

NORWICH UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS

COUNCIL

Minutes of the Council

Minutes of the meeting of Council held using Microsoft Teams on Friday 02 October 2020 and commencing at 09.30.

Present:

Mr A McMenemy (Chair)
Ms C Armor
Ms C Bray (to Item 3.2)
Ms R Chakraborty
Prof. Lady R Cooper
Ms A Ferguson
Mr A Grimby
Mr M Jeffries
Ms A Johns
Ms S Kennedy
Prof. J Last
Mr D Lawford
Ms N Lanzalaco
Ms N Nannar

Mr J Smith
Mr I Watson
Mr T Wilson
Mr T Wood

In attendance:

Prof. H Carlisle
Prof. N Powell
Mrs A Robson
Prof. R Sawdon-Smith
Ms A Tubb
Mr D Williams (Clerk)

Apologies:

Non

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

The Chair opened the meeting and extended a particular welcome to the three new members who were attending their first meeting of Council. Each new member provided a brief summary of their background and current activities to Council.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

The following were appointed as officers of Council for the current year:

Chair of Council: Albert McMenemy
Deputy Chair of Council: Mark Jeffries

Chair of Audit Committee: Andy Grimby
Chair of Finance and Resources Committee: Mark Jeffries
Chair of Personnel Committee: Alison Johns
Chair of Remuneration Committee: Andy Grimby
Ex-officio Chair of Nominations Committee: Albert McMenemy

1. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The Council approved the Minutes of the meeting held on 03 July 2020.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were no matters arising.

PART I

3. VICE CHANCELLOR

3.1. Vice Chancellor's Policy Update

The Vice Chancellor (VC) began his report by paying tribute to the work of the Acting Vice Chancellor and the Senior Management Team (SMT) in managing the Covid-19 pandemic. He noted that while so far there had been no out-break of Covid-19 at the University, the number of students and the University's city centre location, suggested an out-break was likely at some point.

In the event of an out-break, the University had a Covid-19 Outbreak Response plan. This included a range of scenarios with procedures, those required to self-isolate and communications required for each one. The Director of External Relations was the lead contact when dealing with the press enquiries.

Notwithstanding the absence of an out-break, a number of journalists had approached members of staff and students at the University trying to find "a story".

Members commented that it was important to be proactive when dealing with the press and that there was opportunity to use the President of the Students' Union in seeking to engage with journalists. There was also an opportunity to use alternative platforms to place a positive narrative in the public domain.

The national context for the higher education sector was reviewed. Student recruitment across the different mission groups and individual institutions showed marked variation. For universities who had been unable to recruit their planned student numbers it was highly likely that they would need to make significant adjustments to their operations, including reducing the size of their staffing base.

It was important to note that on-line delivery was not a cheap, low cost, option, and calls for universities to reduce or refund tuition fees failed to take account of the facts.

Public announcements suggested the government was advocating a blurring of the divide between further and higher education. This was likely to be accompanied by a push towards encouraging shorter "bit-sized", and more flexible learning. There was also a sense that vocational education should be located with further education providers. It appeared that the recommendations from the Augar Review remained on the policy agenda.

The Chair thanked the VC for his report, which Council received.

3.2. Acting Vice Chancellor's report

The Acting Vice Chancellor (AVC) updated Council on the hybrid model being used to deliver learning to students. Typically, students were receiving approximately 3.5 days of teaching and learning each week, of which one day was on campus.

Prior to the start of the academic year 2020/21, the University had made it very clear to students how courses would be delivered. As a result, few students had elected to withdraw from, or defer entry to, the University.

The University had begun the process of focusing on recruitment for 2021/22, by introducing live on-line open days. At the same time, the University had increased its outreach work with schools. In part, this was to address concerns about the possible lack of preparation for entry to higher education by the new year 13 students (i.e. those aged 17 on 31 August 2020).

Student recruitment for the current 2020/21 had been successful with the number of new entrants rising by 12% on the previous year. The new students had settled in well and were acting responsibly.

Staff, both front and back office, had returned to work from their offices on campus with some flexibility on working from home for those with multiple shared offices if work could be undertaken equally effectively.

The University's healthy recruitment and financial position meant that no jobs were at risk, and indeed no staff had been furloughed.

Experience to date suggests many students preferred on-line learning to more traditional methods of delivery. Student attendance and engagement had increased in a number of delivery sessions.

The higher than planned level of student recruitment had led to some course sessions taking place in the evening. It had not, however, been necessary to timetable sessions on Saturdays to accommodate the increased student numbers.

Staff morale remained positive, and staff were very mindful that NUA was financially secure when compared to other institutions, many of which had announced staff redundancies. Academic staff, in particular, were thrilled to have students back at the University.

Although the University had strongly encouraged staff to take a large proportion of their annual leave entitlement during the summer period, many had also spent time preparing materials for on-line delivery in the autumn term.

While moving to on-line delivery had been a challenge for some members of staff, staff were becoming increasingly confident both personally about their use of on-line learning and in general about the effectiveness of the hybrid learning model.

Turning to estates, the AVC reported that due to unforeseen circumstances the Duke Street Riverside Development was approximately five weeks behind schedule. An increase in costs of circa. £100k had been incurred. A major risk continued to be a delay to the opening of the facility for 2021/22, and the consequential loss of rental income should the student accommodation not be ready for the start of the autumn term.

Council noted the low level of formal student complaints received by the University, and under consideration by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

Recent movements in the University's position in higher education league tables published by The Times and Guardian were noted. The University's position in both tables was adversely affected by its performance with regard to graduate outcomes. The University was well-aware of the need to improve the current level of performance. The newly-appointed Pro-Vice Chancellor, working with the Director of Enterprise and Innovation would play a major role in taking forward the University's work in this area.

It was agreed that it would be helpful if members could receive a presentation on the University's work on employability over the last two years and its current standing at its next meeting in November 2020. This would give Council an understanding of the point from which the University would develop further its work in this area.

Director of Enterprise and Innovation

Members of the governing body shared their knowledge of the employment prospects in different sectors of the creative industries. For some sectors, the immediate employment prospects were poor, and individuals were leaving the industry in significant numbers. This suggested it was increasingly important to recognise the utilisation of creative skills in employment sectors outside of the creative industries. Further, there was perhaps an opportunity for NUA to develop collaborations with institutions focussing on science, engineering, technology and mathematics (STEM).

NUA was a small community, where there was a high-degree of interaction between staff and students. The city of Norwich was also very attractive to students. The biggest challenge for the University was to maintain the level of personal interaction between staff and students, while moving to a hybrid model of delivery, with significant on-line delivery.

Notwithstanding Covid-19 there was a need to complete the work on the University's new strategic plan. The plan would run for the shorter period of three years, allowing the newly appointed VC to review and revise, if necessary, the plan early in their tenure. A draft of the new strategic plan would come to the next meeting of Council.

AVC

The Chair thanked the AVC for her report, which Council received.

4. STUDENT MATTERS

4.1. Students' Union Report

The President of the Students' Union (SU) shared with Council some of key recent activities and work of the Union. These included supporting students during the "moving-in" week, and dealing with student concerns. For instance, some students were worried about money, having been unable to obtain paid employment during the summer period. Covid-19 had impacted Freshers' Week, which had been held online. More generally, the SU had developed detailed guidelines on Covid-19 for student clubs and events. The guidelines included a need to undertake risk assessments for events or activities.

PART II

5. GOVERNANCE AND ASSURANCE MATTERS

5.1. Revised HE Code of Governance

Members attention was drawn to the publication by the Committee of University Chairs (CUC) of a revised Higher Education Code of Governance. A small group, led by the Deputy Chair, had been established to consider the revised Code and to advise Council on whether it should consider changing any of its policies or practices in order to comply with the updated Code. The group would report to Council at the next meeting of Council.

Deputy Chair

6. CHAIR'S COMMENTS AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS MATTERS

6.1. Chair's update, including progress on the recruitment of a Vice Chancellor

The Chair updated members on progress in the recruitment of the next VC.

The closing date for applicants was the 12 October 2020. The Executive Search firm leading the recruitment had reported a high level of interest in the vacancy. Potential applicants had been highly complimentary about NUA.

The Chair had asked Tom Wood to Chair an employers' panel, which was expected to interview candidates for the post of VC on or about 1 December 2020. Members, who are not members of the Appointments Committee, but were interested in joining the panel were invited to email the Chair or Tom Wood.

Governors

7. Any other business requests

7.1. Unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 12 August 2020.

The Minutes of meeting were received.

8. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would commence at 1300 on 13 November 2020. It was expected that the meeting would be held using Microsoft Teams.