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| **Meeting title:** | | Council | | |
| **Date:** | | Wednesday 13th May 2020 | **Time** | 12.30pm |
| **Location:** | | Via Microsoft Teams | | |
| **Present:** | | Mr P Greenish (Chair), Prof. Dame M Atkins, Ms F Barnes, Mr R Cartwright, Ms E Harrison, Mr G Hobbs, Mr P Hollins, Professor J Holloway, Dame J Macgregor (Vice-Chair), Professor R Mills, Ms H Pawlby, President & Vice-Chancellor, Dr D Price, Professor P Reed, Mr A Reyes-Hughes, Mr W Shannon, Vice-President (Research & Enterprise), Dr A Vincent and Mr S Young. | | |
| **In attendance:** | | Clerk to the University Council & Senate, Chief Operating Officer (Interim), Executive Director - Finance & Planning, Vice-President (Education).  For Part 2 only - Professor Max Crispin, Professor Keith Godfrey, Professor Bill Keevil and Professor Sabu Padmadas, | | |
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| **87** | **Chair’s Introduction**  The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting via Teams and explained that the meeting would be split into three parts:  (i) Usual agenda business  (ii) COVID discussion with University academics  (iii) University Response to COVID discussion  Council then received an update on the Remuneration Cttee which had met in March 2020, noting the various activities undertaken by the committee including:   * Allowances for senior postholders * Revised methodology for benchmarking future senior appointments * Informal Committee self-assessment * Supplement in lieu of pension arrangements | | | |
| **88** | **Apologies**  The were no apologies. | | | |
| **89** | **Minutes**  It was agreed that the action to update Council on International activity be made clear in the list of actions.  Vice-President (Education) be added to the list of those in attendance.  **RESOLVED** that the amended minutes of the meeting held on 18th March 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed. | | | |
| **90** | **Actions and Matters Arising**  Council noted the Annual Calendar of Business.  Council then noted a full update on the outstanding actions as follows:  (i) 109/1819 – International Strategy: In abeyance  **ACTION:** Interim VP (Int) to provide update on international activity in July  (ii) 29/1920 – Deep Dive on Enterprise Strategy: Now arranged for July 2020  (iii) 33/1920 – Annual Academic Assurance - Report back to Council on degree awarding analysis and assignment ghost writing: To be reported in July 2020  (iv) 58/1920 – Student Recruitment – To be reported in July 2020  (v) 59/1920 – ED&I – The Vice President (Research & Enterprise), as ED&I champion, updated that progress was being made with added student voice on the re-formed Institutional ED&I committee. Athena Swan work was also now making good progress. Specific suggestions made by Council in January around “sponsorship” in the promotions process, looking at ED&I in other organisations and more partnership working with the Hospital Trust were all part of the plan for work over the coming year. Council also noted that equality impact assessments were now at the forefront of activity as a result of COVID19.  (vi) 74/1920 – Sustainability Discussion – Report on Progress in March 2021  (vii) 79/1920 – Awayday Outcomes - Executive to consider developing a dashboard of key info for Council – Ongoing Action | | | |
| **91** | **Declarations of Interest**  No declarations were made. | | | |
| **92** | **Publication of unrestricted papers**  RESOLVED That no papers be released. | | | |
| **93** | **President and Vice-Chancellor’s Report**  Council noted highlights from the last two monthly Vice-Chancellor and Executive reports.  The Vice-Chancellor paid tribute to all university staff for their incredible efforts over the past 2 months in preparing the university to be able to deliver all teaching and assessment online. Thanks were also expressed to frontline staff for keeping the essential services of the university running smoothly under difficult and unprecedented circumstances. Council noted particular thanks to the University Executive Board for their excellent management and leadership through testing times.  Council noted the excellent research work that had taken place to support the national effort against the virus and further noted the latest position with sector national policy and the response and lobbying activity from sector groups. A Government task force had now been established to form thinking on research funding.  Health and safety of staff and students had been the primary focus for the University so far through the crisis. Council also noted that the University Coronavirus Appeal fund had attracted some generous donations.  In relation to USMC, it was noted that the campus was now delivering teaching online and that the relocation to new premises was continuing well. Regarding the Harbin project, it was noted that all aspects would be moving online. Details about the start of the project were still in discussion including the most appropriate time to carry out a full collaboration provision visit.  The President of SUSU raised a point regarding the bringing forward of students’ loans to help students with expenses now that part time jobs had either ceased or been paused, including approaching private landlords about student accommodation. It was agreed that SUSU and the Vice-Chancellor would work to produce a joint approach to these landlords, especially if the dates of the Autumn Term changed.  **RESOLVED** that the update be noted. | | | |
| **94** | **Report from the President of the Students’ Union** | | | |
|  | Council considered a report by the President of the Students’ Union which provided an update on recent SUSU activity including specific updates from each of the Sabbatical team members.  The President highlighted in particular the request for certain cohorts of students to receive a part refund of their tuition fee, stating the case for students at WSA, who had been finding difficulty in completing their work online due to the practical nature of their subject, and medical students who had graduated early in the year. While Council had sympathy, the government had been clear on its policy that no refunds would be made and it remained the case that essential learning outcomes would be achieved despite the obvious changes to what had been provided. Council asked that the discussion be taken offline with the people who could most appropriately deal with the specific questions asked.  **ACTION: SUSU President to meet with most appropriate individuals as identified by the Vice-Chancellor.**  **RESOLVED** that the report be noted. | | | |
| **95** | **Chair’s Actions**  **RESOLVED** that the following action be noted:  (i) Appointment of Professor Jon Essex as Head of Chemistry from 1 August 2020 for a period of 3 years | | | |
| **96** | **Committee Minutes**  Council received and noted all the Committee minutes from meetings that had been held since the last meeting. | | | |
| **97** | **COVID19 Discussion with University Academics**  The Chair of Council welcomed Professor Max Crispin, Professor Keith Godfrey, Professor Bill Keevil and Professor Sabu Padmadas to the meeting and asked them to brief Council individually on the work they had been recently undertaking.  Professor Godfrey updated Council on worked linked with advising government on ways to cope with the virus, the usefulness of the UK lockdown, virus testing and general advice.  Professor Padmadas then outlined his focus on demography and global health adding that the main concern was with the accuracy of supplied data, particularly regarding testing and deaths, which was thought to be largely under-reported. It was further noted that the accuracy the UK R number could not be guaranteed due to the low numbers of testing. The data was beginning to illustrate that the UK lockdown was not only reducing the rate of infections and deaths, but also had allowed the NHS to avoid its own crisis of dealing with too many cases at once. The lockdown also had negative implications for the UK economy and population health and well-being, but easing the lockdown should be handled with extreme care not to induce a second wave. In answer to a query Professor Padmadas suggested that, in order to get more accurate data of the R number, testing would need to be rolled out to the general population.  Professor Crispin outlined his team’s work in supporting the effort to identify and develop an effective vaccine by primarily creating the virus under laboratory conditions to test both vaccines and testing kits. While the university lab was working around the clock to provide the virus, it would need commercial companies to help scale the activity to required levels. It was noted that the laboratory was operating safely at the current time. In answer to a query it was noted that the possibility of the virus mutating was currently low but was a recognised risk.  Professor Keevil then outlined his work on testing in conjunction with a local company that involved PhD students. The virus strain seen in the UK was being grown in hospital labs ready for testing vaccines and a similar strain was being grown on campus, similar to the common cold, also for testing purposes. Professor Keevil’s team had been approached by companies the world over to test the effectiveness of various products such as hand sanitizers, copper impregnated products and face masks. Professor Keevil has also been involved in a study of microbiology in food to establish whether the virus is a risk within the UK food chain. Studies so far had demonstrated it to be a very low risk.  In response to a query it was noted that there was still controversy around the effectiveness of face masks and home-made face coverings and also that the virus was thriving in warmer countries such as Brazil. While profit was not a driver in the current activity, the University’s interests were being appropriately protected.  With regard to the virus and transmission to and from animals, it was noted that bats hosted a large number of different coronavirus strains and that jumps between species had been evident. Such jumps between species normally led to strain mutations.  In conclusion Professor Keevil stated that while the Government was following scientific advice it should be accepted that there were many scientists nationwide and that full agreement on all aspects of the virus and the fight against it was not universal.  It was confirmed that media and communication outlets were being kept up to date, where news was not confidential, with University activity in the fight against the virus.  Council thanked all of the academic colleagues for their excellent work in supporting the national effort and also for their time at Council.  Council was pleased to note that the Staff Awards scheme set to run later in the year would include specific categories to enable staff who have been involved in supporting both COVID related research and the University frontline services to be recognised. | | | |
| **98** | **University Response to COVID19 and Scenario Planning**  Council considered a report by the University Executive Board (Gold Command) which summarised all of the activity in various areas in response to the COVID19 crisis. Members of the Executive Team then added to the report.  **Education Arrangements** – Although the evidence is partial, online teaching has been received well by students in certain areas. A review will be undertaken in the future to assess the effectiveness of the online teaching. In preparing the online offer there had been close and powerful partnership working with SUSU to ensure that the student voice was at the heart of all preparations.  A survey of international offer holders had concluded that there was very little appetite among them for a September start for the next academic year for some key PGT programmes if it was wholly being offered on-line. Proposals were being developed for some programmes to allow for dual start dates in September and January.  It was noted that iSolutions had worked extremely well and supported the education changes very well and the recent upgrade to the BlackBoard online learning system with its new collaboration features had been well received.  Council requested a presentation of the BlackBoard online teaching and learning system to enable first-hand experience of what students are currently presented with.  **ACTION: Clerk to the University Council/VP Education**  A query was raised regarding the University being satisfied that all students had the necessary equipment and support to access the full extent of the online learning. It was noted that as much work as possible had been undertaken in this area, but that students should be encouraged to flag issues so the University could action and rectify.  Council was advised that not all programme options will be offered as it is important to focus effort on providing a high-quality online experience for both students and staff. The academic year may be extended to reflect the late start to the summer term.  In was noted that there is a real need to support staff involved in delivering online teaching. While preparation is in hand for the worst case scenario of full online delivery, it was hoped to bring back students on campus in a phased approach at early as possible next year. Work is underway to engage appropriately with current A-level students about what future university education delivery may look like.  It was confirmed that discussion was being held with professional bodies regarding accreditation standards both at University level and via the Russell Group and QAA. Many of the relevant bodies have been flexible and adapted their standards to incorporate online assessment and accreditation.  Challenges for the next academic year include maintaining the commitment and enthusiasm of students into the new way of working and building the One Southampton community remotely.  **Research and Enterprise** – Council noted the three main issues; the ability to undertake research work that was being paid for, supporting the careers of both PhD students and post-doctoral staff and finally, the future of the funding landscape.  Council noted the challenges faced by the research staff at the University, particularly the effect on career development for early years researchers. In some cases research that was dependant on the time of year would have to be delayed for a year. Purely experimental projects were generally severely affected, however, in many cases projects that involved experimental and modelling/computational work had been re-phased to enable them to continue through the lockdown.  Council was pleased to note that there had not been any immediate significant effect on research spending and the grant application and award rates were so far relatively unchanged.  The University was working closely with representative groups and partners (the Russell Group, UUK, UKRI, etc.) in an attempt to resolve any issues that arose within the research area.  In response to a query it was confirmed that laboratory-based research was an activity identified in the recent Government guidance that could now return to operation, albeit observing strict hygiene and distancing measures. A University group had been established to agree standards and procedures to enable university labs to reopen in early June. Thought was being given to the best way of operating the labs including assigning staff to work solely on particular equipment rather than moving around the lab, and the possibility of using labs in shifts with long overall operating hours.  With regard to REF and KEF it was confirmed that the University was on track, particularly with the rescheduled submission dates. A loss of momentum was a recognised risk, and as a result focus was being maintained by adhering closely to a revised schedule for preparing for submission. iSolutions had been working to ensure that research IT equipment, together with IT equipment across the wider university, was as safe as possible from cyber-attacks.  **HR Matters** – The work of the Human Resources team was recognised, as almost all matters related to COVID had a staff angle. The team had been busy responding to queries, amending policy, taking forward new ideas and maintaining the University commitment to the well-being of staff. There has been close trade union involvement with HR to develop guidance on the continued working from home and the return to campus and laboratories. Work continued on the arrangement for staff furloughing in certain areas. The team were also now investigating ways in which the University could reduce the overall pay-bill without affecting service delivery or staff morale.  In response to a query it was confirmed that work was underway to survey staff about mental and physical disabilities and issues. This was to enable the University to put appropriate help in place to protect those individuals during the crisis.  **Health, Safety and Risk** – The team had responded extremely well to this crisis from an early stage and enabled some good practice responses to be rolled out immediately. The team had also worked extensively in the field of staff well-being in order to support staff.  **Financial Impact and Scenario Planning** – It was reported that the focus now was on the immediate financial position and longer-term issues will be presented at Council in July. Cash flow, income and expenditure are all being closely monitored together with fee recovery. The immediate financial position for financial year 2019/2020 was largely stable but the bigger challenge would be 2020/2021. Bond reporting requirements were also being reviewed and it was noted that the scheduled Moodys’ rating visit would take place in July, but it had been confirmed that institutions with strong financial positions were not their main focus.  A scenario planning group had been established to help understand the scale and length of the impact. A base case was being developed to consider the wider impact for the University including future fees, moving the academic year start date and a wider national recession which may affect student recruitment and research grant funding. Council in July would be presented with a base case for testing and discussion.  Council noted the possibility of some reshaping of the HE sector. The minister had written to Vice-Chancellors and asked them to keep this in mind. Council recognised that there are some important decisions to be made over the coming months that would need to be made in the absence of clear information and evidence. It was clear that the University should remain flexible and ambitious.  **Estates and 10YP** – Once the impact of the lockdown was known, work had started to identify which projects could be put on hold immediately, which should remain in progress and which should be kept under review. Projects that involved partnership funding were regarded as a priority and kept in progress.  There was also a focus on opportunities to develop projects. A project to deliver a sport offer on campus to help with student recruitment will continue. The development of the North East Quadrant was also vital to future plans and was continuing. Other quick wins while the campus was empty were progressing. It was clear that opportunities to help the sustainability of the University should be identified during this period of lockdown. Encouraging new ways of working and travelling were highlighted in an attempt to change behaviours. A feasibility study on future use of the Nuffield Theatre was underway. Master-planning work is underway for the heart of campus, including the Student Union buildings, which is almost ready to share.  **Governance and OfS** – It was noted that Gold and Silver commands were established as part of the business continuity arrangements and had proved to be vital for responsive decision making. Regular governance and decision making was operating well and being monitored closely to ensure that the University complied with all legislation, requirements and conditions of the OfS.  Council was reminded of the academic quality assurance responsibilities placed upon it by the OfS. The detailed report by the Academic Registrar provided assurance to Council that the requirements and conditions were all being fully met. Senate was also being consulted on the report and any comments from Senate would be brought to Council in July. **ACTION: Clerk to the University Council & Senate**  In response to a query it was agreed that the University had responded extremely well to the challenges and circumstances of the pandemic and the new ways of working and meeting with colleagues had been successful. The intense work rate and high engagement of staff would be a challenge to maintain over the long term particularly as some more difficult decisions would need to be made that would directly affect staff.  It was noted that while the effort to respond to the crisis was well communicated to staff and Council it perhaps needed wider communication to students. The arrangements for online teaching and assessment for instance, was vital to providing students with assurance that the degree outcome from the University would remain of top quality. It was agreed that the executive team would consider wider student communication. **ACTION: Vice-Chancellor**  Council thanked the executive team for a thorough report and presentation. | | | |
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| **99** | **Council Operation during COVID**  Chair of Council stated that, now the initial emergency response phase was passing, it was time for Council to become more involved in reshaping the University post COVID. It was suggested that Council should meet more regularly, adding shorter informal meetings in between the formal meetings at approximately 3 week intervals. These meetings would keep Council updated more regularly, lessening the need for extensive updates at main Council meetings. It was recognised that a balance should be observed understanding the pressure put upon the Executive team at the current time. It was agreed that the basis of the update meetings would be provided by way of the Gold Command minutes being circulated to Council and any queries being addressed at the meeting.  Council was reminded that the lay members had agreed to become more involved in individual areas and workstreams and that their expertise and guidance was welcomed.  It was also suggested that deep dives continue where possible together with the faculty visits, both to be done via a remote method with input as appropriate from other campuses such as WSA and USMC. It was also suggested that Council should examine options for its future operation using the experience gained during lockdown. This could involve, for example, fewer but potentially longer meetings and associated briefings on campus with additional business meetings conducted remotely. Benefits would include more efficient use of time and reductions in travel for those based at a distance from the University. **ACTION: Chair of Council/Clerk to the University Council & Senate**  Emily Harrison the SUSU President, who was attending her final Council meeting, was thanked for her contributions. | | | |

**Restricted Items**

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| **100** | **Restricted HR Matters**  (i) Senior Appointments  **RESOLVED** That the senior appointments as set out in the report be approved.  (ii) Redundancies  **RESOLVED** That the redundancy procedures move to the next stage, be approved. |

**The meeting concluded at 4.22pm**

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**Actions**

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| **Min No./Year** | **Minute Title** | **Action Summary** | **Owner** | **Report Back Date\*** |
| 109/1819 | Int Strategy | Presentation of International Strategy with priority timeline | Vice-President (International) | ? 2019 |
| 33/1920 | Annual Academic Assurance Report | Report back to Council on degree awarding analysis and assignment ghost writing | Academic Registrar | July 2020 |
| 58/1920 | Student Recruitment | Consider a more strategic approach to address the need to increase the diversity of the student intake and of their chosen subjects | Vice-President (Education) | July 2020 |
| 68/1920 | Actions | Interim VP (Int) to bring an interim update on International activity | Dean of FSS | July 2020 |
| 74/1920 | Sustainability Discussion | Update in 12 months | Dean of FELS | March 2021 |
| 79/1920 | Awayday Outcomes | Executive to consider developing a dashboard of key info for Council | Chief Operating Officer | Ongoing |
| 94/1920 | SUSU Report | SUSU President meet with those most appropriate, identified by the VC, to discuss tuition fees during COVID | SUSU President/Clerk to the University Council | June 2020 |
| 98/1920 | Response During Covid | Council to receive a presentation of the BlackBoard system | Clerk to the University Council/VP Education | June 2020 |
| 98/1920 | Response During Covid | Any comments from Senate on the OfS Report passed to Council | Clerk to the University Council | July 2020 |
| 98/1920 | Response During Covid | Comms to Students | Vice-Chancellor | July 2020 |
| 99/1920 | Council Operation During Covid | Proposals for Changes to Council Operation During Covid | Chair of Council/Clerk to the University Council & Senate | July 2020 |