

NORWICH UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS

COUNCIL

Minutes of the Council

Minutes of the meeting of Council held using Microsoft Teams on Friday 26 March 2021, commencing at 13.00.

Present:

Mr A McMenemy (Chair)
Ms C Armor
Ms C Bray
Ms R Chakraborty
Prof. Lady R Cooper
Ms A Ferguson
Mr A Grimby
Mr M Jeffries
Ms A Johns
Ms N Lanzalaco
Mr D Lawford
Ms A Mound
Ms N Nannar
Mrs A Robson

Mr J Smith
Mr I Watson
Mr T Wilson
Mr T Wood

In attendance:

Prof. L Anderson
Mrs A Beckett
Prof. H Carlisle
Prof. J Last (first item only)
Prof. R Sawdon-Smith
Mr D Williams (Clerk)

Apologies:

None

CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION AND OPENING REMARKS

The Chairman opened the meeting, and welcomed those attending their first meeting of Council.

Attending his last meeting of Council, the Chair invited the retiring Vice Chancellor, Professor John Last, to speak. Professor Last expressed his thanks to Council for granting him the privilege of leading the University, and thanked all the members of Council and the Senior Management Team for their support during his period of tenure.

On behalf of Council the Chair thanked Professor Last for his work on behalf of the University.

Professor Last left the meeting.

PRESENTATION FROM PROFESSOR RICHARD SAWDON SMITH ON THE WORK OF THE CHANGE GROUP

The Chair of the Change Group, Professor Sawdon Smith, briefed the Council on the work of the Group. The Group had been established in Summer 2020 in response to the Black Lives Matter movement. The aim of the Group was to enable the University to become a more diverse community. The Group's work was focussed on the areas of staff recruitment, student support, visiting speakers and the curriculum. During its first year the Group had made good progress, but recognised that further work was required to fulfil its aims.

The Group was encouraged to issue an update on its work to students, and to consider inviting a representative of the student body to join the Group.

Professor Sawdon Smith

The Chair thanked Professor Sawdon Smith for his presentation.

1. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The Council approved the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2020.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were no matters arising.

PART I

3. VICE CHANCELLOR

3.1 Acting Vice Chancellor's Policy Report

The Acting Vice Chancellor (AVC) summarised changes to the external operating environment, drawing Council's attention to the recent publication of the Further Education White Paper; the government's interim response to the Augar Report; the outcomes of the Pearce Review; and the Strategic Guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Education to the Office for Students (OfS). A matter of concern for the University was the threat of withdrawing funding for Foundation years.

The AVC updated Council on the University's operations since the start of the spring 2021 term, including how teaching had been delivered and student access to the University's facilities. The University's facilities would remain open for students over the Easter break.

Reflecting a very low rate of withdrawals during 2020/21, the retention rate for undergraduate students remained exceptionally high.

Applications for undergraduate courses made through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) by Home students for 2021/22 entry, were down by 4.5% year-on-year. Applications from European Union (EU) students had remained steady, and non-EU international applications risen.

While the fall in the number of Home applications contrasted with the trend across the higher education sector, it was important to recognise that typically c.15% of applications were received by the University after the UCAS deadline. It was also important to recognise that it not just the number of applicants received, but the quality of the applicants that mattered.

Council's attention was drawn to staff changes detailed in an annex to the AVC's report. In addition to the names listed, Kate Secker, Director of Human Resources had announced that she would be retiring in Summer 2021. Levels of staff turnover remain stable.

The University continued to test staff and students for Covid-19. To enable testing, the University had established a new Lateral Flow Test facility on campus. To date, the numbers of staff and students testing positive for Covid-19 had been low.

The AVC reported that the Duke Street Riverside development remained 6-7 weeks behind schedule.

The University had drafted its submission to the Research Excellence Framework (REF), and the return would be made ahead of the deadline.

A highly successful University Development Day was held for all staff in December 2020 which resulted in the building of the Action Plan to deliver the Strategic Plan.

3.2 Council Key Performance Indicators

The Key performance indicators were noted.

On behalf of Council the Chair thank the AVC and the Senior Management Team for their work in managing the impact of Covid-19 and for the support they have given students.

4. ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE

The Chair reminded members of the respective roles of Council and Senate, and the matters that Council should concern itself with.

The Chair invited non-executive members of Council who attended Senate to confirm the accuracy of the Minutes of the two meetings of Senate. The Minutes were confirmed to be an accurate record of the meetings.

4.1 Senate

The Minutes were received and noted.

4.2 Annual Monitoring: Quality Enhancement Plans

Council was interested to learn how far the University had progressed in delivering high quality courses, including comparisons with other institutions.

The University's recently appointed Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) shared her experience of courses at other institutions which had secured exceptionally high outcomes in the National Student Survey (NSS). A common characteristics of such courses was the presence of teaching delivered by staff whose work was informed by leading current research or industry practice.

The PVC and Registrar were revising the University's quality enhancement process to enable the adoption of institutional themes to be the focus of quality enhancement for all courses in future years.

4.3 The quality enhancement plans for 2019-20 and 2020-21 were noted.

4.4 Annual Report on Grade Outcomes

The report confirmed that there was no evidence of grade inflation.

The report was noted.

5. PRESS

5.1 Press coverage

The Chair enquired as to whether members found the press pack useful and if its collation resulted in significant additional work for the marketing team.

The AVC explained that the generation of the press pack was separately required by the University, and sharing the information with members of Council did not involve additional work.

6. STUDENT MATTERS

6.1 Students' Union Report

The President of the Student Union introduced her report and highlighted key activities and events, including the elections of the officers of the Union for 2021/22.

Council invited the President to offer her views on how the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted the student body. The attitude of students typically varied according to which year of the course they were undertaking, with, for example, final year students less likely to be discontent that students in year 2 who had suffered two years of disruption. For students in all years, mental health was an issue. Students were happy to be back on campus.

The Chair thanked the President for her report, and offered congratulations on her re-election as the Students' Union President for a second term.

6.2 NUASU Constitutional Changes

The proposed amendments to NUASU's constitution arose from the creation of the new post of Vice-President of the Student Union.

The Council approved the changes to the NUASU's constitution.

The meeting was adjourned for a ten minute break

Part II

7. CHAIR'S COMMENTS AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS MATTERS

7.1 Chair's update

The Chair explored with members the options for holding the July 2021 meeting of Council.

Subject to the wider context, it should be possible for members to meet in person. If this was the case, then the intention was to hold an informal dinner on the previous evening, allowing members to network and meet the new Vice-Chancellor.

Similar arrangements to those advocated for the summer meeting of Council, namely holding a dinner the night before, would also be adopted ahead of the October 2021 Away Day. Further, the plan was to use the first part of the morning of the Away Day to provide an opportunity for members in pairs to visit different sections and departments of the University and to learn about the area of work and to meet students. Members would then have the opportunity to share their observations with Council.

Members were enthusiastic about the proposed arrangements for the July meeting of Council and the Away Day and highly supportive of the idea of holding an informal dinner on the preceding evening.

Chair

7.2 Any other business requests

The Chair had been advised of one other business request. This was the opportunity of creating a content creation hub in Norwich linked to the University. Members noted this was a very good and timely idea, which aligned with the idea of achieving greater regional content creation.

The idea of a content creation hub could link with a number of existing initiatives involving the University. For instance, the University was working with Norwich City Council, which had secured £25M to establish a digital hub for the City. Similarly, the University's Director of Innovation and Engagement was exploring funding options to establish a Green Studio with the support of the Screen Agency.

It was agreed that the PVC would keep Ri Chakraborty and Derren Lawford informed about developments, which link to a content creation hub.

PVC

8. GOVERNANCE AND ASSURANCE MATTERS

8.1 Annual Report on NUA Freedom of Speech Code of Practice

The updated CUC Higher Education Code of Good Governance required Council to receive assurance that the University was fulfilling obligations in relation to freedom of speech.

The report detailed the processes for approving events and external speakers at the University. To date there had been no occasion when a prospective event or speaker had been stopped.

Following the government drawing attention to matter, there was currently considerable discussion about freedom of speech at universities. It is anticipated that the OfS might in future seek to monitor institutions and freedom of speech.

An annual report on freedom of speech will be submitted to Council every year.

Registrar

The report was noted.

8.2 Internal Review of Council Effectiveness

The Chair thanked all members of Council for their time and assistance in undertaking the review.

Council approved the actions detailed in the report.

8.3 Governor Effectiveness Review – proposed guidelines

Ms A Johns withdrew from the meeting for the item.

The Chair prefaced the item by informing Council that most of the prospective providers of effectiveness reviews, knew, or were known to him. He would therefore recuse himself from the process of selecting an external provider to undertake the governance review. He had invited the Deputy Chair to lead a small task and finish group to oversee the selection and delivery of the Governor Effectiveness Review (GER).

The Deputy Chair briefed Council on the proposed guidelines for the review.

The guidelines were approved by Council.

8.4 Recruitment of a new Chair of Council

The Chair introduced his report, highlighting the option of either recruiting the next Chair from the existing members of Council or seeking an external appointment.

Council's preference was that the next Chair should be appointed from within its current membership. Members wishing to be considered for the position of Chair were asked to submit an expression of interest to the Clerk to the Governing Body by the end of April 2021.

Members

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

9. REPORT FROM THE FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

9.1 Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2021

The Chair of the Finance and Resources drew Members attention to the following:

- I. The additional costs of Covid-19 for the University were estimated to be in the region of £1M
- II. The financial outcome for the year was a projected surplus of £3.7M
- III. There would be a cash outflow of c.£8M in the current year, reflecting the cost of developing the Duke Street Riverside project. The University would generate cash in 2021/22.
- IV. To improve the rate of return, the University was seeking to place some of its cash reserves in the capital market.
- V. To allow employees the option of joining a lower-cost pension scheme, the University was progressing the introduction of an additional defined contribution pension scheme.

Investments in the capital market would be at the lower end of the risk spectrum, reflecting the Council's agreed appetite for risk. Any proposed investment in the capital market would take account of the University's ethics policy and align with the University's Treasury Management Policy. The Finance and Resources Committee would undertake the role of Investment Committee.

Council received the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting.

9.2 Finance Report February 2021 – Executive Summary

The Finance report was noted.

10. REPORT FROM AUDIT COMMITTEE**10.1 Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2021**

The Chair of the Committee drew Council's attention to the high level of assurance provided by the work carried out by Internal Auditors; the closure of all the actions identified by internal auditors and agreed by management from previous years; and the annual GDPR monitoring report. In line with the practice of good governance the Committee had also initiated re-tendering processes for the University's external and internal audit services.

Council received the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting.

10.2 US Department of Education loan programme representation and assertion letters

Council approved signature of the loan programme representation and assertion letters.

Chair

11. REPORT FROM THE NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE**11.1 Oral report of the meeting held 26 March 2020**

The Chair drew the following to Council's attention

- I. Ms R Chakraborty would serve at Deputy Chair of the Committee.
- II. The Committee had deliberated on the Skills Register and felt currently it did not fully capture all of the experience available to Council from the members. Further work on the Register would take place and the Register would be reissued to members for completion.

Clerk

- III. The Committee had reviewed its terms of reference, and noted the level of discretionary spend, before needing to seek Council's approval, to access professional advice had been set historically and was below what at today's prices might realistically enable access to appropriate expertise. The Committee was suggesting the level should be raised from £500 to £3000. It was proposed that the revised threshold should apply to all of the Council's committees. Council approved the change.
- IV. The University had engaged Nurole to assist in recruiting future members of Council. Working with Nurole ensured the recruitment process was open and transparent. It was hoped that Nurole would help create a pipeline of suitable appointees, which would assist with succession planning.

11.2 Determination of Council numbers for 2021/22

The Council agreed that membership of the Council should continue at the current number for the academic year 2021/22, namely:

- 13 independent members
- 1 member to the teaching staff nominated by Senate,
- 1 member of the Students' Union, namely the President
- 2 co-opted members: one of whom would be a member of the University's professional services staff nominated by Senate and other an external member with a background in education

In addition, the Vice Chancellor would be an ex-officio member of Council.

11.3 Renewals

Council approved the renewal, each for a further term of three years, of the following independent members:

- Cathy Armor (from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2025)
- Alex Ferguson (from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2025)
- Andy Grimbly (from 1 May 2021 to 30 April 2024)

Council approved the renewal of Professor Lady Rachel Cooper's term as the member co-opted by Council with a background in education for a further term of two years (from 1 August 2021 to 31 July 2023).

12. CHAIRMAN'S CLOSING REMARKS

The Chair thanked participants for their attendance and contributions to the meeting.

13. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would take place on 02 July 2021. Closer to the date it would be confirmed whether it would be a face-to-face meeting.