

Minutes of Meeting

Held on Wednesday, 19 August 2020,
Virtual Meeting by Zoom, commencing at 5.30 pm.

1. Welcome

The President, David Bellair, took the chair, opened the meeting and welcomed those in attendance. He particularly welcomed the Guest Speaker, Professor Pip Nicholson, Dean of Law.

2. Guest Speaker

The guest speaker, Professor Pip Nicholson, Dean of Law, began by stating that her talk would cover four main areas:

- a. the University budget;
- b. the work of the University in regard to future planning;
- c. the effect of COVID-19 on the University and Law Faculty;
- d. the impact of the pandemic on teaching in the Law Faculty.

a. Budget

The University is facing a billion-dollar shortfall over the three years of 2020-2022. It has budgeted for no shortfall in 2023, however, this is only an estimate. Initiatives to cope with this situation, over the last few months, have included a reduction in operating expenditure (e.g. for travel and for external consultants), making only critical new appointments, putting capital projects on hold and implementing pay cuts for the University Executive. The University has approximately \$3bn. in reserves; however, these reserves are partly encumbered (endowments, staff entitlements, research allocations, etc.) and the Vice Chancellor has made a point of publicising that. To the relief of all, however, a proportion of the reserve funds will be used for student support.

b. Future planning

Early in the pandemic, two task forces were established, one in regard to the budget and a second on the future state of the University in regard to its size, shape and teaching resources, including online learning. There will be a greater use of shared services, e.g. in HR.

c. Law Faculty

In the first months of the pandemic every aspect of the School was impacted. As a result, changes need to be made to the selection of students, both in Australia and internationally, to the current examination system (which would have been impossible to manage) and to how students can access library resources. Subjects involving international relationships have been profoundly affected, including those normally affording travelling scholarships and internships. Some PhD programs have had to have been recast.

New legal issues have arisen as a result of the pandemic. Now, there is the COVID-19 Research Network, which is providing new collaboration and research opportunities. It has been heartening to see scholars working across multiple Faculties, with new approaches to learning.

d. Teaching

Previously there was no online teaching in the Law Faculty, so it has been necessary to build a virtual classroom for staff and students to be connected (rather than simply to provide virtual teaching). A synchronous teaching and learning experience has been the goal.

The internet protocols of Zoom and Canvas have allowed students the necessary access and a digital designer has been appointed to facilitate teaching and learning. Professor Nicholson meets students weekly to discuss what 'works', in this regard. She has seen enhanced collegiality amongst the students, and she is very optimistic that the planning undertaken to date will result in greater access to students, internationally, particularly in Asia. As Professor Nicholson pointed out, international time zones are the new 'devil in the detail'.

No law school people have been directly impacted by the virus. Home schooling places strenuous demands on many.

Comparing law schools, Cambridge has gone online for a year, whilst Sydney University has returned to campus.

This year there are more enrolments than were anticipated. Now that the courses are fully online, students have been attracted, from afar: many of these would not have come, otherwise. The student body is diverse, not vulnerable to any particular ethnic group.

The President thanked Professor Nicholson for her time and, particularly, for her inspiring presentation.

3. Attendance

a. Members Present:

Anne Ada, David Bellair, Cecily Close, John Harcourt, Gary Israel, Irene Jablonka, David Janson, Ros McMillan (Minute-taker), Elizabeth Mitchell, John Nelson, Christine Oldham, Beverley Rodan, Stan Sahhar, John Scott.

b. Apologies - Received:

Noel Whiting.

c. Leave of Absence – as granted:

Nil.

4. Confirmation of Minutes

The previously distributed Minutes of the preceding meeting, held on 15 July 2020, were confirmed.

Proposed: Anne Ada; Seconded: John Harcourt; carried.

5. Membership

a. Additions and Withdrawals

The President confirmed that he will contact Jenny Stillman in respect of her membership of the Committee.

b. Leave of Absence

None granted.

6. Report of the President

7. The President distributed a written report (attached hereto) in advance of the meeting. At the meeting, the President spoke to his report, and:

- a. The President noted that the University staff has done a wonderful job in regard to both the University and the wider community. He believes that the Vice Chancellor and the administration appear to be working well and that the VC intends to consult widely with staff members;
- b. The President noted that the University has moved up six places to No. 35 in the Shanghai Ranking Index, known as the Academic Ranking of World Universities 2020.

8. Financial Report

The Treasurer, Christine Oldham, reported that the bank balance of the Committee stood at \$212.89, five members having contributed \$20, each, since the last meeting.

The report of the Treasurer was accepted.

Members are reminded that payments to the Committee should be made by bank deposit to: BSB 633-000 Acct No. 141509497.

9. University of Melbourne Items of Interest

The President noted that Gary Israel had provided material from Gwenda Thomas, on Scholarly Services, which had been circulated to all members, prior to the meeting.

Irene Jablonka reported that she had attended some events during the recent Science Festival 2020 week. This included the Dean's Lecture entitled "Trusting Science in Times of Crisis". At this lecture, one of the panellists, Professor Fiona Fidler, mentioned the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and the attention that it has been placing upon the replication of published results. Professor Fidler, made the point that volunteers had found that, in the small sample of published results and claims in biological journals that they looked at, only 50 % could be replicated. However, the sample was small, due to poor funding. Professor Fidler had added that the volunteers keep a low profile as their 'bone fides' are often challenged and they were harassed, because of their work.

Anne Ada had attended four webinars hosted by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. The series was entitled "Propelling Education Through a Covid-19 World".

Anne Ada had also attended the Science Festival 2020 Dean's Lecture "Trusting Science in Times of Crisis". Further presentations were: "Politicisation of Climate Science", "Reliability of Forensic Science" and "Vaccine Acceptance".

Stan Sahar voiced his concern in respect of the decision by the State Government to implement the assessment of current Year 12 students, on an individual basis, by their teachers. This would be based on teachers' opinions as to the levels that students might have achieved, but for the current pandemic. It was noted that this would amount to an enormous amount of work for teachers.

Stan Sahhar also raised the question of whether the University should place increased emphasis on the education of citizens of Victoria.

10. Key Matters for Consideration

- a. Actions Update – no change.
- b. Membership Development – all members were again urged to approach eligible colleagues who might be interested in joining the Committee. Where possible, members should attempt to make contact with their Dean(s).

John Harcourt has asked the Dean of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences to suggest someone to approach and he has been informed that the e-mail has been received.

11. Other Business

- a. Website

No discussion

- b. Tours and speakers

Irene Jablonka reported that the speaker for the September meeting will be Dr Gemma McKibbin of the Department of Social Work in the Faculty of MDHS. Dr McKibbin will discuss her research into Domestic Violence and Child Sexual Abuse.

The speaker for the October meeting will be the Provost, Professor Mark Considine.

- c. DORA

A lengthy discussion was held in relation to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA). A central theme of the discussion was the need for repeatability in respect of research findings.

12. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is to be held by Zoom on Wednesday 16 September 2020, commencing at 5.30 pm.

13. Close

The meeting closed at 6.51 pm.

Attachments

Updated Actions listing

Report of the President

COMMITTEE OF CONVOCATION - ACTIONS

| Ref. No. | Date | Description | Responsibility | Status | Ref. No. |
|----------|------------|--|----------------------|-------------|----------|
| 85 | 2015-09-16 | Identify individual graduates who may be approached to determine their possible interest in joining the Committee [Sub-committee of David bellair, Ros McMillan and Gary Israel formed on 2018-06-20] | All Sub-committee | In progress | 85 |
| | | | | | |

President's report August 2020

I thank John Harcourt for setting up this Zoom meeting for us.

The impact of COVID-

I think that University staff have done a wonderful job in changing to on-line teaching at short notice, and coping with quarantine rule changes brought about by the second Melbourne outbreak. The medical research staff have developed new diagnostic tests and provided expert advice to governments, while many have provided helpful public comment and information. Unfortunately, non-essential research requiring physical access to University facilities seems to have been suspended.

I think that overall the University has amply fulfilled its obligations to learning, research, and the community. Reading the VC's recent advice to staff, I think that the University will continue for a year with staff cuts, pausing capital expenditure, cutting unnecessary expenditure and using some cash reserves, while it rethinks its longer-term operations. Hard decisions will be taken, impacting many staff and programs.

I can think of a number of possible longer-term issues for the University of Melbourne and for the federal government, brought to a head by the pandemic. I hope both are willing to consider radical changes. As Winston Churchill said "Never let a good crisis go to waste".

Issues for the University include:

- Does it expect the reduction in student numbers from China to be permanent?
- How does the University continue to fund research costs, especially the research infrastructure not funded by grants?
- To what extent do the University international rankings affect its international standing, and which ratings are the most important?
- Is the federal government sympathetic to universities such as Melbourne, which are inherently different from more skills-based universities?
- Ought the University continue to develop the intellect as well as imparting knowledge?
- Should the University continue to offer courses in such a wide range of disciplines, and could it cooperate more with other institutions?
- Should the University allow some academics to concentrate on student learning without prejudice to their careers?
- Can University student learning continue long-term with a large part of the teaching staff on short-term contracts?
- What can graduates do to help their University?

Issues for the federal government include:

- Is it sensible for all universities to conduct teaching and research?
- Is it sensible to encourage so many students to attend conventional degree-granting universities, rather than other post-secondary institutions?
- Is it reasonable for employers to demand "job-ready" graduates, so avoiding their own responsibility to provide workplace training for new graduates?
- Will the conventional multi-year broad qualification be supplanted by very short *micro-qualifications* with limited and specific content? To what extent will they co-exist?
- Will the government make substantial long-term changes to university and TAFE education to provide a broader range of academic, professional and trade qualifications at all levels?
- Is it time for an independent Post-Secondary Education Commission to undertake long-term planning and decision-making for the whole post-secondary education sector?
- Is it desirable for Education Ministers to be making frequent policy changes, with limited consultation, which seriously impact the post-secondary sector?
- To what extent ought the federal government support universities financially?
- Can graduates lobby the government in helpful ways?

I hope that Committee members can add to the above lists.

My feeling is that in the present circumstances graduates must rely on the good sense of senior University staff to make good decisions for the University as a whole.

I am sure that Committee members want to keep informed, and I thank those members who assist with that.

Further contact with the University Director of Scholarly Services

You will have received already copies of further contact Gary Israel has had with Gwenda Thomas, the Director of Scholarly Services. I thank Gary for pursuing this, and will ask him to report on it under item 8.

San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)

Last month I mentioned that the University of Melbourne has just become a signatory to the [San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment \(DORA\)](#) (see the report to staff by the Deputy VC (Research) James McCluskey, *Contemplating the future of research at Melbourne*, dated July 9, 2020). DORA includes the statement that research should be judged on its intrinsic merit, rather than on the prestige of the journal in which it was published. I know that one member would like to discuss this further, so it has been included under Item 10, Other Business.

David Bellair
August 19, 2020

Committee of Convocation
Minutes of Meeting

Held on Wednesday, 15 July 2020,
Virtual Meeting by Zoom, commencing at 5.30 pm.

1. Welcome

The President, David Bellair, took the chair, opened the meeting and welcomed those in attendance. The Committee had been in abeyance since the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic. John Harcourt acted as Zoom Host, having expended considerable effort to do so on behalf of the members.

2. Guest Speaker

There was no guest speaker on this occasion.

3. Attendance

a. Members Present:

Anne Ada, David Bellair, Cecily Close (Minute-taker), John Harcourt, Gary Israel, Irene Jablonka, David Janson, John Nelson, Christine Oldham, Beverley Rodan, Stan Sahhar, John Scott.

b. Apologies - Received:

Ros McMillan, Elizabeth Mitchell, Noel Whiting, Eugene Antczak (interested colleague of John Scott).

c. Leave of Absence – as granted:

Nil.

4. Confirmation of Minutes

The previously distributed Minutes of the preceding meeting, held on 20 November 2019, were accepted and confirmed with one amendment, proposed by Irene Jablonka, that the words “registration of the” be inserted in the second paragraph of 11 (a). [*Amended minutes, Revision 2, were subsequently circulated to all members by the Secretary.*]

5. Election of Office Bearers

It was agreed that the biennial election of Committee office bearers should be deferred until the next face-to-face meeting of the Committee.

6. Appointments

It was agreed that the biennial Committee appointments should be deferred until the next face-to-face meeting of the Committee.

7. Correspondence

(Refer to the report of the President)

8. Membership

a. Additions and Withdrawals

It was reported that Trefor Morgan had resigned from membership of the Committee on 28 January 2020.

It was agreed that the long leave of absence of Jenny Stillman should not be extended. The President undertook to write to her, explaining this and pointing out that there would be no obstacle to her re-joining, should she wish to do so, in the future.

b. Leave of Absence

None granted.

9. Report of the President

David Bellair advised, as follows.

“I hope you and your families and friends are all well and have avoided the corona virus. I guess most of us are in the vulnerable group. Thank you all for joining this meeting.

Firstly, I would like to thank Gary Israel for suggesting a Zoom meeting.

Secondly, and importantly, I would like to thank John Harcourt for setting up this meeting.

It appears that there is no quick solution to the pandemic, so it seems unlikely that we can have physical meetings and dinners any time soon.”

Report

1. I attended an event at University House organised by the Dean of Engineering, on February 27, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the launch of an amateur radio satellite built by a group of students from the University. The main dining room at University House was packed for the main event, and those closely involved, including the American who had championed our launch with NASA, had dinner afterwards in the Karagheusian Room. One of those students, now Emeritus Professor Rod Tucker from Electrical Engineering, was instrumental in getting the support of the Dean of Engineering, Mark Cassidy.

2. I wrote to the VC after our November meeting last year, supporting the Library Scholarly Services Accommodation Master Plan (SSAM). Gwenda Thomas, the Librarian expressed her appreciation.

3. Early in December, last year, I wrote to Mark Considine, the Provost, on behalf of the Committee, supporting his *Academic Advising* initiative, to encourage closer personal contacts between staff and students, and he thanked us for our support.

4. I thank Ros McMillan for putting a tribute into the Age for Barbara Hamer who passed away recently. She had been a member and President of this Committee.

5. Early in June, I wrote to the V-C, on behalf of the Committee, expressing our support for him in these difficult times. Not long afterwards, I think, there was an announcement of staff cuts.

6. After the recent Executive Zoom meeting (held on 17 June 2020) I wrote to the Director of the Doherty Institute, Professor Sharon Lewin, expressing our admiration and respect for the work being done at the Peter Doherty Institute.

7. We may be seeing the beginnings of a shake-out in the tertiary sector as a consequence of COVID-19. The probable reduction in income from students from China will have a major impact on the University, and the recent related policy announcements by the Minister for Education, Dan Tehan, have seemed unhelpful and confusing.

8. Former V-C Glyn Davis suggested reforms of the tertiary sector, including the formation of an independent Commission to make long-term plans and, hopefully, that suggestion will not have been forgotten.

9. A recent seminar arranged by the Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) with participation by Frank Larkins and Mark Warburton from the CSHE, and others, showed that nobody seems to know what the Minister is trying to achieve. An advisory group, that includes V-C Duncan Maskell, has been set up to advise the Minister on research funding.

10. A positive step is that the University of Melbourne has just become a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) which urges that published papers be judged on their intrinsic merit rather than on the status of the journal in which they are published. It has been claimed that roughly half of all peer-reviewed scientific papers contain results that cannot be replicated by others and that, therefore, would appear to be suspect.

10. Financial Report

The Treasurer, Christine Oldham, reported that the bank balance of the Committee stood at \$112.89. It was agreed that members should be requested to contribute \$20, each, by direct bank deposit to bolster funds.

The report of the Treasurer was accepted.

Members are reminded that payments to the Committee should be made by bank deposit to: BSB 633-000 Acct No. 141509497.

11. University of Melbourne Items of Interest

John Harcourt reported that, although the Dental Advisory Committee had been subsumed into a new structure, adopted in January, former members were invited to continue to submit items of interest. All teaching was being done on-line and other restrictions were being applied.

Ann Ada reported that the Faculties, with which she is concerned, were going a good job, having switched to a webinar format for the Dean's lectures.

Irene Jablonka recalled that she had distributed information before the meeting on Science Faculty public offerings. She mentioned that she viewed the virtual visit to Burnley Campus. Having previously organised a tour of this campus she found the real-life visit to have been far more enjoyable.

The Zoom seminar from the Melbourne Centre for the Study of High Education, referred to in the President's Report (point 7), is available at its website.

12. Key Matters for Consideration

- a. Actions Update – It was agreed that actions 107 and 108 should be discontinued, but action 85 should be ongoing.
- b. Membership Development – all members were again urged to approach eligible colleagues who might be interested in joining the Committee. Where possible, members should attempt to make contact with their Dean(s). John Harcourt offered to ask the Dean of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences to suggest someone to approach.
- c. Advancing Melbourne 2030 - the President undertook to circulate his readily readable text-only version of the latest report from the University.

13. Other Business

- a. Website

The website has been modified and it was agreed that it is much improved. John Harcourt was thanked and congratulated in respect of this.

- b. Tours and speakers

Irene Jablonka advised that she had been asked to find speakers for the forthcoming lectures on Zoom. She said that Prof Considine had been scheduled to be our April 2020 meeting speaker. Unfortunately, that meeting had to be cancelled due to the government regulations connected with the State of Emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. She said she is now in the process of, once again, contacting the VC and Prof Considine in the hope they can attend a Zoom meeting.

She also reminded members that she has previously sent to members lists regarding virtual Public Lectures and tours arranged by University staff. At this stage, no face to face Public Lectures are planned for this year. She suggested members consider viewing the virtual July Physics Lectures and others on the lists, which were sent.

She mentioned that, due to the situation that exists at the University of Melbourne, with respect to trying to carry on business as usual in these trying times, she is unable

to arrange any face to face tours for the Committee of Convocation this year. She asked that the item relating to pre-meeting tours be left off the Agenda, until further notice.

Irene was warmly thanked for her work in securing speakers.

14. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee is to be held by Zoom on Wednesday 19 August 2020, commencing at 5.30 pm.

15. Close

The meeting closed at 6.30 pm.

Attachments

Updated Actions listing.
