

NORWICH UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS

COUNCIL

Minutes of the Council

Minutes of the telephone conference held in lieu of the scheduled face-to-face meeting of Council on Friday 27 March 2020, commencing at 12.30 pm.

Present:

Mr A McMenemy (Chair to Item 10)
Ms C Armor
Ms C Bray
Ms R Chakraborty
Ms C Coleman
Prof. Lady R Cooper
Ms A Ferguson
Mr A Grimby
Mr M Jeffries (Chair from Item 10)
Ms A Johns
Prof. J Last
Ms H Lindsell
Ms N Nannar
Mr J Smith
Mr T Wood

In attendance:

Prof. N Powell
Mrs A Robson
Ms A Tubb
Mr D Williams (Clerk)

Apologies:

Prof. H Carlisle
Prof. R Sawdon-Smith
Mr I Watson

BACKGROUND

In the light of the coronavirus outbreak and the government's advice for people to travel only if it was essential, the meeting was conducted as a telephone conference. It was difficult for technical reasons to monitor attendance at all times throughout the meeting, as individual Members left and re-joined the meeting at various points.

1. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

The Chair thanked all Members for their attendance and extended a warm welcome to Catherine Bray, who was attending her first meeting of Council.

2. UPDATE FROM THE VICE CHANCELLOR AND SENIOR TEAM ON COVID-19

The Government had issued regular updates on the developing public health situation and its advice had been incorporated in the actions taken by the University. Under the circumstances the University believed it had managed the situation as well as it could. The Vice-Chancellor (VC) paid tribute to the adaptability and work undertaken by the Senior Team.

All teaching was now on-line, and only 3 weeks of scheduled teaching remained until the end of the current academic term.

Graduation had been postponed, at least to the autumn.

The University was supporting particularly international students stranded in the UK. During the period of the crisis the Senior Team had met every other day, recently using video conferencing.

All aspects of the University continued to operate.

All staff were working from home, save for a small skeleton team of essential workers located in Francis House. The on-site presence of these workers was required to maintain essential services.

The University was in-touch with all staff who were self-isolating.

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The University was sending electronic communications to all staff on a regular basis. The University was committed to honouring its commitments to hourly-paid staff and low-paid workers to the end of the summer term.

There remain a number of unresolved national issues. These included whether students would be reimbursed for their term 3 tuition fees and payments for their residential accommodation in university halls waived. On both matters, the University would follow best practice and advice from government.

The Office for Students (OfS) had written to all registered higher education providers (HEPs). OfS aim was to support the sector at the current time, and had, for example, relaxed a number of the on-going conditions of registration. At the same time some required data returns had been deferred.

The OfS had imposed a moratorium on HEPs making offers to students for 2020/21 entry. In the light of the University's practice of making offers based on interviewing students and assessing their portfolio of work, OfS's decision was unhelpful. The University would be unable to finalise its offers to students until August 2020.

Other sector-wide decisions included moving submissions to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) from 2020 to 2021, and extending the duration of the existing Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) awards to summer 2021.

For the sector the big challenge would be the commencement of the 2020/21 academic year. A delay or postponement to the start of the 2020/21 academic year would have significant financial implications, and could lead to a number of HEPs struggling to survive.

For the current year, the University estimated that the loss of income resulting from repaying term 3 student fees and waiving the rental charge for students who would have lived in University controlled accommodation would amount to circa. £7.5M. The University had sufficient cash reserves to cover the loss of income if needed in extremis. The University was also incurring some additional costs as a result of moving its teaching on-line.

The President of the Students' Union confirmed to Council that students had been kept well-informed about the developing situation. Students' concerns were around their personal loneliness and access to facilities to produce work.

3. STRATEGIC PLAN

The work on the strategic plan was noted. It was agreed that until the duration and impact of COVID-19 was clear, it was difficult to progress the plan.

4. ITEMS REQUIRING APPROVAL

The Chair proposed, and Members agreed, that it would appropriate to consider next the items on the agenda, which required Council's approval.

Students Union updated strategic plan for 2020-23 (Agenda item 4.1)

Council was impressed with, and approved, the updated strategic plan.

Amendments to the Standing Orders (Agenda item 5.1)

The proposed amendments to the standing orders were approved.

Renewals (Agenda item 9.2)

Council agreed that the following independent members, should each have their term of office renewed for a further period of 3 years:

- Alison Johns
- Ian Watson
- Tom Wood

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Determination of Council number 2020/21 (Agenda item 9.1)

Council approved the recommendations made by Nominations Committee as to the total size of Council and the number in each variable category.

5. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Council approved the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2019.

The Chair electronically signed the Minutes as the formal record of the meeting.

6. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were no matters arising.

7. VICE CHANCELLOR

Vice Chancellor's report to Council on strategic and operational matters

Prior to COVID-19, the University had been making positive progress on a number of fronts.

The public health crisis had led to postponement of the investiture of the University's new Chancellor. This was now expected to take place in autumn 2020.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Report

The figures for NUA broadly mirrored those of Norfolk as a whole. The report was noted.

Karsten Schubert Bequest – update paper

The report was noted and agreed under the Large Donations policy as an appropriate one.

Draft economic impact report

Emphasising the importance of the creative industries to the city of Norwich, the intention had been to launch the report alongside the installation of the University's new Chancellor. The report was noted.

Duke Street Riverside (DSR)

Until the present week, progress on DSR had remained more or less on track. However, the inability to ensure workers could remain a safe distance apart while working on the site, had resulted in construction work being halted and closure of the site on 26 March 2020.

Investigation of the ground conditions on the DSR site had discovered high voltage electric cables in the ground. The discovery of the cables had not to date affected the critical path for the project.

Curriculum developments

The development of the curriculum had been informed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor, supported by the President of the Students' Union, meeting with more than 1,000 of the University's undergraduate students.

The resulting curriculum changes included an increased emphasis on employability; acknowledging that graduates were not only employed in the creative industries.

Senate, 11 December 2019

The meeting had included the review of the University's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The review had found that while the direction of travel was positive, there was further progress to be made. The review had also identified the need to improve data capture. The Minutes were received and noted.

Senate, 03 March 2020

In the light of the circumstances arising from COVID-19, the meeting had agreed a number of revisions to the University's assessment regulations. The Minutes were received and noted.

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Report from the Students' Union President

Issues with attendance at the Summer Ball aside, good progress had been made in a number of areas. Council noted the report.

9. GOVERNANCE AND ASSURANCE MATTERS

CUC Code of Higher Education Governance

The current public health crisis was expected to delay publication of the revised Code, and the associated timeline against which HEPs might be required by OfS to adopt the new Code.

Due to a technical problem the Chair of Council left the meeting and the Deputy Chair took the Chair.

10. REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES**10.1 REPORTS FROM THE FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Movements in income and expenditure, the cash flow, and the continuing strength of the balance sheet were highlighted. Council approved the report.

10.2 REPORTS FROM THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

The Committee had received a presentation on cyber security. The presentation offered good evidence of the resilience of the University's information technology systems and their ability to withstand a range of external threats and attacks. Council noted the report.

11. CLOSING REMARKS

On behalf of the Chair and all Members of the Council, the Deputy Chair expressed his thanks to the University's staff for responding so positively to the exceptional demands placed upon them at the present time. The VC agreed that he would relay Council's thanks to the institution's staff.

VC

Subsequently the Chair of Council wrote on similar lines to the President of the Students Union thanking her and the students for being so cooperative and understanding.

All members of the University staff in attendance at Council, left the meeting.

12. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR OF THE GOVERNING BODY

Reflecting the exceptional circumstances, Members were unanimous in approving the motion that Mr A McMenemy should be invited to serve as a member of the governing body, and subject to annual re-election, as Chair of the Governing Body for at least 2, and if necessary 3, further years.

Clerk