

## THE COUNCIL

### Minutes

This paper details the confirmed Minutes of the last meeting of the Council held on Tuesday 24 September 2019 in library room Seminar 4, at the Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA.

The Council **approved** these Minutes as a correct record, at its meeting held on 26 November 2019.

Dr Jonathan Nicholls  
University Secretary  
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Attachments:

C-2019-06-M Minutes of the last meeting of the Council held on Tuesday 24 September 2019

## **THE COUNCIL**

Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on Tuesday 24 September 2019 in library room Seminar 4, at the Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA.

**Present:** Mr Malcolm Sweeting (Chair), Professor Mary Kellett (Vice-Chancellor), Ms Cath Brown (President, OU Students Association), Professor John Brooks (Vice-Chair), Dr Jovan Byford, Mrs Frances Chetwynd, Mrs Mary Curnock Cook, Mr John D'Arcy, Ms Maggie Galliers, Mr Paul Greenwood, Dr Richard Heffernan, Ms Anna Henderson, Mr Tim Parry, Mr Bob Spedding, Dr Barbara Tarling, Professor John Wolffe, Dr Greg Walker (via Skype).

**In Attendance:** Professor Tim Blackman (Vice-Chancellor-designate), Mr Jonathan Nicholls, (University Secretary), Dr Laura Lauer, (Head of Governance and acting Working Secretary), Mr Jake Yeo (Deputy University Secretary), Mr Laurence Holden (Group Finance Director), Mr Chris Youles (Chief Information Officer, for Minute 4), Ms Caragh Molloy (Group People Director, for Minute 8).

**Apologies:** Mr Sandy Begbie, Ms Ruth Girardet, Mrs Rachel Lock, Mr Robert McCracken, Ms Sue Thomas, Senior Manager, Governance (Working Secretary).

Proxy voting instructions were received from Dr Greg Walker in case of technical difficulties, Mr Robert McCracken and Mrs Ruth Girardet..

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### **1 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **2 WELCOME**

2.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly Professor Tim Blackman who will formally join the University as Vice-Chancellor on 1 October 2019.

2.2 The Chair reminded members that this meeting should have been reserved for the Council Development Day; an additional meeting had been necessary as there had not been sufficient time in the June agenda to consider some regular reports. The meeting also allowed Council to receive updates on several ongoing projects.

2.3 In response to the feedback from members, the Council agenda structure is being looked at with a view to introducing future changes to facilitate the smooth flow of business.

### **3 BREXIT RISK UPDATE**

**C-2019-06-01**

3.1 The Deputy University Secretary, Jake Yeo, introduced the report and updated risk register. He noted one correction in the register: 8% of Associate Lecturers were non-UK EU nationals, not 52%. In the context of continued uncertainty, the University currently planned for a no-deal Brexit and VCE kept the register under regular review. Day to day Brexit oversight was being co-ordinated from the University Secretary's Office, with

operational interests reviewed regularly by service leads with representation and review from the OU's Business Continuity Steering Group.

- 3.2 The University's planning was currently focused on three key areas: staff, research students, and research-related funding. The University had arranged for affected staff to be offered free legal advice; People Services were currently working to ensure the latest staff data was complete and would write to staff and line managers to offer up to date guidance as well as reassurance. Research students were being similarly supported through the Graduate School. The ongoing risk regarding research funding, and its disproportionate affect on Faculties, remained under active review.
- 3.3 The University's exposure to fluctuations in foreign exchange was queried. The Group Finance Director assured the Council that the OU's EU students paid fees in sterling, effectively mitigating the risk. Minimal risk to the OU's supply chain and data transfer was noted in the short-term.
- 3.4 There was a potential opportunity for the OU, as it had maintained a presence in the Republic of Ireland for the past 25 years. The University Secretary, Deputy University Secretary, and the Director for the OU in Ireland were investigating this.
- 3.5 The Council **noted** the paper and the Brexit risk register.

**4 CORE SYSTEMS REPLACEMENT OUTCOME UPDATE C-2019-06-02**

- 4.1 The Chief Information Officer, Chris Youles, introduced this update report. He brought the following items to the Council's attention:
- a) PA Consulting would continue to provide independent assurance reports to the October and November meetings of Audit Committee and to the November meeting of Council. VCE reviewed progress every fortnight.
  - b) The March go-live date for ERP Release 1 (Finance, Procurement, HR, and Payroll) would not be changed. In response to questions from Council members, the CIO clarified that it may be necessary to run the new and old payroll systems in parallel. The Payroll Manager had identified areas of concern and these were being independently assessed. Work was also underway to ensure that members of staff would find the same, or similar, functionality when interacting with the payroll system. This was especially important for Associate Lecturers.
  - c) The Student Lifecycle may be delayed by 12 months to 2022. This delay would allow the University to test solutions for scalability and suitability. This decision had not yet been taken.
  - d) itelligence were now providing a good level of support; the project had recently been allocated two itelligence members who are able to provide an overall view.
- 4.2 Council members raised issues surrounding communications/business readiness and data migration. The Chief Information Officer confirmed that project communications were managed via his office and acknowledged that more work on communications to academics and Faculties was necessary. People Services would lead on training and the adoption of new systems across the OU. The University's new Chief Data Officer had reviewed the data migration.

**ACTION: Chief Information Officer to provide a section on business readiness as part of the next report.**

4.3 The Council **noted** the Core Systems Replacement (CSR) Programme Report.

**5 REPORT ON OU PARTNERSHIPS C-2019-06-03**

5.1 The University Secretary, Jonathan Nicholls, introduced this report, which presented an initial overview of curriculum and teaching-related partnerships. This report will form the basis for the development of a Partnerships Strategy for the OU which will enable partnerships to be dealt with in a consistent manner across the institution.

5.2 Members of Council welcomed the report and the work to be done to develop a Partnerships Strategy. Any such strategy would need to be mindful of the risks: reputational or regulatory risks regarding partners and the tension between financial incentives and academic sustainability. Members were informed that work was already underway to review incentives.

5.3 The Council **noted** the report.

**6 ESTATES ANNUAL REPORT C-2019-06-04**

6.1 The Deputy University Secretary, Jake Yeo, introduced this report. While the report showed a snapshot of the University's progress, it was evident that in many areas the OU was making improvements in its own performance and against external benchmarks.

6.2 A longer-term analysis of the University's Estate is currently being undertaken to inform the development of a more strategic Estates Masterplan. The Masterplan will review the Estate's fitness for purpose and focus on how it can be mobilised to support the OU's strategic priorities, including toward greater environmental and financial sustainability. VCE will receive the initial analysis, with an OU-wide consultation planned around any substantial development.

6.3 Council members observed that the OU's central campus was well-placed with regard to local universities (including a new Milton Keynes University, Cranfield University) and Oxford and Cambridge, as well as having excellent transport links to London. It was also noted that space utilization did not seem to be optimised.

6.4 Members welcomed the proposed strategic view to be taken by the Masterplan and emphasised the importance of having the right leadership in place to ensure the strategy is delivered.

6.5 The Council **noted** the report.

**7 CARBON MANAGEMENT PLAN C-2019-06-05**

7.1 The Deputy University Secretary, Jake Yeo, introduced this report, noting that the University was ahead of target in reducing emissions.

7.2 The forthcoming Sustainability Week activities are intended to form the basis of a group to develop the OU's sustainability strategy. Council members pointed to the breadth and quality of relevant research being undertaken in the OU and recommended that academics and students be closely involved in the development of the strategy.

7.3 The Council **noted** the report.

**8 PEOPLE SERVICES: ANNUAL REPORT C-2019-06-06**

- 8.1 Ms Caragh Molloy, Group People Director presented this report. She noted areas of progress (Resourcing Hub) and areas in which more work was still to be done (People Hub, getting consistency across the Business Partner model, and joining up teams in People Services).
- 8.2 In her view, the OU required a People Strategy, with People Services having KPIs linked to institutional objectives. She set out the following priorities for the coming year:
- a) Ensuring transactional services were operating efficiently and well.
  - b) Embedding the OU's strategic priority of Dynamic and Inclusive Culture. This will be done by reviewing the OU's attraction strategy (in the context of a tight employment market in the Milton Keynes area) and its employee value proposition. The OU has applied for the Race Equality Charter Mark and discussions have begun regarding an application for Athena Swan.
  - c) Focusing on the employee voice to build confidence throughout the organisation, including developing a positive and trusting relationship with the OU's trade unions.
- 8.3 Council members thanked the Group People Director for her presentation and discussion focused on two interrelated issues: culture change and Core Systems Replacement. A key component of CSR will be to successfully implement not just a technical solution, but a change in ways of working; members recognised that People Services had an important role in this and in culture change across the institution more widely.
- 8.4 Members noted the importance of the AL contract implementation and issues of merit awards and academic staff promotions as issues affecting staff morale.
- 8.5 The Council **noted** the report.

## **9 DECLASSIFICATION OF COUNCIL PAPERS**

The following papers were declassified:

C-2019-05-22 People Services Report

## **10 REVIEW OF MEETING**

In closing the meeting, the Chair invited members of Council to formally express their gratitude and appreciation to the outgoing Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mary Kellett.

## **11 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next ordinary business meeting of the Council will be held on Tuesday 26 November 2019 in Library Seminar 4 & 5 in Milton Keynes.

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