



COUNCIL

**Minutes of the 251st meeting of Council held on Monday 4 May 2020
at 14.00 to 15.00 via Zoom**

1. PRESENT

Members present: Dame Denise Holt (Chair), Ms Adrienne Fresko (Vice-Chair), Ms Kirstin Baker, Professor Saul Becker, Mr David Benson, Mr Andy Bryant, Ms Fran Barnard, Mr Tony Bullman, Mr Mark Devlin, Mr Mark Fisher, Ms Katie Ghose, Professor Sir Peter Knight, Professor Mario Novelli, Professor Kate O’Riordan, Ms Jane Parsons, Professor Steve McGuire, Mr Albertus Schoeman, Ms Aleema Shivji, Professor Adam Tickell, Mr Filip Vasilijevic, Mr Nick Watson, Professor Gerhard Wolf, Mr Richard Zaltzman.

In attendance: Dr Tim Westlake (Chief Operating Officer and University Secretary), Mr Allan Spencer (Director of Finance), Professor Stephen Shute (Pro Vice-Chancellor (Planning and Resources), Professor Kelly Coate (Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students)), Ms Michelle Gordon (Director of External Relations), Ms Bridget Edminson (General Counsel), Ms Rowena Rowley (Head of Governance Services).

Apologies for absence were received from: Mr David Curley and Professor Steve Caddick.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 No declarations of interest were noted regarding items on the agenda.

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 Council AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2020 as a true record (paper C/250/M)

4. MATTERS ARISING

- 4.1 Council NOTED matters arising from the minutes not referred to elsewhere on the agenda (paper C/251/1).

5. CHAIR’S ACTION AND REPORT

- 5.1 Council NOTED the Chair’s written report on key developments since the March meeting of Council, and specifically:
- a) NOTED an update on governance arrangements between March and July 2020, including the decision to hold informal fortnightly briefings for Council members, the arrangements for financial oversight and delegations, and the chain of command in

case of illness, namely that the Vice-Chair would deputise for the Chair, and in the absence of both the Chair and Vice-Chair, Professor Steve Caddick would deputise.

- b) NOTED the decision to postpone the Staff Survey from May 2020;
- c) NOTED the Vice-Chancellor's decision to forego 10% of his salary and that this will be added to the student hardship fund;
- d) NOTED the work being done by Committee Chairs to review the annual workplans between now and July to ensure appropriate focus on key issues resulting from COVID-19.

Items raised in discussion regarding the work of the Committees included:

- i) The decision to pause any further work on the development regarding the approach to the University's Strategy, summarised in the Operationalising the Vision paper shared with Council in March 2020, subject to detailed review and consideration of how the University's Strategy might need to be adjusted to reflect the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. This work will be reviewed in due course by SPRC.
- ii) The importance of the oversight from Student Experience Committee regarding the student experience for students now being taught on-line; the University's approach to supporting students in relation to wellbeing and mental health challenges; and the approach to widening participation both this year and in the future.
- iii) The work of Remuneration Committee B to consider the University's approach to staff pay, and particularly options regarding performance related pay versus retention as the University enters a more financially challenging period.
- iv) The decision to delay the staff survey had been taken by the Executive without consulting the Unions, and a proposal will return to SPRC in due course regarding the best time to undertake this survey.
- v) Audit and Risk Committee have convened an additional meeting on 5 May 2020 to consider the specific COVID19 Risk Register.

6. VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT

6.1 Council RECEIVED an oral report from the Vice-Chancellor, who drew Council's attention to the following:

- a) The focus on not only student, but also staff wellbeing during this difficult period, with a variety of initiatives in place including increased guidance on the internal website with signposting to wellbeing support; reminders about the free employee assistance support line; the granting of an additional minimum service day for staff on 11 May; and regular and clear communication with staff both as a whole and through separate stakeholder groups, including positive messages regarding the work that the University is doing to support the national effort.
- b) Work is now being done to plan for the return to work in due course, and how best to ensure staff and students can return to campus safely and in line with government

guidance. Each School and Division is working on local plans to ensure that this can be done methodically with a clear focus on student and staff safety.

- c) All student wellbeing services have been continuing on-line, and additionally the student survey application “enlitened” has been utilised to keep in touch with students and gain an understanding of the issues that are currently most pressing for students. Students using the app have the opportunity earn virtual coins and many students have chosen to donate these to charities supporting the national efforts against coronavirus.
- d) The higher education sector will be facing significant financial challenges in the next academic year, and it is likely that this will lead to some consolidation or restructures from within the sector and this is something that Council will need to remain aware of.

Items raised in discussion included:

- i) The sector consolidation is likely to focus on mergers within the UK, rather than increased international partnerships, although nothing can be ruled out at this time. The Executive, with input from the Chair and a small number of Council members, is putting some early thought into what potential criteria might be used to assess any opportunities that arise before this is shared with Chairs’ Committee and then Council.
- ii) Student numbers for 2020 entry remain down against last year, there has been a delay to the date for firm acceptances so it will be autumn until the position is clear.
- iii) The Executive are continuing to monitor the position regarding the financial stability of on-campus partners such as Chartwells and Interserve as well as the Students’ Union.

7. VOLUNTARY SEVERANCE SCHEME

- 7.1 Council RECEIVED an update on the proposed Voluntary Severance Scheme (paper C/251/3) introduced by Professor Stephen Shute, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Planning and Resources).

Items raised in discussion included:

- a) The decision to go ahead with the proposed Voluntary Severance Scheme now, rather than early in the 2020/21 academic year, reflects the impact of the international student fee income which is currently at risk, whilst the full extent of the financial challenge will not be known until the autumn there is no scenario in which efficiencies will not need to be made.
- b) Care has been taken to design the Scheme so that managers have the choice as to whether to accept applications or otherwise, to avoid business critical staff leaving through this route. This is the first time that a voluntary scheme of this nature has been launched at Sussex in recent history and it is hoped that it will be viewed positively by staff members.
- c) The anticipated take-up has been modelled using peer institution schemes but until the launch it is not possible to know how many staff will apply.

Council:

- i) NOTED that the campus Unions have been consulted on the principles and launch of the VS Scheme.
- ii) NOTED the proposed VS Scheme which may potentially cost £5.1m, with a reduction in headcount of c158 staff, and permanent pay savings of c£6.8m annually from summer 2021 onwards using best estimate of staff take-up. The request for approval from Council for cost of change is £7.5m and will allow for some headroom since settlement amounts will vary according to pay and length of service and given that take up rates across grades are based on our best estimates but cannot be accurately predicted in a voluntary scheme especially in the current external environment.
- iii) NOTED that in line with agreed governance arrangements, the final proposal including full costs will be presented to a sub-group of Council for approval later in May.
- iv) COMMENTED on the proposed Scheme, principles and estimated costs as per the discussion outlined above.

8. UNIVERSITY FINANCES

- 8.1 Council RECEIVED a high level update from the Director of Finance on the University's finances and NOTED the thresholds being used to keep the financial position under review (paper C/251/4).

Council NOTED:

- a) At present, the University's financial status is "sound for the current year at least". Should there be a change in status Council will be informed as soon as practicable.
- b) To-date, only one action has been taken under the delegated authority approved by Council on 24 March 2020 to a small sub-group, namely the authorisation of non-collection of third term rent from students who have left University accommodation. The total maximum exposure to lost income could be £8.8m.
- c) There will be more clarity on the position for the next academic year once the final student numbers are known for 2020/21 entry.

9. LEGAL AND COMPLIANCE MATTERS RELATING TO COVID19

- 9.1 Council RECEIVED a paper setting out an assessment of the legal risks relating to the University's response to the coronavirus pandemic (paper C/251/5) introduced by the University's General Counsel, noting that the overall risk analysis as set out in the paper is low.
- 9.2 Council RECEIVED an update on regulatory changes during COVID19 (paper C/251/6) introduced by the University's General Counsel, and specifically:
- a) NOTED the new guidance from the OfS during this interim period relating to reportable events; academic quality and standards; consumer and student protection and data returns.

- b) RECEIVED assurance from the Executive that arrangements are in place to ensure ongoing compliance with the revised guidance and no issues are anticipated in providing assurance to Council regarding compliance with the OfS Conditions of Registration for 2019/20.

10. UUK CONSULTATION

- 10.1 Council NOTED the institutional response to the UUK consultation on the methodology and risk appetite for the 2020 UUS valuation, which had been submitted on 1 May 2020 (paper C/251/7).

11. COMMITTEE MINUTES

- 11.1 Council NOTED the draft minutes of the ARC meeting held on 6 March 2020 (paper C/251/8) and the SPRC meeting held on 13 March 2020 (paper C/251/9).
- 11.2 In relation to the draft ARC minutes it was noted that the reported call from student Senators for academic staff to make up teaching time lost through industrial action had subsequently been nuanced by those students who clarified that they had referred to “knowledge compensation” as separate to a request for teaching time to be made up.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 12.1 No other business was raised.

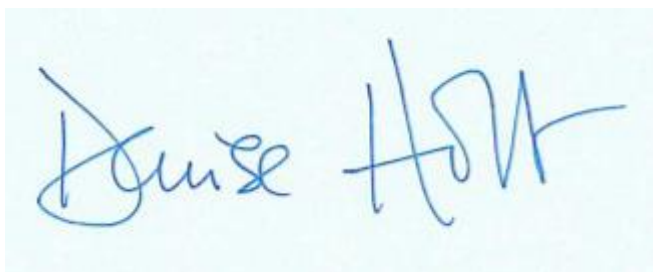
13. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

- 13.1 Friday 3 July 2020 unless an earlier meeting is required.

Dr Tim Westlake
Secretary to Council

May 2020

Approved by Council on 3 July 2020 and signed electronically by the Chair, Dame Denise Holt.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Denise Holt', is displayed on a light blue background.