

COUNCIL
Monday 22 February 2021

DRAFT CONFIRMED MINUTES

Present:

Lord Clement-Jones (Chair)	Ade Adefulu	Shamima Akter
Professor Colin Bailey	Professor Alison Blunt	Sarah Cowls
Celia Gough	Professor Colin Grant	Stella Hall
Isabelle Jenkins	Dr Philippa Lloyd	Dr Darryn Mitussis
Professor Mangala Patel	Dr Alix Pryde	Melissa Tatton
Peter Thompson	Professor Wen Wang	David Willis

In attendance:

Karen Kroger	Dr Nadine Lewycky	Jonathan Morgan
Mat Robathan	Paula Sanderson	Sarah Scott

Apologies:

Bushra Nasir	Luke Savage
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Welcome and apologies

2020.040 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.

President and Principal's Report (QM2020/34)

2020.041 Council **discussed** the President and Principal's Report. The following points were noted in the discussion:

Policy environment

- [a] The Government had announced a change to the Higher Education Teaching Grant that would refocus funding onto courses in Medicine, Dentistry and STEM subjects from the Arts and Humanities. Although funding for STEM subjects would go up, our overall funding from Government would decrease by £4.8m.
- [b] It was expected that the Government's levelling-up agenda would result in less direct funding for London institutions. The redistribution of these funds to STEM subjects at institutions across the country would result in a further loss of £2.7m.
- [c] The Government was considering the introduction of a minimum grade for university admission. This would not have a significant impact on Queen

Mary but would reduce opportunities for students who did not perform well at A-level.

[d] The reduction of fees to £7,500 recommended in the Augur review remained a possibility.

[e] We were making the case about the importance of the Arts and Humanities to the UK, and especially the Creative Industries, which was the largest growth sector. We had no plans to reduce the number of subject areas offered in Humanities and Social Sciences as one of the great strengths of Queen Mary is its excellence across all disciplines. However, courses were reviewed regularly and strategic decisions would need to be made in the event that any had become unviable. Council said that it hoped the sector would be more vociferous in their support for the intrinsic value of Arts and Humanities courses.

OfS Regulation

[f] We were undertaking a review of our compliance with OfS regulations in relation to consumer protection during the covid pandemic. This was a major piece of work which, when completed, would be reported to Council.

Student finances

[g] The Government had provided additional funding for the student hardship fund. Undergraduate students in on-campus accommodation had been offered a 30% reduction on rent. Currently 197 students had not accepted the discount and were refusing to pay rent. Rent for postgraduate taught students was being considered on a case-by-case basis.

Freedom of speech regulation

[h] We were committed to protecting freedom of speech within the law. It was felt that our governance structures were effective but would be reviewed in the context of the new regulation.

USS Pension scheme

[i] The valuation and pricing of benefits had been delayed due to covid. Discussions were ongoing with the pension regulator about a strong assessment of the covenants. Even with a strong covenant, the benefits would remain unaffordable and result in increases to the contribution rates of 10 to 15%.

Lockdown roadmap

[j] Ahead of the Government's announcement about the lockdown roadmap, it looked likely that only final year students on practical subjects would be allowed to return. There was no evidence that covid was spread on campuses, but there was concern about the widespread movement of students across the country. Most universities had reported that c.60% of students had already returned. Our students could come on to campus if necessary for their studies or wellbeing.

Ways of working

[k] A consultation on new ways of working would be launched shortly. Department W would be ready in September to house some Professional Services staff. With the introduction of more flexible ways of working, the

capacity estimate for the building had increased to 1,000 from 600 with more space for engagement activities. Challenges remained around the use of individual offices by academic staff. Pre-pandemic occupancy was around 20% and retaining individual offices would not be feasible going forward. Plans for the new School of Business and Management included flexible space instead of individual offices.

QMSU President's report (QM2020/35)

2020.042 Council **received** the QMSU President's report. The following points were noted in the discussion:

- [a] A summary of the motions passed at the Annual Student Meeting, attended by 800 students, showed that the issues concerning students centred on tuition fees, accommodation costs and covid mitigation measures.
- [b] Concerns had been raised among some international students about the tone of communications from staff members regarding de-registration for non-payment of fees. This had been addressed with the help of the Director of Student and Academic Services and going forward, training would be offered to help improve individual communication styles.

Finance and Investment Committee minutes (QM2020/36)

2020.043 Council **received** the Finance and Investment Committee minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2021. The following points were noted in the discussion:

- [a] The Committee had considered and recommended to Council for approval the five year forecasts for the OfS financial return.
- [b] The current financial position had shown that the year to date financials were tracking against the revised budget approved in November 2020. Measures to reduce costs and protect cash had been successful. Although the position was positive, there would be a number of uncertainties in the next few years to be mindful of.

OfS financial return (QM2020/37)

2020.044 Council **received** the OfS financial return. The following points were noted in the discussion:

- [a] The deadline for the annual return had been moved to March 2021 due to the pandemic. The figures from the March 2020 budget had been revised to a slower growth rate to reflect of the impact of covid.
- [b] The pandemic had shifted some of the major capital investment in the strategy back by two years and changed some of the underlying assumptions around Estates and the digital infrastructure. The blended learning element of the strategy had been brought forward by five to six years. However, the focus on getting all of our education online had paused our plans for distance learning. The pandemic had also impacted research levels. Although research facilities had remained open, research capacity had been reduced due to social distancing measures and the academic

focus on online education. Council said that an overview of what areas of the strategy had been accelerated or held back in response to the pandemic would be useful.

[c] The submission was being finalised in response to queries from the OfS. Council agreed to **approve** the OfS return and to delegate sign off of any minor changes to the President and Principal.

Action: [b] President and Principal

Agenda for the next meeting (QM2020/38)

2020.045 Council **noted** the agenda for the meeting on 25 March 2021 and the addition of items on strategic risk and consumer protection.

Dates of Meetings 2020–21

- Thursday 25 March 2021, 1600 hours, via Zoom.
- Thursday 20 May / Friday 21 May 2021 – Residential conference including Council meeting.
- Thursday 08 July 2021, 1600 hours, Colette Bowe Room, Mile End.