



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

Office  
Of  
The President &  
Vice-Chancellor.

UEB/2020/0704/01

## Minutes

## University Executive Board

<b>Date:</b>	24 March 2020
<b>Present:</b>	Professor K Lamberts (KL) (in the Chair) Professor J Derrick (JD), Professor S Fitzmaurice (SF), Professor S Hartley (SH), Professor M J Hounslow (MJH), Ms J Jones (JJ), Professor W Morgan (WM), Professor C Newman (CN), Professor D Petley (DP), Mr R Sykes (RS), Professor G Valentine (GV)
<b>In attendance:</b>	Dr T Strike (TS)
<b>Apologies:</b>	Professor C Watkins (CW)
<b>Secretary:</b>	Mr N Button (NB), Mr D Swinn (DS)

### Welcome and Introduction

KL welcomed members to the meeting, which was the first to be held remotely via video and teleconference due to the coronavirus pandemic, and in accordance with Government restrictions.

### 1. Coronavirus Update

#### 1.1 Workforce

UEB reflected on the latest announcements from the Prime Minister that significantly reduced individual freedom of movement. However, the extent of any exceptions, e.g. for essential workers, was unclear. All Heads of Department had been asked to complete a spreadsheet detailing their essential workers, which would then be shared with the relevant authorities. It was clear that there were high levels of compliance with the request that colleagues work from home where possible. Suitable arrangements were in place in relation to essential services like the BSU and IT services that minimised interaction between staff.

#### 1.2 Research activities

UEB had previously decided to suspend all research activities where there was not a threat to life or welfare, or where it would not lead to damage to equipment and/or buildings.

**Action:** FVPs were asked to ensure that these measures were enforced firmly and that there was a clear sign-off procedure for any exceptions. UEB agreed that there would need to be exceptional circumstances for research work to continue and any queries should be directed to the Executive Director of Academic Services; financial implications were not sufficient.

### 1.3 **Recruitment**

UEB noted the challenging financial situation posed by the coronavirus outbreak and its impact on student and staff recruitment and research activities. There was a great deal of uncertainty about the impact of the pandemic on the University's financial situation, which would not become clearer until the start of the next academic year. UEB agreed to pause all recruitment of staff in all stages of recruitment unless there was a strong case that the role was business critical. The HE sector was awaiting clarity over whether recently announced furlough provisions would apply to universities.

For externally funded research posts, careful consideration would have to be made about delivery of individual project objectives, given the curtailment of research activity previously agreed by UEB. Further clarification was needed from the Research Councils about how extensions to posts would be funded; it was reported that the Russell Group had produced a number of urgent queries to raise with UKRI. It was also noted that the University had been asked to estimate the amount of bridging funding needed to sustain research staff and equipment.

#### **Action:**

- (a) Human Resources and GV would work with FVPs to review posts, prior to communication and discussion with Heads of Department and colleagues based on a form of words prepared by HR.
- (b) SH would circulate the queries for UKRI for comment prior to submission.
- (c) JJ would liaise with Research Services about financial implications, to inform a response from the Russell Group to a Government request for information about the overall financial implications of the coronavirus pandemic.

### 1.4 **Finance**

JJ updated UEB on the work of her Department in considering the financial implications of the coronavirus outbreak on the University. With respect to timescales, it was noted that the overall impact of the pandemic would not become clear until after student registrations in September/October. Until there was less uncertainty, it was necessary to constrain non-essential and discretionary expenditure as part of wider efforts to ensure that cash holdings were maximised. A special meeting of Finance Committee was being convened.

## **2. Closed Minute and Paper**

### **3. REF Update**

3.1 UEB received and noted an update on the University's preparations for REF2021. The University was awaiting an announcement regarding any delay to the timetable due to the coronavirus outbreak that was expected in the near future. The University was holding its current position on deadlines, including environment templates that had a deadline of 22 April, although it would look sympathetically at exceptions on a case-by-case basis given the exceptional external circumstances.

3.2 UEB noted the report, and also noted that there had been a delay to the open access consultation and the pilot of the Research Integrity Committee. The Russell Group had stated a position that the KEF pilot should be extended for another year.

*Post-Meeting Note: The University was subsequently informed that the REF2021 submission deadline would be extended, but the current 31 July staff census date would continue to apply.*

#### 4. Round Table

- (a) Admissions: KL informed UEB of a letter received from the Universities Minister regarding some universities moving a significant number of offers to unconditional during this period of uncertainty in order to gain competitive advantage in the next round of admissions. The OfS had also stated that this practice was not acceptable. The Government was modelling expected drops in home (-25%) and overseas (-50%) student numbers in the next academic year, likely based on large numbers of deferrals. UEB agreed that to seek competitive advantage at this time would likely damage the prospect of government support for the sector in the event of financial difficulties. The implications for new student number controls, which were under discussion prior to the coronavirus outbreak, were noted. WM noted that consideration would be given to the practicalities of beginning the delivery of teaching to home and international students online, in the event that the campus was unable to reopen and/or overseas students were unable to obtain visas in time for the first semester of the academic year in the Autumn.
- Action:** The implications of online and digital provision, and potential mixed cohorts, would be considered through the Learning & Teaching Incident Management Group, in liaison with other relevant groups and colleagues, before providing an update to UEB in due course.
- (b) USS: KL updated UEB on the valuation process for the USS and noted that the coronavirus outbreak was likely to have implications for the Scheme in the short and longer term. The consultation on the 2020 scheme valuation was underway.
- (c) HEIF funding: DP sought input from UEB on fixed-term contract posts that were funded through the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF). Further discussions would take place with Human Resources and Partnerships & Regional Engagement to ensure that a common position was maintained. It was noted that there was currently a commitment to continue, and to increase, HEIF funding in 2020/21.
- (d) Exams and assessment: WM informed UEB that a working group chaired by the Deputy Vice President for Education would be considering how to adapt the Summer assessment period in response to the coronavirus outbreak, based on a set of core principles.