Chair's action

21/60 Action had been taken on behalf of the Council to approve the following matters:

- the drawdown by Pretivia Limited of £25k against the existing convertible loan facility;
- the change of the use of the £250k investment previously approved by the Council by Ultracell Networks Limited for match funding purposes;
- a £166k loan to enable Northern Gritstone Company to fund costs over a four month period whilst the company raised investment; and
- the opening of a new bank account with Barclays Bank under the University's existing arrangements and bank mandate.

Authority to use the Common Seal

21/61 The Council endorsed the uses to which the Common Seal had been put since the previous meeting of the Council, as detailed in in CL/21/12.12.