



COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held at 10:00 on 11 MAY 2023, Main Hall, International Politics.

Present: Dr Emyr Roberts, Chair of Council (Chair); Ms Meri Huws, Deputy Chair of Council (Chair); 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; Mr Dafi Jones, UMCA President; Dr Louise Marshall; Ms Rhuanedd Richards; Ms Aisleen Sturrock, AberSU President; Mr Arwel Thomas; Ms Claire Vaughan; Dr William Williams; Ms Nicola Wood; and Professor Reyer Zwiggelaar.

In attendance: Bayanda Vundamina, Incoming AberSU President, Ms Elain Gwynedd, Incoming UMCA President; Mr Mark Godsell, Interim Director of Finance; Mrs Jean Jones, Head of the Vice-Chancellor's Office; Dr Rhodri Llwyd Morgan, Director of Welsh Language and External Engagement, (for minute 65); Mrs Andrea James, Director of Estates, Facilities and Residencies (for minute 65 and 66); Mr Nick Rogers, Director of Human Resources and Operational Development; Mr Steve Thomas, Head of Communications and Public Affairs; and Dr Gwawr Taylor, University Secretary

Apologies for absence had been received from Ms Sharron Lusher and Mr Mark Tweed.

54. MATTERS RAISED BY THE CHAIR

1. Welcome

To the incoming AberSU President and UMCA President

1. Bayanda Vundamina; Incoming AberSU President
2. Elain Gwynedd, Incoming UMCA President.

2. Congratulations

To the following on being elected to the Learned Society of Wales

1. Professor Hazel Davey FLSW
2. Professor Helen Roberts
3. Professor Andy Evans

Also, to Professor Rhys Jones on being elected as Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences.

3. Condolences

Sympathies were expressed following the deaths of:

1. Charlie McLeod, second year computer science student;

2. Nick Bache, Technical and Production Manager, Arts Centre; and
 3. Benjamin Lewis Davies, former Night Management with the University's Residential and Hospitality Services.
4. Vice-Chancellor Interim arrangements

The Vice Chancellor outlined the anticipated absence period.

RESOLVED

The Chair and Deputy Chair of Council would convene to agree the interim arrangements. [**ACTION:** University Secretary]

5. Appointment Process: Chair of Council

1. Members were updated on progress and the anticipated timetable was outlined.

6. Suicide Safer Guidance on postvention

1. Governance and Compliance Committee had reviewed Universities UK's guidance document, 'Responding to suicide: advice for universities' and considered the work undertaken at Aberystwyth University to address the matter. An update on staff appointments in this area and the training programme was provided to Council.

55. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

NOTED

Item 64.2, Paying University Governors could be a potential conflict for all independent members of Council.

56. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RECEIVED

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2023 (COU2223-085).

RESOLVED

That the minutes be confirmed as a correct record.

57. 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 (COU2223-086).

NOTED

1. The updates provided in the decisions log.

2. The following actions were reported as 'closed', following a verbal update:
- 11.2.3 - Key Performance Indicators
To prepare a report for GCC specifically addressing the low completion rates for ECS.

 - 17.2 – Reappointment of Chancellor and Pro Chancellor
To approve the recommendations.

 - 32.2 – Disposal of Llanbadarn – Options Appraisal
The Council approves the disposal strategy for Llanbadarn.

 - 43.1 – Letter from David Blaney, Chief Executive, HEFCW
An action plan has been agreed, following a meeting with the Department of Law and Criminology. Considerable strides have been made and an updated action plan has been sent to HEFCW, which will be circulated to Council, for information.

 - 50.2 – Renaming of IBERS – Penglais
The building was financed by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC). A member queried whether permissions needed to be sought before changing the name.

58. DECISIONS TAKEN BETWEEN MEETINGS

RECEIVED

Report by the University Secretary (COU2223-087)

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 by members via correspondence were:
 1. Annual Equality Report;
 2. Appointment of Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research, Knowledge Exchange and Innovation).

During the same period, the following was approved by the Chair on behalf of the Council:

3. Tender for Lever 4 Healthcare Support Worker Education Programme: Phase 2
4. UCEA Interim Pay Increase
5. Shared use path from Gogerddan to Penglais.

59. CORRESPONDENCE

1. Letter from Dr David Blaney – 2022 National Student Survey Outcomes

RECEIVED

Letter from Dr David Blaney (COU2223-088)

NOTED

1. An analysis of the National Student Survey is undertaken every year and action plans are subsequently agreed. A proactive approach was taken, prior to receiving the National Student Survey Outcome letter, and actions had been implemented to address the matters noted before the letter was issued.

RESOLVED

2. Council noted the letter.
2. Institutional Review Risk Letter

RECEIVED

Letter from HEFCW

NOTED

The draft Institutional Risk Review Letter from HEFCW had been tabled at the Council briefing session. The final letter and a full response would be presented to a future meeting of Council for consideration following receipt of the final letter and confirmation of the response deadlines.

60. VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT

RECEIVED

Report by the Vice-Chancellor (COU2223-089)

NOTED

1. The report consisted of three key parts: a highlight report; a planning and student recruitment report; and a communications report.
2. Further to the agreed strategy by Council to prioritise healthcare, an initial scoping proposal to consider the feasibility of offering dentistry in Aberystwyth University will be undertaken. Subject to the conclusions of the scoping exercise and confirmation of sufficient funding by Welsh Government, any proposals would be considered by the appropriate governance committees and Council.
3. A financial assumptions paper was discussed in Resources and Performance Committee. The financial position and the need to build cash reserves and improve liquidity days was noted in the Institutional Risk Review letter.
4. The University remains in a position to grow, which could be achieved by looking at the core provision and continuing to recruit international students. The flat fee is a long-term issue that presents a significant challenge to the sector.
5. Members queried whether retention rates had been impacted due to the cost-of-living crisis. Officers noted that retention rates were returning to pre-Covid levels, which was not the pattern reflected in other Welsh universities.

6. Recruitment is looking positive, with good numbers of acceptances for both home and international students. The actions that have been implemented internally have led to more students.
7. More research income is being generated. The VetHub laboratories have now received approval to commence use of Hazard Group 3 biological agents.
8. UCU continue to be in dispute with employers across the UK on issues relating to pay and conditions. Staff have been informed that 50% of pay will be deducted for days on which they are boycotting marking, but the University reserves the right to withhold 100% if the impact across the institution is severe. This is aligned to the UCEA guidance of a band between 50% and 100%. The Students' Union passed to support the action in its recent Annual General Meeting (AGM), but noted that its primary focus was to support the students.
9. An update was provided on the University's 150th events. Council congratulated officers on the success of recent events.
10. The University was shortlisted in 5 categories in the WhatUni Student Awards, winning the Lecturers and Teaching Quality, and Student Life awards. The University was placed third in the University of the Year award.
11. Professor Angela Hatton will start as Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research, Knowledge Exchange and Innovation in August 2023. Other senior appointments and awards were also noted.

RESOLVED

12. Members noted the report.

61. HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE

RECEIVED

Report by the Health, Safety and Environmental Manager (COU2223-090).

NOTED

1. The report provided a summary update on health and safety, drawing on the relevant reports presented to the Governance and Compliance Committee (GCC) on 7 March 2023.
2. The progress to-date has been notable and GCC was assured that previous resourcing challenges were being addressed. The dates in the Health, Safety & Environment action plan should be updated to reflect progress. [**ACTION:** Health, Safety and Environment Manager]
3. Members welcomed the consideration of health and safety culture at the University, particularly noting how the work complemented the broader consideration of culture at the University in Governance and Compliance Committee.

62. REPORT BY ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION

RECEIVED

Report by the AberSU President (COU2223-091).

NOTED

1. The report provided an update on developments at AberSU since the last meeting of the University's Council.
2. The threshold for quoracy was met in the Students' Union's AGM and several policies were subsequently passed.
3. The election process had been positive and collegial, and a new team has been appointed.
4. UMCA held several events during 'Welsh week' to share and promote the language. UMCA is working with a Gaelic Society in Ireland to share good practice and to discuss the status and use of the respective languages.
5. The students' representatives were thanked for their contributions and they, in turn, thanked Council for its welcome and support. The incoming officers were invited to the meeting as part of its induction process.

63. FINANCIAL MATTERS

1. Management Accounts update

RECEIVED

Report by the Deputy Director of Finance incorporating the Month 8 2022-23 Management Accounts (COU2223-092)

NOTED

1. The in-year pay award has been implemented at a cost of £700,000. This has been fully offset by receipt of additional funding from HEFCW, which was received in March 2023.
2. Footfall in the Arts Centre has not returned to pre-pandemic levels. The new Director of the Arts Centre will start in June and will review the operations, specifically how the Arts Centre could address the needs of the student body. The challenging situation with the Arts Centre is mirrored in similar venues across Wales and is not unique to Aberystwyth.
3. Members discussed the impact of financial pressures on resources and subsequently on staff workload and absences. Regular reports are presented to Governance and Compliance Committee to monitor the data. A mental wellbeing strategy is being developed with joined-up initiatives between staff and students.
4. The current vacant rooms in Pantycelyn was discussed. An options paper will be submitted to the University Executive for consideration, before circulating to Resources and Performance Committee in June.
5. If fee levels remain at £9000, the sector will need to consider possible solutions, including but not limited to organisational structure and delivery models. The

financial sustainability of the organisation, contingency planning, and the links to workforce planning was discussed.

RESOLVED

6. In relation to 63.2, Council agreed to invite the new Director of the Arts Centre to a briefing meeting in autumn 2023 [**ACTION:** University Secretary].

2. Key Performance Indicators

RECEIVED

Report by Steve Walsh, Head of Planning (COU2223-093)

NOTED

1. The KPIs relating to research funding and international student intake were very positive.
2. The KPIs will be reviewed to ensure they remain sufficiently challenging.
3. Effective Contribution Scheme (ECS) targets have been discussed at Governance and Compliance Committee, noting that it may not be the most effective indicator of the culture at the university. Some of the operational challenges of completing ECS documentation was outlined.

RESOLVED

4. The report was noted.

3. External Auditors: Agreement of Fees

RECEIVED

Report by Mark Godsell, Interim Director of Finance (COU2223-094)

NOTED

1. The procurement process highlighted the current state of the market, and the increased fees reflects this context. Staff inflation costs and the additional audit work have also been reflected in the fees.

RESOLVED

2. Members approved the reappointment of KPMG as the University's external auditors for the year ending 31 July 2023.

4. Unregulated fees recommendations for 2024-25

RECEIVED

Report by Sue Clarke and Steve Walsh, Planning (COU2223-095)

NOTED

1. Fees have been reviewed and will be integrated into the review process in future. The comparative data in the report was welcomed by Council.
2. An impact assessment will be conducted in relation to free accommodation which will allow the university to mitigate or plan appropriate mitigations.

RESOLVED

3. The proposals were approved.

64. GOVERNANCE MATTERS

1. Report on meeting dates 2023-24

RECEIVED

Report by the University Secretary (COU2222-096).

NOTED

1. Minor amendments have been made to the committee schedule in comparison to previous years to mirror the Council meetings and to balance the business across the academic year.
2. A Nominations Committee has been scheduled to ensure regular oversight of its terms of reference, which will report to Council in spring 2024.
3. All Council meetings, apart from one, will be held face-to-face at Aberystwyth. Sub-committee meetings will be held virtually on Microsoft Teams.

RESOLVED

4. Members approved the meeting dates for 2023-24.

2. Paying University Governors

RECEIVED

Report by the University Secretary (COU2223-097).

NOTED

1. A paper was considered by Governance and Compliance Committee (GCC) in November 2022. The University Secretary was asked to consider the report and present a recommendation to GCC and, subsequently, to Council.
2. The number of Chairs and Chairs of sub-Committees receiving remuneration in England is increasing. However, no Welsh University has approved paying any member of their governing bodies.
3. The challenges of the role and the changes within the sector were acknowledged.

RESOLVED

4. Council approved the recommendation that no change is introduced with regard to remuneration of Council members. The University Secretary will continue to monitor the situation and present relevant updates to the committees and to Council, as appropriate.

3. Membership of Council

RECEIVED

Report received by University Secretary (COU2223--098).

NOTED

1. There are too many members on Governance and Compliance Committee, while there are vacancies on other committees, namely Audit and Risk Committee; Investments Committee and Remuneration Committee.
2. The membership of the sub-committees was considered against the skills matrix. Members considered the criteria and agreed that developing further guidance to complete the self-assessment form would provide a more consistent analysis. [**ACTION:** University Secretary]
3. The skills matrix should be utilised to identify any skills gaps, prior to recruiting new Council members.

RESOLVED

4. The revised membership of the sub-committees was approved.

4. EDI Information

RECEIVED

Report by the University Secretary (COU2223-099).

NOTED

1. Nominations Committee considered the diversity of Council membership in its meeting on 27 March 2023 and recommended that Council members' diversity information was collected and held securely
2. The University is required to report gender statistics as part of its annual reporting. Any additional information from Council members would be submitted voluntarily.
3. Other information, such as socioeconomic deprivation (SED) was also considered and noted for future exercises, subject to advice from the Diversity and Inclusion Manager. [**ACTION:** Diversity and Inclusion Manager]

RESOLVED

4. Council agreed the recommendation to collect its members' diversity information annually, on a voluntary basis, reflecting the information collected for University staff. [**ACTION:** University Secretary and Diversity and Inclusion Manager]

65. OLD COLLEGE UPDATE

RECEIVED

Report by the Dr Rhodri Llwyd Morgan, Director of Welsh Language and External Engagement (COU2223-100).

NOTED

1. Legal advice was sought and considered further to the discussion at the previous meeting of Council. For completeness, Resources and Performance Committee considered the Deed of Variation and noted the risks associated with each option. Members were content for officers to proceed with signing the Deed of Variation, subject to securing written confirmation from WEFO that they were content for the project to proceed on that basis.
2. Exit clauses have been included in the Deed of Variation to allow the University to terminate the work, should the costs become unaffordable. The Old College Oversight Group is meeting monthly and is monitoring costs, ensuring information is fed through to Resources and Performance Committee and Council.
3. Sub-contractors have reached the site and the work has recommenced. The schedule is being reviewed and adjusted accordingly.
4. Dr Rhodri Llwyd Morgan, Andrea James and the team were thanked for their work.

RESOLVED

5. The report was noted.

66. ESTATES STRATEGY ACTION PLAN UPDATES

RECEIVED

Report by the Andrea James, Director of Estates, Facilities and Residences (COU2223-101).

NOTED

1. Good progress is being made on the masterplan, although some challenges remain. Officers are prioritising areas that are bringing in income, which can be re-invested.
2. The disposal plans, previously approved by Council are being sold for higher sums than initially assumed.
3. Hybrid working has changed how staff work. A space utilisation survey will provide some evidence to inform future plans and commitments. Examples of new office spaces and styles of working have been developed in departments such as Finance, and Research, Business and Innovation. Developing spaces to support research was welcomed.

RESOLVED

4. Members noted the progress against the action plan.

29. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

RECEIVED

Members received reports on the following for information:

1. Summary Corporate Risk Register (COU2223-102);
2. Documents affixed with the Common Seal (COU2223-103); and
3. Covid: Lessons Learned (COU2223-104);

NOTED

4. The contents of the reports were presented for information.
5. Since the previous meeting of Council, the Deed of Variation in relation to the Old College project was signed under seal on 9 May 2023.

30. REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

RECEIVED

A composite report comprising the following (COU2223-105):

1. Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee (07 March 2023);
2. Governance and Compliance (07 March 2023);
3. Resources and Performance (01 February 2023 and 09 February 2023); and
4. Senate (02 February 2023)

NOTED

5. The reports received from the sub-committees.

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

1. Members expressed an interest to see the facilities at Trawscoed. It was proposed that a future meeting of Council could be held in Trawscoed. [**ACTION:** University Secretary]
2. Farewell
 1. This would be Sharron Lusher, Aisleen Sturrock and Dafi Jones's last meeting of Council. The Chair thanked them for their work and valuable contributions during their respective terms of office.
3. The next meeting of Council will be held on 7 July 2023.