**UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER**

**COUNCIL**

**Unreserved Minutes of a Meeting held by ‘Teams’ on**

**Monday 10 May 2021**

**Present:**

Gary Dixon (Chair)

Janet Arthur Stephen Garrett

Huw Barton Alison Goodall

Craig Brown Martin Hindle

Edmund Burke Ian Johnson

Nishan Canagarajah Azam Mamujee

Martin Cullen Andrew Morgan

Sophie Dale-Black Vijay Sharma

Sandra Dudley Richard Tapp

Mehmooda Duke Carole Thorogood

Cathy Ellis

**Apologies** for absence were received from Mia Nembhard.

**In attendance:** Neil Cox (Assistant Council Secretary); Alex Erdlenbruch (Chief of Staff, President and Vice-Chancellor’s Office); Michael Flanagan (Director of Estates and Digital Services, for item 21/M53 specifically); Geoff Green (Registrar and Secretary); Aash Khadia (Director of Planning, for items 21/M50-52 specifically); Kerry Law (Chief Marketing and Engagement Officer); Martyn Riddleston (Chief Operating Officer); Emma Stevens (Director of Human Resources, for items 21/M50-52 specifically); and Graham Wynn (Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education).

**UNRESERVED BUSINESS**

21/M46 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of personal interest in any of the items dealt with under the Unreserved Business section of this meeting.

21/M47 **UNRESERVED** **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Council considered the unreserved minutes of the virtual meeting held on 17 March 2021. **Council approved** them as a correct record. There were no matters arising that were not dealt with elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting.

21/M48 **EFFECTIVENESS SURVEY**

The Chair of Council reminded members that the last review of Council’s effectiveness had been conducted during 2017-18, with an expectation under the new CUC Code of Governance for such reviews to be conducted at intervals of no longer than three years. It had therefore been decided to conduct a further initial review during the remainder of 2020-21, using an independent effectiveness survey template provided by Advance HE. The survey would be conducted on-line and it was expected to be launched on 11 May 2021, and open for a period of two weeks.

21/M49 **PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR’S BUSINESS**

The President and Vice-Chancellor introduced his written report for Council which provided a wide-ranging and comprehensive update on recent developments in the HE sector generally, and at Leicester.

With regard to the COVID-19 picture, it was hoped that the further easing of national restrictions would proceed as planned from 17 May 2021, and that this would allow a gradual expansion of activities on campus. Lateral flow testing was working very well and the University was well-prepared to deliver the extra testing that would probably be required if more students were allowed to return to campus.

**Council was pleased to note** that despite the challenging operating conditions over the last few months the University had continued to record significant research awards and fellowships, and other prominent staff distinctions.

21/M50 **SHAPING FOR EXCELLENCE - GENERAL UPDATE**

Council received a general update on the current progress of the Shaping for Excellence Programme. The President and Vice-Chancellor emphasised that the key strategic objectives of the programme were to deliver the best education possible, to create an inclusive and enabling research environment, and to ensure that the University remained sustainable in the long term. The current volatile operating environment placed even greater emphasis on the importance of a robust strategic approach for the future of the University.

**Council noted** that from the outset the Shaping for Excellence programme had been conducted in accordance with the Leading and Managing Change Principles developed and agreed with the three recognised Trade Unions in 2018. The 90-day consultation period which opened in January 2021 was fully compliant with the redundancy ordinance process - and twice as long as the legal minimum - and had taken input from a wide range of interested parties. Regular updates had been provided to the JNCC, the University Senior Leadership Team, Senate and Council. Some cases for change had been revised in response to the feedback received, so there were no grounds for complaints that the consultation had not been genuine and open. Concerns received about the programme’s alleged infringement of ‘academic freedom’ had all been investigated by relevant panels, with appropriate legal advice being taken as necessary, and no evidence had been confirmed of any such breach.

**Council noted** the full range of responses that had been received to the Cases for Change, including through traditional and social media channels and by means of a ‘global boycott’ of the University. As previously noted by Council, some of these responses had been expressed in ways that were potentially in breach of the University’s policy on dignity and respect, and these would be dealt with accordingly. The University’s ongoing public responses to these reactions were deliberately confined to the correction of misinformation and factual inaccuracies only. Every effort was being made to engage constructively with the Students’ Union and the UCU; the latter had declined to engage unless all proposed staff redundancies were withdrawn, which the University would not agree to do.

**Council noted** the update on the Shaping for Excellence programme. The Chair again expressed his appreciation to the President and Vice-Chancellor and other members of the Executive Board for the dignified way in which they were responding to the inaccurate, misleading and defamatory criticism that the Shaping for Excellence programme was continuing to generate in some quarters.

21/M51 **SHAPING FOR EXCELLENCE - SPECIAL MEETING OF SENATE**

Council received an oral report from the President and Vice-Chancellor on the outcome of a Special Meeting of Senate held on 7 May 2021. Senate had received an update on the Shaping for Excellence programme, equivalent to the update provided to Council (21/M50 above), and had recommended by an overwhelming majority, for approval by Council, the merger of the Schools of Mathematics and Informatics (21/M52 below).

The President and Vice-Chancellor reported that it had been an open and constructive meeting of Senate, particularly with regard to staff communications and morale, suggested improvements and clarification of the relevant University Ordinances, and through recognition of the possible risks presented by the current negative publicity and ‘global’ boycotts, with the need for the University to remain firm and resilient in responding to these.

21/M52 **SHAPING FOR EXCELLENCE - MATTERS REQUIRING APPROVAL BY COUNCIL**

Consideration was given to a proposal, recommended by Senate for approval by Council, in line with Council’s powers under Ordinance 10, for the disestablishment of the School of Mathematics and Actuarial Science and the School of Informatics, and the establishment in their place of a new academic School with a strategic focus in artificial intelligence, computational modelling, digitalisation and data science. The name of the proposed new School, if its establishment was approved by Council, would be subject to further consultation in due course.

**Council noted** the strategic vision and rationale for the disestablishment of the two existing Schools and the creation in their place of a single new School as outline above, and **unanimously approved** the proposal.

21/M53 **HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELLBEING ANNUAL REPORT 2020**

Council considered a report which outlined the work undertaken and the progress made by the University’s health, safety and wellbeing team during 2020. **Council noted** that in the first three months of the year the team’s attention had been directed at delivering the strategy outlined in the last annual report. In the remaining nine months the focus had been dominated to a huge extent by supporting the University’s response to COVID-19. Council recorded its appreciation for all the work done by the team on COVID risk assessment; for the development of the necessary policies, guidance and training; and for the work undertaken to enable a safe return to campus for the staff and students who needed to be there.

It was clear that COVID-related health and safety work would continue at a very significant level for some time to come, but **Council was pleased to note** that good progress was being made in addressing other non-COVID matters and statutory compliance requirements. The Fire Safety Officer had left during the year but had since been replaced, and appropriate catch-up work was now in train.

In other specific areas of non-COVID activity **Council noted** that the health and safety team was working closely with the colleges to try to ensure that the management of laboratory safety was aligned to best effect with the resources available, including ensuring that the University’s best laboratory facilities were used to their full potential and capacity. With regard to the cladding at Nixon Court, a comprehensive risk management plan was in place, which had been prepared in conjunction with the relevant authorities and was compliant with all legislative requirements. With regard to the need to improve the completion rate of mandatory health and safety training by staff, imaginative solutions were being considered which might include, for example, allowing only limited access to the University’s IT facilities for staff who had not completed the training.

21/M54 **STUDENT EXPERIENCE UPDATE**

Council considered a paper which provided a strategic update on work being undertaken to support and enhance the student experience in the context of COVID-19. Responding to the pandemic had been the dominant workstream in this area during the last year, particularly the launch of the ‘Ignite’ blended delivery programme.

**Council noted** that the national context for the University’s ongoing work in this area was becoming increasingly uncertain. There were doubts about the future direction of both the NSS and the TEF, with signs of a possible shift towards the evaluation of students’ academic experience rather than their general ‘satisfaction’, and a growing focus on consumer protection. In this context **Council was pleased to note** the details of the measures that the University was continuing to take to minimise the disruption and other impacts of COVID-19 on students and to protect outcomes through a Senate-approved Education Safeguard. This applied to all taught programmes, except those subject to professional regulatory requirements, with the aim of ensuring that student outcomes were protected at cohort level, and were balanced with the requirement for University awards to remain consistent with national standards and to hold their value.

Council also gained significant assurance from the work being undertaken to support students in a variety of mother ways, particularly including health and wellbeing, careers and employability, and general engagement activities. Council would receive a further update on work in this area during the autumn term.

21/M55 **SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT UPDATE**

Council considered a paper which provided an update on how the University was handling and coordinating its work in relation to cases of alleged sexual violence and harassment in the student community.

**Council noted** that since the introduction of a formal reporting and investigation system in November 2018 good progress had been made in addressing these issues, with the investment of new resources and the development and implementation of new regulations, policies and procedures. **Council noted** the details of these, and of further developments and improvements that were being planned. The number of reported cases made at the University was not small and probably under-reported. Although broadly in line with case numbers experienced at other universities it was difficult to make absolute comparisons as data presentation and reporting arrangements were variable.

**Council agreed** that whilst this was an area in which the University had made considerable progress, it was important to keep it under continuous review, to ensure that duty of care obligations were met and that a consistent and transparent approach was taken across the University. **Council was also pleased to note** that in future it would receive a formal annual report on this topic, as required by the latest guidance issued by the Office for Students. It was also important for Council to be made directly aware of any significant issues as they arose, rather than anecdotally through reports in the media.

21/M56 **FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Council received a report of a meeting of the Finance Committee held on 19 April 2021.

With regard to the University’s approach to financial planning for 2021-22, in the continued uncertain planning climate, **Council noted and endorsed** the increased significance and focus that was being placed on cash generation and control measures.

21/M57 **AUDIT COMMITTEE**

Council received a report of a meeting of the Audit Committee held on 27 April 2021. **Council noted** that an advisory internal audit report on the University’s response to COVID-19 had highlighted many positive findings and areas of good practice, with no significant concerns. On other matters, **Council noted** that the new external auditors had commented positively on actions being implemented by the University to address certain internal procedural issues identified during the 2019-20 external audit. The Committee was also in the process of exploring how it might undertake a review of its own effectiveness, as required under the CUC Code of Practice for audit committees in HEIs.

21/M58 **EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE**

**Council received and noted** a report of a meeting of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee held on 9 March 2021. There were no specific matters that needed to be drawn to Council’s attention on this occasion.

21/M59 **STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION**

Council received a report of a meeting of the Standing Committee of the Alumni Association held on 15 April 2021. **Council noted** that the President and Vice-Chancellor had attended the meeting to share his strategic vision for the University and to acknowledge and emphasize the key role of the alumni community in helping to support and achieve this. This had prompted a very positive and fruitful discussion about how the relationship between the University, the Standing Committee and the wider alumni community might be enhanced moving forward.

21/M60 **UNIVERSITY SEAL**

As custodian of the University’s Seal **Council received and noted** details of the affixing of the Seal to the document(s) as listed in Appendix C/21/M60App, attached to the signed copy of these minutes.

21/M61 **DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

**Council noted** that its one remaining ‘Ordinary’ meeting in 2020-21 would be held at 4.00pm on Tuesday 6 July.

With regard to the joint Council/Executive Board Strategic Awayday originally scheduled for Tuesday 8 June 2021, **Council noted** that this would be rescheduled until a later date, probably in September, when it was hoped that it might proceed as a face-to-face meeting rather than as a virtual event.

**Council also noted** the following provisional dates of meetings in 2021-2022, all to commence at 4.00pm unless stated otherwise, which were expected to be confirmed shortly:

Wednesday 29 September 2021 - Ordinary meeting

Tuesday 23 November 202 - Ordinary meeting

Tuesday 15 March 2022 - Ordinary meeting

Wednesday 11 May 2022 - Ordinary meeting

Tuesday 7 June 2022 - Council/Executive Board Awayday, all day

Thursday 7 July 2022- Ordinary meeting

CHAIRTotal duration of meeting (reserved and unreserved business): 2 hours and 15 minutes