



## COUNCIL

### Minutes of the 256<sup>th</sup> meeting of Council held on Friday 26 March 2021 from 9am to 4pm via Zoom

#### 1. Present

Members present: Dame Denise Holt (Chair), Adrienne Fresko (Vice-Chair), Kirstin Baker, Professor Saul Becker, Andy Bryant, Tony Bullman, Professor Steve Caddick, Professor Sara Crangle, David Curley, Mark Devlin, Mark Fisher, Connor Moylett, Professor Mario Novelli, Max O'Donnell-Savage, Jane Parsons, Rosemary Martin, Professor Steve McGuire, Albertus Schoeman, Professor Adam Tickell, Nick Watson, Professor Gerhard Wolf, Richard Zaltzman.

In attendance: Dr Tim Westlake (Chief Operating Officer and University Secretary), Professor Keith Jones (Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise)), Allan Spencer (Director of Finance), Professor Stephen Shute (Pro Vice-Chancellor (Planning and Resources)), Dr Kate O'Riordan, Siobhan O'Reilly (Director of HR), Alexandra Fulton (Associate Director of Communications), Georgina Seligmann (Deputy Head of Governance), Emma Potts (Interim Deputy Chief Operating Officer and Deputy University Secretary).

David Allen and Frank Toop, from the Halpin Partnership, attended the meeting as observers, as part of the Governance Effectiveness Review.

Apologies were received from David Benson

#### 2. Declarations of interest

- 2.1 No declarations of interest were noted regarding items on the agenda, other than the re-appointment of individual Council members who were asked to leave the meeting whilst this was under discussion.

#### 3. Minutes

- 3.1 Council AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2020 (C/255/M) as a true record.

#### 4. Matters arising

- 4.1 Council NOTED matters arising from the minutes not referred to elsewhere on the agenda (C/256/4). There were two open items: in respect of the engagement of the University community in the process for nomination of independent members of Council, the Chair proposed that this might be considered by Halpin as part of the Governance Effectiveness Review, in accordance with best practice elsewhere. **[Action: Interim Deputy University Secretary to liaise with Halpin]**

With regard to a proposed briefing on the Brighton and Sussex Medical School; it was proposed that this occur either at the July Council briefing or in the autumn. It was noted that a briefing on Sustainability had been requested for July. **[Action: Interim Deputy University Secretary]**

## **5. Chair's Action and Report**

- 5.1 Council NOTED that no actions had been taken by the Chair on behalf of Council since the previous meeting.
- 5.2 Council received an oral update from the Chair, noting that, after the detailed discussion of the Size and Shape programme, the bulk of the agenda included reports from the various Council sub-committees, to ensure that Council members heard about the work undertaken during this committee cycle and also to ensure a clear understanding of the remit of each Committee, without full Council needing to repeat in detail the discussions held in each Committee.

## **6. Financial Delegations**

- 6.1 Council RECEIVED a report on action taken under the financial delegation agreed by Council in March 2020, updated in November 2021 (C/256/6), introduced by the Chair, who made the following points by way of introduction:
  - a) In March 2020 Council agreed to reduce the Vice-Chancellor's expenditure authority from £10m to £750k and delegate authority to the Chair or Vice Chair and one other Committee Chair (not ARC) to take action on behalf of Council including approval of items over £750k but less than £10m.
  - b) A separate Sustainability Group was established to keep the University finances under close review with regular updates provided to Council. It was felt that this group had provided an important and useful monitoring function.
  - c) The delegation referred to in (a) above had been actioned on four occasions since November 2020, bringing the total occasions to nine since March 2020. Whilst the report before Council proposed that the delegation arrangements continue until 31 July 2021, the Chair proposed that in view of the experience gained in the past year, and the relatively more settled economic climate, this might be an opportune moment for delegated authority to return to the Vice-Chancellor with immediate effect. whilst retaining the Sustainability Group until the end of the financial year, to ensure continuity of monitoring.
- 6.2 Council APPROVED the financial delegation arrangements reverting back to the Vice-Chancellor holding expenditure authority up to £10m, but with the continuation of the Sustainability Group until 31 July 2021, to provide a financial monitoring function.

## PART 2 - MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION AND/OR DECISION

### **7. Vice-Chancellor's Report**

7.1 Council RECEIVED a report from the Vice-Chancellor (C/256/7) who drew Council's attention to the following:

- a) There had been an omission from the report, which should have included the award of an OBE to Professor Kathleen Stock in the New Year Honours List.
- b) The USS valuation report had recently been issued; this presented significant challenges to the sector. Discussions with the Trustee and Pensions regulator had been focused on seeking to price in the covenant support that the employers were proposing. A consultation is expected to be launched by UniversitiesUK within the next two weeks; it was, however, clear that the status quo cannot be maintained. Council will have an opportunity to contribute to the University's response; once the timeframe for the consultation is known, Council will be advised accordingly and a meeting date set.
- c) As mentioned at the Council briefing the previous evening, there are challenges within the research funding environment with significant cuts, including to the Global Challenge Research Fund. Work is being undertaken to understand the impact of these.

### **8. Strategy 2025: Size and Shape of the University**

8.1 Council CONSIDERED a report on the academic vision for the University, in support of the Strategy to 2025 (C/256/8a) and RECEIVED an accompanying presentation on the Size and Shape programme from the Vice-Chancellor, uploaded to BoardPacks following the meeting. In summarising the objectives of the programme and its various elements, the Vice-Chancellor drew Council's attention to the following:

- a) The Higher Education (HE) sector faces a range of challenges including cuts to research funding and the outcome of the Augar review; the latter might result in a reduction in tuition fee income. The size of the Student Loan book remains an issue; government needs to reduce this and the impact of a reduction may result in fewer students entering HE. Whilst previously a reduction in tuition fee income could be met through an increase in international students, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted international student recruitment.
- b) In general the HE sector is becoming ever more competitive, and the future looks uncertain, with the operating environment for universities having been completely transformed. The University nonetheless remains committed to achieving the objectives set out in Sussex 2025. An area of key concern is student satisfaction, with NSS scores demonstrating the range of work that needs to be undertaken to address areas of poor performance. Whilst the recent staff survey results show improvements, there is still much that needs to be done to improve the staff experience too.
- c) The focus of the Size and Shape programme is on academic excellence, and ensuring that Sussex remains a broad-based institution that maintains a commitment to cross-subsidy where this supports retaining excellence. The work being undertaken within Professional Services is focussed on supporting the academic mission and, over the coming weeks, university-wide engagement will be a key part of developing proposals for change.

Items raised in discussion included:

- i) Council noted the unprecedented challenges faced by the HE sector and the importance of protecting the future of the institution through exploring opportunities to be both efficient and effective in the way it operates. Trustees have a responsibility to protect the university not just for present generations but also for the future, and to this end they must ensure that it generates sufficient surpluses to invest in the infrastructure. An additional Council meeting in September was proposed, to focus on a more forward look. **[Action: Interim Deputy University Secretary]**
- ii) One of the challenges is to balance academic excellence with employability, and how to assess the quality of provision and articulate this clearly. There are clearly areas of good practice within the University and an opportunity to learn from this from within the institution, as well as externally. Academic leaders within Schools will be producing their academic strategies which will be focussed on achieving excellence.
- iii) Identifying why students choose Sussex now and in the future is key to ensuring that the University can maintain a distinctive offering and a clear brand. The inclusion of a values-based offer within the strategic framework captures the essence of what Sussex stands for and it is important to retain this.
- iv) One of the main challenges is to implement a vision on the back of a pandemic, at a time when staff have been facing considerable pressure and may receive proposals for change negatively. Careful messaging and communication will be key to maintaining staff morale and emphasising ways in which staff can engage and contribute to the development of proposals.
- v) The approach to the programme is coherent and credible; there are opportunities to highlight further the people strategy, to make clear that a key priority is to attract, retain and value the best academic and Professional Services staff.
- vi) Whilst not directly part of the Size and Shape Programme, Council noted the work on league table improvements and student satisfaction, observing also the complexity of the course portfolio and that 65% of students who graduate, do so on a unique pathway.

8.2 Council NOTED an update on progress on the Size and Shape programme of work (C/256/8b)

8.3 Council CONSIDERED a report on the Portfolio Review: the opportunities and challenges and the implications for student numbers and the size and shape of the University (C/256/8c), alongside a presentation (uploaded to BoardPacks following the meeting) by Professor Stephen Shute and Sally Baily (The Knowledge Partnership), who drew Council's attention to the following:

- a) The course portfolio is a key determinant of student choice. The portfolio review undertaken by The Knowledge Partnership (TKP) recommends a small number of courses for withdrawal where their future appears unviable. These recommendations for withdrawal are offset by opportunities that have been identified for growth. The next stage of the Portfolio Review project will include careful review of the TKP data, aligned to the University-wide engagement process.
- b) The shape of the University has been changing in recent years; this reflects the change in popularity of some subject areas and intense competition across the HE sector. Russell Group institutions have been expanding aggressively and taking students in Arts

and Humanities and the traditional Science disciplines who would previously have gone to non-Russell Group institutions. Sussex's dependence on the Foundation year for certain subject areas, in the light of potential funding cuts, is a key risk.

- c) There are opportunities for increased module efficiency; in the School of Media, Arts and Humanities, work has already started in seeking to reduce the number of modules offered. TKP also recommend a review of the practice of capping module registrations.
- d) All undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses have been reviewed and assessed against sector benchmarks, with growth areas identified. Course improvements have also been recommended, including course title and curriculum changes, and a rationalisation of the number of 'and 'and 'with ' courses, particularly where there are low student numbers and limited prospects for growth.

Items raised in discussion included:

- i) The number of growth opportunities was noted, acknowledging that the former Portfolio Review 1 project had been focussed on identifying low-recruiting courses and recommending them for closure. Whilst the number of courses offered is not out of line with the sector, there are inefficiencies at module level where some rationalisation can be achieved. It was noted that the proposals for withdrawal are for low-recruiting courses; embedding a culture of continuous monitoring would be beneficial, so that staff become accustomed to this process as being routine rather than exceptional.
- ii) Brand, purpose and identity are key; the course portfolio needs to align with these and fit into a coherent strategy. The involvement of recent graduates as well as prospective students in market analysis was suggested, to ensure that lessons could be learned from the experience of our recent graduates and incorporated into future proposals. This would, to a certain extent, also include NSS data.
- iii) The success of the Foundation year was highlighted; alternatives need to be considered should the government remove funding for this area. The Foundation year is a key differentiator for Sussex, and is a pillar of our Access work, so it is important that this is retained.

8.4 Council CONSIDERED a report on OneProfessional Service and the opportunities to support the future size and shape of the University (C/256/8d), introduced by Tim Westlake, who drew Council's attention to the following:

- a) The role of Professional Services (PS) is to support the academic endeavour – both the academic community and students. The focus is on efficiency, which should then deliver the required financial savings. This builds on work that has been undertaken in the last few years to restructure elements of PS to make them more effective, including the merger of a number of units and the development of the Portfolio Management office and an in-house legal function.
- b) PS staff need to work in partnership with academic leaders, in support of the academic strategy within the Schools. The development of clear career pathways for PS staff is critical, with objectives for services and for staff articulated. The delivery models will vary dependent upon the service and processes concerned, ranging from a business partner approach to more integrated provision.

Items raised in discussion included:

- i) The career progression element is critical, particularly for staff on lower grades, so that staff are able to see their future trajectory. Consistency of job descriptions is key to achieving this, so that staff understand the criteria for grading of posts. An increase in career development opportunities for lower-graded staff should be prioritised.
- ii) The final proposals should highlight what ‘efficiency and effectiveness’ looks like, with suitable examples included so as to ensure good understanding. **[ACTION: COO to include in final proposals]**
- ii) Council NOTED the significant savings made within PS over the last few years and the challenge now faced in making further cuts to services to achieve savings targets. The paper identifies a lack of experience of change management within the University; further work should focus on the ‘people management’ issues and ensure that appropriate care and attention is being given to staff engagement and support, as part of the University engagement process. **[ACTION: Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise)]**

8.5 Council RECEIVED an oral update from the Chair of SPRC, following discussion of the Size and Shape programme at its meeting on 5 March 2021, who drew Council’s attention to the following:

- a) SPRC had welcomed the holistic approach being taken to the programme, with high quality papers produced. They had noted the important focus on academic excellence and felt that the emphasis should be more on Shape rather than Size. However, SPRC had also acknowledged the scale of the savings required and the importance of recognising the financial challenges and creating a sustainable model for the future.
- b) SPRC noted that staff engagement is a critical element of the programme, alongside ensuring that lessons learned from previous exercises are incorporated into the engagement process, to ensure that the university community are able to contribute their ideas to the programme.

8.6 Council NOTED a proposal to initiate a UEG Consultation (Engagement) process, in support of the emerging work from the Size and Shape Programme (C/256/8e), introduced by Professor Keith Jones, who drew Council’s attention to the following:

- a) The term ‘UEG consultation’ originates from a set of principles and procedures that were established for use in circumstances where there is a proposal for significant restructuring. Given that the Size and Shape programme is University-wide, this is being described as a ‘University engagement’ process, to reflect more accurately that this will engage university-wide, and is not a formal consultation process. The purpose of the proposal is to engage with all stakeholders, both students and staff, on the details of the Size and Shape programme; this will include engagement with the unions and with Senate.
- b) At the heart of the engagement process will be an Engagement group chaired by Keith Jones, comprising 16 people with a broad representation from across the University, including students. This group will define the approach to engagement and frame questions to solicit views via a 6-week engagement process that will collate all of the feedback for further consideration and reflection.

- c) The Heads of Schools and Professional Services Directors will lead discussions within their respective schools and divisions, using the questions provided by the Engagement group. The Engagement group will also invite Heads of Schools and PS Directors to attend the group to speak to particular areas and themes that emerge from the engagement exercise. Alongside these activities there will be opportunities for individuals to provide feedback.
- d) The aim is to achieve a synthesis of all of the feedback from the various engagement activities, with a report produced by the Engagement group for UEG at the end of May, to inform UEG decision-making.

Items raised in discussion included:

- i) The process for soliciting feedback was discussed, noting that there is a challenge with running this alongside a voluntary severance scheme; clear communication will be essential. The aim is for there to be as much face-to-face interaction with staff as possible, avoiding the use of surveys.
- ii) Stakeholders need to be given clarity as to how the process will work, how their feedback will be considered and how they will hear about the outcome of the exercise. Clarity on the role of Senate within the process is also needed, to ensure that meetings with Senate are scheduled during the engagement weeks. Staff need to know that their voice is an important part of the process.
- iii) Council noted that the Executive are keen to hear all views from across the University; it will be important to provide all stakeholders with feedback on the engagement process, so that they can understand how their views have been incorporated into the final report to UEG, rather than the outcome having been pre-determined. **[Action: Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise) to ensure that the process includes feedback to stakeholders]**

8.7 Council CONSIDERED a proposal for a new Voluntary Severance Scheme (C/256/8f), introduced by Siobhan O'Reilly, Director of HR, who drew Council's attention to the following:

- a) The previous Voluntary Severance scheme had been very successful and resulted in 112 colleagues leaving, achieving savings of just under £6m. A further scheme would need to be managed carefully, ensuring that any approved applications are in the business interest and consider the sustainability of the institution.
- b) The proposal is that the scheme would run from 27 April to 26 May, with a panel appointed to review applications and for decisions to be made in June. The process followed would be the same as in 2020.
- c) The proposal to launch a further Voluntary Severance scheme had emerged from a staff engagement exercise in the latter part of 2020, when staff had been asked for their views on ways in which the University might achieve savings. A further Voluntary Severance scheme had been proposed during this exercise and so launching this now would demonstrate that we are listening to our staff as well as to reduce the risk of losing any further staff through additional savings measures. Furthermore, the University's regulations stipulate that, if proposals for change might result in compulsory redundancies, a Voluntary Severance process is required.

Items raised in discussion included:

- i) Council discussed the timing of the scheme, noting that it is relatively soon after the original scheme, but noting that this was one of the proposals emerging from staff feedback. Whilst proposals for Size and Shape will be discussed at the same time as the Voluntary Severance period, no decisions will be made during this time.
- ii) Some staff have already indicated they would like to make an application for Voluntary Severance, perhaps because their circumstances had changed since the last scheme was run. There are no indications as to the likely take-up of the scheme, although other institutions have run up to three schemes in a 12-18 month period and had good uptake from all of them.
- iii) This scheme is part of a raft of other measures that emerged through staff engagement, including an Annual Leave Purchase scheme that is being launched shortly. By June there will be information as to the level of savings that have been achieved through this exercise and, alongside the other work being undertaken, this will help in identifying what further savings are required in order to achieve the Council-approved surplus for 2021/22.
- iv) Elsewhere in the HE sector there are significant redundancy programmes in train, particularly at similar-sized institutions to Sussex, but there is considerable variety as to the scope and remit of these schemes. In order for the Voluntary Severance scheme to be successful, effective communication to staff will be critical.

Council APPROVED by consensus the proposal for a new Voluntary Severance Scheme.

## 9. **Audit and Risk Committee**

9.1. Council RECEIVED an oral report from Mr David Curley, Chair of Audit and Risk Committee and NOTED the draft minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2021 (C/256/9). The Chair of ARC drew Council's attention to the following:

- a) The last meeting had focussed on assurance and internal audit, and included a discussion of the recent SAAT review undertaken by Halpin, and overseen by Tony Bullman. This had been considered previously by Capital Programmes Committee who had requested a management response from UEG, for ARC's review. ARC had considered the UEG response which accepted all of the review recommendations. ARC had proposed that, in future, all projects of this scale must undertake a risk appetite exercise at the project initiation phase.
- b) ARC had reviewed progress of the internal audit programme and tracked the extent to which recommendations were being implemented. Four key internal audit reviews had been undertaken: Data Quality (HR) (amber/red), IT Security (amber/red), Research and Procedures involving animals (amber/red) and Risk management (amber/green). ARC had also considered the timeline for resolution of the recommendations and in some cases were requesting interim updates on progress.
- c) ARC had also considered the latest Institutional Risk map and suggested that there be closer integration between the internal audit work and the risk map, so that these were aligned. Standing items on assurance, including OfS conditions of registration and the Health and Safety Action Plan had also been considered. The Chair noted that a minor change to the ARC minutes at item 9.1 should be made, to state that 'ARC noted the



assurance received from Senate on compliance with the B conditions and provides this assurance to Council' **[Action: Interim Deputy University Secretary to adjust ARC minutes to reflect this change].**

- d) ARC had considered the revised Sussex Estates and Facilities (SEF) Financial Regulations and received assurance from the Director of Finance that all appropriate work had been undertaken to revise these in accordance with the University's financial regulations.

Items raised in discussion included:

- i) Council noted the detailed scrutiny of the Internal audit reports undertaken by ARC and the careful consideration given to the content and timing of the recommendations.
- ii) Council noted the severity of the risk of achieving a financial surplus and that, given the volatility and general uncertainty within the HE sector, ARC's recommendation was that the rating of this risk was suitably cautious at the current time. This risk was not just a financial evaluation; it included other contributing factors that led to its current rating. However, through the Size and Shape programme of work, it should be possible to reduce the level of risk, unless external factors prevented this.
- iii) Council observed that one of the changes within the SEF Financial regulations reflected Interserve being taken over by Mitie; it was suggested that consideration should be given by ARC as to whether there might be any reputational risks arising from this change. **[Action: Deputy Head of Governance Services to add to ARC business]**

9.2. Council APPROVED by consensus the revised SEF Financial Regulations (C/256/9a).

9.3. Council NOTED the University's updated Institutional Risk Map (C/256/9b).

9.4. Council RECEIVED assurance that the University remains compliant with the OfS Conditions of Registration (C/256/9c).

## **10. Strategic Performance and Resources Committee**

10.1. Council RECEIVED an oral report from Ms Kirstin Baker, Chair of Strategic Performance and Resources Committee and NOTED the minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2021 (C/255/10a) and the draft minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2021 (C/256/10b). The Chair of SPRC drew Council's attention to the following:

- a) SPRC had met twice since the last Council meeting and reviewed the student number position for 2020/21. Whilst numbers were 3% down on 2019/20, they were 3% higher than Q1 predictions, translating to a financial forecast of £7.3m above the Q1 budget. Student numbers for September 2021 were still in flux; whilst undergraduate applications were up 20% they were still below 2017 levels and overseas recruitment was proving challenging. Student number predictions would be refreshed in April.
- b) Whilst the financial position for 2020/21 was better than forecast, accommodation income remains a major risk. Significant work is being undertaken to achieve voluntary staff savings and other non-pay savings, to reduce the need to make payroll savings. A lower surplus target of £5m-£10m would mean that less funding would be available for investment in the infrastructure, with limited scope for the inclusion of new capital projects alongside previously-agreed capital commitments.

- c) SPRC had reviewed the Gender Pay Gap report for 2021, noting a reduction in both the mean and median pay gap. This reduction arose primarily as a result of the inclusion of staff on sessional teaching roles who are now contracted rather than casual staff; this practice is already common elsewhere in the sector, so we can now compare more accurately against other institutions.
- d) SPRC had also reviewed proposals for KPI/T replacement, and specifically the proposal that the TEF Gold KPI be replaced by a league table KPI. Other proposals included an increase in the target for international collaboration and a growth in knowledge-based income. Proposals for adjustments to the Innovative Teaching and Sustainability KPIs would be considered by SPRC in June.

Items raised in discussion included:

- i) Council noted the effects of the pandemic on students, observing that some PGR students were running out of funding and, whilst hardship funding is available, this is not sufficient in some cases. Although the financial position is better than forecast, there is still considerable volatility within the sector and the position post-Easter in terms of student return to campus is unknown. Efforts have been made to be sensitive to staff morale issues, including through the resumption of the academic promotions exercise and Discretionary Pay Review approach.
  - ii) Whilst the financial position has improved, there remain significant issues with a backlog of estates maintenance and IT infrastructure work which are funded through the generation of a surplus. These improvement works are essential and we are falling behind our competitors in this regard.
  - iii) Whilst financial improvements need to be made, capturing and understanding the deleterious impact of savings needs to be undertaken in order that the risks can be assessed.
  - iv) Council noted that the budget planning work undertaken for 2021/22 did not include any planning for compulsory redundancies.
- 10.2. Council NOTED the financial monitoring update for 2020/21 to 2023/24 and initial budget and assumptions for 2021/22 including treasury and investments management review (C/256/10c).
- 10.3. Council NOTED the University's 2021 Gender Pay Gap report (C/256/10d).
- 10.4. Council APPROVED by consensus the proposals for KPI/T replacement, changes and committee review processes as revised metrics for Council level KPI/Ts (C/256/10e).

## **11. Capital Programmes Committee**

- 11.1 Council RECEIVED an oral report from Mark Devlin, Chair of Capital Programmes Committee and NOTED the draft minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2021 (C/256/11). The Chair of CPC drew Council's attention to the following:
- a) The March meeting had been Mark Devlin's first as chair; thanks were extended to Steve Caddick for chairing previously. CPC had reviewed the Estates and IT roadmaps, which were focussed on the IT network replacement and the West Slope developments. On the recommendation of UEG, CPC had agreed that the development of business

cases for the network replacement and West Slope should continue, at a cost of £300k each as previously approved.

- b) The East Slope project had reached practical completion and the Student Centre work was proceeding, but otherwise the majority of work was still paused, with no requests at this stage for any further funding.
- c) CPC had reviewed carefully the SAAT 'lessons learned' report from Halpin, noting that the new Programme methodology and Governance structures had already addressed some of the recommendations. CPC had asked that an initial management response be provided to ARC, with any feedback being incorporated into a revised management response for CPC to consider at its next meeting. Understanding the risk appetite for major projects at the outset is key, alongside assessing the level of institutional readiness. Preparations are underway to initiate a new Student Records system project; this will be closely scrutinised and monitored by CPC to ensure that lessons learned have been addressed.

Items raised in discussion included:

- i) Council noted that a lower surplus would have a significant impact on the Estates and IT roadmap. When the Estates and IT roadmap was first drafted, the original demand after collating requirements from across the University was £1billion. Whilst this demand had reduced to £300m through various engagement exercises, with a Council-approved surplus of only £5m-£10m this would reduce the capital funding available to c.£200m.
- ii) Significant costs have been incurred through the failure of the Life Sciences and SAAT projects; whilst these were undertaken as part of a former management regime, communication to staff about the assurance work that has been undertaken to identify lessons learned is key. In addition, there needs to be careful communication of the controls that are now in place including the role that CPC holds in ensuring appropriate accountability and ensuring that lessons learned are taken forward.
- iii) For future large-scale projects, care needs to be taken at the project initiation stage, to ensure careful planning, risk analysis and institutional readiness are established. These matters will be formally monitored by CPC.

## **12. Chairs' Committee Update**

12.1 Council RECEIVED an oral report regarding Nominations matters including a recommendation regarding appointments and re-appointments of members of Council. Tony Bullman and Katie Ghose withdrew from the meeting whilst their reappointments were discussed. The Vice-Chair of Council drew Council's attention to the following:

- a) Mini-feedback exercises had been undertaken for both Tony Bullman and Katie Ghose, as part of the standard process for their reappointment for a second and third term respectively. Both had received excellent feedback. As part of discussions, Tony Bullman had agreed to take David Curley's position as the ARC representative on CPC.
- b) Chairs' committee had also discussed the timing of Council appointments and agreed that it would be helpful to streamline this process so as to have an annual point in the year when appointments are considered, with a single effective date of 1 August. Any vacancy emerging between 1 August and 31 December would be backdated to 1 August

and, should a vacancy emerge between 1 January and 31 July, the person would be co-opted to Council in the intervening period before being formally appointed on 1 August.

12.2 Council APPROVED the re-appointment of Tony Bullman and Katie Ghose to Council, for a second and third term respectively, from 1 August 2021.

12.3 Council APPROVED the appointment of Tony Bullman to CPC, in place of David Curley, with effect from 1 August 2021.

Council APPROVED the proposal that all appointments to Council would, in future, be with effect from 1 August.

12.4 Council RECEIVED an update on the Governance Effectiveness Review 2021 (C/256/12a), introduced by the Vice-Chair, who advised Council that the review is well underway. Surveys have been launched to Council and Senate and meeting observations are in progress. 1:1 interviews are just starting, with the majority to be scheduled for after the Easter break. The Steering Group is being provided with regular project updates and have helped to shape communications to staff and students.

Items raised in discussion included:

a) Council noted that Professional Services staff are not well represented on either the Steering Group or at Senate, but that communications to staff have stressed that individuals can engage with the review directly, as well as via focus groups, so there should be good opportunities for all staff to contribute their feedback to this review.

12.5 Council RECEIVED assurance that the University continues to demonstrate due regard to the Prevent Duty (C/256/12b). In introducing this item, the Chair noted that this is an interim report on the University's compliance with the Prevent Duty which had for the first time gone to Chairs' Committee before being submitted to Council. This additional step has been introduced to ensure that Prevent reports undergo a similar oversight step as other assurance reports to Council.

### 13. Council appointments

13.1 Council RECEIVED an update on the appointment of the Provost and a proposal for the temporary replacement for the Provost as a full member of Council (C/256/13). In introducing the item, both the Chair and Vice-Chancellor extended their thanks to the current Provost, Saul Becker, for his significant contribution to the University during his tenure. The Vice-Chancellor also drew Council's attention to the following:

a) Interviews for the Provost have been undertaken and a preferred candidate identified. As an appointment of Council, the process involves consultation with Senate before Council approval. The plan is to consult with Senate on Friday 9 April and then share details with Council immediately afterwards for their approval via a BoardPacks vote. Simultaneous announcements of the appointment will then be planned with the candidate's current university for Monday 12 April at 10am.

b) In the intervening period, between the end of April and the arrival of the new Provost, the proposal is that Keith Jones, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Enterprise) be appointed as interim Provost and full member of Council.

- 13.2 Council APPROVED the appointment of Professor Keith Jones as Acting Provost and an interim full member of Council from 1 May until the new Provost takes up post.

#### **14. Student Experience Matters**

- 14.1. Council RECEIVED an oral report from Jane Parsons, Chair of Student Experience Committee and NOTED the draft minutes of the Student Experience Committee meeting held on 17 March 2021 (C/256/14a). The Chair drew Council's attention to the following:
- a) SEC has formally monitored the University's progress against targets for its 2018/19 Access and Participation Plan prior to submission of the annual return to the Office for Students. Good progress has been made in a number of areas including the proportion of entrants from BAME backgrounds and a reduction in non-continuation rates. The Student connector projects and virtual internship programme have also been particularly successful during the pandemic period.
  - b) Work to develop the Learn to Transform strategy and the Education and Students roadmap is progressing well and SEC continues to monitor the revised KPIs. Further work on areas of concern within league tables is focused on 'teaching on my course', assessment and feedback and overall student satisfaction measures. Improvements are being seen as a result of the engagement of student connectors and the mid-year report on Graduate outcomes has seen some good developments with alumni mentoring for students.
  - c) SEC continues to monitor areas of concern including an ethnicity gap in degree outcomes at PGT level (with non-EU domiciled students primarily) alongside more general awarding gaps and areas of grade inflation; this has been particularly challenging to analyse in a period of operating a 'no detriment' policy during the pandemic.
  - d) SEC had also considered a paper provided by student representatives on the effects of the pandemic on students nationally and at Sussex (uploaded to BoardPacks as item C/256/14b). SEC felt that Sussex had made enormous efforts to ameliorate this position, but acknowledged that some challenges remain. Some students are feeling isolated, there is uncertainty for finalists entering the jobs market and there have been some concerns around securitisation and an increased police presence on campus. The paper had included a request for a further rent rebate for students on campus; whilst this was outside the scope of the committee's remit to recommend to Council, it was not supported by SEC, who further noted that some students have returned to campus against government advice.

Items raised in discussion included:

- i) It would be useful for SEC to consider what the student experience might look like moving forward, learning from the experiences of the pandemic situation, rather than reverting back to former practice. A Digital futures group and a planning group have been formed to consider proposals for the next academic year. It is anticipated that there will be some adjustments next year based on the learnings from this year, and then more thereafter.
- ii) The positive influence of different student groups, including student ambassadors and student connectors, were highlighted as being of particular benefit to the student experience.

14.2 Council RECEIVED an oral report from Connor Moylett, the USSU Council representative, who referred to paper C/256/14b and summarised the issues that students had experienced over the course of the pandemic period, with concerns around student finance, mental health and a more securitised campus. Given these issues, the student representatives wished to explore the University providing a one-off goodwill gesture to students against their campus rents, which they feel would demonstrate sector-leading kindness and contribute to improved student satisfaction.

Items raised in discussion included:

- a) Since 4<sup>th</sup> January rent rebates have been provided to students not able to return to their accommodation due to the government lockdown. Some students may have returned for reasons that they consider to be legitimate, and the service provision on campus will have been different during this period, due to nationwide restrictions.
- b) The Chair had received an approach from the rent strike union who had met with the Vice-Chancellor earlier in the week; this group had interpreted the outcome of that meeting as being able to come and present to Council, but it was noted that Council does not receive lobbying groups who instead should work through their representatives.
- c) The current position for students, whether living in campus or in private accommodation is clearly difficult; Council members recognised these challenges alongside the measures that the University has sought to put in place to ameliorate the position. Whilst there was sympathy expressed for the reasons why students chose to return to campus, this was still against the law except in limited circumstances.
- d) It was considered that the best approach to provide support to students was to continue with targeted interventions that focussed on those in need, and continue to deal with students on a case-by-case basis. In that way individually tailored payment plans and other measures, including hardship funding, could be put in place. Students in need should be directed to the hardship fund; if it is felt that barriers are in place that prevent them from accessing this funding then consideration needs to be given to ensuring that they are encouraged to do so.
- e) Some of the campus maintenance issues identified by students were as a result of a failure to invest in estates infrastructure, further supporting the point that funds should be targeted according to need as opposed to a blanket provision given the limited resources available and the need to ensure value for money.
- f) Whilst Council recognised the case made for additional student support given the issues experienced by students during the pandemic period, it considered that a more accessible process for applying for hardship funding was the most appropriate way to ensure that funding could be targeted at those in need, also to ensure that the multiple demands on University finances could be balanced appropriately. Information should also be circulated to communicate to students and staff the measures that have been put in place to support students and the investment made in this provision. **[Action: Chief Operating Officer]**

## **15. Remuneration Committee**

15.1. Council RECEIVED an oral report from Professor Steve Caddick, Chair of Remuneration Committees A and B, who drew Council's attention to the following:

- a) RemCom A had considered the performance and remuneration of the Vice-Chancellor, with RemCom B addressing all other matters. The remuneration of the Vice-Chancellor is reported in the annual financial statements; since then the Vice-Chancellor's objectives have been agreed and interim performance discussed and endorsed.
- b) RemCom B had agreed the removal of the pause on Academic Promotions; this process is now underway and will take place within the usual cycle; this development is considered important for staff morale. The Discretionary Pay review process was moderated for 2021 to recognise staff at or below £49,553, giving them all a £250 (pro-rata) payment, to recognise their performance during the difficult pandemic period. The Equal pay audit has also been added to the future workplan.

## **16. Regulations**

16.1. Council APPROVED delegated authority for Executive functions, including relating to the conferment of degrees in the absence of the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor (C/256/16).

## **17. Joint Brighton Sussex Medical School Board**

17.1 Council NOTED the minutes of the meeting held on 17 February 2021 (C/256/17).

## **18. Office for Students**

18.1. Council NOTED an update on regulatory requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic and RECEIVED assurance from the Executive that arrangements are in place to ensure ongoing compliance (C/256/18).

## **19. Academic Governance**

19.1. Council NOTED the draft minutes of the Senate meeting held on 3 March 2021 (C/256/19a).

19.2. Council NOTED the Heads of Schools' reports to Senate in March 2021. (C/256/19b).

## **20. Student Exclusions and Suspensions**

20.1. Council NOTED an update report on student exclusions and suspensions. (paper C/256/20).

## **21. Finance matters**

21.1. Council NOTED the approach that the University is taking to address the requirements of the Criminal Finances Act 2017 (C/256/21).

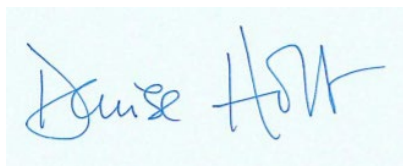
**22. Any Other Business**

- 22.1. Council NOTED that the Chair will write a note to all staff summarising the decisions made at this meeting, to go out after the Easter break. Plans will be made with a view to the July meeting of Council being held in person; this will be reviewed in May in light of government guidance. The Chair will consider whether a communication to students, along the lines of that issued to staff, might be provided in future. **[Action: Chair of Council]**

**23. Dates of next meetings**

- 23.1 Thursday 1 July 2021 from 5pm / Friday 2 July 2021 all day.

Dr Tim Westlake  
Secretary to Council  
March 2021



Dame Denise Holt  
Chair of Council  
March 2021