

Convocation

12 January 2024

Present: Karen O'Brien (Chair), Stephen Ashe, Louis Aslett, Oliver Belcher, Eamonn Bell, Venetia Bridges, Laura Campbell, Rebecca Clifford, Mike Crang, Stefano Cremonesi, Ric Crossman, Andrew Danos, Caleb Day, Paul Denny, Tony Fawcett, Sam Fearn, Fernando Galaz Garcia, Sol Gamsu, Peter Garratt, Martin Gleghorn, Daniel Grausam, Simon Grimble, Alastair Hargreaves-McManus, Peter Hatton, Tyler Helmuth, Rebecca Hodge, Ifan Hughes, Samuel Jackson, Simon James, Alison Jobe, Matthew Johnson, Paul Langley, Madalena Lemos, Jo Lumley, Clare Mahon, Andrew Marcinko, Anna Matejko, James Miller, Arin Mizouri, Katie Muth, Karolina Nieberle, Tim Packer, Joanne Race, Peter Richardson, Paddy Ross, David Sanderson, Catriona Sellick, Mike Shipman, Patrick Steel, Brian Tanner, Jennifer Terry, Sean Twiss, Sara Uckelman, Charles Walker, Jon Warren, Nicole Westmarland, Amanda Wilcox, Mark Wilson, Jane Wistow, and Kara Woodbury-Smith.

In Attendance: Becs Grundy, Lucian Hudson, Nic Johnston, Leanne Stronach and James Walsh (notes)

Notes of an Extraordinary Meeting of Convocation held via Zoom

01. Welcome:

- a) the Chair welcomed members to the Extraordinary Meeting of Convocation;
- b) the University Secretary outlined that the meeting:
 - i) had been called prior to the Privy Council approving changes to the University Statutes on 11 October 2023 and would be held in accordance with the previous Statutes;
 - ii) had been called *'to discuss the decisions of management to set inappropriate and unrealistic deadlines for the return of MAB (Marking & Assessment Boycott) affected marking. This work is also effectively unpaid as management have consistently refused to discuss the return of deducting pay'*.
- c) Convocation was informed that notes of the meeting would be made available following the meeting.

02. Background

Noted:

- a) in recognising that membership of Convocation included the Alumnae/Alumni, the Vice-Chancellor & Warden provided background information relating to the national MAB called by the University & College Union (UCU);
- b) the Vice-Chancellor & Warden highlighted:
 - i) the University had been required by the OfS to *'take all reasonable steps to avoid or limit disruption to students'* ensuring that students were not disadvantaged during the MAB; that students could *'graduate or progress on time where this is appropriate in academic terms'*; and that *'any degrees awarded accurately reflects a students' academic achievement'*.
 - ii) the MAB was classed as a reportable event to the Office for Students (OfS). The OfS had confirmed that it was comfortable with the action taken by the University in managing the dispute;
 - iii) the MAB began on 18 April 2023 and concluded on 7 September 2023;
 - iv) as a member of the University & Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), the University was involved in collective negotiations to resolve the issues contributing to the industrial action called by the UCU, including the MAB.

03. Questions

Noted:

- a) several questions had been raised by members of Convocation in advance of the meeting and were given the opportunity to raise questions during the meeting under the two areas identified for discussion;
- b) in relation to questions relating to unrealistic deadlines for the return of MAB affected marking, the following:
 - i) deadlines were set for MAB affected marking to be completed were balanced, not disadvantaging students and taking into account staff workloads;
 - ii) students required completed marks to progress to further study, employment; or in the case of international students to meet visa requirements;
 - iii) the gap between the end of the MAB and the deadline set by the University for completion of marking, was slightly longer for final-year and continuing students than was normally set during the summer examination period.
- c) in relation to questions relating to pay deductions, the following:
 - i) the University had taken legal advice from UCEA in making a decision about deducting pay during the MAB;
 - ii) although the University was entitled to deduct 100% pay for partial performance, a decision had been taken that the deduction rate of 50% for participation in the MAB be applied;
 - iii) deductions were applied in a consistent and fair manner;
 - iv) should staff feel that deductions relating to their personal circumstances were not accurate, they were to raise this with the Director of Human Resources & Organisational Development.
- d) additional questions relating to the MAB, but not outlined in the original purpose of the meeting of Convocation, were facilitated by the Chair, relating to the following areas:
 - i) academic standards: the University remained accountable to the OfS for academic standards during the MAB and a report had been scheduled for Senate confirming adherence to these standards. This report would be made available to wider University following Senate;
 - ii) marking: the majority of student work affected by the MAB, was marked following the end of the dispute. However, some marking had been reallocated, which was consistent with the Core Regulations for undergraduate programmes;
 - iii) workload: staff had been asked to raise concerns about completing marking following the MAB with their Heads of Department, with departments asked to pause non-essential activity during the revised marking period;
 - iv) Equality Impact Assessment (EIA): the University had completed an EIA in relation to pay deductions providing the information to the Recognised Trade Unions, and could be made available to staff on request;
 - v) UCEA: a majority of universities are part of UCEA with benefits to the University to be a member. There is a strict code about being a member, which the University adheres to. With the UCU branch having consistently supported participating in national collective pay bargaining;
 - vi) spending: money deducted during the MAB was used to support affected students via a number of areas including: additional spring ceremonies; UKVI related travel and subsistence costs; goodwill payments; overtime for staff in covering Boards of Examiners and marking entry. The University's expenditure in mitigating for the impact of the MAB had exceeded the amount deducted from participating staff;
 - vii) governance: Convocation could not consider motions raised during the meeting and no motions had been raised in advance of the meeting.
- e) The Chair apologised to members of the meeting that it had not been possible for them to turn their cameras on. The Chair was not aware that this had been the situation and it was an unintended consequence of the Zoom setup.