

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held at 14:15 on 26 APRIL 2024, via Microsoft Teams.

Present: Ms Meri Huws, Chair of Council (Chair); Professor Jon Timmis, Vice-Chancellor; Professor Tim Woods, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning, Teaching and Student Experience); Ms Kate Eden; Ms Kylie Evans; Professor Simon Green; Miss Elain Gwynedd, UMCA President; Mrs Ellen ap Gwynn; Dr Louise Marshall; Ms Rhuanedd Richards; Mr Arwel Thomas; Mr Mark Tweed; Ms Jane Usherwood; Mr Bayanda Vundamina, AberSU President; and Professor Reyer Zwigelaar.

In attendance: Mr Simon Crick, Director of Finance and Planning; Dr Gwawr Taylor, University Secretary and Director of Welsh Language; and Mr Steve Thomas, Head of Communications and Public Affairs.

53. WELCOME, APOLOGIES AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Members were welcomed to the meeting and thanked for their attendance in the special meeting.

No apologies had been received.

It was noted that all staff members on Council would likely be impacted by any proposed changes.

Jane Usherwood noted that she was married to a Vice-Chancellor of a university in England. It was agreed that it was not deemed a direct conflict but would be noted for completeness.

54. FINANCIAL MATTERS

2024/25 Budget and Planning Round

RECEIVED

Report by the Simon Crick, Director of Finance and Planning (COU2324-103).

NOTED

1. Substantive change was needed, which would require a significant amount of work over the coming months. A lot of progress has been made, but further work is required.
2. Costs are being reduced where possible, but the opportunities to make significant savings prior to the end of the year is reducing.
3. The fee uplift, as discussed in the previous meeting of Council, has been approved by HEFCW.
4. It is estimated that savings of £5.3 million can be achieved, based on the agreed plans. There is also a cost to potential staff changes, therefore the savings would be slightly lower to reflect costs.

5. Executive leads and Heads of Departments were tasked with savings of 10% against their budgets for 2024-25. This was not achieved across each area.
6. Members discussed cultural matters in relation to changes across the university including an aversion to change in some areas and change fatigue following the previous SIP process. It was questioned whether the proposed changes were far-reaching enough.
7. The increased risk on international recruitment is affecting several institutions. The Director of Global Marketing and Student Recruitment has taken a series of actions to incentivise the students and ensure controls are in place to mitigate the risk.
8. Due to the significant shortfall in savings, it was proposed that a voluntary severance (VS) scheme was launched imminently to ensure sufficient savings by the end of the next financial year. The VS scheme would put pressure on cashflow due to the upfront settlements, and additional cash support would be required over the next period. Officers outlined the options available, including approaching HEFCW and using the endowment fund as a loan.
9. A review of the structure of the schools and faculties was discussed.
10. Members discussed the perception that the Old College was costing the university significant sums of money, whilst the university was operating deficit budgets and facing voluntary severance schemes. Officers emphasised that external money was funding the Old College, and stopping work on Old College would not address any of the matters currently under consideration.
11. Members discussed the difference between the current scheme and any future schemes and noted that posts would not be replaced if any members of staff chose to leave. The benefits and drawbacks of a targeted VS, against a broader scheme were discussed. A targeted scheme would not give the quantum required, at the speed required, which was one of the main drivers.
12. Focus remains on the current financial year, whilst work is ongoing on the next financial year. The message to Heads of Departments emphasises the need to reduce expenditure this year.
13. Members discussed cashflow, noting that the end of the calendar month is challenging although it is being managed carefully. The RCF has been fully drawn.
14. Members queried whether flatline student number assumptions were appropriate, and whether further stress-testing should be undertaken. The Director of Finance and Planning confirmed that a monthly review is undertaken, and the budgets are re-forecasted to ensure figures are up to date, before they are presented to the University Executive. Members noted their support to use the sub-committees to scrutinise, challenge and discuss.
15. Undertaking decisions against core values was suggested, as well as the need to ensure the vision for the future of the institution is clearly communicated. Maintaining the excellence of the student experience and constructively challenging mediocrity is important as the organisation rebuilds for the future.

16. The situation across the sector has been regularly reported in the media. The communication notes for the media and for stakeholders are being prepared to ensure the message is proactive and addresses the future.

Jane Usherwood left the meeting.

17. The University will continue to be a research and teaching university.

RESOLVED

18. More radical and transformational thinking is required to address the savings required, and to ensure the long-term sustainability of the University.
19. Council agreed the principle of Voluntary Severance Scheme. Executive should consider the balance between a university-wide scheme and a targeted approach and submit a recommendation to the Redundancy Committee to agree the framework for the Voluntary Severance scheme. Redundancy committee will also approve the package available to staff.
20. Council approved a £3m deficit budget target for 2024-2025.
21. Any income from the fee uplift should be kept as a development fund for investment. The SU noted that their support for the fee uplift was based on the agreement that students would benefit from future investment. The details will be discussed and scrutinised through the committees.
22. HEFCW officers should be approached regarding an advance of cash to enable deliver of the redundancy scheme.
23. The committees will consider the relevant matters according to their terms of reference, but a Council meeting should be called if needed.

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

Officers were thanked for their transparency and Council members thanked for their constructive support.

The meeting finished at 16:00.