

HARPER ADAMS UNIVERSITY

Finance and General Purposes Committee

Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 26 February 2020

Present:	Mr D Wong (Chair) Dr D Llewellyn Mr M Thomas Mr P Nixon	
In attendance:	Dr C E Baxter Mrs L Furey Mr J Cain Mr A van Winsum	University Secretary Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Head of Estates and Facilities for item 13 only Environment and Sustainability Manager for item 13 only
Apologies:	Mr S Vickers Professor P Mills	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Observer:	Mrs M Virseda	Board Apprentice

Members were reminded to update their entry in the register of interests as appropriate.

Noted: that the Vice-Chancellor had completed his term of office as a member of at the Marches LEP Board. Following an open competition and interview process, the University Secretary had been appointed to the Marches LEP as HE representative. The Chief Financial Officer had also completed her term of office on the Agri-Epi Board.

Agreed: that the Register of Interests needed to be updated to reflect these changes. **SMV**

19/20 Minutes

Approved: minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 7 November 2019 (19/01-19/18) subject to three minor points of clarification proposed by Mr Nixon **CEB**

19/21 Matters Arising

Received: a report from the University Secretary

- Noted:
- i) that a bid for projects relating to carbon reduction had been made in response to a call from the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund;
 - ii) that the Chief Financial Officer had updated members by circulation on progress with the bank loan confirmation. Members were pleased to note and grateful for the prompt notification that the loan agreement had been successfully completed;

19/22 Vice-Chancellor's Report

Received: a report from the Vice-Chancellor on recent developments of note;

- Noted:
- i) that undergraduate applications are currently 95% of those received at the same point in 2019 but 102% of those in 2018;
 - ii) that bookings for the new March Open Day were 407 compared to 203 for the Animals Open Day in 2019. The additional open day was

important to ensure applicants for 2020 as well as those for 2021 have an opportunity to visit. Other universities are also offering further open days;

- iii) that the target for undergraduate apprentices is 50, to date 16 applicants are 'firm' acceptances with others anticipated to become 'firm' shortly;
- iv) that the postgraduate application cycle continues to be later in the year. To date a higher number of applications from international students have been received to date. However, as a number were seeking scholarship funding, conversion rates will be challenging;
- v) that the University has used its Business Continuity Plan to plan for coronavirus. CAU students were able to return to Beijing, but incoming CAU students were unable to travel as visa and passport offices remain closed. Remote teaching is in place and it is hoped the students will be able to progress to HAU later in 2020 when travel is permissible;
- vi) that the BUA students are also being taught remotely as their University campus was closed at the current time. It is hoped that progression arrangements will remain unchanged for September 2020, however, it is recognised that the situation remain challenging and it may be necessary to allow a later start if travel restrictions continue. The University was continuing to monitor the situation and engage with UUK International Unit updates;
- vii) that advice to staff and students provided by Public Health England (PHE) had been provided and would be updated as required;
- viii) that the University's Access Plan Monitoring Statement for 2018/19 demonstrated reasonable progress including improvements in area-based measures and offer rates. Conversion rates for BAME applicants remained lower due in part to candidates not always being able to secure work experience.' Access to Agriculture' attempted to address this for BSc Agriculture and related programmes. It remained particularly important to make positive progress and meet targets in light of the OfS requirements under enhanced monitoring;
- ix) that the Vice-Chancellor had been asked to meet Justine Greening. An invitation to join her Social Mobility pledge had been received. Members were supportive of the University joining the pledge; **DGL**
- x) that the new Ministerial for Universities Michelle Donelan and the new Minister for Science, Amanda Solloway were expected to be working closely together. GuildHE had asked for meetings to be arranged;
- xi) that the Strategic Plan implementation was in hand. The Farm Manager and academic staff were working together on plans for carbon zero. The updated Carbon Management Plan was also an important step forward;
- xii) that the University had published a blog on why it does not wish to ban beef from its menus. This responds to beef bans issued at other HEIs. Harper Adams continues to welcome all diets;
- xiii) that the Estates team have been invited to speak at a Times Higher Education exhibition on the STEP scheme;
- xiv) that the University continues to engage with the University's climate commissions activities;

- xv) that the NI Park scheme is continuing to be developed. It is hoped that an anchor client may have been secured for the park;
- xvi) that Frances Turley had been awarded the RABDF Dairy Student of the Year (5th year out of 6 that an HAU student had won the award);
- xvii) that Alltech had supported HAU to develop the first invitro facility in the UK and 7th in the world. The laboratory focuses on fermentation emulating rumen;
- xviii) that the Development Trust had awarded a record £525k in scholarships during February 2020 made up of 174 awards to 123 students. It was important to recall that when the Trust started awards to the value of £17k were made;
- xix) that the 'Grow your Future' project had been shortlisted for a RICS award in the social impact category;
- xx) that Tesco had identified some issues relating to the dairy and were considering termination. It was known that there is a wish to reduce milk volumes and other farms have had similar feedback. An appeal would be made. The likely impact of the contract changes if they went ahead would be £60-80k per annum;
- xxi) that the DEFRA report on how it plans to deliver the Agriculture Bill has been published and will be carefully reviewed. Key action areas highlighted by DEFRA include skills, research (farmer led) and environmental land management (ELM). A further report on ELM has also been issued;
- xxii) that George Eustace had presented future plans at the NFU conference. He had highlighted ELM schemes, farm support payment changes in 2021 and an emphasis on production of food/food security. A review every 5 years is suggested;
- xxiii) that following Dr Hind's decision to retire, the process to appoint an Academic Registrar and Director of Academic Services is in hand;
- xxiv) that the Vice-Chancellor has updated staff at recent staff meetings on the activities of competitors. A range of investments and new initiatives continue to provide significant competition for students;
- xxv) that it is possible that student number restrictions may be introduced which makes 2020/21 intake, as a potential baseline, a particularly important intake beyond the financial year 2020/21;
- xxvi) that a new MSc in Agri-Data Science is being launched for 2020;
- xxviii) that the OfS has launched a consultation on a new funding approach. It is expected that bids for ISF will be launched in the autumn with awards being made from April 2021. It is unclear how this may affect exiting 2020/21 allocations. It is unlikely that there will be increased competition for the funding. The University's performance remains strong and it is hoped this will assist its application to be successful;

Agreed:

to endorse the Vice-Chancellor's approval of the monitoring report on the Access Agreement 2018/19.

- Received: a report from the Chief Financial Officer
- Noted: that no major changes were being proposed, however it was proposed that space utilisation becomes a KPI as it also relates to Value for Money aims and objectives.
- Agreed: the updated Financial Strategy and Financial Indicators subject to minor updates to section 2.4 of the draft. **LF**

19/24 **Financial Planning Update**

Received: a report from the Chief Financial Officer on financial planning for 2020/21

- Noted:
- i) that while the re-forecast for 2020/21 was not yet available, as OfS grant decisions were not yet known, an update on progress to date with preparations for the re-forecast was provided by the CFO. The forecast for the current year remains on target, however, the possible change to the milk contract had not yet been included as it has only just occurred;
 - ii) that the changes associated with the late arrival of CAU students will also be calculated when confirmed;
 - iii) that the JVS bank loan has not yet been drawn down but is likely to commence in early March;
 - iv) that Cedar Energy's performance has been on target and the lease release is in hand;
 - v) that the CFO will be reviewing how donations may be released before and after the year end period with auditors;
 - vi) that there are a number of risks that may affect 2020/21. Members acknowledged that it has been clear for some time that the year will be especially challenging and the OfS potential reduction in grant is likely to be 6% compared to an assumed 3% (although high cost subject calculations are not yet fully clear);
 - vii) that vacancy savings have assisted in 2019/20;
 - viii) that the Vet School investment had been strategic and a deficit had been forecast to reflect this;
 - ix) that while every effort to avoid a deficit will be made, it was agreed that a deficit budget may be unavoidable and that this was strategically acceptable;
 - x) that a stretch target of 671 students had been set;
 - xi) that members would be updated with a full re-forecast in June 2020 including the 5-year plan to 2025/26;
 - xii) that should an earlier discussion of the re-forecast or any related management plan be needed, a teleconference meeting would be arranged. **LF**

19/25 Management Accounts

Received: i) the updated Management Accounts for the University for the period to 31 January 2020 and the re-forecast to 2019/20

ii) an oral report from the Director of Finance on her review of the Students' Union's Management Accounts year to date.

Noted: i) that the budget remains broadly on target, although changes to the dairy income and any impact of a delay to overseas students being able to take up their studies due to coronavirus would need to be evaluated;

ii) that the pay efficiency target is being broadly met to date;

iii) that 'doubtful debt' refers to a provision for student and commercial debts and is not 'actual' debts. The University actively follows up on all debts and only requests 'write off' if it has tried all other reasonable options;

iv) that the Students Union remains on target to meet its budget for the year;

19/26 Strategic Project Monitoring

Received: a report from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor on progress with the Joint Vet School

Noted: i) that the student number target is now 45 per institution (90 in total);

ii) that to date 56 acceptances have been received, equally split. Final decisions are due by 6 June 2020;

iii) that the 'halo' is being seen in terms of increases and maintenance of a number of animal related course;

iv) that a possible 3-year route to postgraduate Veterinary Science is being considered;

v) that a bid will be put forward to the Growth Deal managed by the Marches LEP. This will be challenging and competitive;

vi) that the capital programme is a week late due to the inclement weather. However, this can be managed within the overall programme;

vii) that the budget remains £10.2m overall. Cattle handling facilities are under discussion and are likely to need a higher budget to be funded from the available contingency. However, every effort will be made to minimise costs wherever possible.

19/27 Procurement Strategy

Received: a review of the Procurement Strategy

Noted: i) that no major changes were proposed following the annual review;

ii) that it would be useful to further explore the data behind the KPIs with a view to considering whether any further value could be achieved and whether further investment in central procurement might be useful;

- iii) that members would like to explore why the percentage of impartible spend actively influenced by the procurement function was only c.50% (having fallen from 53.02% in 2017/18 to 45.83% in 2018/19);

Agreed: that the Chief Financial Officer would arrange to meet Mr Thomas to discuss the data presented in more detail and to consider whether current KPIs remained appropriate. **LF**

19/28 Cedar Energy Limited

Received: a report from the Chief Financial Officer/Head of Estates & Facilities

- Noted:
- i) that the Open Day in January had been very successful and had led to positive feedback;
 - ii) that the work completed over summer 2019 has supported a better hot distribution and more effective running of the system. Regular servicing of the CHP was in place every 25 days, while the biomass is using 12 tonnes every 4-6 days, which is much more efficient than in the past;
 - iii) that the system is complex and needs careful management and oversight;
 - iv) that further investment in University infrastructure is under review to improve effectiveness of the overall system;
 - v) that reports from Cedar Energy would continue as a standing item.

19/29 Annual Review of Financial Regulations

Received: a summary of the review of Financial Regulations and proposed amendments

Agreed: to recommend the updated Financial Regulations to the Board for its approval. **LF**

19/30 Annual Review of Treasury Management & Ethical Investment Policy

- Received:
- i) a summary paper from the Chief Financial Officer on Treasury Management;
 - ii) a summary paper from the Chief Financial Officer on the Ethical Investment Policy

Noted:

- i) that no major changes were proposed to either document;
- ii) that it may be useful to benchmark ethical investment policies published by other HEIs to ascertain whether further actions/more precise wording may be useful. **LF**

Agreed:

- i) the Treasury Management Policy for 2019/20;
- ii) to receive an update on the comparisons of the Ethical Investment Policy to those used by other HEIs at the next meeting. **LF**

19/31 **Committees**

Noted: that the following Committee reports would be presented to F & GP in June 2020;

- Farm Strategy Committee
- Health & Safety Committee

19/32 **Carbon Management Plan**

Received: a presentation from the Head of Estates and the Environment and Sustainability Manager

- Noted:
- i) that the University had aimed for a carbon reduction of 20% by 2020 and a stretch target of 42%. 36% had been saved;
 - ii) that the aim for 2020/25 was to address smaller scale projects which in some instances, may be eligible for Salix Loan funding and which will be repaid in a reasonable time;
 - iii) that the University's performance remained comparable to other HEIs;
 - iv) that student growth would be a challenge and additional carbon needed to be addressed;
 - v) that while some HEIs were targeting zero carbon, there did not yet appear to be clear plans to achieve this;
 - vi) that data collection and analysis remained key. The OfS had also been considering whether it would re-introduce a similar approach to HEFCE in terms of expecting HEIs in receipt of capital funding to be addressing carbon savings actively;
 - vii) that the University will need to report under SECR requirements in its annual report;
 - viii) that refreshing the Environmental Sustainability Strategy and the ESS group remained in hand; **JC/AVW**
 - ix) that engagement with the Farm team was key. The toolkit for farms announced by NFU would be reviewed; **AVW**
 - x) that water use was also under careful consideration.

- Agreed:
- i) to approve the revised Carbon Management Plan;
 - ii) to circulate the presentation to members. **CEB**

19/33 **Date of Next Meeting-** 11 June 2020

19/34 **Risk Management**

Noted: a report by the University Secretary on risk items assigned to the Committee

19/35 **Estate Developments**

Noted: a paper by the Head of Estates and Facilities on progress with current estate developments.