



Minutes Meeting of the Council

Date: 14 December 2023

Present: Martin Temple, Pro-Chancellor (in the Chair)
Claire Brownlie (Pro-Chancellor), Adrian Stone (Pro-Chancellor), Rob Memmott (Treasurer), Professor Koen Lamberts (President & Vice-Chancellor), Lily Byrne, Professor Graham Gee, Professor Sue Hartley, Dr John Hogan, Alison Kay, Professor Janine Kirby, Dr Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid, Dr Phil Tenney, Professor Gill Valentine, Professor Mary Vincent

Secretary: Jeannette Strachan

In attendance: Frances Morris-Jones, Anna Campbell, Jo Jones, David Swinn; Rob Sykes; Professor Rachael Rothman (item 4)

Apologies: Dr Brian Gilvary, Gemma Greenup, Varun Kabra, Phil Rodrigo

1. Welcome and Introductions

1.1 The Chair welcomed Members and attendees to the meeting.

2. Declaration of Conflict of Interests

2.1 No conflicts were declared.

3. Final Structural Proposals and the Case for moving to a Schools Structure

3.1 Proposal and Case for moving to a Schools Structure

Council discussed an update on the Senate's discussions about the proposed new Schools structure and considered the accompanying papers which had been submitted to Senate, as well as updates on the wider engagement process since the meeting of Council on 27 November. Council discussed the following:

3.1.1 Structure:

While there had been differing views on the most optimal disciplinary groupings and the various opportunities for alignment and synergies, the engagement process had focused on how to bring existing academic units together in schools to maximise the realisation of benefits in the most effective way possible. In some cases, the engagement had helped to identify areas where links and synergies were less strong than initially thought.

3.1.2 Disciplinary Identity:

The importance of protecting disciplinary identity in larger schools and mitigating any risk or addressing concerns that these identities could be diminished had been key considerations throughout the engagement process. However, whilst recognising that it would be important to ensure that these issues were addressed through the implementation phase, it was positive that over the engagement period, the focus had shifted from the overall strategic question about Schools *per se* to operational issues such as this one. It was noted that within the University's existing departmental structures there were positive examples of multidisciplinary within departments, e.g. Law and Criminology, that would provide useful learning around this point. Similarly, the role of Faculty and School leaderships would be critical in facilitating the safeguarding of individual disciplinary identities.

3.1.3 Student Recruitment:

The importance of ensuring that Schools were able to project the University positively to external audiences, particularly overseas, as a vital means to support student recruitment activity was noted.

3.1.4 Impact on students and programmes:

The University had continued to offer repeated assurances that a move to Schools was not intended to result directly in the closure of any programmes of study. However, there were also ongoing concerns from colleagues and students about how roles might change in a School structure and, as such, it was recognised that the University would need to ensure there was no adverse impact on students' experiences, including in areas such as student support as well as educational activity. It was important that the University continued to counter strongly any suggestion that the proposed structural changes were motivated by a desire to cut programmes and drive out costs savings. Although there were pre-existing strategic initiatives, e.g. the Portfolio Review, that were intended to ensure the competitiveness, attractiveness and effectiveness of the University's educational offer, these were entirely unconnected to the new Schools proposals and this had been made clear to staff during the engagement period. Other strategic change initiatives, such as those under the TEF and changes to Student Support Services and Student Recruitment and Marketing, that were underway before the engagement period, would need to continue. Again, this had been made clear consistently through various fora during the engagement period.

3.1.5 Evidence:

Colleagues had asked about the extent to which the current proposals had been informed by previous smaller scale structural changes, such as the establishment of the School of Biosciences and the new Schools in the Faculty of Health. UEB was persuaded that there was compelling evidence, including from other institutions who had undertaken strategic changes of this type, that the proposals would be effective in delivering the intended benefits.

3.1.6 Other:

Additional points raised through the engagement period were reported to have included: the potential impact on staff, particularly professional staff, the physical location of Schools and departments that were not currently co-located; the timeline, from being too short to too long and the importance of minimising uncertainty for colleagues. Council's decision to extend the timeline for its decision making into January 2024 had been well received. Additional feedback had been raised in relation to the potential opportunity costs during the implementation phase in terms of workloads, disruption and risks to core activities due to process changes. Ultimately, as noted in previous discussions, these were issues that would need to be monitored and managed effectively during the transition and implementation phase to ensure that there was no short-term impact on institutional effectiveness. As previously reported to and shared with Council, a staff survey organised by the campus Trade Union had received 971 responses that were strongly negative in their views on the proposals.

3.1.7 Final proposed School Structure:

The final proposed structure, which had been endorsed by UEB on 5 December and considered by Senate on 13 December was largely the same as that which had been presented at the start of the engagement period but some changes had been made as a result of further details consideration by departments and faculties or because the engagement period and subsequent UEB discussion had identified more appropriate alternatives.

3.1.8 Senate:

- (a) At its meeting on 27 November, Council agreed to seek the advice of Senate in several ways, as noted in the unconfirmed meeting minutes (see Minute 3.3, below), including feedback from the discussion at Senate's 13 December meeting. It was reported that Senate had held a lengthy and wide ranging discussion of the proposals, which was focused around two broad sets of issues related to procedure and the substantive proposals themselves.

A number of procedural points had been raised and clarified in relation to Senate and Council's respective role in the decision making process under the University's constitution, upon which detailed legal advice had been sought during the engagement period. An initial vote had been held to decide whether Senate wished to vote on a motion proposed during the meeting in relation to the substantive proposals themselves. The votes were carried out anonymously during the meeting using OpaVote and only Senate members in attendance at the meeting were invited to vote.

- (b) 67 members of Senate attended the meeting and were invited to vote. This included the Chair, who opted out of the voting process and waived their right to a casting vote. One further member opted out of the voting process, having left the meeting prior to the voting process, so in both instances 65 votes were cast out of 66 eligible voters. The vote was agreed and undertaken as follows:

Does Senate seek a vote on the schools proposal? (Members could answer 'Yes', 'No' or 'Abstain')

65 votes were cast, with 64 members voting on the OpaVote system and one member choosing to vote verbally to the Governance Team due to a technical issue. The result was:

33 voted Yes; 32 voted No; and 0 abstained

With respect to the substantive proposals, following discussion and debate in which a range of views were expressed, both positive, negative and more, with additional questions having been submitted in advance that were also answered during the meeting. Particular comments were made in relation to the underpinning processes, the structure itself, evidence and learning from elsewhere in the sector and institution, the use of equality impact assessments, size of academic units in the context of NSS results, and student protections under the CMA. Ultimately, a second vote was held on the substantive motion, as follows:

Senate recommends the School Structure to Council? Members could answer 'Yes', 'No' or 'Abstain' and 65 votes were cast on the OpaVote system. The result was:

37 voted Yes; 22 voted No; and 6 Abstained

It was noted that this recommendation was in no way binding on Council, which retained the constitutional authority to approve the structural changes, but the result of the vote was an advisory opinion from the Senate, which would be taken into account alongside the other forms of advice that Council had sought to inform its formal determination of the proposals in January 2024. However, Council was pleased to note that, while the outcome of the Senate vote did not represent unconditional support, and neither was it presented as such by the Chair of Senate, it was reflective of a considered and sophisticated debate and the seriousness with which Senate had approached the matter.

3.2 Minutes of the Senate Education Committee and Senate Research & Innovation Committee Meetings on 11 October 2023

- 3.2.1 Council received and noted the Minutes of the Senate's Education (SEC) and Research & Innovation Committees (SRIC) relating to their respective consideration of the proposal to move to a Schools-based academic structure. It was noted that Council members would have the opportunity to meet with members of both committees before the additional meeting of Council in January 2024, as one of the means by which Council had agreed to receive advice to inform a final decision on the proposal to move to a Schools-based academic structure.
- 3.2.2 With respect to SEC, it was reported that the proposals had been broadly welcomed, with particular enthusiasm for the intention to address inconsistencies in the experiences of students and available resources for student support under the current structure. Similarly, work to review related governance structures was an opportunity to clarify strategic and operational activities and respective responsibilities and accountabilities for these.

Nevertheless, SEC had commented on the importance of careful implementation of the plans given the significant culture changes that they would require and had recognised that this would take time. It was also noted that SEC had benefited from useful contributions from the two SU Officer members who attended the meeting and SEC had recognised the importance of embedding the Student Voice during the implementation process.

- 3.2.3 With respect to SRIC, the proposals had attracted positive feedback for the opportunities presented for increased and more impactful interdisciplinarity, collaboration and external partnerships. Further internal opportunities had been noted around interdisciplinary working, the fostering of larger, more resilient research units and the possibilities for increased creativity and innovation in building research clusters through having increased, complementary disciplinary expertise located in single units. However, SRIC had commented on the challenge of ensuring that these opportunities were realised and the need to be able to evaluate whether and to what extent this had been achieved. Supporting colleagues by promoting and facilitating those opportunities, the need to build cohesion in new Schools and to be as ambitious as possible was regarded as essential, with potential lessons drawn from the experience of colleagues in Schools such as Biosciences. SRIC had also commented on the importance of defining what success in research and innovation in the new structure meant, and the need to track progress towards it.

3.3 Extract of the Unconfirmed Minutes of the Council Meeting on 27 November 2023

Council received and noted the unconfirmed minutes of the 27 November 2023 meeting relating to item 3 on this agenda, which would be presented for formal approval to the next routine scheduled business meeting as part of the full set of Minutes.

4. Net Zero Carbon Plan

(Professor Rachael Rothman in attendance for this item)

- 4.1 Council considered a presentation setting out a proposed institutional approach and plan to achieve its net zero carbon targets by 2030, which had been developed with detailed input from external consultants following a request from Council that a detailed decarbonisation plan be developed, particularly options for the transformer, that could inform subsequent iterations of the financial forecasts.
- 4.2 During the related presentation, attention was drawn to the following:
- 4.2.1 The process to date, including external input and consideration by UEB, the UEB Sustainability Steering Group, Finance Committee and One University leads and the further engagements that were planned.
- 4.2.2 The key headline from the process, being the potential to achieve significant reductions in the University's carbon emissions by 2030 and that it would be possible to achieve the net zero carbon target by 2030 for scope I and II emissions, with some offsetting.

- 4.2.3 Caveats to the report and proposals being the use of 'Rough Order of Magnitude' figures by the consultants, which was standard practice in such reports, that were at the upper end of financial envelope, the use of conservative assumptions, and the inclusion of 60% risk and optimism bias (in line with the Treasury green book for non-standard civil engineering projects).
 - 4.2.4 An overview of decarbonisation initiatives, i.e. the transformer, stand-alone heat pumps, new heat clusters and estate optimisation.
 - 4.2.5 The economic and carbon costs of decarbonisation.
 - 4.2.6 The options considered and recommended for the transformer and the transformer's cumulative carbon emissions.
 - 4.2.7 The recommendations for the transformer proposed by the UEB Sustainability Steering Group, which UEB had approved in principle subject to further detailed work and evaluation.
 - 4.2.8 The importance of resilience for the University's energy needs and the means by which to enable and ensure this institutional resilience.
 - 4.2.9 Detailed next steps and the associated timeline over the next calendar year.
- 4.3 During discussion, clarification was provided about the order in which the proposed plan would undertake particular actions, and the attendant risks of overinvestment. Members noted that it was necessary to undertake work around culture and behaviours in parallel to other estates and capital activities due to the time that the latter would take. It was also noted that the University had a civic duty to seek to use heat pumps where possible rather than the Veolia district heating system. In addition, heat pumps were a lower carbon option.
- 4.4 Further clarification was provided about the figures in the current plans and the underlying assumptions, with the initial costs estimate of £220m having been reduced to the £130m figure included in the University's capital pipeline. However, the individual capital projects themselves would be presented for formal approval under the usual estates and capital governance processes in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation (Regulation III). Similarly, as the University considered how to optimise the use of its estate as other capital projects were developed and proposed, these would also contribute positively to the achievement of net zero carbon targets.
- 4.5 It was reported that the Council Finance Committee had noted the strength of the University's position in the latest QS Sustainability rankings and recognised the importance of maximising its credentials in this area, which was also increasingly important to students and applicants. The sustainability ranking would also have a direct benefit on the University's future position in the overall QS World University Rankings.

- 4.6. Council approved the plan as set out in the related presentation and the associated next steps, noting that this would involve further development work and the further consideration of individual capital business cases.

5. Student Recruitment Update

- 5.1 Council received and noted an update on the latest student recruitment position for 2024 entry, following the release of further data since the previous report to Council through the President & Vice-Chancellor's report to the 27 November Council meeting. As previously noted, the University not having been ranked in the QS World Top 100 ranking this year was a challenge to overseas recruitment, and a range of institutional actions were already in place to mitigate the associated risks, but the wider recruitment environment was also challenging.
- 5.2 Attention was drawn to the impact of recent UK government announcements regarding immigration policy, which would adversely affect students and their dependents and the wider attractiveness of the UK as a destination for study. Similarly, the impact of the current economic situation in China meant that many Chinese employers were introducing even greater selectivity into their recruitment processes, e.g. using QS Top 50 institutions and seeking both postgraduate and undergraduate qualifications from QS Top 100 institutions. There were also changes in demand for particular disciplines, both at the University and across the sector, while competitor behaviour in seeking to increase their own overseas student numbers and the competitiveness of Australian and Canadian universities meant that the University was operating in an increasingly crowded market.
- 5.3 Members noted an overview of the latest home and overseas UG and PGT applications and offers and the steps that the University was taking to maximise its overall position for September 2024 entry. These included: refining the use of staged admissions; making optimal use of comparisons with previous years throughout the cycle; increased offer making; widening the pool of potential applicants for a number of disciplines without reducing entry requirements or diluting quality; and reviewing and revising the payment of commission to overseas agents.
- 5.4 It was reported that the University expected to have a clearer idea of the extent of the challenge after the Chinese new year, at which point a new modelling tool would be applied to evaluate the overall student recruitment position and inform scenario planning that would be reviewed by UEB on a regular basis and reported to Council.