
Minutes of the 313th COUNCIL meeting, Wednesday, 19th June 2019

PRESENT:	Dame Yve Buckland (Chair) Amanda Allen Professor Alec Cameron Dr Melanie Gibbs Dr Fiona Lacey Dr Sue Noffke Neil Scott	Amna Atteeq Dr Stuart Doughty Professor Helen Higson Toby Lewis Dr Rob Perrins
APOLOGIES:	Lance Doughty Dr Vij Randeniya Dr Mike Wright	Dr Kevin Morley Professor Kate Sugden
IN ATTENDANCE:	Joanna Forbes Etta Parkes* John Walter (Secretary) * For minutes 18/124-126	Danielle Gallagher John Rushforth

GOVERNANCE MATTERS

18/107 RESOLVED:

To welcome Joanna Forbes and John Rushforth, Shakespeare-Martineau, who were observing the meeting as part of their external review of the effectiveness of Council and its committees; and Danielle Gallagher, SU President (elect) who was attending her first meeting.

Declarations of Interest

18/108 NOTED:

That there were no new declarations of interest from members of Council or from those in attendance with respect to any agenda items.

Constitutional Matters

18/109 RECEIVED:

Paper CO/18/65 on constitutional matters.

Council Effectiveness Review

18/110 NOTED:

That following Council's agreement that an independent review should be undertaken of the effectiveness of Council and its Committees and following a tendering exercise, it had been agreed that Shakespeare-Martineau should conduct the review. The review would consider: Council and its committees in terms of capacity and skills/composition, culture and behaviours; working relationship with the Executive; relationship with the Senate;

effectiveness of documentation and KPIs. The review included a survey and group discussions with staff and students; desk-based reviews of University and Committee documentation; and observations of Council and Committee meetings during the summer and autumn terms. It also involved individual interviews with each member of Council and Executive, together with a representative sample of Senate members in May and June. The final report and recommendations should be available in December this year.

Membership of Council and Committees 2019/20

18/111 NOTED:

- That Amanda Allen, Lance Doughty and Dr Stuart Doughty would be standing down from Council from 31st July 2019 as they complete their terms of office.
- That following a tendering process Odgers Berndtson had been engaged to conduct a search process for two new independent members of Council focussing the search on candidates i) with legal expertise or ii) with HE experience. A Panel comprising members and attendees of the Nominations and Remuneration Committee would interview candidates and make recommendations thereon to Council in due course.

18/112 RESOLVED:

To approve on recommendation from the Nominations and Remuneration Committee:

- i) the re-appointment of Dr Melanie Gibb and Dr Mike Wright for a second term of office ending 31st July 2022, and for Dr Wright to continue to serve for this period as Deputy Chair of Council.
- ii) the membership and Chairs of Committees for 2019/20 as specified in paper CO/18/65.

Terms of Reference of the Audit Committee

18/113 RESOLVED:

To approve on recommendation from the Audit Committee minor changes to the Terms of Reference of the Audit Committee as specified in paper CO/18/65.

Terms of Reference of the Finance and Infrastructure Committee (FIC)

18/114 RESOLVED:

To approve on recommendation from the FIC minor changes to the Terms of Reference of the FIC as specified in paper CO/18/65.

Schedule of Meetings for the University Council and its Committees

18/115 RECEIVED:

Paper CO/18/66, a schedule of meetings for the Council and its Committees for 2019/20, noting that at members' request the start time of Council meetings would be brought forward from 2:00 pm to 1:30 pm.

MINUTES AND UNIVERSITY NEWS

Minutes

- 18/116 RESOLVED:
To approve the Minutes of the 312th meeting of the Council, held on 13th February 2019.

Matters Arising

- 18/117 RECEIVED:

Paper CO/18/67 being a report on matters arising from the minutes of the 312th Council meeting.

Bid for an Institute of Technology for Manufacturing in Birmingham (Minute 18/79)

- 18/118 NOTED:

That the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Institute of Technology Consortium's application to create an Institute of Technology (IoT) had been approved by the Secretary of State for Education. This unique and exciting initiative brought together a partnership of FE and HE providers within the Greater Birmingham and Solihull area, with leading industry stakeholders, to create a powerhouse for the development of advanced manufacturing and engineering skills. The partnership would jointly design, develop and widen education, and training opportunities that were aligned to the latest skills needs of leading tech employers, the local, regional and national economy, and Government's priorities for technical education. The partnership would target learners from underrepresented groups and facilitate clear opportunities for progression from school to high level occupations.

Business Engagement Strategy (Minute 18/86)

- 18/119 NOTED:

That copies of Aston's pitch to employers in respect of degree apprenticeships had been circulated to Council members for information and comment following the previous meeting.

Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive's Report

- 18/120 RECEIVED:

Paper CO/18/68 and an oral report from the Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, noting the following points:

i) UK University Rankings

- Aston's ranking in the Guardian 2020 university league table had risen to 36th from 43rd in the previous year (and 51st the year before that). Aston had attained the highest score in the UK for 'value add' (with 7.5 out of 10). The Complete University Guide 2020 (CUG) has ranked Aston 34th, a rise of 11 places. The Aston Business School had been recognised as a leading international business school by featuring in the QS World Top 100 Universities for Business and Management Studies. These improvements in rankings should assist with future student recruitment and associated revenue generation.
- Members, in noting Aston's excellent record in helping students from disadvantaged backgrounds to succeed academically and in graduate employment, asked how the University assured its academic standards and that grade inflation was not occurring in relation to the classification of degrees awarded. The Provost reported that the

Senate and its sub-committees were responsible for ensuring the quality of academic provision and standards. This was achieved via a number of mechanisms including external examiners, external members of panels for the periodic review of existing programmes and approval of new programmes, accreditation of programmes by professional bodies, etc; and was demonstrated by Aston achieving gold in the TEF. It was anticipated that the next TEF would specifically cover grade inflation and the attainment gap. The SU President confirmed that students had not raised with her the issue of grade inflation.

- It was suggested that the University should do more to promote and advertise its excellent record in transforming the lives of people from a wide variety of backgrounds and its contribution to social mobility within the region. The Provost reported that she had recently been invited to give three keynote speeches on this theme, one of which was in parliament. She would also be working with the PR team further to promote Aston's excellent record. The SU President had recently addressed a conference organised by UUK at SOAS University of London, focussed on addressing the BAME attainment gap and had mentioned Aston's excellent record in this regard, and had been quoted in the national media, including the BBC. The Provost noted the Council's suggestions and agreed to coordinate a further campaign with the PR team.

ii) Reorganisation of the University

- The Vice-Chancellor had commenced engagement and feedback activities with the staff of the University in relation to the organisational changes presented at the Council/Executive Away Day in March. This followed completion of a consultation with the Executive on the impact on Executive roles arising from the proposal. The engagement with staff had included the release of a video (which was circulated to Council members), and two Town Hall meetings (with another scheduled for Thursday, 13th June, and three more in July.) These meetings had been well-attended and generally engagement had been positive. The staff unions had been briefed, and were seeking to engage their members on the issue of any potential job losses (which are anticipated to be small in number). The engagement and feedback process would continue through August, and implementation of the academic realignment would commence following the Senior Management Retreat in September. Appointment of senior roles in the new structure were already in train.
- The Academic Assembly (AA) representative on Council, reported that she had invited AA members to provide feedback on the reorganisation, but had not received any feedback to-date.

iii) University Superannuation Scheme (USS)

- USS issues remained unresolved, with no clear pathway to resolution between the Trustees, the Regulator, the employers (the Universities) and the Unions. Whilst there was lack of agreement about the actual size of the deficit, the Trustees had proceeded to implement higher levels of contribution from employers and employees, with a sequence of increases in April 2019, September 2019, and April 2020. Negotiations were underway to head-off the large increases scheduled for September and next April. Alternative payment arrangements were proposed. While these may be acceptable to the Universities, the Regulator and the Trustees, recent changes in the Union leadership nationally could hinder any agreement. Unions were now seeking for Universities to meet all additional contribution costs, rather than the shared arrangements under the current scheme rules. Given these demands were unlikely to be agreed, Unions had flagged an intention to ballot for industrial action.

iv) Student Recruitment for 2019/20 Entry

- Work was progressing on converting offers to acceptances and enrolments to achieve the student enrolment plan for September 2019 entry, including the increased use of targeted scholarships.

- [FOI exempt/commercially confidential]
- Members requested that Council receive a breakdown of enrolments and associated financial implications early in the new academic year.

ACTION: *Report from the Provost and COO on student enrolments and associated financial implications to be received at 16th October Council meeting*

v) **The Augar Report**

- The Report of the Augar Review had recently been published and was being considered by the government. It was not clear given the current political uncertainties which of its 53 recommendations would be taken forward by the government. It was likely that there would be further consultation and a fairly long lead time before any changes were implemented. The Vice-Chancellor's report provided an overview of the main recommendations and their negative and positive implications for Aston if implemented.
- Members suggested that a possible reduction in tuition fees without the provision of compensating government funding could have a material impact on Aston's financial position and its ability to meet loan covenants, and that this would be an appropriate topic for a strategic Council discussion in the next academic year.

vi) **Charter Dinner**

- The Charter Dinner, held on 6th June, was attended by 160 guests and was generally considered a great success. The theme was Aston University's civic role and contribution, which was well-received. Speakers included Sir John Sunderland, Andy Street, the Mayor of Birmingham, and the Vice-Chancellor. The pre-dinner speeches and drinks were held in the new Aston Students' Union Building, which received general acclaim.

vii) **Award from the Excellence in England (E3) Fund**

- Aston had been awarded £5.5 million by Research England from its Excellence in England (E3) Fund, which was designed to build the capacity and quality of research in departments and units within English universities where excellence existed but at a small scale. The award would support the development and growth of Aston's Institute for Forensic Linguistics (IFL), which was led by Professor Tim Grant and was based in the LSS. As part of the E3 award, IFL would help to build the next generation of Forensic Linguists, and would work across the University's disciplinary portfolio through joint academic appointments with both EAS and Aston Law School. This was the largest competitive award ever secured by the University: of 128 applications originally submitted to Research England, just 13 were successful. Professor Tim Grant and members of his team, and colleagues from Research and Knowledge Exchange and Finance were to be congratulated on their contributions to the preparation of this successful bid.

Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Council's Report

University's Access and Participation Plan for 2020/21

18/121 RECEIVED:

An oral report from the Pro-Chancellor that she had authorised, on behalf of Council, the University's Access and Participation Plan (APP) for 2020/21 for submission to the Office for Students (OfS). She and the Deputy Chair of Council had attended the recent Senate meeting (29.5.19) at which a presentation of the APP had been received and discussed. The Provost reported that the University was in the process of responding to a number of points raised about the APP by the OfS.

President of the Students' Union's Report

18/122 RECEIVED:

Paper CO/18/69, and an oral report from the President of the Students' Union (SU) which provided a progress update on actions in response to issues raised by students and discussed at the previous Council meeting, and an overview of the work undertaken by the Union over the year. The following points were noted:

i) Survey of Students' Perceptions of Safety on Campus

- 341 students responded to a survey over a two week period into how safe they felt on campus. Most students were generally satisfied with the level of safety on campus, although a significant minority were not satisfied. Students were asked to vote on which areas could be patrolled to safe guard them on campus: Aston Street (291 votes); Coleshill Street (200 votes), Lakeside accommodation/Lake area (180 votes), underpass by Aston Street (164 votes), old Students' Union area (107 votes) and journey to Aston Brook Green (38 votes). This information had not been yet been shared with Security or the Police.
- The manifestos of the SU President elect and Vice-President Welfare elect reported both included student safety and campus security as high priorities.
- The Audit Committee had considered an internal audit review of the design and operating effectiveness of the campus security arrangements. This indicated that overall, there appeared to be a well-run campus security team at an operational level but there was a lack of an overarching approach which included strategy and governance, risk assessment and key performance indicators. The Executive needed to be more actively involved at a strategic level in setting appropriate targets for action. PwC were being engaged in an advisory capacity in relation to the development of a high level, overarching strategy for Security, including KPIs, owned by an Executive and endorsed by the Council.
- The Executive had approved the implementation of a Campus 'Safe Zone' App on a voluntary basis in the first instance, which would provide a system for reporting personal emergencies, worker safety and large-scale critical incidents for students, staff and contractors. It could assist with the execution of rapid and consistent responses to emergencies and would aim to enhance the personal safety of members of the Aston community and demonstrate its duty of care.
- The University was continuing its dialogue with the West Midlands Police, Birmingham City Council, Birmingham City University, Unite and other parties, over the adoption of measures aimed at reducing the level of crime and antisocial behaviour in the vicinity of the campus, including increased Police presence on campus and its vicinity. Members suggested that a letter to the Chief Constable from the SU president expressing the safety concerns of Aston students might help to raise the profile of this issue.

iii) International Buddy Scheme

- The international buddy scheme was successfully introduced in 2018/19 and the SU had paired over 300 students together from different cultures and backgrounds to assist them in integrating with University life. The scheme had generated high interest from students and the SU had experienced no difficulty in finding students for the scheme. It was intended to develop the scheme so as to start pairing international applicants with an Aston student as soon as they accepted Aston University as their first choice. This pairing could take place over the summer vacation, and provide support to new students to find accommodations, learn about Birmingham and the University before even coming onto campus. The best part would be that they would already have a friend to help them and be here waiting for them at Aston. This scheme would support students in learning different languages as well as improving their English skills.
- In order to ensure the continued success and growth of the scheme, the President recommended that the University give consideration to the appointment of a part-time post in the International Officer to provide necessary support on a continuing basis.

.ACTION: Provost and PVC (International) to consider ongoing support for the International Buddy Scheme in liaison with the VP Welfare (elect)

iv) Other Achievements

- 1220 responses had been received as part of the Speak Week campaign in term two, asking students to identify “one thing the University or Union could do to improve their time at Aston. The responses had focused principally on academic interests, study space, facilities and transport. The Speak Week report was to be considered in detail by the Learning and Teaching Committee at its next meeting later in June.
- A Facebook group had been established to assist students going on placements to contact other students taking placements in the same location and to share accommodation costs.
- SU Officers had worked closely with Security to allay the concerns of students over safety on campus.
- SU Officers had made a significant contribution to the design and delivery of the new SU Building.
- SU Officers had conducted a student survey on the types of study space they required at the invitation of the Chief Operating Officer, and although there had been a relatively low response rate, the results did help to identify the students’ priorities for study space.

18/123 NOTED:

A member of Council noted that, despite the best efforts of the sabbatical officers, only a relatively small proportion of students appeared to engage with the Students Union. It was hoped that the location of the new SU building in the heart of the campus and the excellent facilities it offered would help to boost students’ engagement. External consultants had been engaged to help develop a University sports and well-being strategy, which could also help to encourage more students to participate in SU societies.

STRATEGIC ISSUES

Student Employability and Graduate Outcomes

18/124 RECEIVED:

Paper CO/18/70 and a presentation from Etta Parkes, Director of Student Employability, on Student Employability and Graduate Outcomes. The presentation focussed particularly on the development of a draft Employability Strategy, which was central to the delivery of the University Mission and Strategy, and was relevant to all three of Aston’s main beneficiaries.

18/125 NOTED the following points:

- Aston had a distinctive mission to be the leading provider of graduates for business and the professions. This was a significant challenge given the characteristics of the student population (eg 32% of undergraduate students were from households with income less than £25,000 and 39% less than £43,000; Aston was ranked the most ethnically diverse university in the UK in the Sunday Times League Table of Social Diversity).
- The Careers and Placement (C+P) team had a strong track record in raising aspirations and developing the employability skills of Aston’s students, many of whom entered the University with comparatively low social capital, so that a high proportion go on to achieve graduate level employment. Aston’s recent ranking as first in the Guardian league table for value-added demonstrated this; as did its rating of second in the Economist for boosting expected graduate earning levels. Key to raising academic performance and employability was the placement year, which all students were encouraged to take. Aston was ranked third in the UK for the number of students taking a sandwich placements (HESA 2018)

- The draft Employability Strategy sought to build on these current strengths, and to ensure that the needs were fully addressed of all types of students that would be studying at Aston under the new University Strategy.
- [FOI exempt/commercially confidential]
- Council members were invited to give positive consideration to Aston graduates as potential employees.

18/126 RESOLVED:

- To thank the Director of Student Employability for her informative presentation, which had highlighted the excellent record of the C+P team in adding value and promoting student employability.
- To endorse the proposed development of the Employability Strategy.

Council's Key Performance Indicators

18/127 RECEIVED:

Paper CO/18/71, presented by the Chief Operating Officer, setting out the lead indicators for the 10 beneficiary KPI's to measure performance and three financial KPI's, which had been populated with the latest data measures. This information had then been used to interpret future performance of the beneficiary KPI's and provide an indicative forecast position compared to the beneficiary KPI target. A RAG analysis and narrative was provided to further articulate the current position. Based on this analysis all of the beneficiary KPI's were currently considered to be on track to achieve target apart from the following three:

KPI 2 High Quality Teaching - Satisfaction with Teaching on my course: NSS

KPI 3 Student Satisfaction: NSS

KPI 10 International Revenue.

18/128 NOTED the following points:

- Council members queried why KPIs 2 and 3 were felt to be at risk despite the action plans that had been put in place to address student concerns and to raise their satisfaction levels. It was explained that pulse surveys were used as an indicative measure to interpret student satisfaction with NSS and PTES survey outcomes, and these were currently suggesting that the NSS target was at risk. Generally the percentage scores obtained in pulse surveys in the second year of study were lower than the final year, particularly as the placement year had a positive impact on the student experience. Overall scores in the pulse surveys also tended to be lower than the actual NSS/PTES survey scores. An action plan was in place to implement the feedback from the pulse surveys with the intention of improving performance in the NSS surveys.
- Council members queried why KPI 5: Income from Business and other Non-HE Collaboration was reported to be on track when the reported data for the third quarter was significantly below the end of target in respect of the number of KTPs and associated income. It was explained that the value of individual KTPs had increased which meant that fewer KTPs would now be required to achieve the income target.
- Council members queried why KPI 8 Research Funding – Awards was reported to be on track when the reported data for the third quarter was significantly below the end of target in respect research awards. It was explained that a number of research awards had been granted but were still formally under negotiation which should be completed prior to the year end.
- It was agreed that individual Committees should review relevant KPIs.

ACTION: *COO to take forward the development of the KPIs and to refer relevant KPIs to Committees*

Financial Matters

Period 9 Management Accounts

18/129 RECEIVED:

Paper CO/18/72 being the Management Accounts 2018/19 for the period ending 30th April 2019.

[FOI exempt/commercially confidential]

Budget and Strategic Financial Model Financial Forecasts for 2019/20 to 2023/24

18/130 RECEIVED:

Papers CO/18/73, being the draft Budget for 2019/20 and Strategic Financial Model Financial Projections for 2019/20 to 2023/24. The Chief Operating Officer outlined the improved process adopted for the preparation of the Budget and financial planning, which included a robust process for agreeing student number and income projections with each of the Schools. From these cost envelopes, based on required contribution/surplus to be delivered, were developed for Schools and professional support services. The 2019/20 Budget was used to build the five-year plan and informed the generation of Balance Sheets and Cash Flow Statements.

18/131 [FOI exempt/commercially confidential]

18/132 RESOLVED:

- i) To approve, on the recommendation of the Executive and the FIC, the draft Budget for 2019/20 and the Five-Year Financial Forecasts 2019/20 to 2023/24 and their submission to OfS.
- ii) To review the financial position of the University in the light of student recruitment at the 16th October meeting.

ACTION: *COO to take forward the implementation of the Budget and financial forecasts and to submit them to the OfS*

STRATEGY REPORTS

References from Committees

Report from the Audit Committee (AC)

18/133 RECEIVED:

Papers CO/18/74 and an oral report from the AC Chair which summarised issues considered at the AC meeting held on 12th June 2019 (the full minutes of which, together with minutes of the meeting of 6th March 2019, were contained in the Resources and Background Material). The following points were noted.

- i) University Risk Appetite Statement and Strategic Risk Register

AC's in-depth discussion theme was the development of the University's strategic risk register and risk appetite statement, noting that the risk appetite statement had been further revised in order better to reflect the risk appetite necessary for the University to meet its current Strategy implications. AC had requested the Executive to review the risk register to ensure that it covered all the major risks to the delivery of the University Strategy; to clarify its approach to rating the current status of risks and progress in implementing the actions taken to mitigate them; to specify timescales for the completion of mitigating actions and the achievement of target risks; to provide examples of the types of actions the Executive would be prepared to undertake with a

higher risk appetite which they would not have been prepared to take with a lower risk appetite. AC would consider revised documentation at its next meeting prior to a full discussion at a meeting of Council.

ii) Health and Safety and Business Continuity Management

AC received a report from the Executive Director of HR and Organisational Development on the action being taken by the University in response to high risk recommendations arising from internal audit reviews of health and safety and business continuity management. AC was assured that management responses were on track to meet the agreed action plans, through the use of external consultants in the short term and the appointment of a Director of Health and Safety and Business Continuity. The Chief Operating Officer undertook to clarify whether or not all fire stopping breaches had been resolved. The Executive was asked to provide written confirmation to the AC (18.11.19) that the H&S management actions due in September had been completed and that the Business Continuity Plan alternative provision arrangements would be in place from April 2020.

iii) Assurance of the Quality and Standard of Academic Provision

Members had queried where assurance was derived in relation to the quality and standard of academic provision. The Chief Operating Officer reported that the Senate was responsible for the oversight of academic quality and standards, and made reports to Council thereon, including Aston's performance in the TEF and REF. Council KPIs included a range of academic KPIs such as: performance in placement take-up, tariff entry scores, student satisfactions as measured in surveys, continuation rates, student recruitment, degree apprenticeships, and research funding. The NRC was conducting a search for a new independent Council member with experience in a senior role within HE who could provide further independent assurance in this area.

Report from the Finance and Infrastructure Committee (FIC)

18/134 RECEIVED:

Papers CO/18/52a and CO/18/52b, and an oral report from the FIC Chair which summarised issues considered at the FIC meetings held on 8th April and 10th June 2019 (the full minutes of which were contained in the Resources and Background Material). FIC had approved the following under delegated authority:

- The proposed implementation of the MB1 MED Office & Teaching Laboratory Development project.
- [FOI exempt/commercially confidential]
- A proposed change to the Financial and Legal Authority Limits such that either the Director of Finance or the General Counsel would be required to sign all contracts under £50,000 subject to a clearer statement that authority limits related to the total contract value for capital and revenue expenditure even if this was spread over a number of financial years.
- [FOI exempt/commercially confidential]
- Revised Financial Regulations and Governance and Bank Mandates and Treasury Controls.
- A report on the Aston University Carbon Management Plan - May 2019, noting that the Plan was being delivered effectively by the Energy, Environment and Sustainability Team under the scrutiny of the Sustainable Aston Working Group. FIC members recommended that Aston should seek to be an exemplar for the sector in the use of carbon reduction technology and should take advantage of any government grants for such initiatives. (The Carbon Management Plan was included in the Council's Resources and Background Material).

- [FOI exempt/commercially confidential]
- 18/135 [FOI exempt/commercially confidential]
Estates Masterplan Vision Statement
- 18/137 RECEIVED:
- Paper CO/18/77 providing a new and shorter version of the Campus Vision statement, which had been endorsed by Executive and FIC as providing an ambitious vision for the redevelopment of the campus including new, high-quality and innovative buildings and infrastructure that would meet the future needs of the University and its students, and also contribute to the development of a wider Birmingham Knowledge Quarter. FIC members stressed that the University should use this vision statement as the starting point for any external discussions with Birmingham City Council (BCC) with a view to optimizing Aston's position within the plans for the development of the City, including appropriate alignment with the HS2 project. The Vision Statement would inform the development of a detailed Campus Masterplan, which would determine the location of the new building, the opportunities for the north part of the campus and the future movement and connection to the changing City so that the Campus was properly aligned.
- 18/138 RESOLVED:
- To approve the Estates masterplan Vision Statement.
- ACTION** *COO and DoE to take forward the development of the Estates masterplan and discussions with BCC*
- Conference Aston (CA) Development Proposals
- 18/139 RECEIVED:
- Paper CO/18/78 proposing the development of a two storey conference centre which would replace the lost space of the CAMs/Great Hall combination. [FOI exempt/commercially confidential]
- 18/140 RESOLVED:
- To approve the FIC's recommendation for the development of a two storey conference centre. [FOI exempt/commercially confidential]
- ACTION** *COO and DoE to take forward implementation of the CA development project*
- Demolition of Students' Union and BIAD Building
- 18/141 RECEIVED:
- Paper CO/18/79, and a report from the Chair of FIC, that FIC had approved proposals for the scheme to go to tender for the demolition of the former BIAD building and the SU building, associated landscaping, redirection of mains water from BIAD and improvements to the car park. [FOI exempt/commercially confidential]
- 18/142 RESOLVED:
- To approve, on recommendation from FIC, the proposed demolition of the former BIAD building and SU buildings.
- ACTION** *COO and DoE to take forward implementation of the demolition of Students' Union and BIAD Building project*

18/143 RECEIVED:

Paper CO/18/80, being a progress report on the implementation and development of the Digital Aston Strategy describing the current planned approach and timelines extending to 2023. Phase 2 of the implementation had commenced in May 2019 and would embed new ways of working, procurement of two major systems (Digital student Experience and Customer Relationship Management system), and take forward the remaining digital priorities. Nours Group has been engaged to provide additional Project Management Officer support during this phase.

Report from the Nominations and Remuneration Committee (NRC)

18/144 RECEIVED:

A brief oral report from the Secretary on NRC's meeting held prior to this Council meeting.

18/145 NOTED:

- NRC had discussed a paper on pension taxation and benefit replacement provided to a small number of senior staff and agreed some actions to be taken forward.
- NRC considered a paper summarising the current position in relation to the ongoing consultations with USS Trustees on the 2018 University Superannuation Scheme valuation. The CUC had circulated a draft positioning statement on pension arrangements in HEIs, which advised that the increasing level and volatility of costs in the main pension schemes operating in the HE sector (including the USS used by Aston) posed a significant risk to the financial sustainability of the sector and this would ultimately make these schemes unaffordable to both employers and employees unless major changes were made. Following consideration of Universities UK's consultation response on the 2018 valuation technical provisions and proposed contingent contributions arrangement, the USS Trustee was consulting on three possible options for concluding the 2018 valuation. NRC accepted the Executive's recommendation that Aston's response to the UUK consultation should be that, at this stage, Option 3 represented best available option for the conclusion of the 2018 valuation. This involved contributions of 30.7% (21.1% for employers and 9.6% for employees) to apply from October 2019, with a 2020 (rather than 2021) valuation. Should no agreement on the contribution rate from the 2020 valuation be implemented before October 2021, the contribution rate would rise to 34.7%. NRC agreed that, at least in the short term, the University should continue to support the consensus position adopted by the majority of institutions involved in USS. NRC Members agreed that the proposed employer contributions were not sustainable in the long term, particularly given other pressures (eg Augar review) and universities would eventually need to address this. The University would be seeking external advice regarding the range of potential options in relation to USS, from doing nothing to complete exit, including a high level analysis of the potential financial impacts and the potential opportunities and barriers.
- NRC noted that the UCU written to the University to seek its commitment to absorbing all additional USS pension contributions over and above 26%. In the absence of such a commitment UCU has stated that it would consider there to be a local trade dispute and would ballot members on industrial action. NRC asked to see a paper setting out the lessons learned from the previous industrial action and how the impact of possible industrial action might be mitigated, particularly in relation to students. NRC emphasised the importance of effective communication in this context.

Action: Provost to provide report on actions to mitigate impact of industrial action on students

- NRC discussed the Health and Safety Annual Report 2018. NRC agreed that the Report provided evidence that the University was meeting its statutory H&S duties. Members commented that the increased number of violent incidents was worrying (noting that

additional security staff training had been provided in dealing with violence) and that the number of reported near misses was very low (the reasons for this should be investigated and addressed). They also suggested that more use should be made of unannounced fire drills and that consideration be given to replacing paper copies of guidance pamphlets with digital versions where appropriate, recognising that not all staff had access to computers. The University was encouraged to build on its efforts to co-ordinate the provision of support for health, safety, security and well-being into a more holistic service, which would be of benefit to staff and students.

- NRC discussed the ongoing search for two new members of Council to start from 1st August 2019, and reviewed potential future membership changes. Some improvements to the skills matrix were suggested which would help to make it more effective in identifying the key skills gaps in the Council membership.
- NRC discussed the ongoing external review of Council effectiveness.
- NRC discussed a report by Innecto on remuneration of HE trustees and referred this matter to the ongoing effectiveness review of Council.

[FOI exempt/commercially confidential]

Report from the Senate

18/147 RECEIVED:

Paper CO/18/83a and CO/18/83b which summarised issues considered at the Senate meetings held on 13th March and 29th May 2019 (the full minutes of were included in the Resources and Background Material).

18/148 NOTED:

That Senate was very grateful for the attendance of two Council members at its May meeting and that all members of Council were encouraged to attend future Senate meetings.

ACTION: *Secretary to ensure Council members are informed of the dates of Senate meetings early in the academic year*

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

18/149 NOTED:

That the Council would next meet at 1:30 pm on Wednesday, 16th October 2019.

REVIEW OF 313th MEETING

18/150 RESOLVED:

To approve a recommendation that Council meetings should in future commence at 1:30 pm.

VALEDICTORY REMARKS

18/151 RESOLVED:

To join the Chair in thanking the following retiring members for their outstanding service to Council and the University:

- i) **Amanda Allen**, who would be standing down at the end of her first three-year term of office as an independent member of Council and as a member of FIC. Prior to this, Amanda had served for six years as an independent member of the Audit Committee. Amanda had provided high quality legal and governance advice and challenge to the

University. Amanda also served on University Staff Grievance Committees and chaired Appeal Committees. She was also a Member of Council's Sub-Group on the Evaluation of the Aston-Cranfield Project.

- ii) **Lance Doughty** had made a significant contribution to the work of the Audit Committee, Nominations Committee, Council and the University, over his six-year term of office as an independent Council member. Lance first served as a member of the Nominations Committee from 2013 and then became a member of the Audit Committee in June 2018 following a review of the membership of the committees. Lance served as Senior Vice President, Head of Systems Development and Integration, at Capgemini UK plc, who were the first employers to complete apprenticeships with Aston, and their first cohort resulted in a very high proportion of first class degrees. Lance served as a member of the IT Advisory Board in EAS. Lance was an external advisor to ABS and EAS and to the University in relation to the Aston Digital Strategy. Lance served as a member of the Search Committees for the new Vice-Chancellor and for the new Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Council
- iii) **Dr Stuart Doughty**, who was appointed as an independent member of Council and the Finance and Major Projects Committee (which became FIC) in November 2010, and was invited by Council to stand exceptionally for a third term of office, which he would complete on 31st July this year. Stuart took over as Chair of FIC in 2015. Stuart provided strategic financial and capital development advice and challenge to the University, and had been actively involved in significant development projects that had helped transform the Campus including Aston Student Villages and the new Students' Union building. Stuart was Council's representative on the Health and Safety Committee and its 'Health and Safety Champion'. He served on the EBRI Technology Sub-Group. He was a Member of Council Effectiveness Sub-Group and a former member of the Nominations Committee. He served as a member of Council ASV Sub-Group and chaired Council's Sub-Group on the Evaluation of the Aston-Cranfield Project. The University honoured Stuart's contribution via the award of an Honorary Doctor of Science in July 2018.
- iv) **Amna Atteeq**, the outgoing President of the Students' Union. Amna and the other outgoing SU Officers would leave behind a significant legacy after just one year in office, which would be of lasting benefit to future generations of students for example: their contribution to the design and delivery of the new SU Building, the Student Communication project, improvements to the Student Representation Framework, the continuing success of the Advice and Representation Centre, and the much higher profile and level of support provided by the SU generally for students and their welfare and engagement. Amna had established excellent working relationships with members of Council and the Executive, and her confident contributions had brought the student interest to the heart of Council meetings. Amna had also brought positive external media attention to the work of the Union and of the University.

JGW/26.6.19