

THE COUNCIL

31 May 2023

MINUTES

Present: Alastair Da Costa (Chair), Professor Simone Buitendijk, Tom Clark, Bethan Corner, Helen Grantham, Dr Kendi Guantai, Lauren Huxley, Professor Peter Jimack, Professor Simon Kelley, Iain Moffatt, Dr Yvette Oade, Professor Alice O'Grady, Maria Papageorgiou, Dr Cordelia Rogerson, Ken Sargison, Tim Smith, Simon Thompson and Dr Rachel Tsang.

In attendance: Alison Blackburn, Rachel Brealey, Professor Jeff Grabill, Jane Madeley, Andrew Mulholland, Professor Nick Plant, Jennifer Sewel, Professor Hai-Sui Yu and Catherine Cho (Minutes).

Apologies: Liz Barber, Fridey Cordingley, Seb Elsworth, Leyla Okhai and Janet Sheriff.

22/224 Welcome

Andrew Mulholland, Deputy Secretary and Director of the Secretariat, was welcomed to his first meeting.

22/225 Employee Engagement Survey

Considered: a presentation providing an overview of the outcome of the Employee Engagement Survey.

Noted that:

- a. the survey, which ran from 20 February to 20 March, achieved a 56% response rate across the University, 24% higher than the last survey in 2018, with a total of 30,166 free text comments;
- b. a leading third-party employee experience service provider had been engaged to supply the survey platform and additional organisational insights support. Their engagement with other Russell Group universities and global higher education institutions provided an opportunity to benchmark the University's results;
- c. the survey data would be used to support a number of the institutional KPIs (EDI, engagement in leadership development, staff engagement and staff perspectives of research culture);
- d. to ensure the University appropriately responded to the survey results a number of steps had been taken including:
 - (i) establishing a University-wide employee engagement working group and steering group with representatives and expertise across the survey fields and academic areas;
 - (ii) identifying and engaging question theme owners (Service Directors) with responsibility for coordinating and gaining agreement on University-wide actions;
 - (iii) identifying and engaging action group leads for each faculty and service;
 - (iv) establishing insight owners to carry out in-depth analysis of the survey comments to provide thematic analysis and further insight into sentiments underpinning the survey results;
- e. the survey headlines included a number of successes and strengths which should be celebrated and captured in the University's communications and engagement activities. These related to staff experiencing managers/supervisors caring about staff wellbeing; having enough autonomy to perform their job effectively; knowing

- what they needed to do to be successful in their role; and feeling they could behave in a way that was consistent with the University Values;
- f. the survey had also identified other areas for attention, which included the extent of the University Strategy and Vision motivating staff; staff feeling like their voice counted; University leaders demonstrating that people were important to institutional success; and low confidence of action being taken as a results of the survey;
 - g. the University Executive was taking time to reflect on the survey results particularly the difference in outcomes around the experience of staff at local level, of their engagement experience with local leadership teams, and of institutional leadership. Consideration would also be given to the question of how areas of the institution engaged locally with the Strategy;
 - h. in response to a question, Council was advised that there were no major surprises in the results and that the high response rate had been particularly welcomed. The results also demonstrated that teams were performing well locally and showed the impact of work undertaken at local level since the last survey;
 - i. in terms of the frequency of future surveys, these would take place on a regular basis, possibly every two years;
 - j. with regard to Strategy engagement by staff, it was suggested that the results may reflect the need for better staff understanding of their role within, and contribution to, the Strategy, which went beyond just communicating it to them. The current unsettling external environment might also be a contributing factor to staff feeling disconnected. The impact of the pandemic may also have resulted in staff still operating in 'survival' mode and lacking the capacity and time to give proper thought to the Strategy. Suggestions were made on the ways in which the University could gain insights into current staff perceptions such as through the use of 'pulse' surveys and discussions led by trained peer facilitators;
 - k. an update would be brought to the next Council meeting on the further analysis underway and the development of action plans around the identified issues. If helpful, Council members could also be approached to provide any input on those matters.

22/226 Minutes

CONFIRMED: the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2023 and the notes of the away day held on 21 April 2023.

22/227 Vice-Chancellor's report

Received: a written report from the Vice-Chancellor (CL/22/67), which updated members on matters of higher education policy and reported on issues of interest to the life and work of the University, and which was supplemented by an oral update.

Noted:

- a. the number of complaints submitted by students at universities in England and Wales to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator had risen in 2022. The statistics reinforced the importance for the University of making every effort to provide an outstanding educational experience to all students;
- b. the OfS had proposed a new condition of registration for higher education providers with the aim of addressing incidents of harassment and sexual misconduct in higher education. In its response to the OfS prior consultation on the proposal, the University had expressed doubts that a condition of registration was the appropriate mechanism to intervene or encourage change in this area. While the University broadly supported the introduction of a single point of information of staff-student relationships, it had expressed concern about how this might be documented. Council was reassured that the wellbeing and safety of students was a key priority for the University and was well placed to respond to any new conditions of registration imposed by the OfS, albeit the associated additional bureaucracy was unwelcomed. In the meantime, the University was participating in an OfS pilot student survey of the prevalence of harassment and sexual misconduct in universities, which aimed to

- understand the issues and provide the context of reporting rates, including areas of under-reporting and other gaps;
- c. further industrial action was taking place by members of the University and College Union (UCU) with a marking and assessment boycott occurring at a number of universities around the country, including Leeds. Unison had also secured a mandate for industrial action at nine universities, including Leeds. Further information was awaited about Unison's plans;
- d. the University had been one of a number of universities to receive correspondence from the OfS about risks related to over-reliance on the recruitment of students from specific countries (most notably, China) if demand were to decline. The University was well aware of this risk, which it kept under review as part of its integrated planning;
- e. the Government had announced plans to place limits on international students bringing family members to the UK. This was an unwelcome development and risked making the UK less appealing to international students and potentially restricting the sector's ability to diversify its cohort mix. It was not anticipated that the proposals would have a significant impact upon Leeds;
- f. a number of successful events had taken place at the University including hosting the Times Higher Education (THE) Digital Universities UK event, and launching the new Leeds University Network for Sustainability in Higher Education, which was designed to encourage Sustainability and a focus on Global Challenges more broadly in the Leeds curriculum;
- g. in respect of the Knowledge Equity Network (KEN), a number of global launches had taken place with the Vice-Chancellor and President attending an event in Pretoria during Africa Week and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research and Innovation attending a Worldwide Universities Network meeting in Mexico. In response to a question, it was noted that institutions which joined the Network would be expected to commit to the Declaration on Knowledge Equity within a year. They would also have access to special interest groups which would support them to achieve the set goals and to share best practice.

22/228 **LUU standing report**

Considered: a paper (CL/22/68) which provided updates on matters and issues impacting students across the University summarised under the headings of Wellbeing, Academic Achievement, Student Opportunities and Belonging, drawing upon data gathered and collated by Leeds University Union.

Noted:

- a. the inaugural report was welcomed by Council members and provided a good flavour of LUU's activities. The item would now be a standing report at each Council meeting. Members were invited to provide feedback to the LUU representatives on the format of the report;
- b. in respect of the comments in the section on Belonging relating to Muslim students' experience at Leeds, the LUU Equality and Liberations Officer was involved in work to devise more activities that were not centred around alcohol, and to support students who might have experienced Islamophobia;
- c. the suggestion that the report should be shared with school staff to provide better visibility of the different types of student engagement activities on campus;
- d. the partnership working between LUU, the Lifelong Learning Centre and Student Success Team to create the Middle Ground Network to support young mature students in finding a community. The Network was supported by the University's Footsteps Fund. Students had been employed to run the Network, which appeared to have made a positive impact on attracting a diverse range of students.

22/229 **Marking and assessment – planning and process**

Considered: a paper (CL/22/69) which summarised the approach, planning and actions required for the 2023 summer assessment period, informed by participation during the most recent period of industrial action, and including planned mitigations around academic and professional services, policy and regulation, and communications to staff

and students. The paper also provided details of the mitigating actions to address the added pressure on the release of marks due to the planned migration work around the Banner student records system. The arrangements agreed following the winter graduations around the issuing of degree certificates would relieve the significant additional administrative burden in the Student Education Service (which followed practices at other institutions).

Noted:

- a. initial analysis of data to date suggested a low level of participation for the period of strike action between 1 February and 30 March 2023, and the uneven spread of such action across the University. Appropriate mitigations and workarounds would be focused on particular areas to reduce the risk of single points of failure, especially for the summer assessment period. In particular, support was being provided to heads of schools, through weekly drop-in sessions with the University Executive team, to help them take proactive, and appropriately school-focused mitigating actions;
- b. in terms of the data capture of staff taking strike action, it was confirmed that there was a clear and robust process in place;
- c. work to streamline and enhance relevant processes was ongoing in parallel with the more immediate response plan. In the longer term, the intention was for mitigating actions to address the issues around marking and assessment to be embedded into 'business as usual' processes;
- d. a mixed operational and strategic approach was being taken. The aim was to empower staff to resolve issues, working with students as close to the point of study as possible;
- e. the impact of industrial action on research activities, including postgraduate research supervision, appeared to be less, but the Pro-Deans: Research and Innovation were monitoring the position closely. As such, there was an expectation of more frequent contact between the Pro-Deans;
- f. overall the industrial action situation remained fluid: the University had received earlier that day communications from the UCU of further periods of industrial action which it was still digesting;
- g. the Council was content with the University's robust response, which was in line with other institutions in the sector, and asked to be kept updated on developments. The University Executive could also call upon Council's support where needed.

22/230 General Revenue Budget Statement

Considered: the draft General Revenue Budget Statement (GRBS) for the 2023 planning cycle (covering sessions 2023-24 to 2027-28).

APPROVED: the draft GRBS, as set out in CL/22/70.

22/231 Second quarter results and forecast out-turn

Received: a paper (CL/22/71) setting out the University's second quarter forecast outturn position (Q2F).

Noted:

- a. the Q2F showed a consolidated operating surplus, compared to the first quarter (Q1F) deficit position;
- b. the favourable variance was primarily due to lower expenditure across the University than was forecast in Q1F, in particular the re-phasing of expenditure into future years (particularly on strategic projects) which would be reflected in the current IPE.

22/232 Senate (10 May 2023)

Received: the Minutes of the meeting of the Senate on 10 May 2023.

Noted that the Senate had:

- a. received updates on the approach to mitigating the impact of disruption on student education and research; and on the re-platforming of Banner to the Cloud and deploying key operational updates;
- b. received confirmation that the General University Disciplinary Regulations were fit for purpose and relevant to current experiences in respect of action which could be taken in the event of unauthorised student protests on campus or in University buildings;
- c. received a summary of the mapping exercise relating to regulatory and statutory compliance at Leeds;
- d. approved the Pricing Policy for use when costing research grants.

Noted in respect of reports received by the Senate from its Boards:

- e. the University Executive Group had approved a proposal to sustain financial support for international student welcome events; the minimum fee increases for PGT and International Foundation Year UG and PGT for 2024; the recommendations for UK and International PGR fees and changes to visitor and bench fees for PGRs; the approach and interim actions relating to the review of the University pay and grading structure; the additional funding to maintain the delivery momentum of Net Zero; and the University's response to the OfS consultation on the payment of fees for investigations;
- f. the Taught Student Education Board had discussed the University's formal position in relation to the use of artificial intelligence assistance tools and academic integrity; and received a progress update on Curriculum Redefined;
- g. the Research and Innovation Board had approved the Research Culture Strategic Plan 2023–2028 and the University's Annual Statement on Research Integrity; and endorsed a framework for the University's emerging approach to decolonising its research;
- h. the Graduate Board had approved amendments to the programme of study for PhD that sat within Ordinance X for Research Degrees to address the requirements of new distance learning programmes, updated guidance and communications for the Attendance Monitoring and Engagement Policy, and the finalised Supervisory Agreement.

22/233 **Report from the Strategy and Investment Committee**

Considered: a report (CL/22/72) of the meeting of the Strategy and Investment Committee held on 11 May 2023. The report also included copies of papers considered by the Committee on the respective roles of the Audit and Risk Committee and SIC in risk management, and on the annual review of related companies.

Noted:

- a. the Committee had received an update on the Student Lifecycle Programme and specifically on the delivery of its current highest priority project, the re-platforming of Banner to the Cloud and deploying key operational updates. It had acknowledged the challenges posed by the Banner migration and was reassured that appropriate action was being taken to mitigate the identified risks;
- b. the Committee had considered changes to the focus and agendas of the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) and SIC to reshape their focus on managing the key University risks. Council members commended the work done to develop the clear delineation of the respective committee's risk management responsibilities and a pathway that worked. This would avoid any duplication of effort and ensure emerging risks were not missed. It also articulated the complementary way in which both committees operated in respect of managing key risks and setting the University's risk appetite. The arrangements would be kept under review and adjustments made where necessary. In the meantime, the committees' terms of reference would be reviewed to ensure they reflected the agreed arrangements;
- c. the Committee had noted the University's second quarter forecast outturn position and the outcome of the annual review of the University's related companies; and had endorsed the draft General Revenue Budget Statement.

22/234 Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee, 26 April 2023

Considered: the Minutes (CL/22/73) of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee held on 26 April 2023.

Noted:

- a. the Committee had considered a summary of the report of one internal audit review (Data Quality: Transparent Approach to Costing Return). The recommendations of the review had been taken on board by management;
- b. the Committee had agreed that good progress had been made in implementing the overall audit programme recommendations due for completion;;
- c. the Committee had considered the strategic internal audit plan for 2023-26 and indicative audit timetable for 2023-24 alongside the external auditors' audit plan for the year ending 31 July 2023. The Committee agreed these were well balanced and linked to the Strategy and strategic initiatives whilst dealing with the usual financial and governance audit requirements;
- d. other matters considered by the Committee included: the outcome of investigations relating to a University subsidiary company and the next steps regarding its operational and governance arrangements; the summary of the mapping of regulation and statutory compliance at the University; and the update on the continuing work to improve the University's information security architecture – the Committee welcomed the improvements made and the clearer sense of direction and purpose evidenced over the reporting period;
- e. the Committee had approved a recommendation for the University to opt out of the Public Contract Regulations (PCR). In doing so, the Committee had noted the KC legal opinion obtained by the University, and the advantages to be gained from opting out of the PCR.

22/235 Report from the Nominating and Governance Committee

Considered: a report (CL/22/74) of the meeting of the Nominating and Governance Committee held on 9 May 2023, which included proposed changes to the Committee's Terms of Reference.

Noted:

- a. the progress on the ongoing recruitment process for appointing 2 lay members to the Council;
- b. the proposed framework for the self-assessment by Council committees of their effectiveness through the use of a self-assessment questionnaire to be disseminated after the last meeting of each committee. The Audit and Risk Committee would continue to utilise its own detailed questionnaire for the self-evaluation exercise;
- c. the Committee had discussed a publication *Halpin Perspectives on Higher Education Governance* on a review undertaken by the Halpin Partnership on their collected governance reports and governance thought leadership.

APPROVED: the proposed changes to the Committee's Terms of Reference as set out in the Annex to CL/22/74.

22/236 Report from the Group on Pensions

Considered: a report (CL/22/75) of the meeting of the Group on Pensions held on 5 May 2023.

Noted:

- a. the meeting had been convened to bring the Group up to date ahead of anticipated consultation over the summer following the 2023 Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) valuation. The Group noted the latest developments relating to the USS on the current funding position, the ongoing covenant assessment, discussions around potential benefit changes and options to help reduce opt-out rates;
- b. Helen Grantham was the new Chair of the Group;

- c. the Group had agreed that its remit should also include the University's Pension and Assurance Scheme (PAS). In this connection, given her role as a trustee of the PAS, Ms Grantham confirmed that if required she would excuse herself from any discussions by the Group relating to the PAS when these arose.

22/237 Summary of mapping exercise relating to regulatory and statutory compliance at Leeds

Considered: a summary (CL/22/76) of the mapping exercise relating to regulatory and statutory compliance at the University.

Noted:

- a. the summary of the Phase 1 work to provide oversight of the University's regulatory obligations, which included information on the historic sector development of regulation and the current regulatory landscape; the institutional context drawing on the University's strategic ambition, outcome-based key performance indicators and IPE and indicative UniForum data; the challenges from the external and internal environment to delivering compliance and dependencies; and the regulatory and compliance catalogue;
- b. the proposed work for Phase 2 which fell under three broad categories: supporting Executive oversight, enhancing regulatory oversight and supporting the regulatory community;
- c. the document provided a helpful sense of the vastness and complexities of the current sector regulatory landscape, and the University's position within that setting.

22/238 Treasury report

Received: a paper (CL/22/77) setting out the University's approach to treasury management during the nine months ending 30 April 2023, commenting on treasury performance and endowment management during that period.

APPROVED: the addition of the Senior Financial Reporting Manager and Financial Reporting Manager as banking portal users.

22/239 Matters for report

Received: a paper (CL/22/78) setting out a number of matters for report including those summarised below.

Noted:

- a. the Council recorded its great sorrow at the deaths which were reported in CL/22/78.1;
- b. warm congratulations were offered to the recipients of honours and distinctions reported in CL/22/78.2;
- c. the details of recent professorial and senior appointments, as set out in CL/22/78.3-4;
- d. details of the action taken by the Chair on behalf of the Council on four matters, as set out in CL/22/78.5-12.

APPROVED: the uses to which the Common Seal had been put since the last meeting of the Council, as detailed in CL/22/78.14.

22/240 Vote of thanks

On behalf of the Council, the Chair extended warm thanks for her contribution to the Council's work and good wishes for her future success to Maria Papageorgiou, whose term of office as Union Affairs and Communications Officer would conclude before the Council's next meeting.