

CANTERBURY CHRIST CHURCH UNIVERSITY
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHAIRS COMMITTEE
HELD ON THURSDAY 4 JUNE 2020 AT 12:30 PM BY TELECONFERENCE

Strictly Confidential

Present: Mr Frank Martin (Chair of the Governing Body)
Ms Judith Armitt (Deputy Chair of the Governing Body and Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee)
Sir Ian Johnston (Deputy Chair of the Governing Body and Chair of the Remuneration Committee)
Mr Philip Fletcher (Chair of the Audit Committee)
Professor Rama Thirunamachandran (Vice-Chancellor and Chair of the Academic Board)

In attendance: Ms Alison Sear (University Solicitor and Clerk to the Governing Body)

1. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies of absence.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Chair's Communications

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

He reported attending a CUC event, which had included a presentation by Helen Thorne, MBE, Director of External Relations at UCAS. The overall tenor of the session had been one of optimism and it was positive that demand for higher education in the UK was expected to continue to remain strong. However, undoubtedly there was great uncertainty among students about where and whether to engage with the sector in the next academic year. He noted the likelihood that a subset of the University's applicant body would not receive the usual support from school about next steps into higher education and such support may not be available at home. This presented the risk that such potential students may decide not to engage with degree level studies in 2020/21. Foundation degrees could become more important. It was widely anticipated that following the pandemic there would be a negative impact on the sector which could last for five years. There had also been a helpful discussion about the new Clearing Plus system.

4. Minutes of the Meeting of the Chairs Committee held on 5 March 2020 and the Additional Meeting of the Chairs Committee held on 11 May 2020

The minutes of the meetings of the Chairs Committee held on 5 March 2020 and 11 May 2020 were confirmed as accurate records and would be signed following the meeting.

5. Matters Arising not Appearing elsewhere on the Agenda

The Vice-Chancellor pointed out that more employees than anticipated at the meeting on 11 May had been furloughed, as noted in the minutes of that meeting.

In relation to the naming of the new STEM Building ('Building 2') Chairs noted that a further update would be provided at a subsequent meeting.

In response to a question from a Governor the Clerk said that following the Chairs' discussions at the last meeting on 5 March 2020, a request for an ex-gratia payment had been submitted to the Charity Commission following the requested further investigations. The outcome would be provided to the Committee at a subsequent meeting.

6. Strategic Discussion Item with a Focus on the Impact of Covid-19 (Item 6)

The Vice-Chancellor said that the majority of his, and the Senior Management Team's focus had been directed to the University's financial position, returning students and staff back to campuses successfully, the recruitment of students and the retention of students.

The Financial Challenge

The Vice-Chancellor reflected on the discussion which had taken place at the Finance and Resources Committee that morning, and a discussion followed about the unprecedented challenges faced by the University as well as the sector as a whole.

Detailed scenario planning had taken place against the backdrop of uncertainty in relation to student numbers, social distancing measures (particularly with reference to much needed guidance around student accommodation) and the likelihood of a second spike of Covid-19. Decisive action would be required to mitigate the forecast deficit for 2020/21 and allow for constructive conversations with the banks to be held. The Senior Management Team had already volunteered to take a 20% pay cut. The Committee recorded its sincere thanks to the members of SMT for their leadership in this regard. The Vice-Chancellor said the SMT were absolutely committed to ensuring both the short term and long term viability of the University. It was possible that an additional single agenda item Governing Body meeting would be required to allow for its consideration and approval of the 2020/21 budget and corresponding cost saving measures.

With reference to the sustainability item presented to the Finance and Resources Committee meeting immediately prior to the meeting, a Committee member warned against cutting the sustainability agenda, which would not sit well with the University's aspirations to become carbon neutral.

Returning to Campuses

The new Project 2020/21 Group, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, had started developing a roadmap for the return to the University's campuses and facilities. This was a substantial logistical challenge. Planning the ways in which the University would physically co-locate people would continue to take account of national Government policy and Public Health England advice. The Deputy-Chancellor was using her network to ensure the University's activities were aligned with those of the higher education sector in general. The University would be prioritising re-shaping its activities in schools due to the importance of its widening participating agenda and given there were so many outreach projects which it was actively engaged in.

Chairs acknowledged that a blended learning model would be necessary. The Vice-Chancellor said that in mixed mode operation, lectures for large numbers of students could be made available online to students to access at home or in smaller teaching rooms. The University could repeat multiple lessons to achieve small group sizes. The Vice-Chancellor said that a flexible approach would be adopted by the University and that careful planning was needed to ensure it was ready for the challenge.

Student Recruitment and Retention

- The Vice-Chancellor noted that the University's admissions teams were communicating with applicants and offer holders and further communications would be needed in due course. Universities UK had published guidance the previous day setting out 'Principles for Emerging from Lockdown' to inform institutions regarding opening in September. A blended offer was inevitable and it was important to be as transparent with students as far as possible in the uncertain circumstances. The Competition and Markets Authority and the Office for Students were expected to publish guidance about what should be offered and communicated to students in the next few days. The University's intention was to commence opening buildings from July.
- In response to a question from a Governor the Vice-Chancellor said that the applications to the University were only 0.9% lower than the applications received by the same time last year.
- The Deputy Vice-Chancellor would present a paper to the Governing Body meeting on 30 June setting out the University's progress with improving its student retention. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor chaired a new dedicated task and finish group in order to make some rapid and deep inroads into this topic which had not been resolved as quickly as originally expected. Chairs noted the essential nature of this area of work in terms of the University's sustainability.
- The Department for Education had announced a temporary annual student number cap for recruitment in 2020/21 which was similar to the number of full-time home and EU students recruited the previous year, and less than the numbers of students recruited by the University for 2018/19. In addition to the student caps, recently announced by the Department for Education to bring about the stabilisation of the sector, 10,000 additional places for health subjects had been announced. The University's ability to submit a bid in respect of these places would depend on its ability to offer placements to the additional students. Negotiations would continue with the relevant stakeholders.

Modernising Our Student Information (MOSI)

The Vice-Chancellor reported that due to the pandemic, challenges in terms of recruitment to specialist roles and staff availability had resulted in a delay to the programme's timetable. Clearing and Confirmation would still take place using the new students record system but new and returning students would be registered onto their programmes and modules in the University's current student record system (QL) and their student record managed in QL, throughout 2020/21.

Further work would be undertaken to perform detailed re-planning of the timeline for the remainder of the MOSI programme. As part of this, the programme team would revisit the programme's scope to deliver additional benefits including functionality and system process improvements.

Estate Master Plan

The STEM Building ('Building 2') was progressing well and on schedule to meet the new practical completion date of early October. Drainage work was underway outside Old Sessions House. The building will not formally come into use until January 2021

Kent and Medical Medway School (KMMS)

The Vice-Chancellor was pleased to report that philanthropic donations and grants of almost £20m had been received to date.

NOTED

Items for Approval

7. Membership of the Governing Body (Item 7)

The Clerk presented Paper M123 which set out the retirement dates of the current members of the Governing Body. The Clerk said that the Students' Union President-Elect was undertaking several induction opportunities prior to her becoming the Student Governor. The President-Elect had attended a finance session led by the Director of Finance, a full new Governor Induction session delivered by the Clerk and had attended the latter part of the Finance and Resources Committee meeting earlier that day.

The Committee noted that discussions were taking place regarding the nominative Governor appointed by the Diocesan Boards of Education of Canterbury and Rochester dioceses acting jointly and an update would be provided in due course.

Several people in the Chairs' own networks were identified for future consideration when the time arose for inviting expressions of interest for new members of the Governing Body. Committee members agreed there was a need to maintain a diverse membership to reflect the student and staff body.

NOTED

8. Office for Students (OfS): Regulatory Requirements During the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Clerk presented Paper M124, setting out the contents of a letter to the Vice-Chancellor dated 25 March 2020 regarding the amended regulatory requirements during the pandemic. Several regulatory requirements applying to the sector had been temporarily suspended, including some of the previously set deadlines relating to some reporting requirements and data returns which would no longer apply. However the data would still be required by the regulator in the usual way. There had been new guidance issued on "Reportable Events" which would apply during the crisis, setting out those reportable events which would continue to be required and those which were temporarily suspended. The two new reporting requirements related to short-term financial viability and significant changes to the delivery of higher education. The two new requirements had been imposed to ensure the regulator had access to meet its objectives of supporting Government, protecting students and seeking to minimise the long term disruption to the sector.

At its meeting on 31 March, the OfS Reportable Events Group had met together with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the Director of Planning and Academic Administration. The Group considered the notification containing the new guidance on reportable events and concluded that the University did not, at that time, have cause to notify the OfS of any reportable event.

It was also noted that in addition to the reduced requirements for data returns, the OfS had confirmed that it will not initiate any new data audit or data reconciliation activity during the crisis. The University's engagement with the OfS in relation to the ongoing OfS data audit was however ongoing and its dialogue with the OfS would continue in the usual way.

NOTED

Items for Noting and Discussion

9. Governor Visits Programme: Feedback and 2020/21 Governor Visits Schedule

Members of the Committee received Paper M125; a summary of the Governor Visits which had been rolled out during 2019/20 as part of the Governor Development Framework. Members noted the positive feedback received from Governors and staff following the visits. It was also noted that some Governors had requested to be more involved in the planning of the visits which had now been implemented by the Clerk's team. Several Governors had requested to have increased interaction with as many students as possible during these unique opportunities to gain an insight into University life. A Committee member acknowledged that there was a need to strike a balance between meaningful opportunities for Governors to ask questions and enter into dialogue during the visits and the desire of the departments hosting the visits to 'showcase' all their activities.

The Clerk set out the tentative Governor Visits schedule for the next academic year whilst acknowledging that continued social distancing measures would make virtual engagements inevitable.

NOTED

10. Governor Informal Reviews 2018/19 and 2019/20

The Clerk presented Paper M126; Governor Informal Reviews 2018/19 and 2019/20. Members noted the outcome of the informal Governor discussions that had taken place in 2018/2019 and noted the progress of the recommendations to date. Members discussed the outcome of the informal discussions which had taken place in the current academic year and a summary of the recommendations which would be shared with the Governing Body on 30 June 2020.

The Committee noted that several Governors had requested to receive a briefing at the next Governor Away Day (whenever that opportunity was next be available) to promote deeper understanding of financial matters affecting the University. The Committee noted that given the pandemic had removed the possibility of the Clerk's team to provide hard copy board papers, all the Governors had been required to work with electronic papers. It was agreed that further discussion would take place regarding the permanent move to away from hard copy papers for sustainability reasons. This could be incorporated into the Governance Effectiveness Review. Committee members shared suggestions on how they would like to see Governing Body papers tailored by their authors to better suit electronic paper delivery. It was agreed that the Vice-Chancellor's Office, Director of IT and the Clerk's office would investigate the best way to make this happen including the possibility of using third party software. A further update would be provided in due course.

NOTED

RESOLVED that further analysis in relation to electronic papers would be provided to the Committee in due course.

11. Governing Body Away Day

Members discussed how the Away Day during 2020/21 might take place and decided to revisit the issue at a later meeting when there was more certainty about social distancing measures.

NOTED

12. Any Other Business

IT Security

The Clerk reported that following a discussion at the Audit Committee the Director of IT had proposed several options for increasing the IT security measures around the distribution of board packs to Governors. It was agreed that from September the Clerk's office would post the paper packs on the e-Governance site hosted on the University's Virtual Learning Environment; 'Blackboard' (already accessible by all Governors) and Governors would be able to access papers securely.

Governance Effectiveness Review

The Clerk suggested that a paper outlining the scope of the Governor Effectiveness Review, due to be presented to the September Governing Body meeting be presented to the Governing Body in June to allow KPMG to carry out part of the work over the summer months. KPMG had been able to offer this review at relatively short notice

as they had been unable to undertake all the previously planned internal audits during 2019/20 due to the pandemic. The Committee agreed to this proposal.

RESOLVED that the Governor Effectiveness Review Scoping Paper be presented to the Governing Body meeting on 30 June 2020 for approval.

13. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Chairs Committee was scheduled to take place on 5 November 2020 at 12.30pm.

The Chair declared the meeting closed at 2.33pm.