

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held at 13:00 on 12 MARCH 2024, in MedRus 3, Penbryn.

Present: Ms Meri Huws, Chair of Council (Chair); Professor Jon Timmis, Vice-Chancellor; Ms Kate Eden; Ms Kylie Evans; Professor Simon Green; Miss Elain Gwynedd, UMCA President; Mrs Ellen ap Gwynn (until minute 46); Professor Louise Marshall (until minute 45.3); Ms Rhuanedd Richards; Mr Arwel Thomas; Mr Mark Tweed; Ms Jane Usherwood; Mr Bayanda Vundamina, AberSU President; and Professor Reyer Zwiiggelaar.

In attendance: Mr Simon Crick, Director of Finance and Planning; Mrs Jean Jones, Head of the Vice Chancellor's Office; Dr Rhodri Llwyd Morgan, Director of Welsh Language and External Engagement, (for minute 48); Dr Gwawr Taylor, University Secretary; and Mr Steve Thomas, Head of Communications and Public Affairs.

Apologies for absence had been received from Professor Tim Woods, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning, Teaching and Student Experience).

34. MATTERS RAISED BY THE CHAIR

Welcome

1. Professor Jon Timmis, Vice-Chancellor, was welcomed to his first meeting.
2. Members noted their thanks to Jim O'Rourke and Nia Davies for the tour of Old College, prior to the Council meeting.

35. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No conflicts of interest were declared in relation to the business to be considered during the meeting.

36. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RECEIVED

Minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2023 and 19 January 2024 (COU2324-073).

RESOLVED

That the minutes be confirmed as a correct record.

37. 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 (COU2324-074).

NOTED

Members noted the updates against open actions.

- 48.1.4. Chancellor's appointment
Council agreed that the Nominations Committee should discuss and agree a suitable role description and appointment process.

38. DECISIONS TAKEN BETWEEN MEETINGS

RECEIVED

Report by the University Secretary (COU2324-075).

NOTED

The report detailed the instances since the last Council meeting where matters had been approved by members by the Chair on behalf of Council.

39. CORRESPONDENCE

1. Statement of strategic priorities for tertiary education and research and innovation.

RECEIVED

Correspondence from Unis Wales in relation to The Welsh Government Statement of Priorities for the Commission (COU2324-076).

RESOLVED

The Chair and Chief Executive of CTER should be invited to a future Council briefing meeting [ACTION: University Secretary].

40. VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT

RECEIVED

Report by the Vice-Chancellor (COU2324-077).

NOTED

1. The report consisted of three key parts: a highlight report; a planning and student enrolment report; and a communications report.
2. The Vice Chancellor noted the death of Aberystwyth University student, Stephen Ashdown and extended his deepest sympathies with his family and friends. The investigation is ongoing, and support services are in place for the family, students, and staff.
3. A news article on sexual harassment was published recently where Aberystwyth University was named as a case study. Although the report noted that very good support had been received by the support services, it was reported that they were not supported by their tutor. A 'lessons learnt' exercise is currently being undertaken.

4. The University was temporarily overdrawn over the Christmas period. No penalties were incurred and HEFCW were informed. Processes are in place to avoid a similar situation in future.
5. The role of the Commercial Director has been revised, although the focus on reviewing specific areas of commercial and revenue activities remains. This will be a 6-month appointment, and the recruitment process for the Chief Operating Officer will be accelerated.
6. International student numbers remain a risk, across the sector and the recruitment patterns remain difficult to predict. The budget is prudent based on the risk level.
7. There are successful areas of research activity which is driving the research agenda. The Queen's Anniversary Prize was noted in particular, and the team were congratulated for their world-leading research.

RESOLVED

8. Members noted the report.

41. REPORT BY ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION

RECEIVED

Report by Bayanda Vundamina, SU President (COU2324-078)

NOTED

1. The AGM, which was held on 4th March was the busiest ever, with 150 students in attendance. Students voted in favour of renaming the Students' Union to 'Undeb Aberystwyth' with a majority of 81%.
2. A range of engagements and campaigning events have been held, including race equality week, liberation celebration and meet-and-greet events.
3. UMCA attended the Eisteddfod Ryng-Golegol and won for the first time in 8 years. UMCA students won four of the six main prizes: namely the Science prize, the Art prize, the Crown and the Chair. Members congratulated the students on their successes.
4. The Union is operating a planned deficit and is working with the University Executive in relation to future funding.
5. Voting for the elections is underway. More candidates have stood for election than ever before.
6. UMCA celebrated 'Diwrnod Hawliau'r Gymraeg' (Welsh Language Rights Day) on 7 December with a day of activities and a display by Cymdeithas yr Iaith. Pantycelyn's Christmas concert raised money for UMCA 50 and Yr Angor. The collaboration between UMCA and the local community was noted in this respect.
7. Work is underway to fundraise for the celebration of UMCA 50, which will be held on 15 June.

RESOLVED

8. Members noted the report.

42. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

RECEIVED

Report from Sion Anthony Jones, Business Intelligence Analyst, Planning (COU2324-079).

NOTED

1. ECS is a traditional indicator, but not necessarily reflective of the culture and feelings amongst staff. Members queried whether the KPI was appropriate, particularly as it had not improved substantially over a long period of time.
2. Members queried whether it was appropriate to review the KPIs as part of the strategic planning, with a view to rationalising and capturing appropriate measures.

RESOLVED

3. Governance and Culture Committee should consider the metrics in relation to ECS and consider how it could be improved [ACTION: Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development].
4. The Vice Chancellor should consider the suitability of the KPIs and amend accordingly, further, to confirming the University strategy [ACTION: Vice Chancellor].
5. Members noted the update on the KPIs.

43. HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE

RECEIVED

Report by Claire Williams, Health, Safety and Environment Manager

NOTED

1. The Health and Safety team have been working with colleagues in Estates ahead of the planning round to identify compliance issues that require prioritisation.
2. Further work has been undertaken in relation to training, looking in particular at improving attendance levels. Meetings are being held with colleagues in Lifelong learning to explore potential opportunities to generate income and maximising efficiencies for training courses. Training on Health and Safety will be provided to Council in due course [ACTION: University Secretary].
3. There has been an increase in Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences (RIDDOR) compared to previous years. The statistics also demonstrate the impact of the weather, and the potential long-term impact of flooding and temperature changes.

4. Members discussed the recommendations and assurance level from a recent internal audit review, and the need to ensure that delegated recommendations to faculties in relation to Health and Safety are included in the update report to Council [**ACTION:** Health, Safety and Environment Manager].
5. Members discussed the areas of risk, particularly with regards to key areas and buildings on campus. The need to ensure appropriate planning and aligning remedial work to the Estates strategy was noted.
6. Health and Safety at the Old College was discussed. It was noted that Andrew Scott was responsible whilst the building work was underway. Consideration should be given to where the risk and oversight of Health and Safety at the Old College should be scrutinised.

RESOLVED

7. Members noted the report.
8. The supporting plans, including the Estates strategy should be considered by Council once the University strategy had been agreed in autumn 2024. [**ACTION:** Director of Estates, Facilities and Residencies].

44. HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY

RECEIVED

Health and Safety Policy (COU2324-080b)

NOTED

1. The Health and Safety policy is an external-facing document which is shared with staff, stakeholders and partners. Amendments have been implemented following discussions in Governance and Culture Committee, and the content in the introduction was confirmed as an accurate record with the Communication and Marketing teams.
2. The Health and Safety Operational Group and Trade Unions had been consulted.

RESOLVED

3. The policy was approved. Members noted the need for consistent messages across university platforms and requested that the narrative and justification was shared with GCC in its next meeting [**ACTION:** University Secretary].

45. FINANCIAL MATTERS

1. Management Accounts update – Month/Quarter end

RECEIVED

Report by Rhian Linehan, Finance Business Partner; Stephen Harrison, Finance Business Partner and Mr Simon Crick, Director of Finance and Planning (COU2324-081).

NOTED

1. The current forecast notes a year-end position of £5.8m deficit without implementation of further management actions. In reaching these conclusions, the Finance team considered a range of options, mapping best- and worst-case outcomes.
2. Good progress is being made on the savings target of £7.3, which is forecasted to be deliverable. Additional savings are required to close the gap. The main risks were outlined in the report.
3. The adverse movements, including the impact of the water leak on campus, was discussed.
4. The Director of Finance and Planning outlined how Council could be assured that work was underway, including weekly cashflow reporting. Members questioned whether a RAG rating could be developed to identify how progress could be made and tracked.
5. Officers noted the need to set a realistic budget which identified all costs. Oversight and management of the position is improving, and officers are not expecting to address any new issues before the end of the academic year.
6. Following the report by TIAA, there remains a heightened responsibility to report. A 'lessons-learnt' paper will be presented to ARAC in June 2024.
7. Members queried whether the plan had been stress-tested to understand the challenges and what levers were at the disposal of the University, should it become a need.
8. Members questioned when specific actions would need to be taken, should the worst-case scenario emerge. Officers confirmed that tracking and monitoring the budget in 2023-24 was essential. Officers also noted that, where possible, some reviews and workstreams were underway to enable immediate actions as required.
9. Members noted concern regarding the impact on staff morale and student experience. Officers confirmed that every effort was made to manage the impact.
10. Members queried the HEFCW Financial Indicators and whether there were issues with the regulator. It was confirmed that regular meetings were held between staff in both organisations and HEFCW officers were assured that actions were being taken.
11. The change in budgets indicates the challenging landscape. Members noted that a constructive discussion was held in Resources and Performance Committee, giving members good assurance about the direction of travel and the final budget position.
12. Members discussed whether there was sufficient resilience in the Finance team if key members of staff were away from the business. The Director of Finance and Planning confirmed revised arrangements in the team to diffuse day-to-day pressures, which also ensured better resilience and clarity regarding the cash position.

RESOLVED

13. Members noted the report.

2. 2024/25 Budget and Planning Round

RECEIVED

Report by Mr Simon Crick, Director of Finance and Planning (COU2324-082).

NOTED

1. Modelling has been produced by the Finance and Planning teams for 2024-25. The main assumption is £12.5m deficit for 2024-25, based on flatline student numbers. The forecast is based on 31 January UCAS home UG numbers and a similar international intake as 2022-23. The consequences and impact of the assumed student numbers, without mitigating actions was considered, particularly in relation to going concern.
2. Discussions are being held with each budget-holder to consider reductions of 5-15% in costs, and the impact. Benchmark data has been provided for Staff Student Ratio (SSR); staff cost as a percentage of tuition income; research overheads and contribution; and information such as courses and modules with low attendance.
3. There will be a cost of change, relating to contractual obligation the university will have to pay before realising the saving. The detail and quantum of the costs are currently unknown.
4. The forecast of £3m deficit for 2024-25 is largely driven by covenant requirements for the new RCF.
5. A recruitment and enrolment update were provided to RPC, with variable modelling due to the unstable landscape. Clearing is likely to be extremely competitive across the sector.
6. Members discussed the need to stop some activities and recognised the mechanism through the University Executive and the planning round to implement local decision, and to ensure that ad-hoc decisions are paused to enable prioritisation through cross-cutting activities.
7. The change programme should be considered as a separate risk on the corporate risk register and the framework monitored by ARAC, and the individual committees as appropriate.

RESOLVED

5. The report was noted

Professor Louise Marshall left the meeting.

3. Student Fees

RECEIVED

Report by Helen Eustace, Head of Planning and Sarah Taylor, Head of Strategic Development (COU2324-083).

NOTED

1. Welsh Government announced an intention to increase the maximum regulated home undergraduate fee to £9250 from September 2024. Legal advice has been sought and based on the University's terms and conditions, the uplift can be implemented from September 2024. The University would need to communicate the change to all students, and a variation to the University's Fee and Access Plan is required.
2. If the uplift was applied, it would be applied to all students and the University would not differentiate between courses in this respect. The international student fees are set and agreed separately.
3. The Student Loans Company Portal opened in March and does not reflect the potential increased fee. This has been raised and is being duly considered, subject to decisions and approvals at a local and national level.

RESOLVED

4. Members approved the recommendation to increase the fee to £9250 from September 2024. Executive were given the authority to decide on the appropriate timing to implement the decision. Council should be notified when the decision has been communicated [**ACTION:** University Secretary].
4. Unregulated Student Fees

RECEIVED

Report by Helen Eustace, Head of Planning and Sue Clark, Business Development Officer (COU2324-084)

NOTED

1. Competitor analysis data demonstrated where Aberystwyth University's fee levels were currently positioned. Fee increases of 5%, 7% and 10% were presented and considered.
2. Any changes would be published immediately prior to the start of the 2025-26 recruitment cycle in spring 2024.

RESOLVED

5. A 10% increase for the following unregulated fees for 2025-26 was approved:
 1. UG International -Classroom subjects
 2. UG International – Laboratory subjects
 3. PGT Home – Classroom subjects
 4. PGT International – Laboratory subjects
 5. MBA Home and International fees
 6. Executive MBA (part-time)
 7. Executive Masters of Management (part-time) Home and International
 8. PGCE International fee
 9. PGR International Arts/Social Science Fee Band
 10. PGR International Science Fee Band

6. A 10% increase for International English Centre Fees was approved.

5. Appointment of External Auditors

RECEIVED

Report by Mathew Clarke, Tax and Investments Manager (COU2324-085)

NOTED

1. KPMG were awarded a three-year contract from 1 August 2022 for External Audit services.
2. Meetings have been held with the auditors to discuss lessons learned following the 2023-24 audit process.

RESOLVED

3. Council approved the reappointment of KPMG as the University's External Auditors for the year ending 31 July 2024.

Ellen ap Gwynn left the meeting.

46. GOVERNANCE MATTERS

1. Deputy Chair of Council

RECEIVED

Report by Dr Gwawr Taylor, University Secretary (COU2324-086).

NOTED

1. Meri Huws previously held the role of Deputy Chair of Council until they were appointed Chair of Council from 1 January 2024.
2. The Nomination Committee considered the expression of interest and wished to recommend to Council that Rhuanedd Richards was appointed Deputy Chair of Council.
3. Rhuanedd Richards's first term on Council is due to conclude on 31 July 2024, therefore a further recommendation was made to Council to appoint Rhuanedd Richards for a second term, until 31 July 2028.
4. To strengthen Council's oversight across the sub-committees, a meeting of the respective Chairs will be convened [**ACTION:** University Secretary].

RESOLVED

5. Members approved Rhuanedd Richards's appointment as Deputy Chair of Council.
6. Rhuanedd Richards was re-appointed for a second term on Council, until 31 July 2028.

2. Clerk to Council: Consideration of Independence

RECEIVED

Report by Professor Jon Timmis, Vice-Chancellor (COU2324-087).

NOTED

1. A paper was presented to Remuneration Committee outlining proposed changes to the Executive team. Remuneration committee approved the proposals as permitted under its delegated authority. Council is responsible for considering that the Clerk to Council is sufficiently independent and that there are appropriate separations in the lines of accountability.
2. The current portfolio would remain with the role, but with additional responsibility for Welsh Language, including Welsh Language Services and Dysgu Cymraeg, and UKVI. The role would also become a full member of the Executive.

RESOLVED

3. Council was assured that the revised role of the University Secretary was sufficiently independent and that there was appropriate separation in the lines of accountability.

3. Report on Compliance with SU Code of Practice

RECEIVED

Report by Dr Gwawr Taylor, University Secretary and Trish McGrath, Chief Executive AberSU (COU2324-088).

NOTED

1. The status of the Code of Practice was noted as an accurate representation following a review of the requirements and actions.

RESOLVED

2. The report was noted.

4. Managing Sickness Absence: Ordinance 35

RECEIVED

Report by Sharon Lilley, Head of Human Resources (COU2324-089)

NOTED

1. Members commended the additional support for staff, particularly in relation to loss, fertility treatment, and the proactive approach to the implementation of the policy.
2. The policy should be reviewed to ensure consistent language is used throughout [ACTION: Interim Director of HR and Organisational Development]. Members agreed that this did not materially change the content, and the priority should be

to replace and improve the current policy and the working practice and give employees the support they need.

3. Internal audit recommendations refer to aspects of 'return to work' in the faculties. Suitable links between audit reports, policy and training should be implemented [**ACTION:** Interim Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development].
4. In response to a query regarding specifying the requirements of managers and escalation processes, it was confirmed that guidance documents will be available to underpin the principles of the policy.
5. Links between approaches to staff and student mental health should be explored.

RESOLVED

6. The policy was approved, and Ordinance 35 should be amended to reflect the policy. Members delegated authority to the Chair of Council and Chair of Governance and Culture Committee to approve minor amendments.
7. The timing of the committees should be reviewed to ensure sufficient time between committees and Council [**ACTION:** University Secretary].

47. ANNUAL REPORTS/STATEMENTS

1. Annual Equalities Report

RECEIVED

Report by Dylan Jones, Diversity and Inclusion Manager (COU2324-090a)

NOTED

1. Governance and Culture Committee considered the report. Members queried whether the narrative and the information in the tables could be presented in an alternative format to be as inclusive as possible. This was agreed and amended.

RESOLVED

2. The report was approved.

2. Strategic Equality Plan

RECEIVED

Report by Dylan Jones, Diversity and Inclusion Manager (COU2324-090b)

NOTED

1. The direction for the next four years, including priorities such as reducing pay gap and student attainment.
2. The actions for the next 12 months recognises that the plan needs to work across the University's core work. As the University Strategy is developed and approved, the interim actions can ensure continued progress. An amended plan and

associated actions should be reconsidered in 12 months to reflect the University Strategy [ACTION: Diversity and Inclusion Manager].

RESOLVED

3. The Strategic Equality Plan was approved, subject to noting that this is a 1-year plan, with 3-year aspirations, and to explain the context of this decision in the report [ACTION: Diversity and Inclusion Manager].

3. Gender Pay Gap

RECEIVED

Report by Dylan Jones, Diversity and Inclusion Manager (COU2324-090c)

NOTED

1. The University is lower than the sector average on mean and median gender pay. An action plan is in place to address the gender pay gap. The University was successful in securing Athena Swan bronze awards.
2. Members discussed academic promotions, notably the number of females progressing to Professor and the associated actions.
3. Departments have expressed an interest in applying for Athena Swann. The work across the university is maintained through the Steering Group, but departments can be invited to the meetings to learn from previous work and apply directly. Workload should be considered prior to any applications.

RESOLVED

4. The Report was approved.
5. The actions and progress should be considered by GCC, with deep-dives into specific areas [ACTION: Interim Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development].

4. AberInnovation Annual Report 22-23

RECEIVED

Report by Rhian Hayward, Chief Executive Officer, AIEC (COU2324-091)

NOTED

1. There are no definitive timelines for the Mid-Wales Growth Deal conclusions. Further information will be presented to Council accordingly.

RESOLVED

2. The report was noted.

48. OLD COLLEGE

RECEIVED

Report by Dr Rhodri Llwyd Morgan, Director of Welsh Language and External Engagement (COU2324-092).

NOTED

1. The projected total cost of the project has increased from £44.1m to £54.303m since the previous report to Council. This is due to greater clarity on the impact of inflation affecting subcontractor labour and materials; additional costs due to the extension of time likely to be required; and the increased expenditure on professional fees. It is proposed that the funding gap will be addressed by accessing other funding sources.
2. The original business plan was drafted in 2019 and amended in 2021 to include the Cambria building to improve the commercial viability of the project. Work is underway to review and update the business plan.
3. The original business plan included an intention to offer free admission to the permanent galleries with an admission fee of circa £4.20 for special touring exhibitions in the Old Hall in the Summer season from June to September. Consideration of cost increases for the operation of the new facilities has identified a number of significant uplifts in costs which were not anticipated at the time. These are essentially due to inflation since 2019. The key additional costs are in labour, food and utility costs.
4. Discussions with HMRC over four years have clarified that there must be a commitment to administer a ticketing system and to keep accurate records for all free gallery admissions. To achieve this the plans have incorporated proposals for Salto electronic locks on the gallery spaces which require a ticket or pass to access the gallery.
5. A charge of £2.00 including VAT would deliver an additional income of some £145,000 from the expected 87,000 admissions which would be a notable contribution to operating costs.
6. A member of Council queried whether membership schemes had been explored. This is not currently in the business plan and should be explored by university officers [**ACTION:** Pro-Vice Chancellor: Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences].
7. It was noted that the business plan would be reviewed regularly, and the fee would be an ongoing consideration and adjusted accordingly as appropriate.

RESOLVED

8. To raise a charge of £2.00 for entry to managed galleries and to incorporate this measure in the Business Plan.

The Chair noted that this would be Dr Rhodri Llwyd Morgan's final meeting. He was thanked for his work on the project and for his contributions to Council and the university community.

49. ESTATES, FACILITIES AND RESIDENCES

1. Disposal of Wasdell Gift Land

RECEIVED

Report by Ms Andrea James, Director of Estates, Facilities and Residences and Tim Macy, Estate and Space Planning Manager (COU2324-093).

RESOLVED

1. Members approved the disposal of land gifted to Aberystwyth University, as per the terms of the bequeathment, including the use of the University Seal as required.
2. Lease of Vicarage Fields Gymnasium as Mosque

RECEIVED

Report by Ms Andrea James, Director of Estates, Facilities and Residences; Ian Munton, Director of Student Services and Tim Macy, Estate and Space Planning Manager (COU2324-094).

NOTED

1. The benefits of entering into a formal agreement with Aberystwyth Islamic Society. The agreement would formalise the long-standing, unwritten agreement, which allows the local Islamic community use of Vicarage Fields gymnasium, as a mosque.
2. The draft agreement would place a full repairing obligation for the building on the Tenant, in exchange for a peppercorn rent. The agreement would also serve to progress the University's commitment to faith and spirituality, strengthen our relationship with the local Islamic community, improve the quality of the space and improve the attractiveness of the University offering to potential staff and students who might wish to make use of such a space during their time at Aberystwyth.

RESOLVED

3. The proposal to enter a five-year lease with Aberystwyth Islamic Society for use of the gymnasium at Vicarage Fields, as a mosque was approved, including the use of the University Seal as required.

50. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

RECEIVED

Members received reports on the following:

1. Summary Corporate Risk Register (COU2324-095).

RESOLVED

- 1.1. The amended risk register was approved.
2. Documents affixed with the Common Seal (COU2324-096);
3. Serious incidents reported to the Charity Commission (COU2324-097);
4. Report on Welsh Language Standards Complaints (COU2324-098);

5. Transparent reporting of income and expenditure (COU2324-099);
6. AUPAS Triennial Valuation Preliminary results (COU2324-100);

NOTED

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

51. REPORTS FROM SUB-COMMITTEES

RECEIVED

A composite report comprising the minutes of the Council sub-committees (COU2324-101)

NOTED

The reports received from the sub-committees.

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

A request was made to discuss the Welsh Strategy in a future meeting. Officers confirmed that the strategy is due to be considered by Senate in June and will be discussed by Council in its meeting in July.

Officers were thanked for their contributions and reports.

The next meeting of Council will be held on 16 May 2024, with a Strategy session on 15 May 2024.