

**UNIVERSITY BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

CONFIRMED

**Minutes of the meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2020 by Skype**

**Present:** Mr G Donnelly (Chair), Miss F Aiken, Mr J Batty, Mrs E Bales, Ms K Brookes, Mr C Bush, Revd Canon C Butland, Professor L Challis, Professor J Lee, Ms J Johnson, Mr I Looker, Professor J Mennell, Mrs J Stannard, Mr M Williams, Mr P Yates

**In attendance:** Dr J Brown, University Secretary  
Mr D Chesser, Chief Operating Officer / Deputy Vice Chancellor  
Professor B Webster-Henderson, PVC (Health)  
Professor R Trimble, DVC (Academic)  
Mrs M Leek, PVC(PPC)  
Mrs E Richardson, Head of the Vice Chancellor's Office

**19:108 Apologies for absence** Verbal  
There were no apologies.

**19:109 Declaration of Interests** Verbal  
Mrs Bales regarding staffing matters; Mrs Stannard regarding NHS matters.

**19:110 Minutes of the previous meeting** UB19/65a  
The minutes of the 21 April 2020 meeting were approved as an accurate UB19/65b  
record. It was noted that in the confidential minutes of the meeting the income from furloughing was per week rather than month as minuted.

**19:111 Matters Arising** UB19/65c  
The action log was noted. The University Secretary gave an update in relation to the action under minute 19:99, with a survey being launched across the University looking at staff wellbeing as well as how staff were operating under the current circumstances.

**19:112 Chair's Business** Verbal  
The Chair gave an update on his activities related to the University since the last meeting of the Board:  
- Attendance at a virtual CUC meeting which had received input from the Chief Executive of UUK;  
- Being a panellist on an AdvanceHR webinar;  
- Reviewing the Barrow Town Deal Expression of Interest;

**19:113 Vice Chancellor's Report** UB19/66

Received a) A report from the Vice Chancellor  
b) A Summary of the Vice Chancellor's activities and engagements

The Vice Chancellor started by setting out that the University is dealing with the issues of the 'here and now' while positioning for the future, with the aim of coming out of this period strongly and with staff engaged with the University.

A section of this minute has been recorded in a separate confidential set of minutes.

Moving on to talk about recent successes, the Vice Chancellor briefed the meeting on the outcome from the Times Higher Education (THE) Impact rankings that assess the impact of universities against the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The overall ranking of the University was between 200- 300 out of 766 institutions – with the University coming 8<sup>th</sup> out of 676 participating institutions in the Quality Education category, an excellent outcome. The opportunities post-Covid19 regarding a change of focus in society were noted as making this outcome even more significant for the University.

With respect to the Borderlands Initiative the Vice Chancellor reported that the public consultation stage was ongoing with the proposals positively received both within and external to the University. The proposal was useful in reassuring staff that the University is looking to the future. Work was continuing on the project, with the only reasons for it not to proceed being if the government funding does not materialise or if the University cannot source the funding required.

The Vice Chancellor reported that an Expression of Interest had been submitted to the Barrow Town Deal Board. Out of a hundred towns, Barrow had been asked to bring a bid forward, with the submission ranked top against all of the criteria. The bid had been approved to go to the next stage, with a Strategic Outline Business Case now to be developed. The University had made it clear that it would not be putting any capital into the project; BAE had agreed to work with the University on the project, which would be demand led.

In concluding, the Vice Chancellor drew the Board's attention to the virtual meeting with the OfS, covered in her paper, and the range of activities ongoing to support business, the community and the NHS in response to the pandemic.

**AGREED:** To receive the report.

**19:114 Students' Union Matters**

UB19/67

Received A report from the Student Director

The Student Director reported that work had been ongoing to maintain contact with the academic representatives with no issues reported from them to date. There had been little change to the usage of the Students' Union's services. Social media was being used to ensure that students knew where to obtain support and to raise awareness of matters.

**AGREED:** To receive the report.

**19:115 Academic Matters**

UB19/68

Received a) A report from the DVC(A)  
b) An update on student support and a report on Institute of Health matters from the PVC(H)

The DVC(Academic) spoke to his report noting that the NSS was now closed for responses with the results to be released on 1 July 2020.

The letter outlining the outcome of the UKVI audit had been received with confirmation that the University was to retain its licence across tiers 2, 4 and 5. One area for improvement had been raised relating to the tracking of international students on placements which was being actioned. The

external consultant that had advised the University in the lead up to the audit confirmed that this was a very good outcome.

A section of this minute has been recorded in a separate confidential set of minutes.

In relation to the impact of the pandemic, the DVC(Academic) reported that all academic staff had been briefed on the Emergency Academic Regulations and Assessment Board Chairs had undergone training in their implementation. It was noted that at the end of the Assessment Boards there would be insight into the progression position, with feedback to date being that extensions were being used more than they would be in normal circumstances. Module evaluation questionnaires had had questions relating to the pandemic added to them; feedback received through this route had been positive. The revised regulations and the work being undertaken was being appreciated by students.

Planning for the 2020/21 academic year was ongoing, with a mix of on-line and face-to-face delivery anticipated. Software to help collaboration between staff and students was being looked into.

In the discussion that followed the Chair noted that it was very encouraging to have the majority of students with no major concerns. A question was asked regarding whether clearing was likely to change its character this summer. The DVC(Academic) set out how the ability for students to change university was always there, but that this may be used more this year. The University needed to be clear, before and through clearing, with respect to what the offer would be for students at the University in September. Communications had been sent out and more work would be done in this area.

Moving onto the second paper, the PVC(Health) reported that University of Cumbria students were still contributing to the NHS, and since the paper had been written there had been an increase in the number going into practice, including second year students, midwives and physiotherapists. The University was not seeing any detrimental impact on students who had gone into the extended placements, none had contracted the virus to date; a very small number had opted-out. Video narratives were being planned to record the positive experiences students have had.

The next steps were to plan for all students to come out of the extended placements in July, with the University planning debriefing sessions and support where required. Placements for 2020/21 were also being planned.

In conclusion it was reported that there was a gradual increase in applications and conversion for health courses in 2020/21.

**AGREED:** To receive the reports.

**19:116 Update on 2019/20 Financial Position**

UB19/69

Received An update on the in-year financial position

The COO/DVC spoke to the paper which set out an improvement on the financial forecast for 2019/20 compared to that presented to the April meeting of the Board. The forecast and areas that had led to the improved position were stepped through, as set out in the paper. The outcome led to a cash surplus of £0.9m, which was above the bank covenant. The

COO/DVC noted that the May SLC payment had been received meaning that the University had sufficient cash for 2019/20. The SLC payment profile had been changed to be 50% through October 2020 and 50% in May 2021, and the resulting cash-flows for 2020/21 modelled. The modelling confirmed that the University should retain sufficient cash to not require emergency funding.

The COO/DVC was asked whether he was confident that the bank covenant would not be breached in 2019/20; he confirmed that this was his view, although there were always matters that were unknown until closer to year-end.

**AGREED:** To receive the report

**19:117 External Audit Provision**

UB19/70

Received Fees for 2019/20 and associated decisions for approval.

The COO/DVC spoke to the paper, noting that KPMG had approached the University in the Spring to say that to do an appropriate audit they needed to increase their fees. The March 2020 meeting of Audit & Risk Committee was briefed and the approach agreed. The COO/DVC reported that since that meeting the fees had been agreed with the auditors and it had been agreed, and communicated to KPMG, that the University would go out to tender for external audit services for 2020/21. A group would be formed to manage the tender process in early 2021.

The fees and approach were approved. It was noted that if PWC were to bid the Chair of FRC would not be able to be on the tender panel.

**AGREED:**

- To receive the report
- To approve the External Audit fees for 2019/20 and the decision to go out to tender for External Audit services in 2020/21.

**19:118 OfS Update**

UB19/71

Received An update on communications with the OfS

The University Secretary briefed the meeting on the communications with the OfS, as set out in the paper. The change of approach was noted.

**AGREED:** To receive the report.

**19:119 2020/21 Discussion**

Verbal

The Chair thanked the Board for sending in their questions and comments, which had been collated into four groups of questions and circulated prior to the meeting. Members of VCE responded to the questions by the groups they had been collated into:

Student recruitment and experience

The DVC(Academic) confirmed that, as was the case in more normal times, the approach to maximising recruitment and enrolment had generic and focused aspects to it. The University's first virtual applicant day had been held, with very good feedback and an increase in acceptances following the day. The first virtual open day was to be held in June. New software had been purchased to help to enhance the virtual events.

Communications with applicants was reported to be ongoing, with the need to clarify the offer in September over the coming weeks.

The PVC(Health) responded to the question regarding employability setting out how the University had a good starting point, with a model introduced the previous year to support students who were most at risk of not getting a job. Work was now focusing on supporting students in response to the pandemic.

With respect to recruitment to Health programmes, the PVC(Health) set out that recruitment was expected to pick up to an extent, with the biggest risk being students not being clear on what the experience would be like if they decide to come to University.

The DVC(Academic) noted that he had asked for further work to be undertaken on post-graduate opportunities, as this was a potential next step for 2020 graduates who may have been looking to go into work before the pandemic.

With respect to supporting students who may be in digital poverty, the DVC(Academic) reported that students had been asked if they needed support as part of the process of moving on-line, with laptops and mobile equipment loaned out as required. He noted that the University may need to put some capital aside for students who declare this as an issue over the coming months.

A Director who had questions in this group responded that the points made were all good, and that he wanted to ensure that when the University flexed down it didn't compromise on the data driven approach to marketing.

#### Staff Confidence / morale / Resilience / Capacity

The PVC(PPC) reported that the confidence and morale of staff was a priority. In order to manage capacity some projects had been put on hold until the next academic year, including the formation of the Registry. The last few weeks had been hard for staff; a number of different ways had been used to connect with staff which had helped to gauge the position. Work was being undertaken with the Senior Leaders to help build resilience. The importance of clear and consistent communications was noted.

The PVC(Health) reported that, with the PVC(PPC), a group had been formed to look at what was needed to support staff and student mental health into the next year. He also noted that some of the projects that had been paused were likely to be restarted, where there was capacity to do so and they were key to enabling the changes required for the future.

The University Secretary briefed the meeting on the work taking place to gather feedback from staff on the challenges and opportunities from the period of remote working – with a monthly survey to be launched shortly.

The Directors with questions in this group confirmed that they were happy with the assurances provided.

#### Opportunities

The Vice Chancellor noted that some of the questions had been responded to within her update at the start of the meeting.

The PVC(Health) noted that the opportunity with respect to a green revolution was very much on the University's radar and had been prior to the pandemic. Work was continuing in this area.

The DVC(Academic) commented that in relation to Borderlands and Barrow, there was significant potential to move the University to a new position in particular parts of the County where there isn't a presence at this point in time. With respect to capacity to take these projects forward, the required groups were in place with plans and timelines to work to. He confirmed that the capacity was there and work would be ongoing.

The COO/DVC reported that in the planning round the Institutes had been asked to plan ahead, not just for the here and now, with a range of projects and initiatives being considered. The senior staff in place now enabled the University to be more confident for the future.

The Vice Chancellor set out how the University was continuing to emphasise its role as the anchor institution for the area, with projects such as that in Barrow a key part of this. Communications had recently gone out to over 200 key stakeholders across Cumbria reinforcing the University's work and role. She noted the importance of managing the next period so that the University comes out of the situation positively and able to thrive.

A question was asked as to whether the Borderlands Initiative still had support at government level. The Vice Chancellor commented that the next few weeks and months would show if the government was able to continue to support the project, but in the meantime work would continue on it, as long as it continued to be the right thing for the University.

A section of this minute has been recorded in a separate confidential set of minutes.

#### Financial Sustainability

The COO/DVC confirmed that the University had been looking at alternatives to the most likely outcome, for example with semester one being delayed until January, and that there would be scenarios within which the University would not be sustainable. A lot was predicated on student numbers, however the diversity of the University's provision was helpful in this respect. Further clarity would only really come with respect to undergraduate numbers following clearing, with work ongoing to get credible forecasts in other areas. The aim was that the June Board meeting would receive a balanced forecast for 2020/21 with the information known at that point.

The cash position was noted, as discussed earlier in the meeting.

The Chair thanked the COO/DVC for giving the Board the most realistic forecast and the understanding of the sensitivities. He noted that the biggest variability was how staff costs could be flexed, and asked whether there was a stage when the gap was sufficiently large that it could not be closed by this means. The COO/DVC set out how the work under the UoC2020 project was designed to change structures and provide the flexibility required.

The Chair went around all Directors to gather their view on the discussion and any further matters to be raised. Feedback included:

- That it was clear how much hard work had been undertaken by the whole team;
- That it may be worth looking at the Business Bank loans as a possible way to pay off the Barclay's loan; the COO/DVC confirmed that this was being looked into but the basis of any bid would need to be considered;
- The scope of losses at some other universities was noted, and, although the Director was pleased with what they had heard, they suggested that things could get worse than currently planned for;
- The lack of a significant cash reserve was noted as being a challenge for the University – with agility of decision making important for the year to come;
- The link between all of the areas of questions was noted, with the purpose and grounding of the institution being key to having the confidence to offer what was required;
- It was noted that the government was interested in organisations working in partnership.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions and the discussion.

**AGREED:** To note the discussion

**19:120 Governance Matters**

UB19/72

Received An update on Governance matters, including University Board dates for 2020/21

The Chair noted that the dates for 2020/21 had been provided as if it was a normal year, however it was recognised that additional meetings were likely to be required as a result of the implications of the pandemic.

As set out in the paper, he reported that with Professor Challis retiring from the Board at the end of 2019/20, Ms Tatlow, approved as a Director from 1 August 2020, would chair Academic Governance Committee from 2020/21 and Mr Williams would chair Remuneration Committee.

He reported that Nominations Committee had met and agreed a process with respect to a prospective Chair of University Board.

The University Secretary noted that role profiles for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Board were included within the paper.

**AGREED:** • To receive the report

**19:121 Dates of Future Meetings:**

Monday 15 June 2020  
Thursday 9 July 2020