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Council

23/64 A meeting of the Council was held on Thursday 28 September 2023 at 2.00 pm in Room 201, Carrington Building, Whiteknights.

Present:

The President (for Minutes 23/64-23/77)
The Vice-Presidents (Mr K Corrigan and Mrs K. Owen)
The Vice-Chancellor
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Dr C. Baylon)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor E. McCrum) (for Minutes 23/64-23/66)
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor D. Zaum)

Mr S. Alexander
Mr S. Ali
Professor E. Beleska Spasova
Professor R. Frazier
Professor J. Gibbins
Mr E. Gregory
Mr J. Jack
Ms S. Jordan
Ms S. Maple
Mr P. Milhofer
Mrs S. Plank
Mr N. Richards
Dr C. Shaw
Professor K. Strohfeldt
Dr J. Young

In attendance:

The Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary
The Director of Finance
The Director of Quality Support and Development
The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor P. Miskell) (for Minutes 23/64-23/67)

Apologies for absence were received from: Mrs S. Butler, Mrs P. Egan, and Mr A. McCallum.

[The decisions taken by the Council were approved by those members who were absent at the meeting]

23/65 President's opening remarks

The President:

- Welcomed Dr Caroline Baylon, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International), to Council and wished her success in her new responsibilities;
- Advised that, due to the unavoidable absence of a number of lay members, the meeting was inquorate. The meeting would consider

- Continuation, completion, and progression rates, noting evidence of very high continuation and completion rates for all groups of students, with outstanding rates for some groups of students and outstanding rates of progression in some subject areas and student groups.

Some 46 higher education providers had achieved Gold, 100 Silver, and 29 Bronze; 53 outcomes were pending (i.e. under appeal). No universities had been rated 'Needs improvement'.

The University considered that its Silver ratings fairly represented the University's performance against the criteria. The detailed feedback from the TEF panel confirmed the value of the University's work to date in improving the student experience and outcomes, and, along with analysis of TEF reports on practice in other institutions, would inform future work.

The Council thanked Professor McCrum and colleagues for their work in achieving this outcome.

23/67 Disclosure of interests (Item 2)

The Council received a list of members' interests, and members were asked to notify the Chief Strategy Officer and University Secretary of any amendments.

23/68 Student Access and Participation (Item 3)

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience) (Professor P. Miskell) gave a presentation of the University's most recent Student Access and Participation Plan.

Professor Miskell explained that the University's Access and Participation Plan responded to a twin imperative: the University's ethical commitment to ensuring that people from all social groups were equally able to join and succeed in our programmes; and the fulfilment of the regulatory requirement,ti1 (or)n95 0 T

Professor Miskell advised that the University's new Plan had been submitted in July 2023. The University's priorities, set out in the Plan, focused on:

- By working with partner schools, supporting removal of attainment gaps at the age of 16 (KS4) for black students and those in IMD4 or receiving free school meals;
- Ensuring our entry cohort reflected the demography of the age cohort in the south-east, London and south-west;
- Ensuring students from under-represented groups continued on and successfully completed their programmes;
- Eliminating gaps in degree outcomes and positive Graduate Outcomes which correlated with categories of disadvantage most relevant to each measure.

Progress would be achieved through four or five specific activities related to each objective.

In response to questions, Professor Miskell advised that:

- The broad themes had changed little between the previous and new Plans, but there had been some change in the groups of students identified in relation to each of the themes;
- The University was working to develop a consistent approach to evaluation across the range of initiatives;
- The targets identified in the Plan were University-wide, but in practice much of the work would focus on a more limited number of Schools where the relevant groups of students were mainly represented;
- The University was sharing ideas and practice with some other higher education providers participating in the first wave.

The President asked the Student Experience Committee to take broad oversight of this work.

23/69 Reading Students' Union priorities (Item 4)

The Council received a paper setting out the RSU Officers' priorities for 2023/24.

The RSU President and RSU Education Officer gaTc -0.0046 Tw T Tc 0 Tw (part) 3 0 Td[den e

Activities included: a discounted Savers menu and free tea and coffee in RSU venues; an Academic Resource Fund to assist students in financial difficulty to purchase textbooks and other essential resources; and a fund to remove financial barriers which prevented students from participating in societies and clubs.

3. Safety
   Activities included: reviewing the security arrangements in the RSU venue and raising awareness among students of the security measures in place; working with UPP and Street Pastors with a view to the extension of their support services to Union night and similarly working with the Safer Streets Partnership; and providing Bystander Training and Consent Training.

4. Housing
   Activities included: partnering with Student Hand, a company which provided a guarantor service for international students seeking private rental accommodation; and improving information for students about their rights as renters.

In response to questions, the RSU President and RSU Eda02 Tw -2.2 udents ea guareeki

to support, the proposal, which would serve to increase the value of NIRD's assets and allow increased investment in research in fulfilment of its charitable purposes. The University's scoping study of agrifood research, led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, was expected to report before the sale of the land was completed.

The Vice-Chancellor explained alternative models by which the University might take the development forward, which would involve different balances of risk and financial returns. A decision on the model to be adopted would be required in due course. The strong recommendation in the paper was for a "Didcot style " model , i.e the University would dispose of the land whilst minimizing its financial infrastructure and planning obligations.

In response to questions, the Vice-Chancellor:

- Affirmed the University's commitment to involve the local community in shaping local amenities, heritage sites, transport and the eco valley;
- Recognised the capacity constraints within the University Executive Board and the governance challenges presented by a project of this scale. He believed that, at this stage, it was important that the Vice-Chancellor was seen to be leading the work, given its political dimension, but that, in due course, there would be greater reliance on external consultants and the Commercial Advisory Group. The governance arrangements would be reviewed when the model for taking the development forward were confirmed;
- Agreed that a timeline would be prepared for Council which would set out the different phases of the project and the decisions which would be required at each stage;
- Indicated that eco valley would be an outstanding amenity for the local community and would be highlighted in communications about Loddon Garden Village;
- Explained that the extent to which dairying research facilities would be required at Farley Hall Farm would depend on the outcomes of the review of agri-food research;
- Advised, in response to a question from the RSU President, that, for reasons of commercial confidentiality, it had not been possible to communicate openly with students about the farm purchase. However, the student intero9 (i)16 s,2 (i)6 (e5r)3 Tw 28.esea2 (a)10 ((u)9.9 (a)10

4. The Report of the meeting of the Appointments and Governance Committee held on 21 August 2023, now submitted, be approved."

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Professor Zaum) and Director of Finance returned to the meeting.

23/72 Response to the Consultation on Student Loan Repayment Thresholds

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committees of Council (and to Senate), and chairs were asked to ensure that, over the course of the year, their committees explore in greater detail one or more of the assigned risks. Chairs were also asked to identify other issues within the scope of their committees which might constitute a strategic risk.

In response to a question, Professor Zaum confirmed that the shortfall against the student recruitment target had prompted reflection on the effectiveness of the mitigations identified in the Corporate Risk Register and consideration of possible further mitigations.

23/82 Council Standing Orders (Item 17.2)

The Council noted the Council Standing Orders.

23/83 Documents sealed and to be sealed (Item 17.3)

The Council received a list of documents sealed and to be sealed.

"That the Council approve the action taken byTw 4.83 0 Td( )TjEMHeg1 un>10 (t)/P pa1 un>c S.