

COUNCIL

MINUTES

This paper presents the confirmed minutes of the last meeting of Council held on 7 March 2023 via Microsoft Teams.

Action Required

Council **approved** these minutes as a correct record at its meeting held on 9 May 2023.

Present

Malcolm Sweeting (Chair),
 Tim Blackman, Vice-Chancellor
 Robert McCracken, Treasurer
 Margaret Greenaway, President, OU Students Association
 Nick Barratt, Senate representative
 Carol Howells, Senate representative
 Gary Elliott-Cirigottis, Senate representative
 Eileen Scanlon, Senate representative
 Rob Parker, Senate representative
 Sas Amoah, member of non-academic staff
 Catherine Halliwell, associate lecturer
 John Brooks, external co-opted member, Vice-Chair
 Andrew Dickinson, external co-opted member
 Thomas Frawley, external co-opted member
 Paul Gray, external co-opted member
 Julia Goodfellow, external co-opted member
 Paul Kett, external co-opted member
 Rachel Lock, external co-opted member
 Rashik Parmar, external co-opted member
 Tevin Tobun, external co-opted member
 Observer: Gareth Jones – Deputy President, OU Students Association

In Attendance

Dave Hall, University Secretary
 Paul Traynor, Chief Financial Officer
 Camilla Briault, Assistant Director, Governance
 Sue Thomas, Senior Manager, Governance
 Jhumar Johnson, Vice Chancellor's Office.

Development session:

Fridolin Wild, Professor in Technology Enhanced Learning, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education & Language Studies
 John Domingue, Professor, Faculty Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
 Tim Plyming, Managing Director, Microcredentials
 Viren Patel, Director of Employers and Partnerships, Business Development Unit (BDU)
 Emma Stace, Chief Digital and Information Officer

Agenda items

Minute 7 Financial Update and Four-Year Planning Update: Haf Merrifield, Director of Strategy
Minute 9.2 Estates Plan: Dorian Holloway, Director of Estates, Sadie Janes, Director of Development, Savills and Jessica Mailey, Architect Associate, BDP.
Minute 10 Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap Reporting: Marcia Wilson, Dean, Equality, Diversity & Education.
Minutes 13 Research Items: Kevin Shakesheff, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Research and Enterprise
Minute 14 Approach to Digital: Emma Stace, Chief Data and Technology Officer
Minute 15 SSP Update: Brigid McBride, Programme Director
Minute 16 ERP Report: John D'Arcy, Chair, ERP Delivery Board

Apologies

Ceri Doyle

1 DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS

- 1.1 Council participated in a Development Session led by Professor Kevin Shakesheff, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Research and Innovation. The session covered the launch of a new online start-up accelerator, the IET EdTech Foundry, to support businesses that produce innovative educational technology products to enhance learning experiences and encourage the use of technology-enhanced learning. The foundry would support a total of 12 projects with up to £50,000 each as well as infrastructure, enterprise support and coaching to take the businesses to the next stage.
- 1.2 Council also received a report from Viren Patel, Director of Employers and Partnerships, Business Development Unit on the University's partnerships with employers in the public and private sectors.
- 1.3 Council welcomed the reports of the pioneering and innovative initiatives and plans to expand them. It wished all those involved every success and looked forward to further updates.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES

C-2022-08-M

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2022 were **approved**.

4 MATTERS ARISING AND ACTION TRACKER

C-2023-01-01

The Council **noted** the report of matters arising and the action tracker.

5 CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair reported that:

- a) Kara Chiana Dique, Student Representative on Council, had stepped down. Gareth Jones, Deputy President, was attending as an observer from the OU Students Association.
- b) The key items for discussion at the meeting would be the Four Year Planning Process, Tuition Fees, Estates Plan and Approach to Digital. The discussion around these items was likely to overlap as the items were closely interlinked.

6 VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REGULAR REPORT

C-2023-01-02

- 6.1 In reflecting on some of the issues raised in his report the Vice-Chancellor commented that:

- a) The first major action of the work to achieve financial recovery by 2025, a university wide Mutually Agreed Resignation Scheme (MARS), would launch on 13 March 2023. This would be supported by comprehensive communications and engagement with staff, along with tailored guidance materials, FAQs, briefing sessions for managers and a dedicated intranet site.
- b) Units had submitted savings proposals as part of their three-year budget planning, which were currently being reviewed. Reductions in staff expenditure will be required as a result of both institutional and unit measures.
- c) The University, with many other higher education institutions (HEIs) had implemented the 2023/24 pay award for staff earlier than normal this year with the first part brought forward to April and backdated to February and the second part scheduled for August. Whilst this was the right thing to do for staff facing pressures due to cost-of-living increases, it had been at considerable cost to the University.
- d) The new Lifelong Loan Entitlement due to be introduced in 2025 could be a significant opportunity for the University. Further detail on aspects of the scheme were expected imminently. However there remained challenges for the University because of cohort depletion. In response work was ongoing to attract school and college leavers to the OU's offer. The latter group was growing and could increasingly see the OU as not just an option for their next step in education but as their lifelong university.

6.2 Council reflected that staff were facing significant pressure and challenge during this period and sought assurance that there would be support for their wellbeing. The Vice-Chancellor acknowledged that the next two years would be challenging but emphasised that support for staff was a priority and that opportunities were being taken to examine workloads and prioritise important tasks and stop others.

6.3 Council **noted** the report.

7 FINANCIAL UPDATE INCLUDING FOUR YEAR PLANNING PROCESS

C-2023-01-03

7.1 The Chief Financial Officer and Director of Strategy reported that:

- a) The Q2 forecast was showing an improved position from Q1 because of savings identified. However, the additional pay award cost had had an adverse impact.
- b) Work continued centrally (through institutional measures) and within units (three year unit planning) to return to an operating surplus. A revised process for units and three-year financial targets were provided to managers in early December. Proposals from Units for savings were currently being considered though it was acknowledged that not all would come to fruition. It was expected that the planning process would facilitate greater collaboration between units.

7.2 Council:

- a) Welcomed the efforts to identify savings but sought clarification on the savings to be made through staffing reductions. It was noted that the reductions would include a significant number of associate lecturers (ALs).
- b) Further information was also sought on the favourable movement in the USS Pension deficit and whether this would result in reduced employer and employee contributions.

7.3 The Chief Financial Officer and Vice-Chancellor:

- a) Explained that an initial estimate of the cost of MARS and any subsequent voluntary redundancies had been made but a further evaluation would be made once the MARS scheme had closed in mid-April.

- b) Emphasised the importance of establishing stability in the USS Pension scheme. The University was aware that current contribution levels were discouraging some staff from joining so an examination of costs was required. A further valuation of the scheme was due this year.

7.4 Council **noted** the report.

8 TUITION FEE STRATEGY

C-2023-01-04

8.1 The University Secretary explained that to generate additional fee income in the short-term in England (from 2024/25) changes to the Tuition Fee Policy were required. Strategic Planning and Resources Committee (SPRC) had discussed the amendments and welcomed the clarity they were likely to provide for students. SPRC had also held a preliminary discussion around the options for fee setting in England from 2024/5 onwards and recommendations would come forward to Council in the autumn.

8.2 Council:

- a) **Approved** the revised wording in the Tuition Fee Policy for 23/24, based on SPRC's recommendation
- b) **Noted** the emerging options for implementing fee increases from 24/25 onwards

9 ESTATES PLAN

C-2023-01-05

This minute is recorded in a separate confidential minute.

10 2022 GENDER AND ETHNICITY PAY GAP REPORTING

C-2023-01-06

10.1 The Council:

- a) Welcomed the improvement in the Gender Pay Gap (GPG) and Ethnicity Pay Gap (EPG) but wished to see further work to reduce the Ethnicity Pay Gap to the target. The work to increase recording of disability to improve reporting in future was also welcomed.
- b) Considered it essential that EDI work was not adversely affected by the MARS scheme.
- c) Sought clarification as to how Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff in the lower quartile were encouraged to progress in their careers.
- d) Enquired whether the University ascertained partner organisations' approaches to EDI issues.
- e) Sought information on tailored approaches to EDI in Nations Offices.

10.2 The Dean, EDI:

- a) Assured Council that EDI initiatives were embedded in Unit priorities as core business.
- b) Explained that an equality impact analysis would be carried out as part of the implementation of the MARS Scheme.
- c) Reported that retention of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff at lower quartiles had decreased, but there were several initiatives in place to help address this.
- d) Confirmed that any organisation with which the University entered a partnership was requested to confirm alignment of their values to those of the University.
- e) Explained that each Nation office had EDI representatives. In Ireland their work included focussing on race and religion.

10.3 Council **noted** the report.

11 NATION REPORT: WALES

C-2023-01-07

11.1 The Director, OU in Wales gave a presentation on the activities, levels of growth, collaborations and progress being achieved in Wales. The Director drew attention to the positive relationship between the OU in Wales and HEFCW, and a recent institutional visit had been very constructive. The OU in Wales had recently launched its Learn and Live Strategy (Wales) which provided a framework for delivery of objectives in the next five years.

11.2 Council welcomed the report and recorded its thanks to the staff in Wales for their hard work and achievements and in particular the focus on supporting students domiciled in areas of deprivation. Council wished Mrs Casella well for her forthcoming retirement and thanked her for her contribution and leadership.

11.3 Council **noted** the report

12 OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION REPORT

C-2023-01-08

REVIEW OF THE OU-OU STUDENTS ASSOCIATION RELATIONSHIP AGREEMENT C-2023-01-09

12.1 The President, OU Students Association:

- a) Presented a report on the Association's recent achievements in relation to engagement, awareness, EDI and representation.
- b) Reported that the interim Chief Executive, Beth Metcalf, had been appointed to the substantive role.

12.2 Council:

- a) **noted** the report.
- b) **approved** the revised OU-OU Students Association Relationship Agreement

13 ANNUAL RESEARCH INTEGRITY STATEMENT

C-2023-01-10

RESEARCHER CAREER DEVELOPMENT CONCORDAT ANNUAL REPORT

C-2023-01-11

13.1 The PVC Research and Enterprise explained that:

- a) Both reports demonstrated how the University supported research staff in their career development and were embedded in the University's Research Plan. They had been considered by Research Committee and Senate and were being recommended for approval by the governing body as required.
- b) The use of fixed term contracts for research staff was being examined as it was acknowledged this remained an area of concern.
- c) International partnerships were vetted by the University. Further information could be provided on this after the meeting.

13.2 Council **approved**:

- a) Annual Research Integrity Statement
- b) Researcher Career Development Concordat Annual Report

14 APPROACH TO DIGITAL

C-2023-01-12

14.1 The Chief Digital Information Officer presented a report on the University's digital approach, emphasising that it was user centred and service oriented bringing together people, processes and

technology in ways that delivered high quality outcomes and experiences. It was a holistic approach based on relationships and collaboration.

14.2 Council:

- a) Welcomed the holistic vision but sought assurance that the University was ready to embrace this approach. It would involve technical innovation but also cultural change.
- b) Sought information on the risks associated with resilience of systems.

14.3 The Chief Digital Information Officer and University Secretary:

- a) Emphasised that collective, collaborative efforts underpinned the digital approach. Student feedback showed students struggled to access information and this needed to be addressed urgently.
- b) Explained that work was ongoing to clarify centralised and decentralised IT services and core principles would be presented to Audit Committee.
- c) Confirmed that internal systems now had increased resilience and over the next three years, would be maintained and become more change ready. The cost base would shift over time from running and maintaining existing systems and services towards the value of innovating and improving.
- d) Reported that reactions so far to the collaborative approach had been very positive. Systems and processes required staff to work across the organisational structure and this has resulted in increasing integration and collaboration.

14.4 Council **noted** the report.

15 STUDENT SERVICES PORTFOLIO UPDATE

C-2023-01-12A

15.1 The Programme Director explained that the Portfolio was a key element of the service evolution described in the presentation on the University's digital approach. The first digital team was making excellent progress, including establishing the technology for more frequent releases of features to students. A second digital team would undertake discovery work on qualification structures with the aim of minimising duplication and improving efficiency in relation to curriculum processes.

15.2 Council **noted** the report.

16 ENTERPRISE RESOURCE PLANNING (ERP) UPDATE

C-2023-01-13

Council **noted** the report.

17 FINANCE COMMITTEE

C-2023-01-14

Council **noted** the report of the meetings held on 24 and 28 January 2023

18 AUDIT COMMITTEE

C-2023-01-15

Council **noted** the report from the meeting held on 21 February 2023

19 GOVERNANCE AND NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

C-2023-01-16

Council:

- a) **approved** the reappointment of Robert McCracken as Treasurer from 1 August 2023 – 31 July 2027, on the recommendation of GNC.

b) **noted** the report from the meeting held on 18 January 2023.

20 STRATEGIC PLANNING AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE **C-2023-01-17**

Council **noted** the report from meetings held on 20 September 2022 and 28 February 2023

21 REMUNERATION COMMITTEE **C-2023-01-18**

Council **noted** the report from the meeting held on 20 February 2023

22 SENATE **C-2023-01-19**

Council **noted** the report from the meeting held on 1 February 2023

23 COUNCIL FORWARD PLANNER **C-2023-01-20**

Council **noted** a report on future business being presented to Council

| Future Meeting Dates |
|--|
| 9 May 2023 – Hybrid Meeting 11 July 2023 – Milton Keynes 21 November 2023 – Belfast with Dinner on evening of 20 November 2023 |

Dave Hall
University Secretary

Sue Thomas
Senior Manager, Governance
Sue.thomas@open.ac.uk
29 March 2023