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LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY COUNCIL (REFLECTIVE): Tuesday 21st September 2021

PRESENT: Revd Canon Peter Winn (in the Chair), Mrs Jane Beever (Vice-Chair), Mr Tim Alderman, Ms Ann Marie Costello, Ms Jean Ellis, Dr Penny Haughan, Very Revd Dr Sue Jones, Fr Chris McCoy, Dr Arthur Naylor, Revd Canon Professor Kenneth Newport, Fr Michael O'Dowd, Ms Clara Priestley, Professor Gerald Pillay, Ms Paula Raper, Dr Caroline Wakefield

By invitation: Ms Laura Gittins (Clerk to Council), Mr Derrick Dykins (minute secretary).

For item 3: Dr Wendy Bignold, Dr Tom Sykes, Ms Jo Whittingham, Professor Peter McGrail, Mr Dave Sennett, Mr Jack Evans, Ms Emma Baker, Mr Matthew Courtney, Ms Sophie Reppion, Mr Lukas Loh-Baxter, Ms Abby Kain

1. The Chair **received apologies of absence** from Bishop Paul Bayes, Revd Canon Chris Fallon, Ms Lesley Martin-Wright, Mr John Norbury, Mr Ultan Russell, Ms Maggie Swinson and Judge Graham Wood. He welcomed all new members present to the meeting and each member introduced themselves briefly.

2. **The Corporate Plan and The Hope Way**

The Vice Chancellor presented the above documents which members had received. He explained that when the university college became a university in its own right he was tasked with determining the distinctive purpose and mission of the University. The Corporate Plan was established to try to be faithful to the Anglican tradition that every parish should have a School; and the Notre Dame belief that the best way to reach disadvantaged members of society was through education.

The University has inherited a long tradition of Higher Education which was first established by the Church. The Vice Chancellor noted that the Corporate Plan does not change but rather confirms a collegium of fellowship. However, the strategic plan will change, and possibly frequently, to be able to adapt and thrive.

Members were asked to form groups, and consider three overarching questions regarding the two documents:

- What themes and ideas do these documents strike you as representing?
- Has the experience of lockdown impacted on the way we live according to these themes?
- What do we do to recover those themes now that the pandemic appears to be easing; specifically, what can Council do to help recover those themes?

One group noted that it was refreshing how the Hope Corporate Plan differs from those at other HEIs where they are more generally KPI-focussed. The Hope Plan is based around broad principles and values which drive what the University does. It suggests a broader view of education, preparing students to be global citizens. One member noted that, "rather

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than creating a better world for our children, we should be creating better children for our world”.

Another group felt that there needed to be a “translation exercise” between the language of the Corporate Plan and how to put this across to our secular world society, for both staff and students, especially students who have a radically different experience in terms of who they are regarding faith etc. The thread of care and inclusion comes through what we do and this was evident during Covid with the support the University provided.

Covid meant that the University was forced to move to a virtual model rather than the face-to-face model as stipulated by the Hope Way. The biggest challenge is how Covid has changed the external environment. The challenge of returning to a largely face-to-face model is going to be more difficult given expectations post-Covid.

Knowing students individually is important and there is a need to re-evaluate what we do but not to lose the USP of personal experience. There was good and best practice that was identified during lockdown which should be maintained. It was important to recognise that students might have found themselves in difficult situations at home etc. which may have impacted on their mental health.

3. The Experience of Members of the University during the Pandemic

Members were later joined by staff and students representing a broad view of the Hope community. Dr Haughan introduced staff and students who talked about their experience over the last year, and their hopes for the current academic year. Staff talked about the range of delivery they were able to do, with some practical subjects able to deliver substantial sessions face-to-face as well as online. Generally, the experience had been positive though students have valued being able to meet in person for practical sessions where these were possible.

Online teaching has gone as well as was possible and students were well supported. Students generally had a positive experience and recognised that everyone did everything they could to keep them as supported as possible. Some enjoyed online lectures more, as lectures in a large hall can be intimidating. Online delivery was more flexible and also helped some students who were home-schooling their children. Second year students who had already met their tutors said the fact they had had some face-to-face sessions helped the transition to online delivery, though this will have been harder for first year students who may not have met any tutors face-to-face. One of the biggest disadvantages was not being able to take part in extracurricular activities though students appreciated the Students' Union online activities which helped to make them feel part of university life.

Overall, the sense of community was one of the biggest challenges. There were only 350 students in halls, who were there for a variety of reasons. At times it was challenging supporting these students due to restrictions as they missed the physical sense of community. It was acknowledged that many students had chosen Hope because of the attractiveness of the campus.

For support staff who remained on campus throughout the pandemic, there was a real sense of coming together as they had to put their hand to what was necessary e.g. switchboard and post etc and ensure that everyone was looked after. It was rewarding to be able to support students directly. Academic staff knew they had to respond quickly to online teaching. Those present said they were impressed by colleagues adapting quickly, and supplying necessary resources, including support staff providing computers and accommodation on campus where there were issues at home. However, it was acknowledged that key incidental meetings that pre-pandemic occurred naturally around the physical campus were missed.

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With online delivery, it was difficult building relationships with students as they did not use their cameras. This year academics will need to work hard to build the relationship in the real world. Over time, however, they had managed to build a semblance of a community via tutorials groups. Importantly, the quality of academic work did not drop.

It is hoped that those students moving into private accommodation this year will be able to transition smoothly, though it will not be the same as for cohorts in previous years. They are moving into a situation where such students do not know each other as well as previously. There may be issues over the coming year due to this. We also need to be mindful of students who are home based who might not have formed any connections with others. The Students' Union are already involved in reassuring students and have employed a part-time officer for non-residential students. There will a push this year for non-residential engagement with Students' Union activities.

It was felt that there may be certain legacy issues which will need consideration over the coming few years e.g. there are students who have never sat an exam in a hall. Many students who have a requirement for a number of practical hours for accredited courses haven't been able to reach these hours so far and the University will need to find a way of remedying this.

Dr Bignold also said that many international students have studied at home and have no experience in the UK, let alone of the University campus. The University's International Hub has been working closely with the small group of international students that were in Halls.

4. Next Meeting: The AMG will take place on 23rd November 2021 at 4 pm.