

# Council

29 March 2022

## Minutes

Present:	Christine Swabey Godfrey Allen (virtually) Sandra Ashton Jonathan Curtiss Professor Jon Friedland Professor Sian Harding Professor Jenny Higham (Principal) Sarah Jones Josh Joshi Becky Kemp-Arnold Gillian Norton Dr Aileen O'Brien Damian Reid Sue Rimmer Dr Baba Sheba Sarah Wilton Ewart Wooldridge	Chair of Council Independent Member of Council Elected Professional Services Staff Member Independent Member of Council Ex officio Member Independent Member of Council Ex officio Member Student Member Independent Member of Council Student Member Independent Member of Council Ex officio Member Independent Member of Council Independent Member of Council Elected Academic Staff Member Independent Member of Council Independent Member of Council
In attendance:	Professor Debbie Baines [minute 86] Dr Vanessa Ho Dr Julie Leeming Susan McPheat Sian Marshall Paul Ratcliffe Emma Whitaker Jenny Winters	Chair of the Safety Management Committee Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Director of Planning Director of Finance Clerk to Council Chief Operating Officer Senior Governance Officer Director of HR and Organisational Development
Apologies:	Dr Sally Jackson Professor Jane Saffell Graham Schofield	Independent Member of Council Ex officio Member Director of Estates and Facilities

### 75. Presentation on suicide prevention, and tackling bullying and harassment

Council received a detailed presentation prior to the meeting from the Dean for Students and the Student Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer on the work being undertaken across the university on suicide prevention, tackling bullying and harassment and improving student wellbeing and welfare support.

### 76. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

### 77. Remarks from the Chair

The Chair welcomed Dr Vanessa Ho, Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, to the meeting.

### 78. Minutes

Considered and approved: The minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2022.

**Paper Council/8/A**

### 79. Matters arising from the minutes not on the agenda

Received and considered:

- (i) A report on actions and matters arising.

**Paper Council/8/B**

Reported:

Action 90(i) Budget and long term financial forecast: This action would be addressed via the Budget and long term plan paper that would come to Council in June.

Action 21 Access and Participation: The new Director for Fair Access had indicated that a revised approach to regulating Access and Participation would be notified to universities in April. An update had been planned for Council in June 2022. An update on the new metric agreed by Council in October 2021 would be provided as part of the routine update to Council planned for February 2023.

There were a number of actions relating to student wellbeing and welfare (actions 94, 16 and 61) and a report was planned for the Council meeting in June. The report would provide an action plan for addressing issues around student wellbeing and support and for embedding wellbeing within strategic priorities.

Council was aware that there were a number of ongoing challenges between the university and the Students' Union that had been reported previously and acknowledged the significant role of the Students' Union and the elected officers in promoting the student voice and contributing to the strategic direction of the university. The Chair of Council had met with the Chair of the Students' Union Board of Trustees and proposed to establish a liaison group between the university and the Students' Union; the executive and Students' Union representatives were supportive of this approach. Formal terms of reference and membership would be agreed and the liaison group would oversee an external review of the governance arrangements with a view to clarifying roles and responsibilities. The liaison group would also have an opportunity to review the wellbeing report and action plan prior to its submission to Council in June.

Agreed:

- a) That due dates would be added to each of the open actions to ensure timely completion, with clear indication of ownership.
- b) To support the establishment of a liaison group between the university and the Students' Union.
- c) To receive a report from the liaison group at its next meeting.
- d) That the Chair of the SU Trustees be invited to attend the presentation on student wellbeing at the June Council meeting.

**Action: Clerk to Council**

- (ii) Minute 62(i): The updated benchmarking HEI analysis.

**Paper Council/8/C**

Reported:

The benchmarking data provided to Council in September 2021 had been updated with the latest data sets to enable Council to evaluate the merits of potential partners for collaboration or joint working. The data had been reviewed by the Council Strategy Group on 9 March 2022 and it had been agreed to refine the list of potential partners in order to remove any providers who were subject to enhanced monitoring by the Office for Students in relation to their financial viability. It had not been possible to determine the identity of the providers under enhanced monitoring, but a number of measures of financial health had been considered, including liquidity and surplus as a percentage of income. It was acknowledged that the measures identified provided only a simplistic view and did not attempt to provide the level of detail required for a more detailed review. Based on the data, it was proposed that three institutions should be discounted from any further benchmarking analysis.

Discussed:

The measures of financial health selected did not provide a complete view on the financial health of an institution, particularly for larger institutions, and there was scope to look at other measures to provide this broader view.

The data and report provided useful context for discussion around potential partners and would provide a starting point for Council to evaluate the risks and benefits. Council members thanked the Director of Planning for the report.

Agreed:

- (a) That Damian Reid would work with the Treasurer, Director of Planning and Director of Finance to consider other measures of financial health and to further refine the data;
- (b) That Council approval to discount any institutions from the benchmarking analysis would not be required, but the recommendation was supported.

**Action: Treasurer, Director of Planning, Director of Finance, Damian Reid**

- (iii) Minute 62(ii): The consolidated action plan arising from the merger due diligence.

**Paper Council/8/D**

Reported:

Completion of the action would be monitored at executive level with Professional Services Directors having been identified as action owners. Oversight by Council or executive committees was proposed for some actions and it was intended that relevant sections of the action plan would be brought to the sub-committees of Council for monitoring on a periodic basis.

Council would be provided with updates via sub-committee reports and the action plan as a whole would be brought back to Council for review, particularly to ensure oversight of actions under Council's remit or where there is no sub-committee oversight.

**Action: Chief Operating Officer**

- (iv) Minute 62(iii): An update on the joint working group with the Trust.

Reported:

An initial meeting had been held with Council representatives on the joint working group to discuss the proposed terms of reference and a date for the group's first meeting was in the process of being identified.

The Chair of St George's University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust reported that there had been good progress made already in relation to a number of the Estates and Finance matters that would fall within the remit of the group and this would continue in the lead up to the joint working group's first meeting. Trust staff were willing to support the setting of meeting dates, if required, and Trust representatives would be keen to input into the setting of the terms of reference to ensure an appropriate environment for progressing the group's work.

Agreed:

- (a) That a report from the working group would be provided to the next meeting of Council.
- (b) That a timetable would be provided for resolving any matters relating to the Trust not being taken forward by the working group.

**Action: Chief Operating Officer**

## **80. Report from the Principal**

Received: A report from the Principal.

**Paper Council/8/E**

Reported:

The high rates of inflation were compounding the pressure on the financial position with the imminent increase in National Insurance, no reduction in costs and the ongoing sector pay negotiations. There were many investment priorities but limited opportunity to realise them given the current environment and increasing rather than decreasing pressures. A priority area for investment was student wellbeing and support.

Notification had been received from the Department for Education that St George's had met the criteria for University Title. The Scheme and Statutes would need to be revised and approved by the

University of London before the revised nomenclature could be introduced. This decision would enable discussions to progress with respect to updating the institution's trading name and branding, which had been put on hold pending the University Title application.

There had been some pressure on Medical Schools to consider taking in Ukrainian medical students who had been affected by the war in Ukraine. However, this was not currently possible given the strict cap on medical student numbers, including international student places. It was hoped that the Government would consider increasing the cap given the need within the NHS to increase its practitioner numbers.

Discussed:

Council noted the recent grant funding successes and the citing of St George's in the recent report by the Civic University Network.

## **81. Report from the Students' Union**

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

**Paper Council/8/F**

Reported:

The Students' Union was making a number of changes to its approach to supporting student welfare and EDI issues; each student society would be required to have a wellbeing officer to promote wellbeing and EDI training would be provided to society committees. A campaign would also be launched to encourage conversations around mental health.

The Students' Union recognised that providing support services to students was a challenge for many institutions in the sector and the hard work that St George's staff were undertaking to support students was recognised. However, anecdotal feedback had been received for some time that support for mental health was lacking in some areas.

An ex-student of St George's had recently posted on Instagram about her experience of studying at St George's and this had prompted comments from many current and past students that their experiences had not been wholly positive. The Students' Union President felt that it was important to bring these posts to the attention of Council to highlight the need to prioritise student wellbeing and addressing the barriers to improvements being made. The Students' Union was supportive of the work that was ongoing to improve student wellbeing and hoped that this would have the impact desired.

It was acknowledged that the Instagram posts did not represent the experience of all students, but it was felt that staff needed to be provided with increased support in helping them to support students. Some students had fed back that some staff could be more empathetic and would benefit from training to improve their communication skills.

The Dean for Students acknowledged that the current student support system could be better coordinated and was reactive rather than proactive. Furthermore, there was more that could be done to ensure that the package of support was clearly signposted to students and that there were mechanisms through which staff could escalate matters that they were not able to resolve themselves. It was acknowledged that it may not be feasible to review the Personal Tutor system as this had been done recently, but it was hoped that better central support could be provided to ensure greater consistency in the quality of Personal Tutor support.

The Principal reported that the executive had acknowledged already that there was a need to improve wellbeing support; this was supported by the NSS and other survey data, and there was a need for further investment. The Executive Board had met the previous week and agreed funding for two additional posts in the Student Services team. By building an enhanced central service for students seeking welfare support, it was hoped that there would be opportunities to share expertise and to provide an escalation route where needed.

Discussed:

Council noted that it was disappointed to read the negative comments from students but thanked the Students' Union President for bringing the issues for discussion. Council was reassured to understand that there was a shared understanding of the issues around welfare and wellbeing provision and that actions were already being taken to achieve meaningful change. Council welcomed the report that would be provided to Council in June, but acknowledged that this would

be the starting point for further discussion. There would need to be a planned approach to improving welfare provision and this would be presented in the report in June.

The challenge faced by Personal Tutors in supporting students in difficulty was recognised and improved central provision was considered key to ensuring Personal Tutors had support in place to escalate issues and to refer students for appropriate support.

Agreed:

That the draft wellbeing and welfare report and action plan should be submitted to the liaison group between the university and the Students' Union prior to its submission to Council to ensure the Students' Union perspective was considered.

**Action: Dean for Students**

## Strategic Matters

### 82. Research and Enterprise

Received and considered: A report from the Deputy Principal (Research and Enterprise).

**Paper Council/8/G**

Reported:

A priority for the institution would be to reopen the Biological Research Facility (BRF), which had been closed this academic year owing to ongoing challenges in maintaining the Facility in line with Home Office requirements. Reopening the zebrafish facility was the first step in this process and it was planned that this would happen in 2022. An indicative cost for refurbishing the BRF had been provided as £21m, however, adjustments to the specification were required and this estimate was considered to be around £3-4m too high, without taking account of the impact of the invasion of Ukraine on costs.

Discussed:

Prior to the pandemic, the institution had been on track to exceed the target of a 20% increase in research income outlined within the Strategic Plan, however, the pandemic had meant that all research other than Covid-19 research had had to be suspended and many of the research charities did not provide funding during the pandemic. As the target had been based on grant spend rather than awards, this had been affected by the pandemic and the target would not now be met. The trajectory going forward was positive with £18m already awarded this year. It was hoped that by the end of the next five-year period St George's would be bringing in at least £20m per year.

The pandemic had provided opportunities for Covid-19 research funded through the Trust and St George's was now achieving its own grant funding successes in relation to Covid-19 research.

The Deputy Principal (Research and Enterprise) had developed a detailed Operational Plan and good progress had been made in achieving the targets set. The development of the Clinical Academic Groups (CAGs) had been key to increasing the benefit from the partnership with the Trust, including encouraging more Trust staff to be involved in education and research.

It was noted that it was important for a research active university to have a BRF in terms of its reputation and the ability to attract and retain staff. It was acknowledged that redeveloping the BRF would involve significant capital investment and plans for how this could be funded would need to be considered in more detail. There were opportunities to consider renting out space for start up activity and to reduce costs by reducing the requirement for decant space. The Home Office requirements meant that it would not be possible to redevelop the BRF on a phased basis but there were different options for taking this forward that were being considered.

It was noted that recently achieving NIHR recognition for the Clinical Research Facility would enable St George's to secure both further NIHR funding and industry grant support.

Agreed:

A business case for developing the BRF would be required before funding requirements could be assessed and further details would be brought to the Finance Committee.

**Action: Deputy Principal (Research and Enterprise)**

**83. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

Received and considered: A report from the Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

**Paper Council/8/H**

Reported:

The report provided a high-level overview of student and staff demographic data and a snapshot of current activity being taken forward. It was not intended to be comprehensive as it was not possible to report on the wide range of activity being taken forward across the institution. The primary focus for EDI activity had been on gender and race equality, where good progress had been made through Athena Swan and the Race Equality Action Group. Going forward, it would be a priority to take forward work on disability and LGBTQ issues with an intersectional approach.

Mental health and wellbeing were not a primary focus for the report, but it was acknowledged that EDI issues could have a significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of staff. Ensuring a truly inclusive culture at St George's would therefore have a positive impact on staff.

It was intended that the report would be shared first with Executive Board and Senate and then more widely with staff in order to share the useful information and data. There was not currently a formal EDI strategy in place but as the EDI work matured it was hoped that systems would be developed to report more frequently on particular areas. It was a priority to embed EDI as a cross-cutting theme within the new Strategy in order to embed EDI in all activities.

Discussed:

There were a number of staff networks such as the race equality network and the LGBTQ+ network. These networks were organised by staff to share experiences. There was appetite within the Students' Union to bring together staff and student networks.

Questions on staff and student views on the institutional approach to EDI were included in staff and student surveys and anecdotal feedback was provided by staff, for example, as part of the Personal Development Review (PDR) process. It was noted that other opportunities to track student and staff views would be considered.

There was a perception that some staff experienced "EDI fatigue" and did not always consider EDI work to be meaningful. It was planned that there would be roadshows aimed at staff to raise awareness and reinforce the importance of EDI. A section on staff contribution to EDI activity had been included in the PDR process to emphasise that it was an important responsibility for all staff.

The Chair of Council thanked the Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for the detailed report.

**84. Strategy Development**

Received and considered:

- (i) An update on the key themes arising from discussions about the new Strategy.
- (ii) The outline agenda for the Council away day on 11 May 2022.

**Paper Council/8/I**

Reported:

A number of strategy development sessions had been held with the Senior Leadership Team and the Principal's Advisory Group and planning for the Strategy away day had begun.

Agreed:

- (a) That it was desirable for Council to receive a draft of the new strategy before the away day, setting out the ambition for the university and the options for achieving it. This would enable Council to challenge the Executive on why this was the right strategy, to encourage the Executive to be ambitious and to contribute to discussions around how to achieve the strategy.
- (b) That Council did not wish to spend time discussing in detail the mission and vision statements.

- (c) That the independent members felt most able to contribute to the discussion of how to achieve the strategy, given the options that were presented and following an honest and open dialogue on the challenges St George's faces.
- (d) There was appetite from the executive to hear Council's views where they had helpful experience. For example how funds might be raised to plug current and future funding gaps. However these needed to be quantified by the executive in terms of the outline strategy.
- (e) Further discussion would be held at the next meeting of the Council Strategy Group as to the focus of the away day.

**Action: Principal, Chair of Council, Clerk to Council**

## **85. Staff Survey**

Received and considered: The results of the staff survey.

**Paper Council/8/J**

Reported:

The staff survey results were broadly positive with improved scores in all areas when compared to the previous results, this was very positive for St George's, particularly given the pressures the pandemic had placed on staff. The main priority area identified was improving the Personal Development Review (PDR) process. It was acknowledged that progress had been made in that there was now an expectation from staff that PDRs would be held annually, which indicated that culture change was happening.

## **Reports from Committees**

### **86. Health and Safety [Confidential]**

*Minute 86 is confidential.*

### **87. Finance Committee**

Received and considered:

- (i) An oral report on the meeting held on 15 March 2022.

Reported:

The Committee had reviewed the Financial Regulations and proposed a number of changes for approval by Council in June.

There remained considerable work to be undertaken to separate the Joint-Faculty balance sheet from 1 August 2022.

- (ii) An update from the Director of Estates and Facilities on progress with the fire safety works at Horton Halls.

**Paper Council/8/L**

Reported:

The order for the removal and replacement of the cladding from Horton Halls had not yet been placed as a number of technical queries had been raised at a meeting held the previous day concerning the roof top common areas, which needed to be resolved. The programme of work would start six weeks from the order being placed and would take approximately 40 weeks to complete. It had been confirmed that the insurance claim would not delay the works from starting. The cost of the works would be £1.7m including contingencies and VAT. The cost reported to Finance Committee was a lower figure as this did not include the contingencies and VAT.

The appointed contractor was responsible for the removal and safe disposal of the ACM cladding and had been asked to confirm the environmental impact. Council would be informed by email regarding the disposal of the cladding and the confirmed start date.

**Action: Director of Estates and Facilities**

**88. Audit Committee**

Received and considered:

- (i) The minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2022.
- (ii) The Strategic Risk Register

**Paper Council/8/M**

Reported:

The Committee had noted that the risk profile for information governance had increased in relation to cyber-security. Since the meeting was held, confirmation had been received that St George's had achieved cyber essentials plus accreditation.

Council noted that the concerns around cyber security risk remained but that the accreditation provided assurance that the risk was known and being managed. The Chair of Council commended the Director of Information Services and his team for their hard work in achieving the accreditation.

**89. Senate**

Received and considered: The minutes of the meeting of Senate held on 1 March 2022.

**Paper Council/8/N**

## **Matters for Approval**

**90. Student Protection Plan**

Considered and approved: The updated Student Protection Plan for submission to the Office for Students (OfS).

**Paper Council/8/O**

Reported:

The updated Student Protection Plan had been considered by Senate at its meeting on 1 March 2022 and approved by email circulation following the meeting.

Agreed:

- a) That the Students' Union representatives would review the revised Plan and confirm their approval the following week.

**Action: Students' Union President**

- b) That Council approved the Plan for submission to the Office for Students subject to confirmation from the Students' Union.

## **Matters for Report**

**91. Agenda for the next meeting**

Received and noted: The draft agenda for the meeting of Council on 30 June 2022.

**Paper Council/8/P**

**92. Student Cases**

Reported:

- (i) A Fitness to Study or Practise Hearing Committee was convened to consider the case of a student on the MBBS programme and determined that the student should receive a number of conditions.
- (ii) A Student Appeal Committee was convened to consider the case of a student on the BSc Paramedic Science programme under the *Procedure for consideration for a final discretionary attempt at an assessment* and agreed to uphold the decision of the Discretionary Panel in full.

**93. Dates of Meetings 2021-22**

11 May 2022 – away day

30 June 2022 at 9.30am – note revised date



**94. Dates of Meetings 2022-23**

21 September 2022 – Council dinner  
12 October 2022  
29 November 2022  
11 January 2022 – Council seminar  
22 February 2022  
28 March 2022  
17 May 2022 – away day  
27 June 2022

**Any Other Business**

**95. Any other business**

There was no further business.

## Action Points

Minute	Item	Action	Responsible
79(i)	Matters arising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) That due dates would be added to each of the open actions to ensure timely completion, with clear indication of ownership.</li> <li>b) To support the establishment of a liaison group between the university and the Students' Union.</li> <li>c) To receive a report from the liaison group at its next meeting.</li> <li>d) That the Chair of the SU Trustees be invited to attend the presentation on student wellbeing at the June Council meeting.</li> </ul>	Clerk to Council
79(ii)	Benchmarking HEI analysis	(a) That Damian Reid would work with the Treasurer, Director of Planning and Director of Finance to consider other measures of financial health and to further refine the data;	Treasurer, Director of Planning, Director of Finance, Damian Reid
79(iii)	Action plan	Council would be provided with updates via sub-committee reports and the action plan as a whole would be brought back to Council for review, particularly to ensure oversight of actions under Council's remit or where there is no sub-committee oversight.	Chief Operating Officer
79(iv)	Joint working group with the Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) That a report from the working group would be provided to the next meeting of Council.</li> <li>(b) That a timetable would be provided for resolving any matters relating to the Trust not being taken forward by the working group.</li> </ul>	Chief Operating Officer
81	Report from the Students' Union	That the draft wellbeing and welfare report and action plan should be submitted to the liaison group between the university and the Students' Union prior to its submission to Council to ensure the Students' Union perspective was considered.	Dean for Students
82	Research and Enterprise report	A business case for developing the BRF would be required before funding requirements could be assessed and further details would be brought to the Finance Committee.	Deputy Principal (Research and Enterprise)
84	Strategy Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) That it was desirable for Council to receive a draft of the new strategy before the away day, setting out the ambition for the university and the options for achieving it. This would enable Council to challenge the Executive on why this was the right strategy, to encourage the Executive to be ambitious and to contribute to discussions around how to achieve the strategy.</li> <li>(b) That Council did not wish to spend time discussing in detail the mission and vision statements.</li> <li>(c) That the independent members felt most able to contribute to the discussion of how to achieve the strategy, given the options that were presented and following an honest and open dialogue on the challenges St George's faces.</li> <li>(d) There was appetite from the executive to hear Council's views where they had helpful experience. For example how funds might be raised to plug current and future funding gaps. However these needed to be quantified by the executive in terms of the outline strategy.</li> <li>(e) Further discussion would be held at the next meeting of the Council Strategy Group as to the focus of the away day.</li> </ul>	Principal, Chair of Council, Clerk to Council

Minute	Item	Action	Responsible
86	Health and Safety	<p>a) That a presentation on Council's responsibilities in relation to health and safety should be arranged once the Institutional Health and Safety Policy has been finalised.</p> <p>b) That Council wished to receive further information on the plans to address sustainability at St George's.</p> <p>c) That an update would be provided to Council on the actions to ensure completion of safety training by all relevant staff.</p>	<p>Clerk to Council, Assistant Director (Safety, Health and Environment)</p> <p>Chair of the Environmental Working Group</p> <p>Chair of the Safety Management Committee</p>
87(ii)	Finance Committee: Fire Safety	Council would be informed by email regarding the disposal of the cladding and the confirmed start date.	Director of Estates and Facilities
90	Student Protection Plan	a) That the Students' Union representatives would review the revised Plan and confirm their approval the following week.	Students' Union President