

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Wednesday, 20 January 2021 (meeting held via video conference)

Present: Mr Edward Astle (in the Chair), President and Vice-Chancellor, Mrs Ann Barnes (Deputy Chair), Mr Gary Buxton, Prof Claire Alexander, Mr Michael Crick, Prof Danielle George, Mr Colin Gillespie, Dr Reinmar Hager, Prof Steve Jones, Mr Kwame Kwarteng (General Secretary of UMSU), Dr Neil McArthur, Mr Robin Phillips, Mr Richard Solomons, Mr Andrew Spinoza, Dr Delia Vazquez, Dr Jim Warwicker, Mrs Alice Webb, and Ms Ros Webster(20)

Apologies: Mr Nana Agyeman, Mr Nick Hillman, Mrs Bridget Lea

In attendance: The Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer (RSCOO), the Deputy President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, the Chief Financial Officer, the Vice-President for Learning, Teaching and Students (item 7), the Vice-President for Social Responsibility (item 7), the Director of Human Resources (item 7), the Director for the Student Experience (item 7) and the Deputy Secretary.

1. Declarations of Interest

Reported: there were no new declarations of interest

2. Minutes

Agreed: the minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2020 as a correct record.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

Received: an updated report on ongoing issues that had been raised at previous meetings.

4. Draft Financial Statements 2019-20

Received: the latest draft of the 2019-20 Financial Statements together with a brief overview.

Noted:

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

information

Redacted – Restricted

(4) It was anticipated that outstanding work would be concluded in the next few days. Consequently, a further joint meeting of Audit and Risk and Finance Committees and a meeting of the Board would be scheduled in week commencing 25 January 2021, noting the imperative of concluding matters as quickly as possible to ensure compliance with private placement and Bond covenant requirements.

(5) The Operating Surplus had been represented so that it was now shown after depreciation; this was a change from the University's previous approach and was now more common in the sector. The University would be transparent about this change in reporting, noting that the figures underpinning the reporting had not changed.

5. President and Vice-Chancellor's report

Received: a verbal update from the President and Vice-Chancellor.

Reported:

(1) Covid-19 infection rates were continuing to rise and in light of the national lockdown, the government had advised students not to return to campus until further notice unless they were studying on a small number of exempt programmes (largely medical, clinical and health care related) or there were clear personal reasons for returning (e.g because of mental health or inability to study from home: this included researchers and research students who required access to specialist facilities for their work). The later report on preparations for student return to campus advised that 40% of students in University residences had returned, with a further 10% intending to return.

(2) At a national level, there was concern about the ability of students on some professionally accredited programmes to graduate. Dentistry was a particular concern given practice requirements and lack of placement opportunities. Also at a national level, there were growing calls for tuition fee rebates.

(3) As referred to in the later report on student return to campus, for students living in University halls, two reductions in rent had been given to all residents. A 30% reduction to rent for the whole of the first semester (to 31st January; cost £~6m) had been made. This was to recognise that the experience and the facilities in some halls had not been at expected level (e.g. social spaces had not been allowed to open), and that government guidance on the Christmas 'travel window' meant many students had to leave their accommodation up to three weeks early.

(4) In addition, during the current lockdown students who do not use their room would not pay any rent for the duration of the lockdown or until their date of return (whichever was sooner): the estimated cost of this was in order of £15 million. Residents who had returned would pay the full rate from 1 February and in recognition of current uncertainty and financial challenge, the date of the next instalment of rent (due on 21 January), would be pushed back to late February. As had been the case since October, any student was able to break their license agreement at any point and only incur charge up to the date they return their key (very few students had opted to do this so far).

(5) The Board had recently been advised of the University's five point [Assessment Pledge](#) to students which was also referred in the report on return to campus.

(6) The Estates and Facilities teams had facilitated the fit out of the former Chancellors Hotel site to enable it to be used as Covid-19 vaccination centre, supporting the roll out of the national vaccination programme.

(7) The Department for Education (DfE) had confirmed that university staff required to deliver or to support delivery of teaching or research and the provision of appropriate university facilities were considered critical workers for the purposes of their children accessing education. However, many schools were unable to take additional students, largely due to staff absences. Support and wellbeing resources were available to help staff during the current lockdown. A coronavirus special leave allowance had been made available to all staff last year. Some staff had used this allowance and it was not possible to carry over any unused leave, but a further 14 days leave was being offered in 2021 starting from 5 January. Student mental health and wellbeing support was referred to in the later report on student return to campus.

(8) At its meeting on 5 January, Senate had considered a motion to establish a Task and Finish Group to work with senior management in the response to the pandemic. After consideration, Senate had rejected the motion.

(9) The local UCU branch had proposed a vote of no confidence in senior management and leadership and was encouraging members to raise the matter at School Boards. Members of the Students' Union had also gained the required number of signatures to trigger a referendum proposing support for a vote of no confidence in University senior leaders.

(10) The Board had been advised of changes to [equality, diversity and inclusion structure and reporting](#), including the creation of a new Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion reporting direct to the RSCOO.

(11) Ensuring financial sustainability remained a key focus and priority and had been assisted by a constructive discussion with the Board Chair and committee chairs on 17 December about the extent of the current challenge and the ongoing development of the five year plan for future consideration by the Board.

(12) A raft of government announcements were expected imminently; this would include a White Paper on training and skills, the interim conclusion of the review of post-18 education and funding (the Augar Review), a review of post-qualification admissions, the response to the independent review of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (the Pearce Review) and future funding arrangements.

Noted:

(1) Given the plethora of imminent announcements, it would be helpful for the Board to receive a summary of key, salient points at an appropriate time. **Action: Deputy Secretary**

(2) In relation to the proposal for the Senate Task and Finish Group, some Senate members had been concerned about the lack of specificity regarding the role of the Group and the potential diminution of Senate's role. The University's governance framework provided other avenues for provision of advice and other innovative ways of seeking input (e.g. Wikis) were noted. One member commented on the possibility of a Senate member who had proposed the motion being appointed to the Task and Finish Group overseeing actions following the Fallowfield Fences Inquiry report.

(3) The Board placed on record its appreciation for the contribution of Patrick Johnson, current Head of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, who was leaving the University later in the month. The Chair advised that he and other members had thanked Patrick in person at a meeting of the informal Board Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Group held earlier in the week. The Group would meet every two months this year to act as a sounding board and source of advice (any members wishing to join the Group were asked to contact the Deputy Secretary).

(4) International students who had not been able to return to Manchester had raised concerns about retrieving their personal possessions in accommodation in the city: it was agreed that this matter should be referred to the Directorate for the Student Experience.

Action: Director for the Student Experience

6. Management response to recommendations arising from the Fallowfield fences inquiry report

Received:

(1) An interim progress report on implementation of actions arising from the inquiry into the erection of fencing at Fallowfield Halls of Residence on 5 November 2020 (the inquiry report had been sent to the Board on 3 December 2020).

(2) The report set out the terms of reference and membership of a Task and Finish Group providing oversight of actions arising from the inquiry report.

Noted:

(1) In response to a question, and without anticipating the outcomes of the work of the Task and Finish Group, areas for attention were communication between the University and its students and internal communication and interaction between constituent parts of the University.

(2) In response to a question, the decision to reduce rents by 30% in the first semester had been the consequence of multiple factors; most significant had been the constructive meetings with representatives of student halls of residence and the University's recognition that it had not been able to provide all services to expected levels.

(3) The University was seeking external advice on its approach to communications, including social media and the ability and capacity to respond more effectively to crises. Work on the development of a revised communications strategy was progressing and was expected to conclude within the next two months.

(4) The University was not waiting until work on the communications strategy was concluded before effecting improvements and more proactive social media monitoring and other improvements meant that the University was likely to be better prepared for future incidents of a similar type.

(5) In response to a question, it was difficult to assess the extent of external reputational impact of the fences incident. Press coverage of the incident had been relatively short-lived but it was still referred to in more general press coverage about the impact of the pandemic on the HE sector.

(6) In response to a question, as set out in the report, Deloitte's would provide an external perspective on the review of actions arising, particularly review of task management procedures and internal communication and interaction. This external perspective was important and a meeting with Deloitte's was scheduled (as part of an ongoing commitment) to confirm its scope.

(7) In response to a question about the alleged racial profiling of a student at Fallowfield, involvement of Greater Manchester Police had resulted in internal processes being paused.

Agreed: that a further report be submitted to the Board at its meeting on 24 March 2021, after prior consideration by Planning and Resources Committee. **Action: RSCOO**

7. Preparations for student return to campus

Received:

(1) A report providing an update on key elements of the teaching, learning and student experience with a particular focus on developments and improvements since the start of the academic year. The paper focused in particular on student wellbeing, behaviours, halls of residence and the current overall approach to teaching and learning.

(2) A presentation providing further information on Emergency Hardship Funds, other student support measures funded through donor funding, the evolution of the University's approach to blended, flexible learning, the Assessment Pledge, use of Library Study Spaces, the Accommodation Pledge and support for student mental health and wellbeing. A separate presentation provided an update on staff wellbeing and sickness absence (both presentations were placed in the Diligent Reading Room).

Noted (in response to questions on the report and presentations):

(1) Comparisons between Universities of the number staff employed in mental health support and wellbeing roles was difficult as there was not consistent categorisation. Such benchmarks as were available showed that the University compared well in the sector and had recently invested in mental health nursing, as well as counselling support.

(2) There were monies available in the Student Hardship Fund and students in need were being encouraged to come forward. There were review and due diligence processes in place to establish need. The Students' Union Advice Team played a key role in signposting students towards relevant support.

(3) Regarding the impact of the switch to blended learning on research productivity, this was a matter which would be considered at Faculty level. There was a need for regular review of mode of delivery although it was clear that the rapid step change over the past year meant that, in the near future, changes were likely to be more incremental.

(4) The University was proactively contacting students in halls to assess and establish need (approximately 50% had been contacted in this way) and this was enabling early identification and resolution of issues (this was particularly important for students new to the University who may be more reluctant to ask for help). During the first lockdown, approximately 2,500 staff had volunteered to make contact with students and a buddying scheme in partnership with the Students' Union was also in operation.

(5) The report noted receipt of the recent letter from OfS detailing its approach to regulation in the current phase of the pandemic and setting actions for providers to take. All providers were being asked to conduct a review of their compliance with consumer law, and this included providing assurance to the governing body. Work on this underway and the Board would receive a report at its March meeting.

Action: Deputy Secretary

(6) In relation to delivery of intended learning outcomes (ILOs), this was a matter that was kept under regular review. The potential need to extend or reconfigure the teaching year (including examination and Examination Board timetables) was discussed. In some programmes, delivery of ILOs was potentially dependent on resumption of face-to-face teaching, noting that this would need a degree of flexibility at local level.

(7) Assuming no issues with availability, students in clinical settings would be prioritised for vaccination. The timing of rollout of vaccination to critical workers (which included staff delivering face to face teaching and frontline services was currently uncertain.

8. Revolving Credit Facility (RCF): extension of delegation

Reported: At the Board Meeting on 7 October 2020, the Board had delegated authority for the negotiation and agreement of a Revolving Credit Facility (RCF). This delegation expired on 31 December 2020 and the Board is asked to extend the delegation of authority to enable the facilities to be agreed and the legal documentation to be concluded.

Agreed: To extend the delegation of power to enter into the RCF as set out in the attached minute, which was in the format requested by the University's legal advisors.

Close