

CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL BRIEFING MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 28 APRIL 2020	
PRESENT: via video conferencing	
Lord Kerslake (Chair)	Prof C Kinsella
Ms J Allen	Mr N MacDonald
Mr A Adegbola	Dr J Morrissy
Prof J Bale	Ms M Munn
Mr D Bradley	Mr S Muhammed
Ms E Buckley	Prof J Patnick
Mr D Bye	Mr K Taylor
Dr K Grainger	Ms P Thompson was present via telephone when video conferencing service was intermittent
Prof Sir C Husbands	Dr S Timothy
Mr C Kenny	Prof P Wiles
APOLOGIES:	
Ms K Finlayson	Ms A Foulkes
IN ATTENDANCE:	AGENDA ITEM
Ms M Boryslawskij, University Secretary and Clerk to the Board	
Mr R Calvert, DVC Strategy and Operations	
Prof R Eccleston, DVC Academic	
Ms D Harry, Chief Finance and Planning Officer	
Ms S Jackson, Chief People Officer	
Prof K Kerrigan, PVC Business and Enterprise	
Prof A Metcalfe, PVC Teaching and Learning	
Dr L Mooney, PVC Research and Innovation	
Ms L Stallard, Executive Assistant to the University Secretary and Chair of the Board of Governors (observer)	
Mr M Swales, Chief Estates and Facilities Officer	
Prof C Wigginton, PVC Global and Academic Partnerships	
Ms T Goodwill, Minute Secretary, Governance, Legal and Sector Regulation	

Agenda item 1	Chair's Opening Remarks: the University's immediate response to the Coronavirus pandemic	Minute Ref BG/20/50
50.1	The Chair welcomed members of the Board to the special briefing meeting which was being held using video conferencing owing to the continuing advice of the Government in connection with the global Coronavirus pandemic which was to 'Stay at home, protect the National Health Service and save lives'.	
50.2	The purpose of the meeting was to brief the Board of Governors on the University's response to the pandemic and to give the Board an opportunity to ask questions about the decisions that have been taken and actions implemented with pace in challenging	

circumstances as students and staff adapt to new ways of studying and working (minutes BG/20/53, 54 and 55 refer).

- 50.3 An addition to the published agenda was a tabled paper with a proposal for the Board arising from the University's constitutional ability to hold remote meetings (minute BG/20/52 refers).

Agenda item 2	Declarations of Interest	Minute Ref BG/20/51
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- 51.1 There were no declarations of interest.

Additional Agenda item Paper Ref BG/3/20/TABLED	Articles of Government: Remote Governance A proposal for the Board	Minute Ref BG/20/52
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- 52.1 The Clerk introduced the report which clarified the reasons for the proposal to the Board to pass a resolution to interpret the word 'present' at a meeting in the current Articles of Government, to include being present via video conferencing, or internet video facilities. The current Articles came into force on 21 September 1994 and the report outlined the University's constitutional ability to hold remote meetings including the legal advice. The proposal was:
- i) in line with the Charity Commission's guidance;
 - ii) a proportionate approach which allowed meetings of the Board, its committees and the Academic Board to continue and therefore provide the University with the best achievable outcome in the current climate and external context;
 - iii) considered to be the best and only option. This had been confirmed by the Clerk in discussion with other University Secretaries about their approach to constitutional requirements.

- 52.2 The Board:

- i) noted the current constitutional position and the likelihood of challenge and scrutiny. In order to avoid any doubt as to the validity of such a resolution/the holding of virtual meetings, the Clerk would make arrangements to ensure that any decisions were also ratified later, when the usual meeting format is re-introduced and the meetings held in person, as usual;
- ii) resolved to approve the interpretation of the word 'present' at a meeting in the current Articles of Government, to include being present via video conferencing, or internet video facilities;
- iii) noted the next steps in connection with the work of the Board Effectiveness Working Group to review and refresh the Instrument and Articles of Government.

Agenda item 3	Academic delivery of teaching assessment and research in remote mode focusing on aspects of transition	Minute Ref BG/20/53
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- 53.1 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) reported that in the transition to full online delivery, the University's approach to teaching, assessment and research was designed to support all its students to continue their learning and demonstrate that learning through appropriate assessment so that they achieve meaningful qualifications. The range of measures underpinning the transition of academic delivery to remote mode were outlined as follows:

- i) In the context of a policy which had been implemented to ensure that there was no detriment to students from the disruption caused by the pandemic the approach was:
 - providing support to students to complete assessments as best they can in unprecedented circumstances, and in a way which recognised their individual circumstances, including easy access to extensions of ten days without requiring

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- evidence.
- adjusting assessments where necessary, including extending deadlines and moving to online exams or alternative assessment.
 - progressing Foundation Year and Level 4 students where possible, although some Professional Bodies may require assessment to be completed.
 - ensuring no detriment through the Department Assessment Boards' (DAB) careful consideration of student and cohort performance, using current and previous marks to adjust outcomes where an impact is seen;
 - providing a no detriment retake should the student remain dissatisfied with their outcome.
- ii) work to understand the impact of disruption on the portfolio included risk logs for all research and innovation projects. Whilst operating in remote mode the University had had some success with funding applications for research and innovation projects and 60 applications were in progress.
- iii) the no detriment policy acknowledged that some students may not have optimal study conditions in the current environment. Support arrangements included:
- staff in student support teams contacting students who had asked the University to contact them to discuss guidance and support for their individual circumstances. This feedback from students was in response to a short wellbeing survey of their current living arrangements and how they were getting on with their study;
 - staff in student support teams contacting the small number of home students who were still abroad;
 - food vouchers and emergency grants for international students who remained in the City;
 - promotion of access to the Hallam Hardship Fund. Students were facing a range of financial challenges. The Fund had been used to enable students to access the technology they need to continue with their studies;
 - students' access to lectures and course materials on line;
 - a three month extension for postgraduate research students' registration/completion.
- iv) developments in the external environment included:
- the suspension of the programme of OfSTED visits. The OfSTED monitoring visit, which the University had expected sometime in April 2020 (minute BG/20/26 refers) may change to a re-inspection on a date to be determined by OfSTED;
 - the Research Excellence Framework 2021 which was on hold until further notice. The University's work towards a future submission continued in remote mode;
 - a continuing need for the University to keep pace with developments to keep its policies current and students and external stakeholders well informed. This included updates to policies for students on placements and placement providers. Guidance published by UK Research and Innovation was being communicated to the University's doctoral research community.
- v) The University was contributing to the local and national response to the pandemic and had responded to enquiries in connection with:
- the production of 3D printed components for ventilators for the National Health Service (NHS);
 - the provision of personal protective equipment;
 - support services helping communities cope with social isolation.
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53.2 The University thanked the Students' Union for its support for the University's response to the disruption created by the pandemic.

53.3 Governors commented that the University's transition to remote mode and pace with which it had been achieved across a diverse and complex range of teaching, learning and research provision was impressive. The focus on students was the right priority.

Governors asked:

- i) for clarification of the issue raised in the discussions in the media and on social media about universities offering no detriment policies for students. It was reported that the discussions centred on the application of an algorithm to calculate marks and that there was no single, consistent approach to it in the sector. The University would use a student's aggregate mark informed by trajectory. It was commented that the University's approach was believed to be fair and better than the use of a student's average mark. However, there was room for improvement by the University in the clarity of its communications to students in particular about the application of the policy and the reasons for taking its approach to calculating marks. It was reported that communications had been a challenge and clarity in the content of communications was being addressed.
- ii) How the University was ensuring that it continued to operate in the best interests of students given that the sector approach to no detriment was not consistent. It was reported that the University was alert to guidance as it was issued and made sure its approach was consistent with guidance from the Office for Students (OfS) and other sector bodies;
- iii) about marking and providing student feedback. It was reported that even though automatic progression arrangements were in place, academic staff were responding to requests from students for their work to be marked and for feedback on it;
- iv) about the approach to online exams. It was reported that the University's examination dates had been delayed by one week to extend time for revision;
- v) about the application of the University's no detriment policy by the DAB at the point that a student's mark profile was considered. It was reported that the University's arrangements were designed to ensure a coherent and consistent University-wide approach. The University would take time to reflect on transition and its impact to ensure that it had not indirectly disadvantaged any individual;
- vi) about the academic staff workload in 2020 following DAB meetings. It was reported that a range of scenarios had been considered in designing the University's no detriment policy including the implications for academic staff workload. The implementation of the policy may result in a saving in time rather than an increase in workload;
- vii) about the extent to which the degrees to be awarded in 2020 would be seen by employers as credible. It was reported that a campaign for the Class of 2020 would be launched for final year students. The support for 2020 graduates aimed to build confidence and provide opportunities for them in relation to their work, life and further study. The campaign would include the implementation of a communications strategy with employers;
- viii) about the risks and impact on research funding and opportunities. It was reported that the University had confidence in its business funder profile and grant delivery and its programme of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships was well managed. The University's programme of project review included risk assessment to inform decision making in connection with a project's continuation.

Agenda item 4

**Delivery of remote operations, strategic coherence, staff
remote working and risk management**

Minute Ref **BG/20/54**

54.1 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Strategy and Operations) reported that the University was taking a no detriment approach to enable staff to continue to work from home as effectively as they can. The range of measures underpinning the transition to remote working arrangements and the continuing operation of the University were outlined as

follows:

- i) all University buildings were closed with very limited access for critical maintenance, safety, security or pre-agreed essential activities which were either critical to University operations or support the NHS;
- ii) for those staff unable to work from home owing to the nature of their work, the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme had been implemented. The University had furloughed less than 10% of staff. This had involved work by the Directorate of Human Resources and Organisational Development (HROD) and line managers across the University to communicate and implement the Government's guidance.
- iii) the no detriment approach recognised that in working from home there were a number and variety of individual circumstances, including caring responsibilities for family members; a staff pulse survey to be launched in April 2020 would invite staff to share their thoughts and experiences of working during the pandemic. The responses will be considered alongside those gathered from the recent Digital Technology Services (DTS) survey to help develop ways of working during the pandemic and inform ways of working in future;
- iv) technology underpinned the University's transition and continuing operations. The underlying infrastructure had proved robust reflecting recent investments. The support by DTS had been first class and included a considerable amount of work at pace to build substantial capacity to support remote working;
- v) Support arrangements for staff to enable working from home included the:
 - University's purchase of new licences for software;
 - provision of laptops;
 - authorisation by managers of staff requests for necessary additional equipment and consumables.
- vi) the University level governance structure had been condensed and consisted of:
 - the Major Incident Gold Group which was led by members of the University Leadership Team (ULT). The Group met regularly to monitor and prioritise immediate needs and would continue to oversee the University's operations to the end of the 2019/20 academic year;
 - A future strategy group which was considering academic delivery in autumn 2020, the future environment and longer-term implications beyond the pandemic;
 - The ULT which was meeting weekly;
 - The Academic Board and the Board of Governors and its committees.
- vii) planning continued for virtual open days and 2020 Confirmation and Clearing;
- viii) the Gold Group's risk-based approach to the management of the operation of the University included:
 - health and safety requirements which were a key driver of decisions. A record of all health and safety related decisions was maintained.
 - maintaining engagement with staff including support for their continued wellbeing whatever their individual circumstances;
 - recognition that balancing everyday life with the requirements of working from home could affect staff resilience and may lead to a decline in wellbeing including mental health. Staff sickness absence continued to be monitored but there were no trends indicating a decline in wellbeing.

The risk-based approach was informing consideration of what re-opening of the University's City and Collegiate Campuses might look like and recognised that re-opening buildings was unlikely in the short term and would need to be phased over a number of months. A revised strategic risk register had been considered by ULT on 28 April 2020 and would be considered by the Audit and Risk Committee at its

meeting on 14 May 2020.

- 54.2 Governors commented that the University's transition including the support for staff and management of the University's operations was impressive. Governors:
- i) asked whether the salary of furloughed staff would be topped up. It was reported that in the context of its no detriment policy the University would top up the salary of furloughed staff to 100%. Governors asked why the University had taken the decision to top up salaries. It was reported that the majority of furloughed staff were among the lowest paid; and that, in the context of the no detriment policy, the decision reflected that, just because the nature of work meant they were most eligible for furloughing, they should not be disadvantaged;
 - ii) shared their experience of working from home and commented that the technology infrastructure supporting remote working had been robust. The University's communications with staff had been issued at pace to alert them to information and guidance on the staff intranet of which there was rather a lot. The pace with which IT KIT had been offered to staff working from home had been frustrating owing to the timing of the communication giving the arrangements for its issue. The communication was published just before the Easter 2020 holiday and, as a consequence of planned leave over the holiday, staff were only beginning to learn of the arrangements. The working from home arrangements for some staff continued to be sub-optimal. It was reported that the University would review what was working well for all staff and where it needed to provide more support;
 - iii) whether the initiatives started before the transition to remote mode such as Highly Skilled Employment would be put on hold given the disruption to academic work and the stress for staff which may be caused by that. It was reported that the ambition and direction of the University Strategy, Transforming Lives had not changed. Strategic objectives to ensure sustainability in what was likely to be a more competitive environment would need to be adapted. Given the disruption to academic delivery it may not be possible to achieve strategic objectives in the planned time frame. The way in which the University approached change as it moved beyond the major incident response phase would be cognisant of staff for whom working arrangements remained sub-optimal;
 - iv) about the range of support arrangements for staff wellbeing and mental health. These included:
 - an online weekly bulletin;
 - continuation of the University's subscription to the Employee Assistance Programme;
 - increased level of support available in occupational health/counselling;
 - maintenance of active links to other organisations including Samaritans, MIND, and domestic abuse charities;
 - HROD was working with the University's academic psychologists to identify what other measures of support could be provided;
 - Revising the priorities of some HROD staff to provide and manage staff support arrangements.
 - v) how line manager arrangements for contact with their staff were working. It was reported that personal accounts shared in random sampling of staff provided anecdotal evidence that interactions with line managers across the University were good. This would be tested in the staff pulse survey.

54.3 The University's Financial Planning and Sustainability

At its special meeting in April 2020 the Finance and Employment Committee had received a report on the University's financial planning and sustainability (minute FEC/20/24 refers).

The Chief Finance and Planning Officer outlined the position in connection with:

- i) the 2019/20 financial year. Although the current position was changing constantly, it was considered that the University would not see a significant financial impact from the disruption created by the pandemic.
- ii) planning for 2020/21 in the context of many uncertainties including what might happen in terms of home undergraduate and international student recruitment. The Government had yet to respond to the package of measures proposed by Universities UK (UUK) including a student number cap. The Committee had discussed the potential outcomes for the University of stress tests applied to various income and expenditure lines. The Board received a briefing on the potential outcomes for the covenants in the University's borrowing facility and that detail is recorded in a minute confidential to the Board.
- iii) The University budget and five year forecast which had been considered previously by the FEC and then the Board in July. Given that the OfS submission deadline was not until December 2020 and the planning uncertainty, the FEC and the Board would consider a one year budget at meetings in July 2020. The five year forecast would be brought forward for autumn meetings of the FEC and Board in good time for audit sign-off of the going concern statement in the University's annual report and financial statements prior to submission to OfS.
- iv) Capital expenditure and the Estate Plan. The University would not consider any major estate capital commitments until a more firm income position was known in autumn 2020. Work on the City Campus atrium roof and refurbishment project and Furnival Works project had been suspended. As soon as it was safe to do so, based on Government and public health advice to the construction industry, the projects would resume. The University would accelerate progress of the projects whilst the City Campus buildings remained closed.

Agenda item 5

Policy engagement, sector engagement in transition to remote mode

Minute Ref **BG/20/55**

- 55.1 The University was well placed to influence decision makers and was taking opportunities to that locally and nationally with the Government and individual Ministers, HE Sector bodies and other key organisations. The Vice-Chancellor outlined the following in connection with the University's engagement:
- i) The Vice-Chancellor had joined local leaders regularly for discussion and comparison of their organisational response to the pandemic and challenges arising from policy. This included meetings with the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sheffield. He attended meetings of regional local authorities and Chambers of Commerce. He was a member, with other local leaders of the COVID-19 Economic and Social Response Group brought together by the Mayor of the Sheffield City Region to lead the region's economic fightback to the Coronavirus pandemic. The University was in a network of five applied universities in the region including the University of Hull informing the role of universities in the Northern Power House.
 - ii) The Vice-Chancellor had attended the three recent meetings of the Universities UK (UUK) Board and he was part of a weekly information exchange which covered students, accommodation, regulation, the NHS and the crisis more generally. UUK had submitted a package of proposals to the Government which aimed to stabilise the sector in 2020/21. The four main components were doubling of QR funding, a partial suspension of the undergraduate student market (limit to 5% increase on planned levels), extensive engagement on international students' welfare/recruitment involving the British Council and a transformation fund to support a restructuring of

the sector. The Government had not yet responded and it was considered unlikely that the package would be adopted in full. Direct engagement continued and included Government Ministers and other officials, including the Secretary of State for Education, the Chancellor's economic advisor and representatives of UK Research and Innovation;

- iii) The Vice-Chancellor was a member of the UUK group looking at employability and support for 2020 graduates.

The nature of the challenges ahead should not be underestimated. It was anticipated that the threats to the HE Sector's sustainability would crystallise in autumn 2020. Moving beyond the major incident response phase the University would have difficult choices and decisions to make with implications for its operation including the deployment and employment of staff, approach to the digital strategy and use of the estate.

55.2 Governors commented:

- i) that whilst the impact of the pandemic on the University remained to play out they were assured by the immediate response and the scope of the engagement;
- ii) that views expressed in some recent media articles about the HE sector had not been constructive. The following two articles by the Vice-Chancellor would be shared with the Board following the meeting:
- The Times on 27 April 2020: Universities face meltdown without a proper rescue;
 - Times Higher Education on 28 April 2020: What awaits is not a 'new normal' but the 'next normal'
- iii) on the importance of universities in the national economic context but also the significance of their role given the contributions they could make locally to address the challenges to the economy, society, livelihoods and wellbeing created by the pandemic. There was a tension between local and national agendas and a coherent response would be needed to underpin a rebuilding of the economy;
- iv) on the University's approach to semester 1 in autumn 2020. It was reported that the University would deliver a high quality offer and, although a decision had yet to be made, it was likely that it would be a mix of face-to-face and remote and online delivery. The planning for autumn 2020 would be informed by students' responses to a survey of students' experience of online delivery;
- v) asked about the University's recruitment position. It was confirmed that UCAS had extended the deadline from mid-May to 18 June 2020 for applicants to make their decisions on all the offers they had received. The University's position with home undergraduate recruitment and the work to be done in Clearing would become clearer after the deadline. Retention figures would not be known until the end of September 2020, assuming normal start dates for 2020/21. The University was monitoring the timing of the pandemic and its implications for the cycle of international student recruitment. Across the HE sector there was significant uncertainty regarding the ability of international students to access learning in the UK.

Agenda item 6

Date of next meeting of the Board

Minute Ref **BG/20/56**

- 56.1 The next meeting of the Board would be held on Tuesday 9 June 2020 from 4.00pm until 6.00pm. The topics to be discussed by the Board included the approach to academic delivery in autumn 2020, home undergraduate and international student recruitment and, following the June meeting of the Finance and Employment Committee, a financial update.
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