

Council

Tuesday 29 November 2022 at 2.00pm in Boardrooms H2.5/6, level 2, Hunter Wing

Minutes

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| <p>Present:</p> <p>Christine Swabey
Godfrey Allen
Sandra Ashton
Dr Jane Cronin-Davis
Jonathan Curtiss
Professor Jon Friedland
Professor Jenny Higham
(Vice-Chancellor)
Josh Joshi
Becky Kemp-Arnold
Gillian Norton
Ayesha Patel
Damian Reid
Sue Rimmer
Professor Jane Saffell
Dr Baba Sheba
Sarah Wilton
Ewart Wooldridge</p> | <p>Chair of Council
Independent Member of Council
Elected Professional Services Staff Member
Ex officio Member
Independent Member of Council
Ex officio Member

Ex officio Member
Independent Member of Council
Former Student Union President
Independent Member of Council
Student Union President
Independent Member of Council
Independent Member of Council
Ex officio Member
Elected Academic Staff Member
Independent Member of Council
Independent Member of Council</p> |
| <p>In attendance:</p> <p>Soosan Atkins [minute 155]
Dr Anna Dulic-Sills

Omar Hijazi [minute 155]
Dr Julie Leeming
Charlotte Martin (Clerk)
Susan McPheat
Beth Okona-Mensah [minute 152]
Paul Ratcliffe
Graham Schofield
Tim Sice [minute 155]
Nick Smith [minute 155]
Emma Whitaker
Jenny Winters</p> | <p>Head of Operational Excellence Projects
Director of Research Operations / Deputy
Chief Operating Officer
Chair of Student Union Trustees
Director of Planning
Director of GLAS and Clerk to Council
Director of Finance
Head of Strategic Projects
Chief Operating Officer
Director of Estates
Student Union Chief Executive Officer
Nick Smith Consulting
Senior Governance Officer
Director of HR and Organisational
Development / Deputy Chief Operating Officer</p> |
| <p>Apologies:</p> <p>Dr Sally Jackson</p> | <p>Independent Member of Council</p> |
- 146. Apologies for absence**
Apologies were noted as above.
- 147. Declarations of interest**
No declarations of interest were received.
- 148. Quoracy**
It was noted that the quorum required, as set out in the Standing Orders of Council had been met, namely that at least nine members of Council were present, of whom at least five were independent members.
- 149. Remarks from the Chair**
The Chair welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending, noting that there were a number of substantial and important matters on the agenda.

Standing Items

150. Minutes

Considered and approved: the minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2022.

Paper Council/2/A

151. Matters arising from the minutes not on the agenda

Received and considered: a report on actions and matters arising.

Reported:

A number of matters including the NSS action plan, update on BSc in Biomedical Science and a report on student wellbeing and support would be on the agenda for the February 2023 meeting which would have an education/student focus. These actions could then be closed.

The actions relating to the SGUL-SGHFT Task and Finish Group would be reported to the February 2023 meeting and could then be closed.

The actions relating to the Health & Safety Policy and the bespoke training for Council members arranged for 11 January 2023 could be closed.

Agreed:

Closed items would be moved to a closed tab after the meeting. Updates on the items still in progress would be brought to the next meeting.

Action: Clerk

Paper Council/2/B

Strategic Matters

152. Strategic Partnership: Project/Execution and Financial Plan (Strictly Confidential)

[This minute was confidential]

153. Report from the Vice-Chancellor

Received: a report from the Vice-Chancellor.

Reported:

Additional funding of just under £400k for infrastructure and research had been received, resulting from the REF, with the possibility of additional funding in the future.

Paper Council/2/D

Education and Students

154. Report from the Students' Union (SU)

Received: a report from the President of the Students' Union.

Reported:

The SU had undertaken a survey and identified key areas where students need support in the cost of living crisis and had fed back to the cost of living task group on how best to support students. These areas are being addressed and a [website](#) has been produced with information and support for students.

The SU had received communications from a number of societies and groups regarding their inclusion and support within the SU. The SU had agreed to release a statement of support to show allyship, set up regular meetings with the groups involved, reviewed their EDI policies and introduced new initiatives such as 'safe spaces'. The SU President confirmed that the wider issues are being looked into and that reporting procedures are being considered for students who feel under supported.

Discussed:

Council is mindful of cost of living pressures on students and was pleased to see the range of support that had been put in place.

Agreed:

The Dean for Student Welfare would report on the number of students accessing the cost of living webpages and emerging trends to the February 2023 meeting.

Paper Council/2/E

155. Outcome and report from the SGUL-Students' Union Liaison Group

Received and considered: outcome and report from SGUL-Students' Union Liaison Group

Reported:

A liaison group, supported by the Head of Operational Excellence Projects, had been set up to commission a report on the University's relationship with the Student Union (SU), to include the University's legal responsibilities for the SU, to ensure that the student voice was appropriately heard at Council and to be assured that the Council was discharging its responsibilities in respect of the SU. Nick Smith, a consultant in this area, had been commissioned to undertake the work and write an independent report. The University is required to comply with both the Charities Act and Part II of the 1994 Education Act.

Discussed:

Improvements to ways of working were discussed, noting that partnership is key and a Memorandum of Understanding is fundamental to ensure best way forward for the future, clearly setting out agreement on respective roles and responsibilities between the university and the SU. In order to progress matters, a Task & Finish group will be set up to include executive colleagues from both the University and the SU, the former Dean for Students and the Head of Operational Excellence Projects. The group will share the common goal of supporting students with an aim to contribute positively and achieve change with executive decision-making on both sides. The group will prioritise recommendations, agree on timescales for their implementation and consider any funding implications. It was agreed that Students' Unions in similar sized specialist institutions could be considered for indicators of best practice. Council committed to having the Memorandum of Understanding agreed by the end of the current academic year, so that it could be in place for the start of the next academic year.

The liaison group will consider the recommendations from the Task & Finish Group. The Head of Operational Excellence Projects was asked to review the membership of the liaison group given recent changes to the SU Trustee Board. The Chair of Council and Chair of the SU Trustees will continue to co-chair the liaison group.

Council agreed that the Task & Finish Group should clarify the means for hearing the student voice, along with roles and responsibilities and an organisational diagram. It was agreed that the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) would be kept informed of progress in this area. Student voice will be a central part of February 2023 meeting and considered further then.

Council considered the governance issues involved, noting the references to the SU in the Scheme and Statutes. The Finance Committee approves the SU budget and receives the SU accounts but would consider whether further involvement would be appropriate.

Agreed:

Task & Finish Group to be set up.

Liaison Group membership to be considered.

Action: Head of Operational Excellence Projects

Paper Council/2/F

Regulatory

Annual Financial Return

156. Audited Financial Statements

Considered and approved: the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2022 including the Remuneration Committee report for 2021/22 [for submission to the OfS].

Previously discussed by Finance Committee, Audit Committee.

Agreed: the Chair, Honorary Treasurer and Vice-Chancellor were authorised to sign the financial statements.

Action: Chair, Honorary Treasurer, Vice-Chancellor, Director of Finance

Paper Council/2/G

157. Annual Financial Return

Considered and approved: the Annual Financial Return workbook and commentary [for submission to the OfS].

Previously discussed by Executive Board and Finance Committee.

Reported:

The return to the OfS includes the figures for 2020/21, the accounts for 2021/22 and the projections for the next 5 years, plus a commentary. The return had been reviewed by the Finance Committee, which had received confirmation from management that the OfS information had been checked against long term plan and financial statements. The Finance Committee recommended the return to Council for approval.

Agreed:

The Annual Financial Return was approved for submission to the OfS.

Action: Director of Finance

Paper Council/2/H

158. Long Term Plan

Considered and approved: Long Term Plan [for submission to the OfS]
Previously discussed by Executive Board and Finance Committee.

Reported:

The Long Term Plan had been reviewed by the Finance Committee which recommended it to Council for approval.

Agreed:

The Long Term Plan was approved for submission to the OfS.

Action: Director of Finance

Paper Council/2/I

159. External Auditors' Report

Considered and approved: the Audit Findings Report issued by the External Auditors in respect of the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2022 [for submission to the OfS].
Previously discussed by Audit Committee.

Reported:

The updated version of the report had been submitted late, arriving just before the meeting, in spite of the Director of Finance's best efforts. The report confirmed that all outstanding issues had been resolved and concluded. The auditors will sign the accounts on 1 December 2022 and will issue the final version of their report at that stage.

Discussed:

Council challenged the last issues to be resolved which related to some duplication within payroll. The Director of Finance confirmed that these had all been checked and there were no concerns - they related to members of staff who had retired and been re-employed and some couples with joint bank accounts.

Council expressed its concern, which was shared by the Director of Finance, over the lateness with which the final report had been provided.

Agreed:

The Chair of Audit Committee and Director of Finance will follow up the timeliness of submission of the report with the external auditors.

Action: Chair of Audit Committee/Director of Finance

Paper Council/2/J

160. Letter of Representation

Considered and approved: the Letter of Representation to be sent to the External Auditors on behalf of Council.
Previously discussed by Audit Committee.

Reported:

The final version of the Letter of Representation had only been received on the morning of the meeting. It included two appendices with two issues which had been raised for the first time. The issues were an uncorrected misstatement relating to an accrual for £92k which needed more backup and an unadjusted disclosure omission regarding the provision of £1.2m relating to the Trust being deducted from 'Trade receivable' rather than 'SGUHFT'. It was noted that these matters were disclosure issues but that no changes were required.

The Director of Finance was requested to confirm that everything within the Letter of Representation was accurate and correct and that everything necessary had been disclosed in

order to allow Council to sign the Letter of Representation. The Director of Finance confirmed this to be the case.

Discussed:

Again, Council expressed its concern over the lateness of submission of the updated Letter of Representation. It was felt to be unacceptable for the auditors to raise issues at the last minute – these should have been discussed and resolved with Audit Committee some weeks prior to the Council meeting.

Agreed:

The Chair was authorised to sign the letter of representation.

The Chair of Audit Committee and Director of Finance will follow up the concerns with the external auditors.

Action: Chair / Director of Finance

Paper Council/2/K

161. Audit Committee Annual Report

Received and considered: the Audit Committee Annual Report to Council for 2021-22.

Previously discussed by Audit Committee.

Reported:

The report summarises the Audit Committee's work during the 2021/22 year.

Paper Council/2/L

Other Regulatory Matters

162. Prevent Accountability

- i. Received and considered: the Prevent Accountability Report for 2021-22 and Prevent Policy.

Reported:

Some minor updates had been made to the Prevent Policy to do with compliance monitoring and the training mechanism

Discussed:

Council asked for further information about the management of Prevent issues and noted that both the University and the Students' Union (SU) had separate external speaker policies, with all applications for external speakers for the SU being considered by the SU President. The SU is supported by the University in the management of Prevent-related issues when required.

- ii. Considered and approved: the Prevent Accountability and Data Return [for submission to the OfS].
Previously discussed by Executive Board.

Reported:

The University has a statutory duty to submit the Prevent Accountability and Data Return on an annual basis. No issues or incidents had been reported during the year. Training is undertaken on a rolling basis via the HR learning management system. All members of staff should undertake Prevent Training during their probationary period. Key staff in senior positions and/or with student-facing roles undertake mandatory Prevent training on starting their employment and then every 2 years. Compliance for Key staff is reported to the OfS as part of this return.

Discussed:

Council requested further information on numbers of staff who had not completed the Prevent training. Those who hadn't completed the training in time were sent regular reminders but it was noted that a small number object to the nature of the training due to concerns around racism. In these cases, the training is not enforced but individuals are required to have an understanding of how to report concerns as needed.

Agreed:

The Chair was authorised to sign the Prevent Accountability and Data Return for the COO to submit to the OfS.

Action: Chair / COO

Paper Council/2/M

Sub-Committee Reports

163. Finance Committee Report

- i. Received and considered: Finance Committee Report.

Reported:

EY is working with the University to examine the balance sheet and look at opportunities for further funding to support strategic ambitions of institution. The Finance Committee Chair thanked the COO and Director of Finance for furthering this work. EY have reviewed SGUL's Long Term Plan and noted that it is quite conservative in nature which makes it more difficult to raise incremental finances. Positive progress is being made on looking for an allocation of investments and more optimistic plan which is fundable.

- ii. Considered and approved: Cleaning Services Tender (confidential)

[This minute is confidential]

- iii. Received and noted: confirmed minutes of meeting of Finance Committee held on 27 September 2022

Paper Council/2/O

164. Audit Committee Report

- i. Received and considered: Audit Committee report.

- ii. Received and approved: Health and Safety Policy, as recommended by Audit Committee.

Reported:

A bespoke training session is being arranged for Council members on 11 January 2023 on their specific responsibilities under the Health and Safety Policy. The Health & Safety policy was recommended to Council by Audit Committee, for signature.

Discussed:

In response to questions from Council about audit and compliance, it was confirmed that the internal auditors have recently undertaken an audit of Health and Safety, and that further audits are scheduled for every 3 years. The Audit Committee will continue to consider the reasonable checks and balances by challenging reports and identifying areas for further work.

An assessment of CBRE, the new Hard FM contractor is being commissioned from a specialist firm as it is not something that the internal auditors are able to undertake. This will result in an independent report on compliance which will report initially to Safety Management Committee and then on to Audit Committee and in turn to Council.

Agreed:

The Chair of Council and Vice-Chancellor were authorised to sign the Health and Safety Policy and for it to be published.

Action: Chair / Clerk

Paper Council/2/P

- iii. Received and noted: confirmed minutes of meeting of Audit Committee held on 4 October 2022

- iv. Received and noted: unconfirmed minutes of meeting of Audit Committee held on 15 November 2022

Paper Council/2/Q

165. Senate Report

Receive and noted: unconfirmed minutes of meeting of Senate held on 9 November 2022.

Discussed:

Council queried the minute on apprenticeships and their suitability for a university environment. It was confirmed that the minute was not entirely representative of the discussion held and that it should state that the apprenticeship regulatory mechanism had not been adjusted for university settings.

Agreed:

The unconfirmed Senate minutes would be amended accordingly, prior to ratification at the next meeting.

Action: Clerk to Senate

Matters for Note or Approval without discussion

*Starred items are only discussed if the Chair or Clerk is notified in advance of the meeting.

166. Degree Outcomes Statement

Approved: Degree Outcomes Statement for the five year period 2016/17 to 2020/21.
Previously approved by Senate.

Reported:

It is a requirement for the Degree Outcomes Statement to be published on the website by the end of the calendar year.

Discussed:

The percentages of combined first and upper second class degrees awarded had plateaued in 2020/21, with a modest increase in the percentages of firsts. It was noted that OfS scrutiny in this area has changed the practice of league table compilers, but equally that some modest increase in attainment was to be expected if improvement measures put in place across the university were successfully instituted. Council suggested that the demographic metrics of the student body should also be considered within these wider discussions.

Agreed:

It was agreed that the figures would be considered in more detail in the February 2023 meeting, to include analysis of the demographic metrics of the student body, by which point they would include the numbers for the 2021/22 academic year.

Action: Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)

Paper Council/2/S

167. *Report on League Table performance (CUG, GUG and Times)

Noted: an update report on League Table performance (CUG, GUG and Times).

Paper Council/2/T

168. *Annual Research Integrity Statement

Approved: the Annual Research Integrity Statement
Previously approved by Executive Board.

Discussed:

The Council commended the authors on the quality of the document.

Paper Council/2/U

169. *Draft Agenda for Next Meeting

Noted: draft agenda for next meeting to be held on 22 February 2023.

Paper Council/2/V

170. *Dates of Meetings 2022-23

All meetings take place in H2.5/6, level 2, Hunter Wing, unless otherwise stated.

2.00pm-3.30pm, Wednesday 11 January 2023 – Council seminar

2.00pm-5.00pm, Wednesday 22 February 2023

2.00pm-5.00pm, Tuesday 28 March 2023

tbc Wednesday 17 May 2023 – away day (*location tbc*)

2.00pm-5.00pm, Tuesday 27 June 2023

Any Other Business

171. Any other business

There was none.