

Minutes of the Special Meeting of Cardiff University Council held on 17 June 2025 at 15.30 via Teams

Present: Patrick Younge (Chair), Vice-Chancellor, Beth Button, Judith Fabian, Madison Hutchinson, Christopher Jones, Professor Urfan Khaliq, Jeremy Lewis, Stephen Mann, Micaela Panes, Dr Juan Pereiro Viterbo, Dr Siân Rees, David Selway, John Shakeshaft, Professor Katherine Shelton, Professor Damian Walford Davies, Dr Robert Weaver, Dr Catrin Wood, Jennifer Wood, and Agnes Xavier-Phillips.

Attendees: Katy Dale [Minute taker], Laura Davies, Sally-Ann Efstathiou, Tom Hay, Victoria Holbrook, Dr David Langley, Professor Stephen Riley, Dr Paula Sanderson, Professor Gavin Shaddick, Professor Roger Whitaker, and Darren Xiberras.

2353 Welcome and Preliminaries

All were welcomed to the meeting.

2354 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Louise Casella, Tukiya Mutupa, and Suzanne Rankin.

2355 Declarations of Interest

The Chair noted that a number of Council members were impacted by the proposals within the Academic Futures Business Case and the potential conflict in this area was noted. Members were reminded of their responsibility to act in the best interests of the University as Trustees.

2356 Deputation from Campus Trade Unions

NOTED

2356.1 that a deputation was received from the three Campus Trade Unions in accordance with the provisions of Ordinance 3 (Standing Orders), 13 (Deputations);

2356.2 that three representatives were in attendance: Aline Bompas (UCU), Renata Medeiros Mirra (UCU), and Danijela Spiric Beard (Unison);

2356.3 the Deputation spoke for 12 minutes and detailed the concerns of the Trade Unions in relation to the Academic Futures proposals and a paper had been shared with Council in advance; the key concerns were:

- .1 that the move to new Staff Student Ratios (SSRs) would put the University outside of sector norms;
- .2 that there had been limited data provided or financial planning to underpin the proposals and how these would achieve financial sustainability;
- .3 that there were no plans or mitigation measures developed to manage the impact the proposals would have on staff wellbeing and staff workloads, and the impact these may have on delivery of other key priorities (e.g. TNE, REF);

CONFIDENTIAL

- .4 that a number of staff remained in scope and there were concerns over possible processes that may be considered to be constructive dismissal;
- .5 that the consultation process remained incomplete; it was felt that the 12 hours for formal union consultation provided since January was not enough; it was claimed that a number of questions submitted by staff had not been answered or had received evasive responses, that stakeholders had not been responded to, and that feedback on alternative proposals remained incomplete;
- .6 that the proposals were being implemented quickly for financial balancing and threatened the long-term sustainability of the University; it was suggested changes be implemented over a longer and more realistic timescale, included more sustainable changes (e.g. accelerated review of the estate provision), and centred on protecting staff wellbeing, academic sustainability and research activity;

2356.4 that the Deputation were then questioned by independent members of Council;

2356.5 that the paper submitted by the Unions requested that Council not approve the proposals and “advised a pause to implementation, to allow for a full consultation and risk assessment”, “revision of EBIDA targets” to bring them more in line with the sector, and that Council “recommend that UEB rebuild trust in its governance through transparent and meaningful engagement with its academic staff in the Academic Futures reform process”;

2356.6 that it was noted the views presented were of those who had engaged with the Unions;

2356.7 that the Unions suggested further external advice be sought on the University’s financial sustainability and estates backlog; it was highlighted that investment in the estate and residences had not been possible due to other cost commitments (e.g. staff pay); the Unions agreed there were financial difficulties that needed to be addressed but did not feel the current proposals achieved this; Council agreed to share the advice of the independent credit reference agency, Moody’s, who had noted the University’s relative weak operating performance and recognised the importance of the transformation programme in process;

2356.8 the Deputation was asked how long the execution time frame of their proposals would be and confirmed this was six years;

2356.9 that after fifteen minutes of questions, the Chair of Council thanked the Deputation for their presentation.

2357 Academic Futures

Received and considered papers 24/598CR, ‘Academic Futures Business Case’, 24/617C ‘Report from Finance & Resources Committee (Special Meeting)’, and 24/618C ‘Report from Senate to Council Special Meeting’. The Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor spoke to this item.

NOTED

2357.1 that an introduction was provided by the Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor which noted:

- .1 that the aim of the project was to reshape the University’s academic footprint to ensure its future sustainability and contribute to the wider

CONFIDENTIAL

process of change by ensuring the best conditions to achieve the University strategy within the academic space;

- .2 that the business case alone would not close the financial gap but would significantly contribute to it; other areas of income growth and financial review would now be progressed (e.g. TNE, Flexible Lifelong Learning, estates rationalisation and commercialisation, digital transformation);
- .3 that the project had been academically led and had centred on two core principles: to slightly reduce student numbers and to move to a different SSR environment for the whole University;
- .4 that implementation of the proposals would take place over a five-year window and would be appropriately resourced and managed via the Transformation Programme;

2357.2 that Finance & Resources Committee had recommended Council approve the proposals and noted:

- .1 that there was a need to ensure a culture of continuous improvement and evolution across the whole University, given the external environment;
- .2 the need to robustly engage further levers and opportunities for financial savings and increased income;
- .3 the need to include the proposals and other financial drivers in a holistic budget going forward
- .4 that work on Professional Services reorganisation should continue to be pursued;

2357.3 that Senate had not recommended Council approve the proposals, citing the following:

- .1 arguments for the proposed mergers of Schools did not accurately reflect the benefits of such mergers;
- .2 the impact on staff that remained in scope;
- .3 the proposed cessation of degree provision in subjects within the new School of Global Humanities;
- .4 that feedback provided on alternative proposals had not always clearly identified why these were not viable to be progressed;
- .5 concerns over changes to the SSR environment, including impact on staff wellbeing and student experience;
- .6 a need to ensure no detrimental impact on students wishing to study and be assessed in Welsh;

2357.4 that Council noted the strong and rigorous process that had been followed to develop the proposals; Councillors had been provided with detail of the alternative proposals and these had been read by some Council members, who noted their quality but also, at times, contradictions;

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2357.5 that the Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee reemphasised the feedback from that Committee and the rigorous review of the proposals the Committee had undertaken;
- 2357.6 that the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee had met with the External Auditors who had unprompted noted the increased 'going concern' risk around the University, highlighting the need for the University to achieve financial sustainability;
- 2357.7 that a discussion was held on SSRs; that the Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor confirmed appropriate SSR levels had been carefully calibrated in relation to appropriate disciplinary differences in delivery; research indicated that SSRs alone did not dictate student experience and that there was evidence within the University of areas with higher SSRs performing better than those with lower SSRs; the University would not be outside of sector norms in relation to SSRs under the proposals;
- 2357.8 that there was a valid concern raised on staff welfare and wellbeing; Council were briefed about the steps taken to support employee wellbeing, the nature of the complaint to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE), and agreed that the Trade Unions were within their rights to take their concerns to the HSE; that implementation of a Management of Organisational Change (MOOC) had been suggested to ensure a robust process; a recent external audit of the three management systems had recommended the University maintained all three of its health and wellbeing certifications;
- 2357.9 it was acknowledged that a number of staff (418) remained in scope and the impact this was having on them and those around them; the University had maintained three key principles:
- for compulsory redundancies to be a last resort;
 - to move individuals out of scope as soon as possible;
 - and to move individuals out of scope once reductions have been made or a plan agreed to make reductions;
- Council and the Vice-Chancellor expressed a **very** strong desire to avoid moving staff out of scope when there was a risk they may need to be returned to scope in the future; it was agreed the Director of People and Culture would work with the Trade Unions in this area;
- 2357.10 that a concern around workload for staff had been raised and was noted by Council; it was noted that this was also contributing to resistance to change as staff had not seen efficiencies that enabled them to balance workload and achieve financial benefits; Council was informed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor College of Biomedical and Life Sciences of the teaching methods to support deliver within a new SSR environment being piloted by the acting Pro Vice-Chancellor Education & Student Experience; Council was assured the University was progressing alternative pedagogical delivery methods to maintain student experience and reduce academic workload;
- 2357.11 that the Unions had indicated a substantial resistance to change and this was concerning; it was expected that there would be resistance, given the scale of change, and accepted that morale was currently low; the University was required by its Statutes to undertake a 90 day consultation period (as opposed to the usual 45) and this had led to an increased time of uncertainty;
- 2357.12 that there was a move to an "us versus them" mindset in recent days; it was highlighted that staff continued to work in the best interests of the University and there were a plethora of views on the proposals across the University which

CONFIDENTIAL

were not solely represented in the Deputation; there was a silent majority of staff that also needed to be engaged with;

- 2357.13 that there remained a risk that legal action may be taken as it was felt by some that the consultation process remained incomplete; legal and ACAS guidance had been sought and had provided assurance the University had acted appropriately; the University had implemented and would continue to implement processes to support staff wellbeing and was conscious these mitigations would not balance out the difficult decisions that had to be taken;
- 2357.14 that substantial amounts of information had been provided to the University community to provide evidence for change and the proposals; these had often been met with litigation, rather than engagement;
- 2357.15 that Council requested assurance that appropriate feedback had been provided on alternative proposals not taken forward; it had been confirmed in advance that feedback would be oral and feedback was continuing to be given; it was key to ensure ongoing communication, both on these proposals and with the wider University community on next steps;
- 2357.16 that there remained a risk around reputational damage for the University, especially from how the process had been presented within the media and the spotlight placed on it; it was highlighted that the Vice-Chancellor had been the subject of significant negative personal briefing and media coverage, which Council believed was inappropriate;
- 2357.17 Notwithstanding the legal employment issues around communicating potential staff redundancies, the Students' Union representatives expressed disappointment that the plan to engage and consult students was not simultaneous; the Students' Union highlighted concerns on the impact the proposals would have on student experience (especially in areas of increasing SSRs), the speed of change, and the future impact on NSS results; it was key for the implementation phase to honour the expectations of students, for both those courses closing and continuing, and to promote the great work of the University;
- 2357.18 that the ability for students to study and be assessed in Welsh remained a priority for the University in line with the University Success Measure, and that the Academic Futures plans had been framed with that in mind, with a particular example cited in relation to opportunities to mainstream Welsh in the School of Global Humanities;
- 2357.19 that detailed planning on proposed School mergers would be undertaken during the coming months, to enable implementation from 2026/27;
- 2357.20 that preparation for REF continued and would focus on units of assessment (as opposed to individual schools) and would ensure preservation and enhancement of our performance in terms of people, culture and environment;
- 2357.21 that the Vice-Chancellor commended the Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the Academic Futures Task & Finish Group for their work in this area; the Vice-Chancellor summarised the key points from the feedback received:
- .1 that workload and wellbeing of staff remained a key consideration and needed to be pro-actively engaged with;
 - .2 that it was essential changes to SSRs did not compromise the staff or student experience;

CONFIDENTIAL

- .3 that implementation plans needed to be carefully planned and phased and to take account of other transformation and University activity (e.g. REF, Schools/Colleges workstream);
- .4 that there was a need to rebuild cynefin with staff, students and stakeholders;

2357.22 that Council would need to be provided with ongoing assurances that risks and impacts of the proposals were being monitored;

2357.23 that it was not felt the Deputation or the feedback from Senate provided appropriate alternative proposals to those in the business case.

RESOLVED

2357.24 to approve the Academic Futures proposals;

2357.25 to advise the University Executive Board that implementation of the proposals should consider:

- .1 the impacts on staff workload of delivering the proposals alongside other key activities;
- .2 the need to proactively review communications with staff and students and to positively engage and assure the University community and wider stakeholders;
- .3 that a holistic four-year budget should be presented to Council for approval, to capture these proposals;
- .4 progressing of other key projects for financial sustainability, including digitisation and streamlining the estate and income generation;
- .5 determining which projects are urgent and critical, and taking the opportunity to review the timing and sequencing of activities to relieve pressure in the organisation.

Dr Juan Pereiro Viterbo left the meeting during this item; their support for the views of Senate were recorded.

2358 Any Other Business

NOTED

2358.1 that thanks were extended to the Vice-Chancellor, the Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, the Director of People and Culture, the Director of Communications, Marketing and Student Recruitment, and the wider executive team for the difficult work that had been required to develop the business case;

2358.2 that thanks were extended to Council members for their contribution and efforts, especially staff and student members who had been privy to confidential information;

2358.3 that thanks were extended to the Corporate Governance Team for ensuring the appropriate governance for this item.

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2025 were confirmed as a true and accurate record and were approved by Council on 09 July 2025.