
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Convocation Thursday 12th August 2021

Present

Professor Alec Cameron, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive
Neil Scott, Chief Operating Officer
Kerrie Holland, Director of DARO

Convocation Members:

Anum Abdullah	Shuo Feng
Jumoke Ademola	Ian Fleming
Mayowa Ajayeoba	Vaughan Fletcher
Mohammad Ajlouni	Chen Fu
Sharifah Al-Kudcy	Mohammed Gambo
Kehinde Anishere	Umar Geidam
Susan Austin	Liam Gill
Ruth Ayres	Simon Golding
Jigar Bagadia	Michael Gregson
Lu Bai	Jacqueline Groom
John Bell	Robert Hall
David Betteley	Mohammad Haroon
Gladys Bii	David Harrison
Gerald Blackburn	Nicola Hewitt
Mathilde Blanchard	Helen Higson
Thomas Henry Broom	Robert Hogan
David Brown	Susan Holdsworth
Karen Caine	Sarah Horton-Walsh
Charles Carlson	Weili Hou
Richard Carter	Yi Huang
Paul Catchpole	Alan Hughes
Rhea Chandok	Gary Hughes
Pamela Chesire	Michael Jepson
Oyinkansola Coker	Karl Johnson
Matthew Crummack	Tuomas Juustila
Praise Dada	Aditya Kasana
Wendy Dadeboe	Margaret Keane
Matthew Daley	Chrysanthi Kremmyda
Sanaa Darwish	Niveditha Kuganesan
Malcolm Days	Megaklis Kyriazis
Ranjit Dhindsa	Michael Leonard
Gabriele Dillen	Sastika Limbu
Hung Do	Beverly Lindsay
Charlie Dowman	Ziqi Liu
Paula Eccles	Amit Madhogaria
Chisomaga Ekeocha	Arusa Mahmood
George Feiger	Mohammed Mandalawi

Robert Martin
Elisabeth May
Lesley McCarthy
David McCollum
Gertrudes Melicio Cardoso Delgado
Suresh Menon
David Milliken
Anne Millward
Laxmanbhai Mistry
Sucha Modhara
Hasan Mohammed
Keith Munday
Khalid Muneer
Kiran Nair
Akhilesh Kumar Nayak
Ngoc Mai Nguyen
Jane Norton
Tochukwu Nsoedo
Francisca Olekaibe
Goodluck Ole-medeye
Dele Ologun
Nicholas O'Regan
Durryck Ouambo
Eghosa Oyemwense
Aarti Patel
Ashwin Patel
Suru Patel
Daniel Pitcher
Teodora Preda
Michael Pritchard
Janith Rajaram
Tharinda Rathnapala
Haotian Ren
Gurdev Riyat
Peter Roberts
Emmanuel Ruhumuliza

Rachel Rutter
Naman Navin Sadh
Bushra Salim
Nikhil Shah
Samuel Sie
Mark Smith
Benjamin Socal
Gurdeep Sohti
Mayur Soni
Brian Sudlow
Zhongyuan Sun
Arjun Sundar
Neil Thomas
Paul Thompson
Peter Thong
Yichen Tian
Kerstin Treder
Chima Uduma
Reuben Ugwuoha
Wouter Van Lint
Pranav Varma
Dipankar Verma
Samuele Viola
Ivan Virnandyto
Steve Wharton
William White
Carl Whitehouse-Tedd
Martin Wischhusen
Jason Wouhra
Amy Wright
Mike Wright
Lingxiao Xu
Arman Zaman
Alexandr Zubenko

21/1 Welcome from the Vice-Chancellor & Chief Executive

NOTED:

Kerrie Holland, Director of DARO, provided a 'house-keeping' introduction and briefing on Blackboard Collaborate.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alec Cameron, welcomed members of Convocation.

The Chancellor, Sir John Sunderland, and Pro-Chancellor, Dame Yve Buckland DBE, apologise for their absence; the Vice-Chancellor will chair this meeting. The Vice-Chancellor will present the report from the University and Chief Operating Officer, Neil Scott, will present a financial report on the 2019/2020 University Accounts.

The Vice-Chancellor noted he will be leaving the University at the end of the calendar year to take up a Vice-Chancellorship at RMIT University, citing

personal pull-factors for his return to Australia. It was noted an Executive search for the Vice-Chancellor's successor is underway.

Questions were submitted in advance of this meeting and they will be dealt with in 'Any Other Business'.

21/2 Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Convocation held on Thursday 13th August 2020

AGREED:

It was agreed that the minutes from the previous meeting were true and correct.

The Vice-Chancellor signed the minutes for the Annual General Meeting of Convocation 2020 as a correct record of the proceedings.

21/3 Matters arising from the minutes

Feedback had been sought from members of Convocation who attended AGM's first online meeting in 2020. It was noted Kerrie Holland received positive feedback from two attendees, and two who commented they wanted to attend for the Vice-Chancellor's report and Q&A, but not for the procedural items. It was noted in response to this feedback attendees were invited to join the meeting from 1.10pm if they prefer, with future meetings and invitations to follow the same format and schedule.

It was noted the Shakespeare-Martineau review of Council has been published on the Convocation AGM webpage.

21/4 Report from the Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive

RECEIVED:

The Vice-Chancellor & Chief Executive presented his report.

NOTED:

It was noted that some questions and comments submitted in advance by members of Convocation were answered in the presentation.

21/5 Report from the Chief Financial Officer Report on University Accounts for the Year Ended 31st July 2019 and context of performance in current year

The 2019/20 University Accounts were posted on the website and a link given at the end of the 2018/19 minutes, which were sent in advance of this AGM.

Neil Scott commented on the status of the University's account:

- 2019/20 was a positive year although the last 3 months were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

- All commercial activities and research stopped during the first national lockdown and a number of staff in these areas were furloughed.
- £15m was drawn down from the revolving credit facility with HSBC to support available cash balances.
- Recruitment has been positive in 2020/21, despite the challenges presented by Covid-19 including:
 - Blended learning
 - Changing travel restrictions
- Adaptability has been key and teams have worked hard to recruit and deal with the changing requirements. The University delivered our largest ever January intake.
- Research continued during the 2nd and 3rd lockdowns but has been impacted due to lack of travel and conferences meaning income is not forecast to be as high as budgeted.
- Covid-19 has also resulted in an impact on awards for 2020/21 as funding bodies are taking longer to decide on funding. This will impact future years.
- Commercial income has also been impacted due to national lockdowns and government restrictions. However, indications are that bookings are recovering in Conference Aston since restrictions have been lifted.

21/6 Matters Arising from the Vice-Chancellor's Report and the Chief Financial Officer's Report

There were no further questions raised.

21/7 Any Other Business

1. It was noted the Aston Graduates Association prize was not awarded this year as it was felt the nominations were not of the usual high standard, partly due to the restrictions which COVID placed on student activity. The Aston Graduates Association expect to award a prize next year and it will be reported at the 2022 AGM.
2. The University received a question relating to the delivery of Inaugural Lectures by new Professors. (Question raised by Mr David Harrison)

There seems to have been a break of several years in the presentation of Inaugural Lectures by new Professors from before this pandemic. When will these lectures restart?

Response from the Vice-Chancellor:

There was no break in the Inaugural Lectures programme, although they are sometimes at irregular intervals due to the speaker's availability. The Inaugural Lectures were rebranded as Aston Talks in 2020 and have been taking place online during the pandemic, with monthly events in term-time until May this year. Attendance has been higher and people can attend from all over the world. We intend to keep going as virtual events therefore, and the 21/22 programme will be launched in the Autumn term.

3. The University received a question in relation to the standard of British English in exam papers rather than the use of US English. (Question raised by Mr David Harrison)

Response from the Vice-Chancellor:

Exam papers are a matter of academic judgement, written by academic staff and signed off by external examiners. We expect our academic staff to use appropriate language and for exam questions to be clearly understandable for the students sitting the examinations.

4. The University received a question in relation to the provision of toilets for female students, particularly during exam times. (Question raised by Mr David Harrison)

Response from the Vice-Chancellor:

A similar question was raised at Convocation AGM in 2018 and I can confirm the answer remains the same:

The question was raised with the Estates team, and they confirmed that there are female toilets and adequate facilities on every floor of the Main Building including the North and South Wings.

The toilets include multiple cubicles, and this has not been raised as an issue by student representatives.

5. A question was received in relation to the University's ranking. (Question raised by Mr Kevin Wong)

I have a question for the ranking of the university. Why does it keep dropping in the past few years. Does the management team have any plan to improve it?

Response from the Vice-Chancellor:

As highlighted in the Vice-Chancellor's Report, Aston has had some great league table performance and recognition this year, not least as The Guardian's 'University of the Year'. As a smaller university, we do have additional challenges in global rankings such as the QS World Rankings, to which I think the questioner may be referring given its international significance. 50% of the ranking is derived from reputation – put simply: asking academics and employers around the world which universities they rate highest – and although our academic staff and graduates are extremely well-respected there are fewer of them than in many thousands of other institutions in the world. We were pleased to see a return to the top 500 globally this year, and this continues to be a target for improvement. Alumni who are in academic or graduate employer roles can register with QS to complete the annual reputation survey if they wish.

No other questions were submitted in advance of the meeting.

The meeting concluded.

[Please click to access Annual Statement of Accounts](#)

Signed as a true and accurate record:

Professor Aleks Subic
Vice-Chancellor & Chief Executive