



OUTCOMES FROM DEAKIN UNIVERSITY COUNCIL MEETING 5, 2020 – 1-2 OCTOBER 2020

Deakin University Council met on 1 and 2 October. The meeting was initially planned as a two-day conference but was rearranged due to the COVID situation and was held by videoconference from 10 am – 2.30 pm on Thursday 1 October and 9 am to 1.45 pm on Friday 2 October. Council dealt with matters as follows.

Setting the strategic direction of the University

Council was joined by all members of the University Executive for a detailed discussion of Deakin's draft new strategic plan to succeed *LIVE: Agenda 2020* and to guide the University for the decade from 2021. Discussion covered five areas:

- Overall strategic intent
- Education and employability
- Research and innovation
- Enablers
- Risks, opportunities and key performance indicators.

Council endorsed the direction taken and was pleased to note the high level of engagement of the University community in the consultation phases. Council made a series of suggestions for additions, enhancements and emphases. These will be incorporated into a further draft of the plan to be considered at the next Council meeting on 12 November.

The Vice-Chancellor thanked Council for its input and emphasised the value from the wide-ranging and community-connected perspective Council brought to bear.

The Council noted that the challenges and uncertainties of the immediate future means that after the new plan comes into effect it will need be regularly reviewed and refreshed but notwithstanding this the plan provides a strong and cogent framework for the University's future.

Overseeing current issues and actions

Government policy and funding

Council considered legislation proposed by the Commonwealth Government and its implications for Deakin: the *Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020* and *Australia's Foreign Relations (State and Territory Arrangements) Bill 2020*.

Council also received an update on the Victorian Government's support package for universities. The package will fund projects that generate economic growth and employment.

Major Workplace Change and Casual or Sessional Employment

The Vice-Chancellor noted that the major workplace change program was being managed with a high degree of professionalism but was nonetheless a difficult process. The University is extending as much care to affected individuals as possible.

Council discussed the situation of sessional or casual staff who had lost work. Council was advised that a comparison between 2019 and 2020 at end of July reveals an overall reduction of 54 full time equivalent (FTE) positions, of which 41 FTE related to casual professional FTE whose employment was linked to events that have not taken place as a result of the lockdown, such as graduation ceremonies, campus open days and other events.

Campus Reactivation

Council considered an update from the Vice-Chancellor and members of the Executive on business recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. In particular Council discussed changes to the University's physical infrastructure required for COVID safe operations once more on-campus activities resume. The Chief Operating Officer advised that the Campus Infrastructure and Property Strategy has been significantly recast to ensure COVID-safe practices for lectures and to support blended office and work-from-home arrangements.

Overseeing the management and control of finances

Council considered the Financial Report to 31 August 2020 incorporating Outlook 2. Due the COVID-19 crisis the end of year position is forecast to be a significant deficit, compared to the surplus result of \$108 million in 2019.

Council reviewed the University's cash position and projections in detail. Council was satisfied that the cash position at the end of the year will be sound. Council approved actions to ensure adequate cash coverage for monthly variations over the next 12 months, including commencing discussions with lenders about a borrowing program. The University has obtained approval from the Victorian Government for an increase in allowable borrowings.

Research Transformation Project and other Major Projects

Council approved funding for the five-year Research Transformation Project. The Project comprises a series of sub-projects whose overall intent is to:

- alleviate the administrative load on researchers so that they could devote more time to high value research activities and to obtaining external funding
- enable research support staff to operate far more efficiently
- enhance capacity for the analysis and use of research-related data.

Council noted that this Project is the University's key major project for the next triennium. Other major projects are either reaching completion, such as the Waurin Ponds Microgrid and the Burwood Law School, or are being brought to a point where they can be sensibly paused, such as the Research Innovation Science and Engagement (RISE) Precinct.

Overseeing risk management and monitoring systems of control and accountability

Council considered a review of the University's Risk Appetite Statement and approved updates to that Statement. These updates did not alter overall risk appetite ratings but provided a number of clarifications and adjustments to respond to the challenging COVID situation.

Deakin University Council Charter

Council considered the two-yearly review of the Council Charter and approved a series of updates to both the Charter and the associated list of Matters Requiring Council Decision.

Overseeing and monitoring of academic activities

Council received a presentation from Professor Lisa Hanna, Dean of Students. Professor Hanna provided a presentation about her Office's work in respect of academic integrity and enhancing the student experience, including by:

- providing students with an accessible, responsive, fair and impartial point of contact through which they can provide feedback or express concerns about any aspect of their experience at Deakin
- promoting and maintaining rigorous standards of student academic integrity and general conduct
- interpreting student feedback to inform systemic change to enhance student and staff wellbeing.

Council thanked Professor Hanna for her excellent presentation.

Discussion session with students

This item was a discussion forum with a group of 13 students facilitated by Ms Darci Taylor, Senior Lecturer, Deakin Learning Futures. The members of the University Executive also joined the discussion. The students spanned a diversity of courses and levels of experience, from commencers to postgraduate students and recent completers. They conveyed their thoughts on their Deakin experiences in the context of COVID and elements of their learning experience this year that they think should continue on a permanent basis.

Despite the diversity of study backgrounds there were a number of clear, common themes:

- all students were able to progress their study well online, notwithstanding adjustment difficulties and challenges posed by isolation from others and from working at home amidst distractions
- live lectures provided a vastly superior online learning experience than older style pre-records
- students emphasised that the challenges of the COVID situation made it especially important that the University showed flexibility in terms of requirements such as HDR candidature and assignment deadlines rather than an overly rigid approach; students pointed out that they faced a range of competing pressures (work, home situations, variable technology) and that there was a strong argument for the University to be as flexible as possible in enabling students to fulfil study requirements
- students expressed particular appreciation of teachers who went out of their way to be contactable and communicative in the online environment, eg accommodating individual circumstances and extending lecture times to enable continuing discussion after the scheduled end of a class.

Council thanked Ms Taylor for her excellent facilitation of the fruitful discussion. Council expressed its gratitude to all students for their honest and thoughtful contributions and assured students that their ideas and suggestions would be acted on, especially their advice on what Deakin should keep from this year on a permanent basis.