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| **CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1 MARCH 2023** | | |
| PRESENT: | | |
| John Cowling (Chair) | Janet Onyia | |
| Carol Bernard | Meg Munn | |
| Professor Sir Chris Husbands | Giles Searby | |
| IN ATTENDANCE: | | AGENDA ITEM |
| Richard Calvert, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Strategy and Operations (DVCSO) | | All |
| Tracey Hulme, Director of Human Resources & Organisational Development (HROD) | | Items 1 - 5 |
| Dr Sally Jackson, Chief People Officer, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Diversity & Inclusion) | | All |
| Clair Marlow, Head of Legal Services and Deputy University Secretary | | All |
| Ryan Keyworth, Chief Finance Officer (CFO) | | All |
| Tracey Taylor, Committee Secretary | | All |
| Libby Wilson, Group Director, Infrastructure and Change | | Items 7 and 8 |
| APOLOGIES: Gabrielle Berring, Lord Kerslake | | |

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| Minute Ref | Item of Business | Paper Ref |
| FEC/2023-03-01/1 | DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST |  |
| 1.1 | There were no declarations of interest. | |
| FEC/2023-03-01/2 | CHAIR’S BUSINESS |  |
| 2.1 | The Chairwelcomed the new External Co-opted Members to their first meeting, noting that the Committee’s Terms of Reference had been updated to reflect the revised membership. Members acknowledged Katy Gaunt’s recent resignation and recorded their thanks for her contribution to the work of the Committee.  The CFO and Director of HROD were also welcomed to the meeting. | |
| FEC/2023-03-01/3 | MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS | FEC/2023-03-01/P3 |
| 3.1 | The Committee **approved** the minutes (including the confidential minutes) of the meetings held on 14 November 2023 as an accurate record. | |
| FEC/2023-03-01/4 | MATTERS ARISING AND ACTION TRACKER | FEC/2023-03-01/P4 |
| 4.1 | The following matters arising were noted:   * to schedule a bespoke session with staff and student users on digital systems – it was subsequently decided to mark this action as complete following the demonstration of Blackboard and Learner Analytics under item 7. * to clarify the role/focus of the Committee’s involvement in the Brent Cross Town project, noting the comprehensive reporting from the Task and Finish Group to the Board. | |
|  | **Action:** Chair/DVCSO to discuss how best to incorporate updates on Brent Cross Town within the Finance and Employment Committee’s (FEC) business cycle. | |
| FEC/2023-03-01/5 | HUMAN RESOURCE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (HROD) MATTERS |  |
|  | **People Plan Report** | FEC/2023-03-01/P5.1 |
| 5.1 | **Industrial action update:** the Director of HROD updated members on the protracted period of industrial action, predominantly with the University and College Union (UCU), noting that whilst pay and changes to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) were key factors, the action covered other related issues including workloads and zero-hour contracts. It was reported that UCU would likely ballot their members on extending strike action beyond 20 April 2023 and escalating the action to include a marking and assessment boycott.  It was noted that the impact at the University had been effectively mitigated to date and that significant work had been undertaken in collaboration with the local branch of the UCU to move away from zero-hour contracts and offer more secure contractual terms to c.500 Associate Lecturers. | |
| 5.2 | **Collective pay bargaining:** the Committee noted the wavering support across the sector for the national pay bargaining following a number of failures to reach agreement with the unions over the past ten years. UCEA had recently consulted with HEIs on the future approach to national pay bargaining with the following three broad categories of response: stick, adapt or replace.  Whilst it was reported that the University had no plans to move away from the national pay bargaining framework, it favoured the ‘adapt’ option (proposed changes of which included the mandate for consultation and the timing of negotiations) in recognition that the current position was untenable. | |
| 5.3 | **Annual Sickness Report:** the Director of HROD briefed FEC on the highlights from the first annual sickness report, including   * the aim of the report to enhance understanding of the impact of sickness absence across the University and to identify further action to improve the position; * the return of sickness absence levels to pre-pandemic levels, following a significant decrease in sickness absence in 2019/20 and 2020/21 (the years most affected by Covid-19); * absence levels were slightly above the HE sector average, though the impact of varying approaches to outsourcing catering and cleaning services across the sector was noted; * a higher rate of sickness absence amongst professional services staff than academic staff; * high levels of sickness absence in Estates and Facilities and in manual roles. * mental health-related reasons were cited as the most common reason for absence; and * a decline in the number of people taking sickness absence, contrasted with a rise in the average length of individual sickness absences.   It was noted that communicating information and analysis of sickness absence was key to reducing absence levels and that departments and services would be asked to create sickness action plans to address the specific trends in their areas. Progress against these plans would be monitored through new workforce dashboards issued to Directors and Heads of Department, supported by the Senior HROD Business Partners. | |
| 5.4 | Members commented on the findings of last year’s Pulse Survey which reflected the above trends and enquired into the underlying factors. The Director of HROD highlighted that the long-term sickness trend across the University may be linked to the level of vacancies the University was carrying (in line with the rest of the sector) and post pandemic period adjustments such as hybrid working.  The Chief People Officer and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Diversity and Inclusion) (CPO/ PVCDI) reported that, whilst working from home may be masking some sickness, the incidence of mental health and muscular skeletal issues was increasing. It was noted that a further Pulse Survey was due to be issued in Spring 2023 and would focus on post Covid working patterns.  In response to a query on the seasonal pattern of sickness absence rates, the Director of HROD confirmed that the pattern was representative of most organisations and suggested the need for further support for staff over the winter months.  FEC discussed the support available for managers in conducting wellbeing conversations, including training modules to assist line managers in this area and work on Performance Development Reviews (PDRs) to encourage staff to align with the new working practices. | |
| 5.5 | A confidential minute was recorded. | |
| 5.6 | **Staff costings:** FEC noted the challenges presented by rising staff costs and recent consideration by the University Executive Board (UEB) on the options available to create efficiency savings. A confidential minute was recorded. | |
|  | **Staff Wellbeing Update** | FEC/2023-03-01/P5.2 |
| 5.7 | The Committee noted that, following the adoption of the hybrid working model, a refreshed staff wellbeing strategy had been developed, supported by a wellbeing delivery plan over the subsequent two years. The strategy was focussed around six strands - Worklife Wellbeing, Mental Wellbeing, Financial Wellbeing, Physical Wellbeing, Social Wellbeing and Digital Wellbeing, with the first three themes having been identified as focus areas for 2022/23.  Members were briefed on a wide range of activities associated with each theme, including a pilot of onsite health kiosks; the initiative had proved popular with staff and students alike and the key findings of the pilot evaluation would be presented to FEC.  In response to a member’s query on the different approaches to student and staff wellbeing, it was reported that HROD was working closely with student facing colleagues under the Mental Health Charter to align the University’s wellbeing offer as far as possible given the high level of demand for services. It was also noted that HROD was collaborating with Student Wellbeing on identifying potential training providers for an online provision that would meet both staff and student needs.  Members queried the availability of sector research on approaches to hybrid working and noted that an update on work being undertaken by the North-Eastern HR Directors Group. | |
|  | **Action:** CPO/PVCWI to:   * Present the findings of the evaluation of the health kiosk pilot to FEC and update the Committee on sector developments. | |
|  | **Diversifying the Associate Professor/Professor Population** | FEC/2023-03-01/P5.3 |
| 5.8 | Members were briefed on the diversity of the current Professor and Associate Professor (Prof/AProf) staff groups, trends in application and progression success rates and ongoing work to further diversify this population, particularly:   * the sector issue of a lack of diversity in the Professoriate, noting that the University was above the sector average for ethnicity, gender and disability; * actions taken since 2020 to further improve the position, including   + increasing the diversity of panels considering applications and application workshops;   + actively encouraging under-represented groups to participate in the process,   + re-introducing ‘Hallam Aspire’, a mentoring scheme for individuals from under-represented groups with ambitions to progress to Prof/AProf;   + and showcasing successful Profs/AProfs from a diverse range of backgrounds; * overall outcomes which demonstrated a steady improvement in the diversity of the Professoriate population; * the lack of Profs/AProfs from a black background; and * increasing application success rates for the two groups most under-represented at Prof/AProf level (women and ethnic minority colleagues).   Members welcomed the approach to consider outcomes broken down by different ethnic minority backgrounds rather than ethnicity as a whole. It was noted that sector benchmarking data would be helpful in future reports of this nature.  In relation to sector-wide initiatives, the CPO/PVCDI noted the contribution of StellarHE to address the future pipeline of talent by offering a programme designed for ethnically diverse individuals who aspired to senior leadership positions in HE. | |
|  | **Action:** CPO/PVCDI to present the University’s academic career framework at a future meeting or separate briefing session. | |
|  | **People Development Offer** | FEC/2023-03-01/P5.4 |
| 5.9 | The Director of HROD presented the highlights of the Service’s people development offer, key focus areas of which were leadership and management development and its Inclusive Hallam work.  Members noted the key programmes as follows:   * the Senior Leadership Development Programme (SLDP) designed for the Senior Leaders Group (SLG) to support a stronger leadership culture; * Leadership and Management Essentials (LME) established to provide line managers with the essential skills, tools and techniques for leading and managing successful teams; * the Aurora Leadership Programme which aimed to encourage progression   opportunities to any individual who self-identified as female;   * Leading into the Future (LITF) – an in-house leadership programme for aspiring leaders who identify with any of the protected characteristics; and * the Protect and Respect programme; noted that over 1000 staff had engaged with the first phase of the programme and that the second phase of Protect and Respect (launched in February 2023) would look at key subject areas in more detail. The programme would be the main route to deliver staff training to support the requirements of the Office for Students (OfS) in relation to Harassment, Sexual Misconduct and Hate Crime. | |
| 5.10 | Members queried participation rates by Professional Services and Academic staff. The generally higher take up by Professional Services was noted, however, cohorts for the Aurora, LITF and LME programmes were selected on an expression of interest basis to ensure an appropriate balance of participants. | |
| 5.11 | A confidential minute was recorded. | |
| FEC/2023-03-01/6 | 2023/24 BUDGET AND FUTURE FORECASTS – PROCESS, RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS |  |
| 6.1 | The CFO noted the University’s historic financial strategy to invest in the University rather than create large surpluses and members were assured that, despite the current financial challenges, the long-term strategy of income diversification/growth was the right one. It was reported that, due to the impact of the static undergraduate fee (which represented a real term erosion of income), recruitment and retention performance and rising pay costs, the budget challenge (since the Financial Forecast was last submitted to the OfS) had increased significantly. This meant that an even more stringent and robust budget planning process was required to create sufficient headroom in the Financial Forecast to meet the challenges of the next 2-3 years before the longer-term benefits could be realised from the Online Project and Brent Cross Town development.  It was noted that Colleges and Professional Services Directorates were finalising initial cost savings proposals for review by the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) next week in line with the updated student number planning steer.  In response to a query on whether decisions made now as part of the planning process, could be detrimental to the long-term strategy, the Vice-Chancellor reported that the Executive were continually monitoring the impact on the University’s longer-term plans. | |
|  | An independent member of the Committee provided feedback to FEC from his briefing on the University’s debt collection processes which overall had provided assurance in this area. | |
|  | **Action:** The CFO offered to hold an ‘introduction to finance’ session for FEC members (and to extend this to all Governors). | |
| FEC/2023-03-01/7 | DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION REPORT | FEC/2023-03-01/P7 |
| 7.1 | The Committee received an update from the Group Director, Infrastructure and Change on progress since the last meeting, and outlined the purpose of the demonstration to provide an introduction to Blackboard (the University’s Virtual Learning Environment) and Learner Analytics application. | |
| 7.2 | Sarah Churchill, Senior Lecturer from the Directorate of Student Experience, Teaching and Learning gave an informative presentation on the two student facing applications highlighting the key features from both an academic advisor and student perspective. It was noted that each click in Blackboard left a digital footprint which linked to Learner Analytics to demonstrate how students engaged with the range of virtual learning materials, including a traffic light system for module engagement, academic risk score, assessment activity/grades and average engagement data. The system functionality to record interactions with students, secure access provisions and compliance with GDPR were also highlighted.  In response to a query on whether students could review their own analytics, it was noted that a student facing web application ‘My Study Goal’ was available.  Members queried the potential for Blackboard to record attendance information relating to face-to-face activities. It was noted that some practical activities did not require engagement with Blackboard and that it was important for academic advisors to use local knowledge when analysing the data. It was also noted that work on Checkin Plus to enhance attendance monitoring functionality was taken place this year in readiness for 2023/24. | |
| 7.3 | The Group Director, Infrastructure and Change reported on the planned move to the more modern and flexible platform, Blackboard Ultra. Whilst the landing pages had already been transferred, the organisation and module sites would transition to Blackboard Ultra once the course validation associated with the portfolio review was completed, largely during the 2023/4 academic year. Members noted that this incremental approach would not be disruptive to students.  In response to a query on the selection of Blackboard over other providers, it was reported that continuity of Virtual Learning Environment was helpful during a period of wider change, including the introduction of a new Online portfolio. The transaction cost associated with switching provider, and that Ultra should provide all capabilities offered by other systems, was noted.  Work was ongoing in response to changes to the HESA reporting regime; the Data Futures project was a large-scale national programme to rationalise HE data to provide management information and regulatory information to OfS. It was noted that all record keeping around students’ enrolment status and academic progress with the University was stored in the SITS system and that a major integration project was underway that would support improved integration between SITS and other applications including Learner Analytics. | |
| 7.4 | A confidential minute was recorded. | |
| 7.5 | It was noted that Data Futures/SITS technical consultants were in high demand across the sector and that the University was recruiting some interim resource to enhance its technical capability in this area. The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the Data Futures issue had been logged as risk on the corporate risk register for notification to the Audit and Risk Committee and the Board of Governors. | |
| FEC/2023-03-01/8 | ESTATES MATTERS |  |
|  | **Annual Review of the Estate** | FEC/2023-03-01/P8.1 |
| 8.1 | Members considered the annual report on the condition and suitability of the University estate which ranged from excellent through to poor, with a significant residual maintenance requirement in relation to ageing fabric, mechanical and electrical equipment as a consequence. Whilst the accelerated Campus Plan directly addressed the residual maintenance risk by accelerating the disposal/demolition of buildings in poor condition, in the short-term the University wished to avoid non-essential maintenance spend, particularly for those buildings earmarked for disposal. However, it was noted that some buildings would require some interim investment to maintain the student experience and staff working conditions.  Key areas for further consideration included:   * options around the development of a feasible sport and physical activity portfolio, based on the use of wider Sheffield facilities since the Campus Plan did not provide for the development of new sports facilities at City Campus; and * A confidential minute was recorded. | |
|  | **Estate Disposals Planning** | FEC/2023-03-01/P8.2 |
| 8.2 | Members received an update on property disposals which were critical to financing the Campus Plan, as well as to reducing long term maintenance costs, greenhouse gas emissions, and to support a more efficient and flexible estate. It was noted that the next steps involved detailed scenario modelling and planning, supported by specialist property advisers, for the potential disposal of a number of identified high value properties. | |
| 8.3 | A confidential minute was recorded. | |
| 8.4 | The outcome of this exercise would be reported back to FEC, together with key decisions over the period ahead. | |
| 8.5 | A confidential minute was recorded. | |
|  | **Action:** Group Director of Infrastructure and Change to report further on disposals planning as appropriate. | |
|  | **Estates Development Report** | FEC/2023-03-01/P8.3 |
| 8.6 | The Group Director for Infrastructure and Change updated FEC on key estates developments since the previous meeting, including:   * advancement of the Howard Street (Blocks A-D) construction works; despite delays due to the procurement of the concrete cores, the development was still on track to be operational for 2024/25; * the outputs of the 2022 review by the Hallam Alliance Architects to check the current assumptions behind the mapping of key events within the Campus Plan (the ‘tube map’): an updated version of the tube map, together with a table of operational risks and issues to resolve (noting that any strategic risks/issues would be included in more detailed reporting to FEC). An overall project plan with dates, durations and critical path for the entire Campus Plan would also be developed; * ongoing work with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning Teaching and Student Success) to closely manage the dependency between the portfolio plan, teaching delivery methods, and infrastructure (space and technology); * work to model net zero carbon initiatives and climate action steps required in relation to campus management; * a second, collaborative work experience programme run by the Alliance for students across various Natural Built Environment courses, culminating in a series of student-led presentations. | |
| 8.7 | Key risks included:   * the continuing impact of construction cost inflation on capital projects; detailed work was ongoing with Finance to understand the forward modelling of the later stages of the Campus Plan; and * A confidential minute was recorded. | |
| 8.8 | Members queried the varying impact of hybrid working, virtual learning and capacity of the estate on staff and students. It was noted that whilst teaching was a mix of face-to-face and online, students may choose to engage with online delivery on campus which needed to be reflected in space considerations.  In relation to teaching practice, the importance of understanding what teaching delivery would ultimately look like aligned to work on simplifying the curriculum was highlighted. It was noted that the current aim of 70% utilisation provided some flexibility to move teaching as necessary. | |
| FEC/2023-03-01/9 | FINANCIAL MONITORING | FEC/2023-03-01/P9 |
| 9.1 | FEC noted the University’s operating deficit position as at Period 6 (end January 2023. | |
| 9.2 | A confidential minute was recorded. | |
| FEC/2023-03-01/10 | STUDENTS’ UNION (SU) FINANCIAL MONITORING | FEC/2023-03-01/P10 |
| 10.1 | The Committee received an update on the financial performance of the SU as at period 6, noting the surplus position, the main contributing factors for which were staff turnover, delayed staff recruitment and a higher commercial surplus.  Members discussed the operation of the SU, noting that increasing direct representation within the Colleges was working well. | |
| 10.2 | A confidential minute was recorded. | |
| FEC/2023-03-01/11 | **INVESTMENTS SUMMARY** | FEC/2023-03-01/P11 |
| 11.1 | FEC received the cash investment summary, noting that there were no specific areas of concern | |
|  | **Action:** CFO to present a paper relating to the University’s Investment Policy to a future meeting of the Committee. | |
| FEC/2023-03-01/12 | ANNUAL CYCLE OF BUSINESS 2022/23 | FEC/2023-03-01/P12 |
| 12.1 | FEC received the forward cycle of Committee business for the 2022/3 academic year. | |
| FEC/2023-03-01/13 | ANY URGENT BUSINESS |  |
| 13.1 | There was no other business. | |
| FEC/2122-09-20/14 | DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING |  |
| 14.1 | Wednesday, 3 May 2023, 15.00-18.00 | |