

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 12 October 2020

Present: Vice-Chancellor, Principal of Brasenose, Warden of New College, Ms Becker, Ms Boyt, Professor Sir Rory Collins, Professor Coulson, Sir Chris Deverell, Fra' John Eidinow, Professor Essler, Professor Hamerow, Mr Harman, Professor Hobbs, Professor Johnson, Mr Kroll, Professor Lahiri, Professor Nobre, Mr Ovenden, Professor Trefethen, Head of the Humanities Division (Professor O'Brien), Head of the Medical Sciences Division (Professor Screaton), Head of the MPLS Division (Professor Howison), Head of the Social Sciences Division (Professor Dame Sarah Whatmore), Senior Proctor (Professor Horobin), Junior Proctor (Professor Johnston), Assessor (Dr Swift).

Student Member Representatives and representative of the Early Career Research Staff: Nikita Ma (President of Oxford SU), Tucker Drew (Oxford SU VP Access and Academic Affairs) and Lauren Bolz (Oxford SU VP Graduates); Dr Gwilym Rowlands (Chair, Oxford Research Staff Society).

Apologies: the Director of Finance.

Officers in attendance: the Registrar, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Development and External Affairs), Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Innovation), Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Planning and Resources), Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), the Director of Legal Services and General Counsel, the Director of Public Affairs, the Executive Officer (Policy and Governance) in the Vice-Chancellor's Office, the Assistant Registrar (Governance), Dr Berry.

Order of business: the order of business was as set out in the minutes.

Declarations of interest: Council members were reminded to declare any interest that could give rise to a conflict in relation to any item on the agenda.

Introductory matters: The Vice-Chancellor commented that although the meeting was only two weeks after the Away Day, the opportunity had been taken on the date reserved in members' diaries to hold a short meeting on the two major issues currently before Council, namely the University's response to Covid-19 and the consultation on the USS valuation 2020.

I. ORDINARY BUSINESS

(A) Unreserved

0. Matters arising from the Away Day

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Mental health during the pandemic

Comments were made by the breakout groups on the need for more to be done on mental health during the pandemic. The Vice-Chancellor reported that a working group was being formed on student mental health and Personnel Committee was considering staff mental health.

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1. **The Vice-Chancellor's unreserved business (above the line)****

The Vice-Chancellor reported on the following matters.

- The award of the Nobel Prize in Physics to Sir Roger Penrose, that being the University's second Nobel Prize in two years. Two of the honorands at Encaenia in 2019 had also received Nobel Prizes this year, Professor Jennifer Doudna (in Chemistry) and Professor Andrea Ghez (sharing the Physics prize).
- A number of issues raised by Government, including the timing of A-level examinations and measures to help facilitate students returning home for Christmas while minimising the risk of Covid transmission.
- Brexit and access to research funding and collaboration.
- Matters within the University.

* The confidential or restricted designation is removed from this version of the minutes.

**A brief note of the action taken by Council is included instead of a version of the minutes.

- Negotiations with L&G on the Life and Mind Building¹
- Communication channels continued to be developed. A new electronic publication, the University Bulletin, had been launched, based on what had been Blueprint but issued weekly. It was designed to be a little more formal, with closer links to the University website, and would also host a letters page. The last issue had been opened by 14482 individuals. Investment was also being made in the Gazette, which would remain online, have a precis of key issues, and photographs from the archives, making it a more attractive publication. Open fora were being regularly held and the University's Covid-19 website was also being enhanced. The University's public Covid pages had received 1.6m views; those on the Staff Gateway had received 841k views, and the health pages 85k views in August alone.

2. Covid-19

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(a) Update: start of term, new governance arrangements, and request for financial envelope to meet additional Covid costs.

Council **received** reports on the above items and **agreed** a financial envelope to meet additional Covid-related costs.

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(b) Testing

Council **received** a report and **discussed** the next steps.

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3. **Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS): consultations with USS employers (C(20)122)****

Council **endorsed** the draft response proposed by the USS Working Group, subject to further minor amendments which might be needed following consultation with USS members. The final version would be circulated to Council for approval by circulation, before submission.

NPB/SC

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¹ Professors Coulson and Nobre declared interests in this item.

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