

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held at 13:00 on 06 OCTOBER 2023, Research Dialogue Hub.

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 Kylie Evans; Professor Simon Green (via Teams from item 3 onwards); Miss Elain Gwynedd, UMCA President; Dr Louise Marshall; Ms Rhuanedd Richards; Mr Bayanda Vundamina, AberSU President; Mr Arwel Thomas; Mr Mark Tweed; Professor Reyer Zwiggelaar; Mrs Ellen ap Gwynn; and Ms Jane Usherwood (via Teams).

In attendance: Mrs Rhian Linehan, Finance Business Partner (for minute 10); Dr Rhodri Llwyd Morgan, Director of Welsh Language and External Engagement, (for minute 13); Mr Mathew Norman, (Independent member of Governance and Compliance); Mr Nick Rogers, Director of Human Resources and Operational Development; Mrs Jean Jones, Head of the Vice Chancellor's Office; Mr Steve Thomas, Head of Communications and Public Affairs; and Dr Gwawr Taylor, University Secretary

Apologies for absence had been received from Ms Claire Vaughan. Council wished Claire Vaughan well.

Jane Usherwood and Ellen ap Gwynn were welcomed to their first meeting.

1. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Dr Emyr Roberts noted a conflict in relation to item 13: Old College, due to his recent appointment to the National Lottery Heritage Fund Wales Committee.

2. MATTERS RAISED BY THE CHAIR

1. Vice-Chancellor appointment

Professor Elizabeth Treasure recused themselves for this item.

Report by University Secretary (COU2324-018)

The Chair provided a verbal report on the process. Professor Jon Timmis was presented to Council as the preferred candidate for the role of Vice-Chancellor, an unanimous opinion across each focus group and the interview panel.

The Chair thanked committee members, the University Secretary, and the Head of HR for their support with the process, which had been thorough and robust.

RESOLVED

Professor Jon Timmis to be appointed as Vice Chancellor from 1 January 2024.

2. Members were reminded of the upcoming Founders events and noted that everyone was welcomed to attend.

Professor Simon Green joined the meeting.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RECEIVED

Minutes of the meeting held on 07 July 2023 (COU2324-003).

RESOLVED

That the minutes be confirmed as a correct record.

4. 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 (COU2324-004).

NOTED

1. The updates provided in the decisions log.
2. Further to the discussion in the strategy day, a paper will be presented to Council outlining the proposed actions and next steps [**ACTION**: University Executive].

5. DECISIONS TAKEN BETWEEN MEETINGS

RECEIVED

Report by the University Secretary (COU2324-005).

NOTED

1. The report detailed the instances since the last Council meeting where matters had been approved by members via correspondence, or by the Chair on behalf of Council.
2. The matters approved via correspondence were:
 - 2.1. CIELivestock Limited: A proposal to create a new Agri-Tech Catapult group combining Agri-EPI Centre Limited, Crop Health and Protection Limited and CIELivestock Limited (Chair's Action, on behalf of Council)
 - 2.2. To increase the number of closure days
It was noted that Governance and Compliance Committee should discuss and consider that the university has fewer annual leave and closure days than other Welsh Universities.
 - 2.3. Nominations for Pro-Vice Chancellor Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences; and two interim Council members.

6. CORRESPONDENCE

1. Institutional Risk Review Letter

RECEIVED

Letter from Professor Elizabeth Treasure, Vice-Chancellor (COU2324-006).

NOTED

1. The final letter and a full response was presented to Council.
2. Further work will be undertaken on academic oversight and assurance, and the governance structure to support this work.

RESOLVED

3. A proposal will be shared with Council, to be implemented in 2024. [**ACTION:** Vice Chancellor and Academic Registrar].
4. A review of the Terms of Reference of the committee should be considered alongside any changes to the governance structure. [**ACTION:** University Secretary].

7. HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE

RECEIVED

Report by the Health, Safety and Environmental Manager (COU2324-006).

NOTED

1. The report provided a summary update on health and safety, drawing on the relevant reports. A substantial programme of training sessions are underway, and will be reviewed accordingly.

8. REPORT BY ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION

RECEIVED

A verbal report was presented by the AberSU President.

NOTED

1. Welcome week activities were extremely successful, with increased engagement across the board.
2. The non-alcoholic events proved very successful and will be replicated in the future.
3. UMCA's priority for the year will be the 50th celebrations of UMCA; developing and protecting Welsh-medium modules; and working with the Marketing and Recruitment team to recruit Welsh-speaking students.
4. Alumni will be welcomed back for the UMCA celebrations, particularly previous UMCAN presidents. A crowdfunding page has been set up and fundraising is ongoing. Members

suggested using the event as an opportunity to promote the broader Welsh provision, and what students gain from UMCA and studying in Welsh at Aberystwyth University. [ACTION: UMCA President].

9. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

RECEIVED

Report from Helen Thomas, Senior Data Analyst. (COU2324-007).

1. It was noted that the Public Interest Disclosure was taking up management time to resolve.
2. The Vice Chancellor outlined staffing changes at Executive level, which will be managed and discussed with the incoming Vice Chancellor.
3. Good progress has been made to meet the KPIs, with excellent progress in relation to the annual external research income target.
4. Further work will be undertaken with UMCA president in relation to the number of students studying in Welsh and promoting the scholarships that are available.
5. The University is in a good position, and Council may wish to confirm a different set of KPIs with the new Vice Chancellor.
6. The percentage of people who have completed ECS or are in progress is low, but staff surveys indicate that staff are receiving appraisal meetings and managers are holding meaningful conversations with their staff. The system is proving challenging, and the figures don't reflect the true position.
7. Retention is holding up well. The current indications are that the retention levels are at 4%, which compares very well to other universities.

RESOLVED

8. The KPIs were noted. The metrics should be reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose. [ACTION: Vice Chancellor and Planning].

10. FINANCIAL MATTERS

1. Management Accounts update

RECEIVED

Report by Rhian Linehan and Stephen Harrison, Finance Business Partners (COU2324-008).

NOTED

1. Staff were thanked for their work over previous weeks.
2. The University has operated in a challenging financial landscape during 2022-23. The £2.2 million deficit underlying operating position is not in line with budgetary expectations, but it is a reflection of lower student numbers coupled with in year pay award, inflationary pressures and interest rate rises.

3. An adverse movement of £1.2m in utilities reflects further market adjustments and the later than expected installation of the solar array. The solar array is forecast to generate enough electricity to reduce bills by some £0.5m per annum going forward, which will partly mitigate the significantly inflated unit costs in 2023-24 and beyond. Members noted that previous reports indicated that costs were being managed as a result of the solar farm and power purchased ahead.
4. £0.8m of additional in year costs associated with marketing targeted at International Students were incurred in 2022-23. The team will be given a fixed budget to control and manage as appropriate in future.
5. Members questioned why matters were not identified in the monthly accounts. Officers noted that the reports outline the position against the projected budget, not the actual spend. The way reports are presented should be reviewed. [ACTION: Director of Finance]
6. An outline of the position of the Arts Centre was presented to Council. Members discussed the impact of inflation and the footfall, which has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels. Trading has increased by 60% compared to the same time last year, but the base costs are increasing.
7. The review and subsequent grant from the Arts Council of Wales was welcomed. The county council has reduced its grant, which is understandable but challenging.
8. Members discussed the net liquidity days and the target of 36-40 days. This has now decreased. Growing commercial income, research and recruitment will be a priority. The USS alterations and its implications will need to be considered carefully.
9. Officers are holding ongoing conversations with auditors regarding going concern. An updated position will be presented once the indicative income and agreed management actions have been presented and considered. There are challenges in the short term, but opportunities in the medium term.

RESOLVED

10. Members noted the report.

2. Indicative Income

RECEIVED

Report by Rhian Linehan and Stephen Harrison, Finance Business Partners (COU2324-009).

NOTED

1. Aberystwyth University's student body continues to grow; however, the latest student numbers are weaker than budgeted and, alongside adverse movements on the University's Farms, indicate a shortfall against budget of some £2.75m (assuming Postgraduate recruitment remains on target).
2. Officers have taken a prudent assessment of recruitment. The January intake will feed into end-of-year position, but nothing has been included in the budget.

3. No material changes are anticipated in research income.
4. Milk prices have dropped over the past six months and, together with inflation costs and staffing challenges, has had a £700,000 impact on the farms' budget.
5. Securing student debt would not impact on income and expenditure, but it would help cashflow. Action is being taken to address the issue, specifically in relation to the way the university collects fees and the amount of deposit.

RESOLVED

6. The paper was noted.
7. The Director of the Arts Centre should be invited to a future briefing session to present to Council. [**ACTION:** University Secretary].

3. Recruitment and Enrolment update

RECEIVED

Report by Helen Thomas, Senior Data Analyst and Robin Halley, Director of Global Marketing and Student Recruitment (COU2324-010).

NOTED

1. Student intake has increased over the past 3 years. The targets have not been met this academic year, but the student body is increasing.
2. There has been an increase in CAS completions, and small changes to PG firms and students registering on the PGCE and Nursing schemes.

RESOLVED

3. Members noted the report.

11. REFIT PHASE 3

RECEIVED

Report by Dewi Day, Sustainability Advisor and Andrea James, Director of Estates, Facilities and Residences (COU2324-011).

NOTED

1. The total project cost proposed is £3,360,948 (inclusive of VAT) and the scope of works includes LED lighting upgrades across 18 buildings, a rooftop solar PV system on William Davies, Draught proofing windows in Hugh Owen, pipework insulation and emergency lighting upgrades in 16 buildings. The project is expected to reduce CO2 Emissions by 213 tCO2e annually.
2. The majority of the works can be funded via a £2,985,303 interest free Salix loan. The additional £375,000 is to be funded from the University's approved capital budget. The project has an expected payback of 11 years. The average annual energy cost savings of £336,436 outweigh the annual loan repayments of £298,530 – which would be fully

repaid over 10 years. The cumulative benefits of the project over 20-year period would be approx. £9.3M.

3. External approval is required from HEFCW and the bank.
4. The proposal is within the allocation approved at Council in July 2023 for sustainability projects. The full allocation will not be spent in the current financial year.

RESOLVED

5. Council approved the proposal to borrow £2,985,303 from Salix finance to fund the majority of a £3,360,948 energy and carbon saving project.

12. GOVERNANCE MATTERS

1. Annual report on the responsibilities of Council members

RECEIVED

Report by the University Secretary (COU2324-012).

NOTED

1. Members discussed training needs; the remit and Terms of Reference of the sub-committees; and whether Council has the appropriate combination of skills to undertake its responsibilities. Further work would be undertaken on these matters as part of the scheduled governance review. [**ACTION:** University Secretary]

RESOLVED

2. The report was noted.

13. OLD COLLEGE

RECEIVED

Report by Dr Rhodri Llwyd Morgan, Director of Welsh Language and External Engagement (COU2324-013).

NOTED

1. Andrew Scott's Limited are working outside the agreed schedule to ensure work is progressing. There is reasonable confidence that the WEFO funding will be spent in full.
2. The membership of the Oversight Group was amended, and membership now includes a County Council representative.
3. Members questions whether the challenges outlined in relation to cashflow would have an impact on the Old College project. It was noted that WEFO funding was being fully utilised, allowing the university to spend the grant by Christmas 2023.
4. Good progress is being made, but Andrew Scott's are estimating an 8-week delay to the programmes.

5. The schedule of activity for approaches to Trust and Foundations was noted.

RESOLVED

4. The report was noted.

14. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

RECEIVED

Members received reports on the following for information:

1. Summary Corporate Risk Register (COU2324-014). Members were content with the distance of travel.
2. Documents affixed with the Common Seal (COU2324-015); and
3. USS – Response Form – A Consultation on the USS Trustee’s proposed assumptions for the scheme’s technical provisions in relation to the 2023 valuation. (COU2324-016).

NOTED

4. The contents of the reports were presented for information.

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS, MEETING REVIEW, AND FUTURE BUSINESS

The meeting finished at 14:52.