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LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY

UNIVERSITY COUNCIL MEETING: 24th November 2020

PRESENT: Revd Canon Peter Winn (in the Chair), Revd Dr Sheryl Anderson, Mrs Jane Beever, Ms J Ellis, Revd Canon Chris Fallon, Dr P Haughan, Very Revd Dr S Jones, Fr Chris McCoy, Dr Arthur Naylor, Revd Canon Professor Kenneth Newport, Mr John Norbury, Fr Michael O'Dowd, Mr Harry Pearce, Professor Gerald Pillay, Ms P Raper, Dr Caroline Wakefield, Judge Graham Wood (17 members)

By invitation:

Ms Laura Gittins (Clerk to Council)
Mr Derrick Dykins (Company Secretary)

No Conflicts of Interest were reported.

1. **Apologies for absence** were received from Mr Charles Mills (Vice-Chair), Rt Revd Paul Bayes, Cllr Jane Corbett, Dr Simon Hulme and Mr Ultan Russell.

2. Minutes of previous meetings

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th July 2020 and 29th September 2020 (Reflective Meeting) were **APPROVED** as a correct record.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising that were not included elsewhere on the agenda.

4. Vice-Chancellor's Notes to Council

Members had received the Vice Chancellor's Notes to Council which were presented by Professor Pillay. He noted that many of the decisions taken at last the Council meeting in July were proving to be wise, particularly the restructuring of the academic calendar to 8-week staggered terms to manage social distancing; these have also served to create "circuit breakers". The plan when normal delivery can be resumed is that the 8-week terms will stay but will be harmonised across the different undergraduate levels. The Vice Chancellor said that both academic and support staff have worked diligently since the start of the pandemic and would continue to do so. Currently, arrangements were being made for students to leave campus and go home safely at Christmas. An announcement will be made in the week commencing 7th December on how teaching will take place in Term 2 based on the best evidence available.

Dr Haughan noted that figures for student infections had reduced dramatically with only a handful of students currently isolating. In order to allow students to leave safely for Christmas within the government approved window, arrangements were being made to test each student twice prior to 4th December to allow for travel on the weekend of 5th

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and 6th December. Although teaching will not have finished for Years 1 and 2, all teaching will go online from 4th December. The military-run asymptomatic centre currently at Hope Park will close shortly, but the University will be setting up its own centre to manage the mass testing of students. This is being done early enough so that students who test positive will still have an opportunity to get home in time for Christmas. The sector is waiting for government advice on arrangements for students' return in January. It is likely that there will be a mixed model of delivery in Term 2 that will allow for a phased return to complete face-to-face teaching.

The Vice Chancellor highlighted the excellent growth in student numbers which has meant a corresponding increase in the academic compliment with the creation of 30 academic positions. He said that the University did not have the same issues as certain other HEIs in relation to staffing and finances, though he noted that there was an additional cost to the University to maintain online delivery.

Members felt that a message to all staff to thank them for their efforts on behalf of University Council should be sent.

Action: The Chair and the Vice Chancellor to write to all staff on behalf of University Council thanking them for their hard work

5. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Members had received the KPIs for information. The Vice Chancellor said that the National Student Survey (NSS) was problematic due to its timing and advised that the OfS were currently reviewing its efficacy with a view to either significantly changing it or discontinuing it. He noted that research degree numbers had not grown but that this was a conscious decision to limit any growth to the fourteen key REF areas of research excellence. He noted the general improvement in attrition rates and the strong financial position the University was in, currently 10 points above the average in the sector. The University's actual reserves were growing, with good surpluses helping to fund large scale projects.

6. Secretary's Business:

Members had received the Terms of Reference and Composition for Committees of Council for information.

7. Office for Students:

(i) Student Protection Plan 2020/21 and Changes to the OfS Register

Members has received the change to the OfS Register for information, and the Student Protection Plan which required approval.

Members **APPROVED** the Student Protection Plan 2020/21

(ii) Prevent Update

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Members had received the Prevent Update which included the annual return statement. Ms Gittins explained that the application of the Prevent Duty had changed due to the pandemic, which had affected areas such as external speakers. She advised that she had hosted an HE Forum for Prevent shortly after the pandemic began.

There had been two referrals in the last academic year which demonstrated that the University's processes were fit for purpose. The Prevent risk assessment had been reviewed by the Prevent Steering Group and USET, and some different risks had emerged due to the pandemic; currently the University is looking at how it can effectively monitor online speakers who would normally be monitored by the Conferencing Team in face-to-face scenarios. There remained concerns about students posting radical views online and the University was looking at ways of building up online safety and how to be responsible online, balancing this with the student's right to freedom of expression. There are concerns that vulnerable students in isolation may be pulled into radicalisation, though as our two cases from last year have shown, when identified they are given a very comprehensive level of support.

Members **APPROVED** the Prevent Annual Return statement.

The Vice Chancellor noted that Minister Donelan had written to HEIs insisting that they adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism. However, like many universities, Hope University is resisting this as the definition is not well written and open to ambiguity. Academic freedom may also be affected. He said he would keep this under review and will discuss this further at the next Council meeting.

Action: The Vice Chancellor to update Council on the IHRA definition of antisemitism at the next meeting

8. University Council Effectiveness Review Group

The Chair advised that there would be a meeting of the Group in December.

9. Senate

- (i) Members had received the minutes of the meeting held on 11th November 2020, which were presented by Professor Pillay in his capacity as Chair of Senate.
- (ii) Members had received for information the Equality and Diversity Annual Report 2020 and the Annual Report on Student Complaints, Appeals and Discipline.

10. Audit and Risk Management

- (i) Minutes of the meeting of Audit Committee held on 9th September 2020 and 5th November 2020

Members had received the minutes of the meeting held on 9th September 2020 and 5th November 2020 which were presented by the Chair, Dr Naylor.

- (ii) External Auditors' Management Letter on the Accounts

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Members had received the Management Letter from the University's external auditors. It was noted that due to the pandemic, the submission of the letter would not be required until March 2021. Some of the actions required were still outstanding, including the opinion on *going concern*, the pension liability and access and participation disclosure though this was a sector-wide issue hence the rescheduled deadline. Council were requested to give the Chair of Council, the Chair of Finance Committee and the Chair of Audit Committee delegated authority to approve these documents on behalf of Council; it was confirmed that this approach is being used across the sector. Mr Norbury reassured members that there was nothing concerning about this measure.

Members **APPROVED** the delegated authority to Chairs of Council, Finance and Audit Committees to approve the documents on behalf of Council.

(iii) Representation Letter

Members had received the Letter to the External Auditors which confirmed that Council has fulfilled its responsibilities.

The Letter was unanimously **APPROVED** by Council.

(iv) Annual Report of the Internal Audit Service 2019-20

Members had received the Annual Report of the Internal Audit Service. Dr Naylor noted that the Audit Committee had lobbied RSM to upgrade their opinion as the original draft was at odds with accumulated opinions in the individual reports; RSM agreed to review the opinion and this was upgraded to green. Dr Naylor said that members can take considerable comfort from the content of the report.

The Annual Report of the Internal Audit Service was unanimously **APPROVED** by Council.

(v) Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2019-20

Members had received the Annual Report of the Audit Committee which summarised the work over the academic year 2019/20. Dr Naylor said that the report reflected a positive year for audit matters. The University is seeking clarity as to whether the report will be a requirement for the OfS this year and in future years.

The Annual Report was unanimously **APPROVED** by Council

(vi) Items related to risk discussed at Management Meetings

Members had received for information extracts from recent meetings of Management. Dr Naylor noted that Audit Committee had specifically focussed on the risk profile of the University in its last two meetings and at the last meeting had been provided with an updated risk register which detailed the changes in the top ten risks and mitigations being put in place.

(vii) Modern Slavery Statement

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Members had received the Modern Slavery Statement for the last financial year.

Members **APPROVED** the Modern Slavery Statement.

(viii) Students' Union (SU) Update

Dr Naylor noted that the Audit Committee had raised the issue of the governance of the SU and how it was meeting its own requirements and had agreed a course of action to attempt to bring the SU back on track. This had proved successful, as shortly after the University's intervention all the external trustees resigned allowing for appropriate governance arrangements to be put in place. There is now a new manager and the SU is in the process of appointing new trustees. The relationship is working much better and University personnel directly involved with the SU have been impressed with the amount of progress that has been made. The SU have received a letter from the Charity Commission following the trustees' resignation which the SU Manager has responded to.

11. Finance and General Purposes Committee

(i) Minutes of the meeting held on 3rd November 2020

Members had received the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd November 2020 which were presented by Mr Norbury as Chair.

(ii) Financial Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31st July 2020

Members had received the Report and Accounts for the year ended 31st July 2020 which had already been covered under item 10ii. Mr Norbury noted that the figures show a surplus of 6%. The recruitment of undergraduate students demonstrates an excellent performance though the pensions situation dominates finances. He said that all figures were being looked at in mid-summer at a time when negative interest rates were being discussed due to the pandemic. As the markets are now beginning to pick up, the situation should improve.

As discussed under 10ii, Council **APPROVED** delegated authority for the Report and Accounts to be formally adopted by Council once the ongoing concern and pensions elements had been finalised.

(iii) Interim Finance Return

Members had received the interim finance return which projected a surplus of 3% for the current year, though it was acknowledged that this will be very conservative and was coupled with a realistic budget.

Members **APPROVED** the Interim Finance Return.

(iv) Student Fees 2021/22

Members had received the comprehensive list of proposed tuition fees which would take effect from September 2021.

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Members **APPROVED** the Tuition Fees 2021 list.

(v) Purchase of Hopkins Hall Lease

Members had received the proposal to purchase the lease on Hopkins Hall which had come about as the owners had wished to sell it. Mr Norbury said that the proposal made commercial sense as it would reduce accumulated outgoings for the University on the current lease considerably. The initial price had been reduced to an acceptable level and he could see no case for this not going ahead as it would improve the University's balance sheet. Ms Gittins noted that the valuation report would need to be received by members and suggested that members give delegated authority to the Chair of Council for the final approval.

Council **APPROVED** delegated authority for the proposal to be formally approved by the Chair of Council once members had had sight of the valuation report.

Action: Mr Dykins to circulate the valuation report

12. Staffing Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 27th October 2020

Members had received the minutes of the meeting held on 27th October 2020 which were present by the Chair of the Committee, Ms Swinson. She said that the Committee had focused on the Staff perspective with regard to the pandemic. She noted that there had been a review of individual staff risk assessments to ensure relevant staff are protected. Via JCNC, the Committee had been briefed on the position regarding the Staff Allocation Model (SAM) agreed with UCU earlier in year; it was noted there had been changes in the UCU leadership which has so far not been as collaborative as previous years and has meant a revisiting of the Model. This is despite the Model having only been approved recently by the UCU. There would be no pay uplift for 2020/21 and it was highly unlikely that the unions would come out of collective bargaining.

Professor Newport said that the University had worked collaboratively before the summer to finalise the SAM so that UCU were in agreement, and that it was disappointing that they were now attempting to revisit this so soon. He has established a working group to look at the detail of the implications of the agreed model. He is communicating with all staff on a regular basis, including UCU. The Vice Chancellor noted national bargaining does not allow for Hope to uplift salaries unilaterally.

13. Council Standing Committee on Health and Safety

(i) Minutes of the meeting held on 29th October 2020

Members had received the minutes for information.

(ii) Fire Safety Policy

Members had received the revised Fire Safety Policy.

Members **APPROVED** the Fire Safety Policy.

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14. Students' Union

(i) President's Report

Members had received the Report which was present by Mr Pearce. He noted that it had been a productive few months in terms of activities that were permissible during the pandemic and that this has continued to improve as the term has progressed. A number of interim vacancies have been filled including the appointment of student trustees to the governing body. The first informal board meeting will take place on 1st December. The Union Development manager has been recruited, as has a new academic advisor, a new administrator, and part-time officers. At the AGM in October, the board agreed to incorporate using the CIO Model, in particular the Foundation model. It is hoped that this will be formalised by July 2021.

KPIs have been difficult due to the unsettled year last year. However, the SU is working on an operating plan for the current academic year alongside a long-term strategic plan. Roles within the SU have been changed this year to ensure that all areas of the student experience are covered. Mr Pearce said he was grateful for all the support offered by the University especially from Dr Haughan and Ms Gittins.

The Chair congratulated Mr Pearce on behalf of Council for the work that had gone into managing what was a difficult scenario. The Chair of Audit Committee also thanked him for his diligence and Dr Haughan confirmed how hard the SU team had worked this year to realign itself and get things back on track.

(ii) Financial Statements for year ended 31st July 2020

Mr Pearce noted that the SU were aiming to finish the year with a surplus. There were some issues with their bank and they had recently decided for ethical reasons to switch to the Co-op bank.

15. Senior Remuneration Committee Report

Members of the University Senior Executive Team who were present (Professor Pillay, Professor Newport and Dr Haughan) left the meeting for this item.

Members had received the Reports from the Senior Remuneration Committee for both the Vice Chancellor and the Senior Team. The Chair said that the report recognised the exemplary leadership and positive measures that had been in place in what had been exceptional circumstances created by the pandemic. All the reports on individuals received by the Committee were positive. It was decided that at a time when all salaries in the University had been frozen, the same should apply to all senior staff, including the Vice Chancellor. Professor Nagar would retain his incremental increase in salary.

The Chair said that he had already written to senior staff to thank them for taking responsibility during the pandemic and respecting the position for other staff in the University. He said he had endorsed the integrity of staff in being able to continue in an exemplary way in extreme circumstances.