

## COUNCIL

**Minutes of the meeting held at 13:15 on 21 SEPTEMBER 2021, at the *Lolfa Fach*, Pantycelyn.**

Present: Dr Emyr Roberts, Chair of Council (Chair); Ms Meri Huws, Deputy Chair of Council; Professor Elizabeth Treasure, Vice-Chancellor; Professor Tim Woods, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning, Teaching and Student Experience); Ms Kate Eden; Ms Mared Edwards, UMCA President; Mr Owen Evans (via Zoom); Professor Simon Green; Ms Sabina O'Donoghue, AberSU President; Ms Rhuanedd Richards; Mr Mark Tweed; Ms Kath Williams; Dr William Williams; Professor Sir Robin Williams; and Professor Reyer Zwiggelaar.

In attendance: Mr Stephen Forster, Director of Finance and Corporate Services; Ms Jean Jones, Head of the Vice-Chancellor's Office; Mr Geraint Pugh, University Secretary; Ms Charu Maini (via Zoom, until minute 10); Ms Jane Usherwood; and Ms Claire Vaughan.

Apologies for absence had been received from Ms Sharron Lusher; Dr Louise Marshall; and Ms Fiona Sharp.

### 1. MATTERS RAISED BY THE CHAIR

#### 1. Welcome

1. All members were welcomed to the first meeting of the governing body held in person at the University since 14 February 2020.
2. The following were welcomed to their first meeting as Council members:
  1. Owen Evans, Independent Member; and
  2. Prof Simon Green, Independent Member.
3. Those who were currently serving on a Council sub-committee had also been invited to attend the governing body meeting as observers, namely:
  1. Charu Maini, Independent Member of the Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee (ARAC);
  2. Jane Usherwood, Independent Member of the Governance and Compliance Committee (GCC); and
  3. Claire Vaughan, Independent Member of GCC, and the Remuneration Committee.

#### 2. Condolences

Sympathies were expressed following the death of:

1. Dr Marie Rose Wasdell, former warden and academic member of staff.

#### 3. Strategy Day

1. Council had held an away day on the afternoon of 20 September, and the morning of 21 September 2021. The first day had focused on proposed revisions to the institution's strategic plan, alongside sessions on the forthcoming Quality Enhancement Review of the University, and environmental sustainability initiatives. The second day had provided an opportunity to brief members on the outcome of the 2021 staff survey, and proposals to celebrate the institution's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022.

#### **RESOLVED**

2. That copies of all presentations be made available on SharePoint for future reference [**ACTION:** University Secretary].
4. The Times and Sunday Times' Good University Guide
  1. Members welcomed the news that Aberystwyth University (AU) had entered the top 40 in The Times and The Sunday Times' Good University Guide 2022, reflecting its strengths in teaching excellence and student satisfaction.
  2. The University now ranked second in Wales, and 38 out of 135 universities across the UK – an improvement on last year's rank of 42, and the institution's best every ranking in the Good University Guide. The Vice-Chancellor and colleagues were congratulated on this success.
5. Veterinary Science

The first ever intake of students had commenced on the Bachelor of Veterinary Science (BVSc) course at the University the previous day (20 September 2021). This was welcomed by members. Delivered jointly by AU and the Royal Veterinary College, the new course builds upon the BSc Veterinary Biosciences degree introduced by AU in September 2015.
6. Meeting Conduct

In order to ensure an effective online meeting, members had been asked to provide advance warning should they wish to discuss any item marked with an asterisk on the agenda. There had been no such requests, and the items in question would therefore be approved or noted in accordance with the recommendation set out on the coversheet.

## **2. ANNUAL APPRAISAL OF COUNCIL MEMBERS**

#### RECEIVED

Report by Chair of Council (COU2122-002).

#### NOTED

1. During August 2021, the Chair of Council had held annual appraisal meetings with those members whose terms on the governing body were continuing into the 2021–22 academic year. The report summarised the matters discussed during those meetings, and proposed action points.

2. Members would welcome briefings on issues affecting the higher education sector in order to improve knowledge of the context in which the University is working. In particular, an informal briefing session would be arranged in advance of a future Council meeting on the new Bill which was expected to be presented to the Senedd during the autumn on post-16 education in Wales [**ACTION:** University Secretary].
3. During the Funding Council's Institutional Assurance Review of Quality and Student Experience conducted in April 2021, the prospect of Independent Members observing meetings of the Senate had been raised. This had been further considered during the annual appraisal process, with members broadly supportive of such a development. In the first instance, the Chair of Council intended to observe the next Senate meeting [**ACTION:** University Secretary].
4. While members recognised that there were many benefits to holding Council and sub-committee meetings online, there was a desire to return to face-to-face sessions where possible. It was therefore suggested that three out of five Council meetings be held in person each year, with the matters for discussion influencing whether members would be encouraged to travel to Aberystwyth. On this basis, the expectation was that the Council meeting on 26 November 2021 would be held in person [**ACTION:** University Secretary].
5. The relevant Chairs would be asked to decide whether the sub-committees meet virtually or in person, although there was consensus that it would be beneficial for the sub-committees to meet in person at least once a year.

### **3. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

NOTED

No conflicts of interest were declared in relation to the business to be considered during the meeting.

### **4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

RECEIVED

Minutes of the meeting held on 09 July 2021 (COU2122-004).

**RESOLVED**

That the minutes be confirmed as a correct record.

### **5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

RECEIVED

A log setting out the progress made in taking forward decisions and actions agreed at the most recent Council meeting, and outstanding actions from previous meetings (COU2122-005).

NOTED

1. Old College (minute 83)

1. The Vice-Chancellor summarised the project for the benefit of the new Council and sub-committee members, including developments since the last Council meeting where the University had sought legal advice prior to recognising the sole bidder in the tendering process for the construction work on the Old College project as the 'preferred bidder'.
  2. Negotiations and value engineering discussions were now progressing with the 'preferred bidder', with the expectation that these would conclude by the end of October. A recommendation would then be presented to the Resources and Performance Committee (RPC) and Council for consideration and final approval. Where necessary, special meetings of both bodies would be convened to consider the recommendation.
2. The other updates provided in the decisions log.

## **6. DECISIONS TAKEN BETWEEN MEETINGS**

RECEIVED

Report by the University Secretary (COU2122-006).

NOTED

1. The report recorded an instance since the last Council meeting where members had approved the following by correspondence:
  1. On the recommendation of the Nominations Committee, the following appointments to Council and its sub-committees were confirmed:
    1. Prof Simon Green, to serve on Council, and the Redundancy, Investments, and Nominations committees for an initial four-year term commencing 01 September 2021;
    2. Charu Maini, to serve on ARAC for an initial four-year term commencing 01 September 2021;
    3. Jane Usherwood, to serve on GCC for an initial four year term commencing 01 September 2021;
    4. Claire Vaughan, to serve on GCC and the Remuneration Committees for an initial four-year term commencing 01 September 2021;
    5. Melanie Hamer, to serve on GCC (in place of ARAC) for a new four-year term commencing 01 September 2021;
    6. Sharron Lusher, to serve on ARAC (in place of GCC) for a new four-year term commencing 01 September 2021;
    7. Meri Huws, to serve on the Nominations Committee for an initial four-year term commencing 01 September 2021; and
    8. Rhuanedd Richards, to serve on the Redundancy Committee for an initial four-year term commencing 01 September 2021.

## **7. CORRESPONDENCE**

1. 2022-23 Fee and Access Plan approval.

RECEIVED

Report by the University Secretary, incorporating a copy of a letter received from the Chief Executive of HEFCW (COU2122-007).

NOTED

1. On 10 August 2021, the Chair of Council had received a letter from the Chief Executive of HEFCW, Dr David Blaney, to advise that the Funding Council had approved the University's 2022–23 Fee and Access Plan. A copy of the letter received was attached for information.
2. The 2022–23 Fee and Access Plan had since been published on the University's website.

**8. HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE**

RECEIVED

Report by the Health, Safety and Environmental Manager (COU2122-008).

NOTED

1. The report provided a summary update on health and safety. A fuller report would be presented to GCC on 12 November 2021.
2. Members recognised the considerable efforts made by the Health, Safety and Environment team – including the Health, Safety and Environmental Manager; the Principal in Healthcare Education; and Dr Arwyn Edwards, Reader in Biology – for their hard work in developing the institutional response to the Covid-19 pandemic over recent months.

**9. REPORT BY ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION**

RECEIVED

Report by AberSU President (COU2122-009).

NOTED

1. The report provided an update on developments at AberSU since the last meeting of the University's Council.
2. Preparations were being made to hold graduation ceremonies in 2022 – the first such ceremonies since 2019. While the intention was to hold ceremonies over a full week in July 2022, final arrangements would be influenced by the number of 2020 and 2021 graduates intending to return to Aberystwyth to attend a ceremony.

**10. STRATEGIC MATTERS**

1. Strategy Refresh

RECEIVED

Report by the Vice-Chancellor (COU2122-010).

**NOTED**

1. During its Strategy Day in September 2020, Council had considered proposals for a refresh of the University current Strategic Plan for the period 2018–23. The University Executive had since assessed the progress made against the current strategy, the external environment, and what the institution could look like in 2030. The latest iteration of the report built upon the update provided to Council in March 2021, and the feedback received from recent consultations with the Senate and the staff in general.
2. Elements of the Vice-Chancellor’s report had already been discussed during the preceding Council Strategy Day. While Council was being asked to approve the proposed refresh of the institutional strategy, the University Executive would need to further consider the prioritisation of individual projects and bring back a further recommendation in that respect.
3. Council noted the current financial position of the university and the restrictions this placed on developments.
4. Members welcomed proposals to further invest in research activity, although the importance of doing so in a financially sustainable way was emphasised.
5. The University Executive were also encouraged to consider how to further develop the new veterinary science and nursing training programmes – especially since external stakeholders were receptive to initiatives which were of benefit to the local community, and working in partnership with the NHS in particular.
6. An informal briefing session would be arranged for Council members on student recruitment – including on the steps taken over recent months to increase the number of applications, and the institution’s approach to targeting international markets [**ACTION:** University Secretary].

**RESOLVED**

7. To approve the proposed refresh of the institutional strategy, and request that the University Executive consider the prioritisation of individual projects and bring back a further recommendation in that respect [**ACTION:** Vice-Chancellor].
  8. That development of revised Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) commence once a prioritised list of projects has been agreed by Council [**ACTION:** Vice-Chancellor].
2. Strategic Plan 2018–23 Key Performance Indicators

**RECEIVED**

Report by the Head of Planning (COU2122-011).

**NOTED**

1. The report presented the institution’s performance as at 31 July 2021 against the KPIs which had been agreed by Council to monitor the delivery of the institutional Strategic Plan.

2. Members recognised that the KPIs when agreed by Council in spring 2018 were intended to be aspirational, and to be delivered over the five-year term of the institutional Strategic Plan.
3. The number of students studying at least a part of their course through the medium of Welsh was discussed, including the initiatives put in place by the University. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences) was working on a revised strategy in this respect, which would be presented for consideration in due course [**ACTION:** Pro Vice-Chancellor (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences)].
4. Members were disappointed that the Welsh Government was yet to review the Seren Network initiative – which encourages the best qualified sixth formers to gain access to leading universities – to include more than one Welsh university on the list of institutions being promoted via this initiative. The Vice-Chancellor would continue to press the case.

## **11. FINANCIAL UPDATE**

### 1. Management Accounts

RECEIVED

Report by the Deputy Director of Finance (COU2122-012).

NOTED

The report summarised in narrative form the University's forecast outturn at the end of Quarter 4 (31 July 2021). The draft result for the year was in line with previously reported forecasts.

### 2. Indicative Income 2021–22

RECEIVED

Report by the Deputy Director of Finance (COU2122-013).

NOTED

1. The report set out the University's indicative income for 2021–22, which was forecast to be similar to the budget for the year which was set by Council on 09 July 2021.
2. While student numbers for the year would be formally confirmed on the national census date of 01 November, the University Executive did not expect any significant changes which would have implications for the budget nor cashflow forecasts.

## **12. 150<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

RECEIVED

Report by the Director of Welsh Language and External Engagement (COU2122-014).

NOTED

1. The University would be celebrating its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022 – an important milestone that would provide opportunities to raise the institution’s profile in teaching and research excellence, to support targeted recruitment campaigns, and to boost alumni engagement and fundraising.
2. The report built upon a previous iteration which had been considered at the Council meeting on 09 July 2021. Elements of this latest report had already been considered by members during the Strategy Day.
3. Proposals to diversify the audiences being targeted by the University as part of the 150th anniversary were welcomed by members. However, such audiences would not necessarily be ‘hard to reach’, as long as sufficient effort is made.
4. Several other institutions would be celebrating important anniversaries during 2022. The University was therefore encouraged to be ambitious and to select which would be its high-profile events to gain maximum impact.

### **13. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

RECEIVED

Members received reports on the following for information:

1. Covid-19: Decisions Record (COU2122-015);
2. Higher Education Investment and Recovery Fund (HEIRF Monitoring Report) (COU2122-016);
3. Summary Corporate Risk Register (COU2122-017);
4. Documents affixed with the Common Seal (COU2122-018); and
5. Annual report on the responsibilities of Council members (COU2122-019).

NOTED

6. The contents of the reports presented for information.

### **14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS, MEETING REVIEW, AND FUTURE BUSINESS**

1. UCU Ballot
  1. On 6 September 2021, the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) Trustee had written to Universities UK (UUK) to formally start a short consultation on the proposed Recovery Plan for repairing the deficit assessed at 31 March 2020 and on a revised Schedule of Contributions to confirm contribution rates that will apply from 1 October 2021. The Recovery Plan was based on a proposal presented to the Trustee by UUK.
  2. Council had formally approved the University’s response to this consultation the previous day – this approval by correspondence would be formally reported to the next Council meeting.



3. The University and College Union (UCU) had opposed the Recovery Plan proposed by UUK, and had that morning announced plans to ballot members on potential industrial action. The Council would be kept abreast of developments.

2. Farewell

This had been Geraint Pugh's last meeting of the Council, since he would be leaving his post as University Secretary in early October 2021 in order to take up the post of Board Secretary at S4C. The Chair of Council thanked the University Secretary for his contribution to the University and Council over the past eight years, and wished him every success for the future.