

Minutes of the meeting of Cardiff University Council held on 6 February 2024 at 10.30 in the Plaza Suite of the Park Plaza Hotel, Cardiff.

Present: Patrick Younge (Chair), Professor Wendy Lerner, Beth Button, Angie Flores Acuña, Judith Fabian, Professor Dame Janet Finch, Christopher Jones, Jan Juillerat, Professor Urfan Khaliq, Jeremy Lewis, Stephen Mann, Deio Owen, Dr Juan Pereiro Viterbo, Sian Rees, John Shakeshaft, Dr Robert Weaver, Dr Catrin Wood, Jennifer Wood and Agnes Xavier-Phillips.

Attendees: Professor Rudolf Allemann, Laura Davies [Minute 2203], Katy Dale [Minute taker], Tom Hay, Rashi Jain, Julie-Anne Johnston, Sian Marshall, Sue Midha, Catrin Morgan [Minute 2202-2203], Claire Morgan, Claire Sanders, James Vilares [Minute 2197] and Professor Roger Whitaker.

2190 Welcome and preliminaries

All were welcomed to the meeting, especially the new Council lay members (Stephen Mann, Beth Button and Sian Rees).

2191 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Suzanne Rankin, David Selway and Professor Damian Walford Davies.

2192 Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded the Committee members of their duty to disclose any potential conflicts of interest. No declarations of interest were noted.

2193 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 22 November 2023 (23/378C) were confirmed as a true and accurate record and were approved to be signed by the Chair.

2194 Matters arising

Received and noted paper 23/380C, 'Matters Arising'. The Chair spoke to this item.

Noted

2194.1 that an update on the Dental School estate [Minute 2177.9] would be provided under the Vice-Chancellor's Report.

2195 Items from the Chair

Received paper 23/379C, 'Chair's Action Since Last Meeting'. The Chair spoke to this item.

Noted

2195.1 that the Chair had approved appointments to Council and Audit and Risk Committee;

- 2195.2 the Chair had approved appointments to the roles of Pro Vice-Chancellor College of Biomedical and Life Sciences and Pro Vice-Chancellor College of Physical Sciences and Engineering; the Pro Vice-Chancellor College of Physical Sciences and Engineering start date was confirmed as 9 May 2024, with Professor Rudolf Allemann moving to PVC International from this date;
- 2195.3 that the current Vice-Chair's term would end in July 2024 and communications would be sent to lay members later in the week to invite expressions of interest; the deadline for responses would be 22 February and the Vice-Chair was happy to discuss the role with interested parties; it was noted that currently the Vice-Chair and Senior Independent Governor role were held by one individual;
- 2195.4 that Council members had been contacted to express interest in a webinar event on student recruitment.

2196 Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council

Received and considered paper 23/386C, 'Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council'. The Vice-Chancellor spoke to this item.

Noted

- 2196.1 that the challenges in the sector had been recently highlighted in the media and were not to be underestimated; ensuring financial sustainability was thus key;
- 2196.2 there remained a challenging recruitment environment; [part redacted]; being within the QS top 100 was crucial in attracting international students; the recruitment team were undertaking a large amount of work in this area and UEB were reviewing options;
- 2196.3 that the next REF had been delayed to 2029 due to work required around the people, culture and environment elements of the return;
- 2196.4 the Vice-Chancellor had visited China in early 2024, along with the Pro Vice-Chancellor International and Student Recruitment and Head of College Physical Sciences and Engineering, and members of Development and Alumni Relations; there were significant changes in the country, with a desire to deliver their own English Language Programmes and produce global leaders; the University worked well with its international strategic partners but there was a need to further develop transnational education provision, which would be taken forward by the Pro Vice-Chancellor International; the political concerns around China were noted, along with the future of a heterogeneous student body;
- 2196.5 [redacted];
- 2196.6 [redacted];
- 2196.7 that the Chief Transformation Officer role had been advertised and the Vice-Chancellor had also established a Leadership Forum;
- 2196.8 a need to ensure project benefits (not just financial) were implemented and reported on;
- 2196.9 that there was a need to promote successes but also learn from failures;
- 2196.10 that transformation work should be prioritised in areas with the biggest impact (e.g. student experience);

- 2196.11 that the Welsh Government had suggested an increase in fees at £250 per student; this resulted in additional income of c.£5-£6m across a cohort, but resulted in a net loss of £1m when other funding reductions were included;
- 2196.12 that there had been fallout in the sector following the Sunday Times article on foundation courses and entry to study; the Vice-Chancellor had met with Study Group following the publication and the University had robust practices and processes in place in this area, including around the use of agents; the University was also a signatory on a national code for ethical practice in student recruitment.

2197 Future Research Service - Business Case for Change

Received and considered paper 23/354HCR, 'Future Research Service - Business Case for Change'. The Pro Vice-Chancellor Research, Innovation and Enterprise and the Business Manager for the Pro Vice-Chancellor spoke to this item.

Noted

- 2197.1 [redacted];
- 2197.2 [redacted];
- 2197.3 [redacted];
- 2197.4 [redacted];
- .1 [redacted];
- .2 [redacted];
- .3 [redacted];
- 2197.5 [redacted];
- 2197.6 [redacted];
- 2197.7 [redacted];
- 2197.8 [redacted];
- 2197.9 [redacted].

Resolved

- 2197.10 to approve the Future Research Service Business Case, namely the recommended option (4), including provision of £3.065M investment and a programme contingency budget of £793K at the recommended level.

James Vilares (Business Manager for the Pro Vice-Chancellor Research, Innovation and Enterprise) left the meeting.

2198 Investment Plan updates – Capital Investment Plan 2018-23, Short-Term Investment Plan 2021-23 and future projects

Received and considered paper 23/339C, 'Investment Plan updates – Capital Investment Plan 2018-23, Short-Term Investment Plan 2021-23 and Future Projects'. The Vice-Chancellor spoke to this item.

Noted

- 2198.1 there were a number of notable completions of major projects; the paper also provided detail of projects that had been paused or stopped, as agreed by UEB;
- 2198.2 that a number of historic estates issues would worsen if delayed and there was a need to balance reduced spend against required sustainable investment in the estate; work had been undertaken to be more pro-active in running and managing the estate;
- 2198.3 that it would be of benefit to understand the impact on availability of future funds when projects were approved; this was likely to come through the IPP;
- 2198.4 that re-baselining and project benefits realisation work had been undertaken for bond funded projects and this would be reported to Investment and Banking Sub-Committee; the ownership of this for University funded projects was unclear; it was also noted that a document clearly identifying cost, benefits and risks for all projects would be beneficial.

2199 Report from the Students' Union President

Received and considered paper 23/384 'Students' Union President's Report'. The Students' Union President spoke to this item.

Noted

- 2199.1 that there continued to be an increase in student engagement and the Students' Union was keen to ensure a community feeling;
- 2199.2 that at the recent AGM, students had voted to substitute the Vice-President Undergraduate (Education and Welfare) with a Vice-President International Students (Education and Welfare);
- 2199.3 that the majority of student advice enquiries related to academic matters;
- 2199.4 that the activities department had beaten the record for the number of students registered (nearly 7k within the Guild of Societies and over 5k within the Athletic Union);
- 2199.5 that a number of campaigns had been run and over £83k raised for Movember; the PGR Know Your Rights Campaign had centred on presenting information clearly and simply and inciting students to read their contract;
- 2199.6 that a large amount of work had been undertaken to support students at the Heath Park site; the University has also won this year's Medics Varsity; Welsh Varsity would be held in April;
- 2199.7 that the first Cymraeg Student Fforwm meeting had been held and the Union was working towards Cynnig Cymraeg (the strategy to promote Welsh Language service and offerings for those outside the scope of the Welsh Language Standards);
- 2199.8 that nominations for the next sabbatical team closed today and voting would take place in early March;
- 2199.9 that concerns and questions from students around housing issues remained high.

2200 Student Experience update

Received an oral update form the Pro Vice-Chancellor Education and Student Experience.

Noted

NSS

2200.1 that all plans had been submitted to HEFCW on time and these had been confirmed as adequate; how accountability was distributed within the plans was being reviewed;

2200.2 that there had been big changes in some larger schools (e.g. Healthcare, Computer Science and Engineering) and the University was working to support these schools;

2200.3 the Pro Vice-Chancellor had alerted HEFCW to concerns on the 2024 NSS results as it was predicted the legacy of the Marking and Assessment Boycott would move some schools into areas of risk (e.g. English, Communication and Philosophy, History, Archaeology and Religion and Psychology);

Enhancements

2200.4 that the portfolio was due to end in July 2024 and included 11 projects;

2200.5 there were a number of good examples of work within the portfolio including:

- .1 the launch of a new Blackboard Ultra platform within the Inclusive Innovative Environment stream;
- .2 an increase of 75 teaching fellowships this month; the October 2023 HESA data reflected 58% of HESA staff now held a qualification to teach;
- .3 a large amount of work to review key policies and to work on personalised support for students;

2200.6 that student experience was more than the classroom and work was now underway to review these wider elements of students' experience;

Degree Outcomes

2200.7 that these had been impacted by the safety net implemented across the sector during the pandemic; these had dropped to pre-pandemic levels more quickly than had been anticipated and were being reviewed;

2200.8 progression data also reflected a drop between years 1 and 2; the University was reviewing how students were transitioning, how schools were currently supporting them and possible further ways to assist them; support would need to be designed to fit the needs of students and be based on the data;

2200.9 that a fuller report would be brought to Council in the Spring;

2200.10 that thought was being given to the Cardiff offer;

2200.11 that the University had not partaken in the last iteration of TEF, in line with other Welsh and Scottish institutions.

2201 Finance Report

Received and considered paper 23/342C, 'Finance Report – November 2023'.
The Vice-Chancellor spoke to this item.

Noted

2201.1 [redacted];

2201.2 a number of short-term measures had been introduced (e.g. limiting capital spend); these would not fully address the deficit and there was a need to change the way the University was currently operated and configured;

2201.3 that unallocated management challenges were noted in the report; these had been allocated for Q1 and it was suggested this wording was therefore removed.

2202 Freedom of Speech

Received and considered an oral report from the University Secretary and Head of Compliance and Risk.

Noted

2202.1 the Head of Compliance and Risk joined the meeting;

2202.2 that freedom of speech was integral for higher education institutions, as an area where ideas were debated and discussed; academic freedom of speech related to a freedom of right from detriment and the law had recently qualified this related to an academic's area of expertise;

2202.3 that a number of other legal frameworks were also key here (e.g. Human Rights Act, Prevent Act);

2202.4 that the Higher Education Freedom of Speech Bill had been brought in during 2023; this applied to both England and Wales, although the wording meant this was more applicable to England; key points of the Bill included an inability to silence others, introduction of a complaints system, the Office for Students as the protector of free speech in England, and a right to bring legal action for detriment if prevented from freedom of speech; current plans did not indicate this would be extended in Wales at this time;

2202.5 that the University had a compliance framework and process for events impacted by freedom of speech; an incident group may be convened for a specific event and this group would review any lessons learned;

2202.6 that future actions included identifying buildings as suitable or not suitable for events, clarity of staffing and costs and further work on Martyn's law.

2203 Duty of Care to Staff and Students

Received and considered an oral report from the Director of Communications, Marketing and Student Recruitment.

Noted

2203.1 the Director of Communications, Marketing and Student Recruitment joined the meeting;

- 2203.2 that the University had been called upon to back differing viewpoints from a number of community groups around the Israel and Palestine conflict;
- 2203.3 there had been a high level of scrutiny on this on how this was being handled, including from the Minister for Education and Welsh Language;
- 2203.4 that the University had produced communications, voiced by the Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, focussed on its commitment to all staff and students and offering sympathy to anyone affected; these messages emphasised the University did not tolerate hate speech or incitement of any kind;
- 2203.5 that there had been comment following an on-campus event with Natasha Asghar MS; an internal investigation had been undertaken and no areas identified where the University had broken the law;
- 2203.6 a number of protests external to the University had been arranged commencing at the Centre for Student Life; University Security and the police had been involved and the University had been critiqued for being “heavy-handed” in this regard;
- 2203.7 that a motion for a ceasefire had been submitted to the Students’ Union AGM; the language of the motion had been amended by the proposer to remove direct mention of Israel (as requested by representatives of the Jewish Society) and instead referenced ‘Zionism’;
- 2203.8 the University had met with both the Islamic and Jewish societies and with UCU, which had been helpful;
- 2203.9 that social media had posed a real problem in this situation;
- 2203.10 that the University had faced criticism that its response to Gaza was not as strong as its response to Ukraine;
- 2203.11 the University continued to work with other universities on this situation; Universities UK held an open forum every Friday morning to allow UK Vice-Chancellors to meet and discuss this issue across the sector; possible support for Palestinian universities was being investigated and would be sensitive and require careful handling;
- 2203.12 thanks were extended to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Chief Operating Officer and Director of Communications, Marketing and Student Recruitment for their work and leadership in this area.

Catrin Morgan (Head of Compliance and Risk) left the meeting.

2204 Report to Council from Redundancy Committee

Received and considered paper 23/381C, ‘The Proposed Cessation or Reduction of School Activities Report to Council on Redundancy Committee under delegations of July 2023’. The Director of Human Resources spoke to this item.

Resolved

- 2204.1 to approve the case for a proposed cessation of activity within the [part redacted].

2205 Any Other Business

Noted

2205.1 thanks were extended to Rashi Jain and Sue Midha who are attending their last meeting of Council.

2206 Items received for information

The following papers were received for information:

23/385 Researcher Development Concordat: Annual Report 2023

23/387C Report from Chair of Finance and Resources Committee

23/235CR Report from Academic Promotions Committee

23/382CC Report from Chair of Remuneration Committee

23/343C HR Dashboard

23/383 Sealing Transactions