

COUNCIL
Thursday 20 May 2021

DRAFT UNCONFIRMED MINUTES

Present:

Tim Clement-Jones (Chair)	Ade Adefulu [from minute 2020.072]	Shamima Akter
Professor Colin Bailey	Professor Alison Blunt [from minute 2020.074]	Sarah Cowls
Celia Gough	Professor Colin Grant	Stella Hall
Isabelle Jenkins	Dr Philippa Lloyd	Dr Darryn Mitussis
Bushra Nasir	Professor Mangala Patel	Dr Alix Pryde
Luke Savage	Melissa Tatton	Peter Thompson
David Willis		

In attendance:

Sheila Gupta	Karen Kröger	Dr Nadine Lewycky
Jonathan Morgan	Mat Robathan	Paula Sanderson

Apologies:

Professor Wen Wang

Welcome and apologies

2020.070 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the apologies. The meeting was being conducted via virtual meeting software to ensure the continuance of good governance during the pandemic.

Minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2021 (Paper QM2020/59)

2020.071 Council **confirmed** the minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2021.

Matters Arising (Paper QM2020/60)

2020.072 Council **noted** the matters arising from the meeting held on 25 March 2021.

QMSU Board of Trustees

[a] Two new trustees had been appointed and recruitment was underway for a further trustee. An extraordinary meeting of the board had been held to ratify the appointments.

Chair's update (Oral report)

2020.073 The Chair:

- [a] Thanked Council for re-appointing him for another four-year term as Chair. The past four years had been a pleasure and he was looking forward to the next four.
- [b] Said that his one-to-one meetings with Council members had been excellent and that he had conferred with the Chief Governance Officer and University Secretary on taking forward some of the suggestions.

President and Principal's Report (QM2020/61)

2020.074 Council **discussed** the President and Principal's Report. The following points were noted in the discussion:

Covid-19 roadmap

- [a] Activity on campus was increasing as students returned. It was disappointing that, despite lobbying by the sector, the remainder of students were not able to return until 17 May. Most formal teaching would have finished by this time and the undergraduate examination period would have started. We had worked with QMSU to offer a variety of on-campus social events for the remainder of the academic year.
- [b] We were awaiting further guidance on social distancing for next academic year. The timetable was being planned on the basis that 1m+ social distancing would be in place. We believed that this approach was prudent and allowed us to pivot quickly in the event that social distancing was lifted. International travel restrictions in September remained a risk which we were mitigating by offering the options of following courses online. All students would be encouraged to come onto campus at the start of next year.
- [c] We had created a set of education principles to define our education offer in the autumn. This would entail combining in person and online teaching and learning activities in a 'mixed mode' delivery. Schools were responsible for setting the balance of in-person to online activities which was discipline specific. We were timetabling an extended teaching day to accommodate all activity.
- [d] The QMSU President said that QMSU had not been involved in early discussions about the educational offering for next year but that this had been resolved. The Executive said that there had been weekly meetings between QMSU and the Vice-Principal (Education) and the Vice-Principal (Policy and Strategic Partnerships).
- [e] Lessons learned from the delivery of blended learning were being incorporated into next year. Large lectures would be delivered online in response to student feedback and increased student engagement. The move to mixed-mode delivery had accelerated our aspiration in this area set out in the 2030 Strategy.
- [f] We were working with several government departments on managing

student arrivals from 'red' and 'amber' list countries. We were awaiting further guidance on access to vaccines and quarantine/self-isolation. Our preference was for these students to quarantine in our residences. Our residences team was developing an offer as an alternative to government-run hotel accommodation. The government had little confidence in the sector after the poor handling of students in residence last year.

Recruitment and admissions

[g] *Minute 2020.074[g] is confidential.*

[h] *Minute 2020.074[h] is confidential.*

[i] *Minute 2020.074[i] is confidential.*

[j] *Minute 2020.074[j] is confidential.*

Policy environment

[k] The government was continuing to seek ways to address the size and unaffordability of the student loan book and to change the mix of subjects taught at universities through its review of funding for post-18 education. A number of options were being considered including reducing the tuition fee to £7,500; introducing student number caps; or limiting access to the student loan book to students with A-level grades above CCC. A number of courses, particularly in the Humanities and Social Sciences, would no longer be viable at the reduced fee unless we were able to teach more students for the same cost base. The government may continue to top up courses considered to be strategic priorities, such as medicine, dentistry and the sciences. The impact of the government's proposals would be modelled in the next budget.

[l] The Skills and post-16 education bill was announced as part of the Queen's Speech and established the Lifelong Loan Entitlement to give all adults access to the equivalent of four-year loans for higher levels of study at FE and HE providers. There would be significant opportunities for Queen Mary in the provision of short-term and lifelong learning.

[m] The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill would place new duties on universities and Students Unions, introduce the role of Director of Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom within the Office for Students, and enable individuals to seek compensation through the courts if they suffer loss as a result of breaches of freedom of speech. This had caused concern across the sector and we continued to lobby the government that any new measures needed to be proportionate.

Freedom of Speech case

[n] QMSU had declined a request from the Queen Mary Islamic Society to invite an external speaker who had previously been denied a platform at other universities. We were working with QMSU on a formal risk assessment to balance the university's duties under the relevant legislation. Under the law, we cannot refuse to provide an opportunity to any speaker unless the views or ideas put forward constituted a criminal offence or a threat to public order. We would provide practical support to QMSU for the event. Under the new Freedom of Speech bill, Students' Unions would be

considered as separate organisations and could be fined.

QMSU President's report (QM2020/62)

2020.075 Council **noted** the QMSU President's report. The following points were noted in the discussion:

QMSU Elections

[a] The QMSU President formally congratulated next year's sabbatical officers on their appointments.

Israel/Palestine situation

[b] The university's decision not to issue a public statement on the situation in Israel/Palestine had been disappointing to many students.

Rent for on-campus accommodation

[c] The student strike had now ended, but those involved were unable to access the discounts that had been offered earlier in the year. The Executive said that the statement in the report that Drama students had not been offered face-to-face teaching was incorrect, as it was a practical subject.

Study spaces

[d] The capacity of the study spaces at Whitechapel and West Smithfield had been reduced by the introduction of social distancing measures and the university was working to improve ventilation to increase capacity. The Executive said that the space was under review and other spaces at Charterhouse Square and Whitechapel were being considered as alternative solutions.

Staff-Student Liaison Committees

[e] The structure of the Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs) in the School of Medicine and Dentistry was being reviewed following the successful introduction of School representatives in Humanities and Social Sciences.

Security

[f] QMSU had contacted security in relation to student safety concerns on our campuses. QMSU was working with the university on a new security strategy and initiatives to improve the safety of students on our campuses.

[g] Council asked about the scale of the problem. Serious incidents were rare and campus had been quieter last year due to the pandemic. It was a fine balance between creating a more accessible campus and ensuring the safety of our staff and students.

[h] An additional £1m had recently been invested in improving security. CCTV was being increased and the control rooms were being strengthened. We were in discussions with the police, but conscious that police presence on campus was a sensitive issue with students.

[i] Drug dealing occurred around the perimeters of all our campuses. We were working with Tower Hamlets on the openness of Whitechapel campus. The

security strategy would lead to change in culture and ensure that students remained safe in a large city.

Employable Me

- [j] Council said that the Employable Me initiative was significant and that members could be contacted to assist. QMSU would be put in touch with the UK country manager at LinkedIn, who was passionate about women's empowerment.

Reporting to Council

- [k] The structure of the report had been updated to include a section highlighting the key issues for discussion. The QMSU President would welcome feedback from Council members on the new format.

Consultation on the USS pension scheme (QM2020/63)

2020.076 Council **noted** the consultation on the USS pension scheme. The following points were noted in the discussion:

- [a] Our position was that we needed to provide the best possible pension for our staff that was affordable and sustainable for the university and staff members, fair on students in terms of payment through their fees, and would deliver a pension to staff when they retire. Our response emphasised the need for compromise from all stakeholders in order to reach an acceptable and realistic solution.
- [b] In preparing our response, we had engaged with staff members across the university. Four information sharing sessions had been held attended by over 550 staff, which represented 20% of staff eligible to be members. Just under 100 written responses from staff had also been received. 75% of these followed points that were raised by QMUCU, which represented 2% of our eligible staff. Our response would inform the position that UUK would take into discussions with the Joint Negotiating Committee and USS Trustee.
- [c] We continued to have significant reservations about the covenant support package proposed by the USS Trustee. Agreeing to these measures would impact our financial autonomy and result in increased risk to the university. Our response addressed the potential for action by the USS Trustee against those universities who breached the covenant. We proposed that debt monitoring should apply to new debt acquired from the date of implementation and that the covenant support measures be time-limited.
- [d] We were concerned about the high opt-out rate in the sector. We would like to see more flexible options, including a lower-cost saving option for members. Reform to the benefit structure was needed to reduce the risk level, but we were concerned that this view was not shared across the sector.
- [e] We were supportive of the UUK's call for an independent governance review to ensure better representation of employers and members and improve the scheme's transparency and accountability.

- [f] We were in discussions with other Russell Group institutions to align our position. The number of employers in the scheme and the range of responses would pose a challenge to creating a unified response.
- [g] The Treasurer said that, as trustees, Council had a legal duty to ensure the financial viability of the institution. The planned contribution increases would place considerable financial strain on the university. It was important to recognise that this was a private sector scheme without government backing and should not be compared to public sector pension schemes.
- [h] The elected academic staff member (HSS) declared an interest as a member of USS. He said that changes to the pension scheme could make an academic career less attractive, particularly in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Council said that young academics may prefer to have a defined contribution (DC) scheme that was portable and could be flexed. If a compromise could not be found, the scheme could be closed and all members moved to a DC scheme. Given the current rate of opt out from the scheme, particularly among the younger academics, it was clear that a more inclusive scheme was needed.
- [i] The elected academic staff member (HSS) said that the response assumed that UCU was the stumbling block, but the branch's request for a briefing had not been answered by the Executive. Pensions were being discussed as part of the salary package, but this was not how employees thought about it.
- [j] There had been a number of briefing sessions open to all staff. Work had been done with the unions to highlight the employer contributions to the pensions as part of the whole reward package. Clearer communications to staff about the overall reward package and the consequences for the institution of the pension scheme in its current form would be developed.
- [k] Council **approved** the consultation response. The QMSU President and the elected academic staff member (HSS) abstained.

London City Institute of Technology business case (QM2020/64)

2020.077 *Minute 2020.077 is confidential.*

Finance and Investment Committee minutes (QM2020/65)

2020.078 Council **noted** the minutes of the Finance and Investment Committee meeting held on 30 April 2021.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion update (QM2020/66)

2020.079 Council **considered** an update from the Vice-Principal (People, Culture and Inclusion). The following points were noted in the discussion:

- [a] Significant progress had been made over the last year despite the Covid pandemic. EDI governance had been strengthened and clarified through the introduction of new terms of reference for the EDI Steering Group (EDISG). Membership had been extended to be more diverse and

representative of our staff and student communities. The first meeting of the reformed EDISG had been held earlier this month.

- [b] The Race Equality Action Group had been established and included a wide range of staff and students among its membership. The Group had developed a Race Equality Strategy and Action Plan which was being implemented in collaboration with QMSU and the Queen Mary Academy.
- [c] Council thanked the Vice-Principal (People, Culture and Inclusion) for the excellent report which showed significant progress in key areas. The creation of the Working Group on Preventing and Addressing Harassment and Sexual Misconduct was particularly welcomed. This group would provide strategic oversight of work in the area of gender-based violence and identify future priorities. The group had completed a mapping exercise against the Office for Students' statement of expectations, which showed full compliance.
- [d] Council asked about the timeframe for improving data governance and enhancing data quality. Data packs had already been delivered to Schools and Institutes and Professional Services Directorates to support evidence-informed decision-making. Data collection and analysis would be enhanced with the introduction of new E-recruitment and Learning Management Systems. A strategic decision-making framework incorporating Equality Impact Assessments would be rolled out for the new academic year.
- [e] Council asked about the relationship between the initiatives in the report and work to address the academic pipeline. Work was underway in the doctoral college to identify barriers and re-design pathways. New promotions criteria were being introduced which would lead to higher success rates for promotion applications among these groups.
- [f] Work was progressing with the Queen Mary Academy to design career paths for research staff and the development of academic and research leaders aligned to the Research Concordat.

Agenda for the next meeting (QM2019/55)

2020.080 Council **noted** the agenda for the meeting on 08 July 2021 subject to the following additions:

- [a] Changes to the School structure in the Faculty of Science and Engineering would be discussed at the next Senate meeting. If approved, it would require updates to the Ordinances to be considered at the next meeting.
- [b] Council members would shortly be asked for their views and experiences of online meetings and the potential for blended meetings next year. The results of the survey would be considered at the next meeting.

Consultation on Future meeting arrangements [Oral report]

2020.081 [a] We were planning a social event for Council members on campus in July subject to restrictions being lifted. It would offer an opportunity to re-engage

and to thank those Council and Committee members who were finishing their terms.

[b] A separate event would be planned for the QMSU sabbatical officers to present about their year in office.

Dates of Meetings 2020–21

- Thursday 08 July 2021 at 1600 hours via Zoom.