

Confirmed minutes for Thursday 7 October 2021

This document contains the confirmed minutes for our council meeting on Thursday 7th October 2021.

Present:

Tim Clement-Jones (Chair)
Ade Adefulu
Professor Colin Bailey
Professor Alison Blunt
Sarah Cows
Professor Kavita Datta
Celia Gough
Stella Hall
Professor Yang Hao
Dr Philippa Lloyd
Professor Mangala Patel
Dr Alix Pryde
Adi Sawalha
Melissa Tatton
Peter Thompson
David Willis

In attendance:

Dr Elena Baglioni [minute 2021.007]
Professor Kate Heppell [minute 2021.007]
Karen Kröger
Dr Nadine Lewycky
Ian McManus [minute 2021.007]
Jonathan Morgan
Philip Tamuno [minute 2021.007]
Robert Tucker

Apologies:

Professor Colin Grant
Isabelle Jenkins
Luke Savage

Welcome and apologies

2021.001

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 as we transitioned out of the pandemic.

Minutes of the meeting held on 08 July 2021 (QM2021/01)

2021.002

Council confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 08 July 2021.

Matters arising (QM2021/02)

2021.003

Council noted the matters arising from the meeting held on 08 July 2021. The following points were noted in the discussion:

[a]As discussed at the last meeting (minute 2020.086[d]), work was progressing to improve the university's handling of sexual misconduct. An advertisement for a sexual assault and harassment advisor would be published next week and would support the university's work in this area.

Chair's update (Oral report)

2021.004

The Chair said that:

[a]He had been impressed by the quality of facilities and delivery on his recent visit to the medical school in Malta. Last year's QMSU Vice-President (Barts and the London), Mat Robathan, received considerable praise from staff and students there for his support during the lockdown.

President and Principal's Report (QM2021/03)

2021.005

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

Campus open day

[a]Despite the inclement weather, the campus had been full with prospective students and their parents at the most recent open day. The staff and student ambassadors supporting the day had made a significant contribution to the positive atmosphere.

Campus facilities

[b]All campuses were back up and running with most staff having returned. The feedback from Professional Services colleagues who had moved to Department W had been positive. USS pensions and strike action

[c]The Universities and College Union (UCU) would be issuing two separate ballots later this month on pensions and on pay and conditions. Members would be asked to vote on strike action or action short of a strike. Ballots at individual institutions would need to reach at least 50% participation to get a mandate.

[d]UCU had been invited to put forward an alternative proposal on the USS pension scheme to the Joint Negotiating Council (JNC) but UCU had not done this formally. UCU was not supportive of the current proposal and argued that there should be no detriment to members and no change to the contributions. To maintain the same level of contributions, the benefit structure would need to change.

[e]We had invited an independent organisation to give presentations to staff about the scheme, the position of the pension regulator, and to challenge misinformation from the unions.

[f]On the pay and conditions issue, we had improved our gender and ethnicity pay gaps. Short-term contracts were typically used for student employees, including students employed by QMSU. Recruitment and contract extensions had continued during the pandemic. We were one of a few universities to run the bonus and promotions schemes during the pandemic.

[g]Council said that there appeared to have been a breakdown in communication between UCU and senior management and asked how it could be improved. Communication with the moderate element of UCU at national level had been productive. The Joint Consultative Forum provided the formal route for engagement between the executive and representatives from all of the recognised unions on campus and was chaired by the Vice-Principal (People, Culture and Inclusion). UCU had raised issues at recent meetings about the nature of negotiation, consultation and engagement, but not the issues currently under dispute.

Mixed Mode Education

[h]Council said that there had been stories in the press about students' experience of Mixed Mode Education (MME) and asked how the delivery of MME at Queen Mary compared with the rest of the sector. The Executive said that, while it was still early to say, the feedback had been positive. The balance between online and in-person activities varied across disciplines. QMSU was providing feedback where students felt that the balance was not

right. Early issues with the technology had been resolved. Staff had been trained over the summer on using the new equipment. Students from overseas who were required to quarantine on arrival were able to access recordings of live lectures stored on QMPlus.

National Student Survey

[i]Council asked how the lessons learned and best practice from this year's NSS results would be taken forward and shared across Schools. The Faculty Deans for Education and School Directors of Education met regularly to discuss the education strategy, share best practice and address issues. The culture towards teaching was improving.
League tables

[j]Council said that the growth in applications demonstrated that the university's reputation was rising but that it was not reflected in our league table position. Reputation was a key metric in the international league tables and we did not score well enough in this area despite our high number of citations. Our NSS score had an impact on our position in the national league tables. League tables were influential in the decisions of prospective students and their parents. The campus usually had a favourable impression on students who came to visit. The write-ups in The Times and The Sunday Times had been positive but more could be done to improve our ranking.

QMSU President's report (QM2021/04)

2021.006

Council noted the QMSU President's report.

Welcome Week

[a]The Welcome Fair had been a success and many of the events on campus had been over-subscribed with 10,500 entries recorded at the three sites on the Mile End campus. Feedback from students had been positive.

Black history month

[b]QMSU had been engaging with student societies and the university's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team to organise Black History Month events across the university.

Sustainability

[c]One of the most popular sustainability projects with students was the Re-use fair where over 500kg of items were re-used this year.

Study spaces

[d]The QMSU President and Vice-President (Barts and the London) had visited the University of Manchester to learn about its engagement strategy with students during building works. QMSU would provide feedback to all parts of the university that would benefit.

Postgrad representation

[e]Last year QMSU had focused on improving its engagement with postgraduate students. Significant progress had been made and it remained a priority for this year.

Deep dive presentation on sustainability (QM2021/05)

2021.007

Council received a presentation on the university's sustainability agenda.

[a]Council received an overview of the major environmental risks and the university's response set out in the Environmental Sustainability Action plan 2020-23 and Environmental Sustainability Policy 2020. This included a 6-year 30% carbon reduction target against the 2018/19 baseline, a heat decarbonisation and net zero strategy, and work towards attaining the ISO14001:2015 EMS certification by July 2022. Corporate partnerships and collaboration with other universities and the local council were key to achieving these targets, for benchmarking, and for developing lessons learned. A number of sustainability activities had been planned, including the university's first ever Sustainability Week which would showcase our operational and research response to climate change. Engagement with QMSU was coordinated through their Sustainability Coordinator which was part-funded by the university.

[b]We achieved a 28.5% reduction in our carbon footprint in 2019/20 compared with 2018/19. Part of the reduction resulted from the closure of our campuses during the pandemic and partly from recent investment. We were actively monitoring our carbon footprint, the two biggest elements of which were business travel and energy use on campus. We had secured a £2.47m loan to support energy efficiency projects and an additional £0.5m investment to install solar panels on the roof of the Queens' Building. A government grant of £124,399 would support our long-term heat decarbonisation plan and net zero strategy.

[c]We had achieved an Eco Campus gold accreditation and were working towards platinum. We had silver status in the Sustainability Leadership Scorecard framework coordinated by the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC) to embed relevant social, economic and environmental drivers into all aspects of our operation and to monitor our performance. We had been invited to present at a Net Zero conference in recognition of our actions.

[d]62% of 138 undergraduate courses have elements covering sustainable development, and sustainability and citizenship is part of the inclusive curriculum project led by the QM Academy. Over 450 students across 19 departments and 125 staff and PhD students had registered for our free short courses on environmental sustainability.

[e]Professor Kate Heppell, Professor of Physical Geography, presented a case study on how the School of Geography embedded sustainability in teaching and research. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals were embedded in the first-year tutorial programme for Geography and Environmental Science. The campus was being used as a living laboratory for students across disciplines to work on common issues and test solutions. A citizen science project, Chess Watch, supported by the Queen Mary Centre for Public Engagement and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), conducted research on sustainable water management on the River Chess in the Chiltern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

[f]Dr Elena Baglioni, Senior Lecturer in Global Supply Chain Management, presented on the ways in which the School of Business and Management embedded different dimensions of sustainability across the student journey. Environmental sustainability, social justice and good governance were embedded in core modules on business and society. In Year 2 students learned about the complexity of ecological problems, key corporate responses, and the major green corporate strategies in some of the most unsustainable sectors. In Year 3 students are introduced to unsustainable practices in the global economy and how social and environmental costs are out-sourced to the global south.

The following points were noted in the discussion:

[g]Council discussed how progress on the university's sustainable goals should be monitored from a governance perspective. Once the KPIs and controls were finalised, a deep-dive report would be prepared for discussion at Audit and Risk Committee.

[h]Council asked how students were being supported to enter green careers. Careers advice and fairs on sustainable jobs were available. The demand from students was high and more could be done.

[i]The School of Geography was working with the gardening team and other disciplines to develop the campus as a living laboratory and to provide engagement opportunities for students. An application for support had been made to the Westfield Fund. The Head Gardener had made connections with the team at Harvard to share best practice.

[j]Council asked whether the pandemic had provided an opportunity to change culture around academic staff travel and to embed remote conferences as standard practice. It was a challenge that the Strategy encouraged growth in international student recruitment to support investment but that travel was the largest element of the university's biggest carbon footprint. The Sustainability Committee would review the travel policy. There were opportunities to compensate but the level of investment needed meant that Government grants were required.

[k]Council asked how sustainability was being embedded into the research culture across faculties. One of the KPIs would measure research income generated from research on sustainability topics. University research contributed to UK plc on decarbonising the grid.

[l]The Director of Estates, Facilities and Capital Development said it would be a challenge to reduce the carbon footprint of the current buildings on campus. The grant money for decarbonisation and net zero would support the implementation of solutions.

Current financial position (QM2021/06)

2021.008

Minute 2021.008 is confidential.

Finance and Investment Committee minutes (QM2021/07)

2021.009

Minute 2021.009 is confidential.

Strategic Risk Register and KPIs (QM2021/08i&ii)

2021.010

Minute 2021.010 is confidential.

Audit and Risk Committee report (QM2021/09)

2021.011

Council noted the Audit and Risk Committee report. The following points were noted in the discussion:

[a]The Head of Internal Audit opinion for 2020–21 had been positive. The external audit was progressing according to the expected timescales. The panel for the external audit tender was meeting to determine the shortlist. The deep dive on international student recruitment flagged the geopolitics in relation to China as a key risk, although we were less exposed than some other Russell Group universities.

[b]The Committee received a regular report on cyber security which showed progress on a holistic programme of work. Recruiting experienced staff was a challenge facing all sectors. We had hired a consultancy to fill in the current vacancy and deliver on key objectives. Viruses were a significant risk to universities given the high number of external contacts. Training would help change culture and introduce new behavioural norms.

*Use of the Common Seal (QM2021/10)

2021.012

Council noted the use of the Common Seal since it was last reported to Council.

Draft agenda for the next meeting (QM2021/11)

2021.013

Council noted the draft agenda for the next meeting on 18 November 2021.

Dates of Meetings 2021–22:

- Thursday 18 November 2021, 1600 hours, Colette Bowe Room, Mile End.
- Thursday 31 March 2022, 1600 hours, Colette Bowe Room, Mile End.
- Thursday 19 May / Friday 20 May 2022 – Residential conference including Council meeting.
- Thursday 07 July 2022, 1600 hours, Colette Bowe Room, Mile End.