

Finance and General Purposes Committee

Minutes of a special meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 15 September 2020

Present: Mr D Wong (Chair)
Dr D Llewellyn
Mr M Thomas
Mr P Nixon
Mr S Vickers

In attendance: Dr C E Baxter University Secretary
Mrs L Furey Chief Financial Officer (CFO)

Apologies: Professor P Mills Deputy Vice-Chancellor

20/01 Vice-Chancellor's Report

Received: a report from the Vice-Chancellor on further actions taken by the University since July 2020 to prepare for the 2020/21 academic year in a COVID secure manner

Noted:

- i) that the weekly Newsletters circulated to all staff and governors continued to provide a weekly update on actions taken to prepare for the new academic year and to respond to changes in guidance for HEIs issued by the DfE and other bodies and other key developments;
- ii) that the DfE had issued further guidance to HEIs at 06.30am on Thursday 10 September 2020 following the Prime Ministers announcement the previous afternoon. Earlier in the same week, the DfE had asked all HEIs to submit their contingency and response plans for responding to an outbreak of COVID-19, and/or a local lockdown. These were requested, in draft form, by no later than Friday 11 September 2020. The work that the new Deputy Secretary had undertaken to draw plans together and consult widely with managers and staff to secure staff support for such plans had been invaluable in meeting this short deadline. The University has also been continuing its dialogue with the local Health Protection Hub (HPH) and had been able to include information on this to the DfE who were expecting all HEI to share their plans with their local HPH. A mapping of the University's plans against the DfE guidance had be

also be arranged where herds needed to self-isolate while waiting for test results or if there were to be a positive result. Isolation rooms had also been set aside. The HPH would work with the University to manage any issues including where an “outbreak” was identified (normally defined as two confirmed cases of COVID or more within a few days of each other- however such matters are to be judged by the HPH on a case by case basis);

- v) that a simulated exercise to test the COVID Hub system would be run later in the week;
- vi) that the University had continued its community engagement with the Parish Council, Town Council and Telford and Wrekin. Local press had also asked for information on preparations for the new term and it was hoped such information may also help assure local residents that the University has set up COVID secure measures, including the “Harper Herds” concept for student households, the requirements to adhere to the rule of six in social settings (including during SU organised activities) and to maintaining social distancing where groups larger than six are permitted in educational settings and use of face coverings;
- vii) that the new NHS tracing app which was due to be released on 25 September 2020 in England had some merits but was not ideal for use in HEIs with multiple buildings and entrances such as Harper Adams. The COVID Group had agreed that given its limitations and the risk of some smart phones not being able to scan the QR codes, the University would continue its arrangements for its own COVID Hub working closely with the HPH so that staff and /or student cases could be captured and supported to secure a test, and members of student households asked to self-isolate as needed;
- viii) that the forecast for new undergraduate enrolments for September 2020 were currently estimated in the range 575-600. While acceptances were currently just over 600, attrition rates based on previous years suggested the final number may fall. c.25 students were currently being contacted as they had yet to confirm their accommodation acceptances. Based on current acceptances, Postgraduate taught enrolments looked likely to be slightly higher than in previous years and 24 degree-level apprentices had been secured. Overseas student numbers, including BUA appeared to be stronger than had been estimated. Flexible on-line starting arrangements had been put in place to help phase arrivals and manage quarantine. Retention of continuing students had improved in comparison to budget estimates presented in July 2020;
- ix) that as overseas student numbers appeared to be holding up better than expected, GuildHE would be asking ag9lding up 22

- vi) that the underlying result remains as planned at £250K surplus, if all efficiency measures are delivered, but the pension liability will lead to a £889K loss. The forecast identified that bank covenants would be met and liquidity measures were also being met. However, this depended on delivery of the significant staff cost savings as set out in the updated risk table. The table was the “roadmap” to deliver the forecast for 2020/21;
- vii) that as indicated in the next agenda item, the OfS required all HEIs to submit an interim financial data return by 30 October 2020. The requirements had been issued by the OfS the previous day and were being evaluated;
- viii) that the planned voluntary severance scheme was in hand with a number of expressions of interest which would be considered and determined by end of September. It was noted that these included a senior postholder. The process to consider this request would need to follow the process agreed by the Board for senior postholders who are appointed by the Board. The Chair had been briefed on this matter;
- ix) that some restructuring of departments had been taking place and

20/06 Any Other Business

Proposed amendment to the Schedule of Delegation

- Noted:
- i) that the job description for the Deputy University Secretary envisaged the role holder being able to sign contracts, including HR related documents, other legal documents such as research contracts and estates and facilities agreements on behalf of the University. This would ensure further resilience should the Vice-Chancellor or University Secretary not be available to undertake such duties;
 - ii) that to put the above into operation it was necessary to seek approval from the Board for appropriate amendments to the Schedule of Delegation;

Agreed: to recommend to the Board that the Schedule of Delegation be updated as set out above. **DW/CEB**

20/07 Date of next meeting
5 November 2020