



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Office
Of
The President &
Vice-Chancellor.

Minutes

University Executive Board

Date:	31 March 2020
Present:	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)
In attendance:	Dr T Strike (TS)
Apologies:	Professor C Watkins (CW)
Secretary:	Mr N Button (NB), Ms K Sullivan (KS)

1. Coronavirus Update

1.1 Assessment

UEB noted an update on arrangements for the COVID-19 Steering Group and sub-groups. The Steering Group was now meeting twice per week, with alternating chairing arrangements, as means to increase resilience and capability; these arrangements would be monitored. During discussion the following was noted:

- IT resilience: Work to improve IT resilience continued and there had been positive feedback in terms of support being provided to the digital learning team.
- Student Support: Work was ongoing to consider new Government guidelines for students which stated that they should remain in their current accommodation, whether that be University-owned or private residences.
- Critical Incident Lists: Ensuring these were up to date was a key priority; responses from HODs were required urgently.
- Exams and assessment: WM reported that a briefing had been circulated to HoDs regarding the summer assessment period, in response to the pandemic, including enacting a Safety Net policy. There had been a significant level of enquiries from students about assessments, which it was important to address as soon as possible. Following a review by the Sub Group, more detailed information would be circulated to students.

1.2 Staff Recruitment

Following the decision by UEB to pause all staff recruitment of, the Vacancy Review Group had made good progress reviewing vacant posts, at all stages of recruitment. Vacancies had been classified as those where offers had been made, those with start dates confirmed, and those that had not progressed beyond interview stage. A set of clear principles had been

established for allowing recruitment to proceed and this had been communicated to FVPs and HoDs. Where offers had been made, but the role could not be undertaken remotely, the start date would be delayed. Where vacancies had not progressed beyond interview, FVPs had been asked to provide justifications to proceed. UEB noted that all vacancies would be continue to be reviewed rigorously through a weekly executive-led review panel.

1.3 **Actions**

- UEB would receive a further update in due course
- An update would be shared with UEB HODs to highlight the current financial position and actions required regarding discretionary spend, the recruitment review, the need to focus on student recruitment and moving to on-line teaching.
- In recognition of pressures on staff and as a thank you for everyone's efforts in recent weeks, UEB agreed to give all staff 2 days additional annual leave on 9 and 14 April.

2. **National Covid-19 Policy Responses**

2.1 UEB discussed a number of the most pressing policy concerns relating to the coronavirus outbreak. The outcome of those discussions would form part of the University's input to Russell Group and Universities UK in its ongoing discussions with the Government and the OfS.

2.1 **Student Number Controls**

UEB noted the ongoing discussions within Government regarding the introduction of student number controls in response to the coronavirus outbreak and its expected impact on student recruitment. This had been proposed as a method of protecting those institutions that would potentially lose out from a reduced pool of prospective students.

2.2 **Student accommodation**

UEB noted that the Universities Minister had clarified that there would not be financial support for students paying their Summer term rent when they were no longer living in student accommodation. This had come alongside a number of universities and private providers releasing students from their contracts in advance of the scheduled rent payment for the Summer term.

2.3 **National Student Survey (NSS)**

UEB noted the OfS had stated the third-party contractor conducting the NSS would be given more time to submit the data. The OfS had further said that it would test the validity of the data before publishing it. During discussion, UEB noted the following:

- The value in conducting the NSS in the current circumstances was extremely limited.
- Previous validity tests of NSS data had only looked at data at a sector level and should instead have considered its validity at institutional level, as some institutions would be impacted differently.
- There would be no University reminders to students to complete the NSS as it would be inappropriate in the current circumstances.

2.4 **Furloughing of workforce**

UEB noted that the sector was still seeking clarity on the position of universities in the Government's proposals for support for furloughed workers following seemingly

contradictory messages, including for roles that were not publicly funded. UEB agreed that there needed to be urgent clarity on this issue.

2.5 **International students**

UEB supported the position that the current arrangements whereby UKVI had extended student visas to 31 May should be further extended to the end of January 2021. This would help existing students as well as ensuring that prospective international students would have the certainty that if they started their courses remotely in September, they would still be able to obtain their Visa for the start of the January term.

2.6 **Finance**

UEB noted the OfS had asked for information be reported relating to university liquidity, specifically if it appeared that any universities were facing acute financial difficulty. It was not yet clear whether this was with the view of making recommendations to Government for financial support for the sector or to enforce regulatory compliance.

2.7 **Access and participation**

UEB noted that the OfS had altered its monitoring of Access and Participation Plans, but was still expecting universities to meet its spending commitments and action points in their Access and Participation Plans. Given that a significant amount of Access and Participation spending was on outreach in schools that were currently closed, this guidance was inappropriate in the current context.

3. **Report of the UEB Risk Review Group** (Meeting held on 9 March)

3.1 UEB noted the report of the UEB Risk Review Group for the meeting held on 9 March. Attention was drawn to the Faculty updates, and the updated Corporate Risk Register. Given recent events, the work on the risks relating to coronavirus would need updating ahead of the Risk Register being submitted to Council for their meeting on 27 April.

3.2 **Action:** the Risk Register would be updated to reflect changes in the coronavirus risk since the meeting of the UEB Risk Review Group.

4. **Report of the UEB Information Management & Security Group** (Meeting held on 18 March)

4.1 UEB noted the report of the UEB Information Management & Security Group for the meeting held on 18 March. Attention was drawn to the additional work on data protection that was being done as a result of a mass transition to home working. It was also noted that updates were being made to the University's guidance on Subject Access Requests and staff emails. This would need to be carefully communicated to all staff.

5. **Round Table**

- (a) Sheffield Teaching Hospitals: STH had expressed its appreciation for University's support including its work on modelling and the contribution of University medical staff. Update on the modelling would be shared with UEB in due course.
- (b) PGR Scholarships: SH would circulate proposals regarding PGR scholarships. It was noted that there had been no further update from UKRI on its position regarding research grant extensions.
- (c) Review of Semester Dates: It was agreed to defer work to look at semester dates until the Summer. This would be communicated to FVPs and HODs.