

Council

19 October 2021

Minutes

Present:	Christine Swabey Godfrey Allen Sandra Ashton Jonathan Curtiss Professor Jon Friedland Professor Jenny Higham (Principal) Becky Kemp-Arnold Professor Sian Harding Dr Sally Jackson Gillian Norton Damian Reid Professor Jane Saffell 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 Ex officio Member Student Member Independent Member of Council Independent Member of Council Independent Member of Council Independent Member of Council Ex officio Member Elected Academic Staff Member Independent Member of Council Independent Member of Council
In attendance:	Nike Alesbury [minute 18 only] Dr Rachel Allen [minute 21 only] Caroline Davis [minute 18 only] Dr Julie Leeming Dr Rosie MacLachlan [minute 21 only] Susan McPheat Sian Marshall Paul Ratcliffe Graham Schofield Emma Whitaker Jenny Winters	Associate Director (Development and Alumni) Academic Lead for Quality and Partnerships Director of External Relations, Communications and Marketing Director of Planning Associate Dean (Access and Participation) Director of Finance Clerk to Council Chief Operating Officer Director of Estates and Facilities Senior Governance Officer Director of HR and Organisational Development
Apologies:	Josh Joshi Sarah Jones Dr Aileen O'Brien	Independent Member of Council Student Member Ex officio Member

11. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interests were made.

12. Remarks from the Chair

The Chair welcomed Dr Baba Sheba and Sandra Ashton who had been elected as the staff representatives on Council.

13. Minutes

Considered and approved:

- (i) The minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2021.
- (ii) The confidential minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 16 September 2021.
- (iii) The minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 27 September 2021.

Paper Council/1/A

Agreed:

That the minutes of the 16 September 2021 meeting would be revised to clarify that St George's was stronger on research impact and enterprise activity [minute 3].

Action: Clerk to Council

14. Matters arising from the minutes not on the agenda

Received: A report on actions and matters arising.

Paper Council/1/B

15. Report from the Principal

Received: A report from the Principal.

Paper Council/1/C

Reported:

There was concern across the sector about the upcoming Comprehensive Spending Review as there had been little engagement by government with sector representative groups, which was usual practice when policy decisions were to be announced.

The Principal had attended the Universities UK (UUK) conference. A theme emerging from the discussions was the financial pressures on institutions and particularly for smaller institutions.

Research Day would be held on 8 December 2021 and all Council members were invited to attend. An invitation would be circulated by email.

Action: Deputy Principal (Research and Enterprise), Clerk to Council

16. Report from the Students' Union

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

Paper Council/1/D

Reported:

The Sabbatical Officers had been involved in the National Student Survey (NSS) summits and had been pleased to contribute to discussions and to consider how the Students' Union could complement the work being undertaken to improve student satisfaction and support.

Training had been organised for the Sabbatical Officers on anti-Semitism and handling disclosures of gender-based violence, which would enable positive behaviours and good practice to be modelled to students. Opportunities for disseminating training further to the staff and student body were being considered.

Considerable work had been undertaken to organise fresher's and other events to welcome new students and to support and engage students in their return to campus following the pandemic.

The Students' Union had been engaging with students around the merger discussions and the Sabbatical Officers were considering a student referendum on the approach.

Discussed:

The Students' Union President and Vice-President (Education) would be bringing a manifesto to the Education and Students Strategy Committee to highlight the key issues that students were seeking to be addressed. Other opportunities for developing partnerships with students included the student-staff partnership grants, which focused on the impact and legacy of projects.

The Executive Team had held a Q&A session for students on the merger and planned to hold another session in due course. It was noted that a referendum would not have a formal status and there was a risk that it could result in students feeling disappointed if they expressed a negative view and the university decided to proceed with the merger. It was suggested that other mechanisms for engaging with the student body could be beneficial such as regular pulse surveys.

The Chair thanked the Student's Union President for the comprehensive report and commended the Students' Union for the wide range of priorities that were being taken forward.

Agreed:

- a. The Principal and Deputy Principal (Education) would work closely with the Students' Union to ensure students were able to engage and provide feedback on the proposed merger.

Action: Principal, Deputy Principal (Education), Students' Union President

- b. The report had raised a number of issues around equality, diversity and inclusion, and student welfare, and Council was keen to receive further reports on both matters in future. This also aligned with an action from a previous Council meeting to report in future on EDI performance metrics.

Action: Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Strategy & Finance Matters

17. Merger Discussions

Received and considered: A paper outlining the governance arrangements and the process for the appointment of advisors.

Paper Council/1/E

Reported:

The governance structures for the project had been agreed with Royal Holloway, University of London (RHUL) and had now been established. PA Consulting had been appointed to work with both universities to develop the joint case for merger. Timelines had been established for the appointment of independent financial advisors to undertake due diligence on areas including finance, estates, information technology and reputational matters, with the output of this work planned for 12 November 2021. Work was also being undertaken to plan phases 1-3 of the project.

Discussed:

Mills and Reeve had confirmed that they would be able to act as the legal advisors for St George's and had been engaged for the project. It was noted that it would be key for Council to understand its legal obligations as part of the merger decision making. The Chair of Council would be meeting with Mills and Reeve to discuss this matter.

PA Consulting would be working with both institutions to develop the criteria for merger, which would be incorporated within the case for merger.

The joint education and student experience group, which was part of the Joint Academic Case Workstream, would be meeting for the first time the following day and would consider how to engage students in the shaping of the education strategy for the proposed merged institution.

The Chair of Council thanked the Executive Team and other staff on behalf of the Council for the considerable work that was being undertaken to progress the merger discussions.

18. Development and Alumni

Received and considered: A report and presentation on the Development and Alumni Strategy from the Associate Director (Development and Alumni) and the Director of External Relations, Communications and Marketing.

Paper Council/1/F

Reported:

The Development and Alumni Team had experienced a period of instability during 2019-20, which had impacted the scope and range of its work. Nike Alesbury had been appointed as Associate Director (Development and Alumni) and brought considerable experience, including most recently from Cancer Research UK. The current priority was to develop the Development and Alumni Strategy for St George's.

St George's had a strong alumni community with over 21,000 alumni, 75 percent of whom were contactable. Engagement with the university included participating in interviews as part of the admissions process and other activities. The annual alumni telethon raised just under £80k in 2020-21, which was used to benefit students, including funding welfare support in the Students' Union and hardship funds.

It was a key priority to broaden the scope and range of development and alumni activity, particularly in the area of major giving and trusts, and a strategic framework had been developed to guide future activity. The Team was limited by the amount of resource currently allocated but a

part-time Trusts & Foundations Manager was to be appointed and best practice from other institutions was being considered.

The Associate Director (Development and Alumni) was keen to meet with members of Council individually to understand opportunities for further engagement and to access networks.

Discussed:

There was limited capacity within the Team to support work placements and alumni mentoring, although it was desirable to progress this activity in future.

The Team worked closely with the Deputy Principals to identify the development asks in relation to staff, students, education and research and workshops were held to identify research areas that could be promoted.

It was suggested that alumni could be incentivised to participate in the Alumni Survey that was being planned and that opportunities for donations could be promoted, such as the naming of a space.

Council members were supportive of the activity being taken forward and were keen to be involved in future discussions and to share expertise and knowledge to support the Team. The Associate Director (Development and Alumni) planned to meet with the Chief Executive Officer of St George's Hospital Charity to discuss opportunities for shared working.

The Chair of Council thanked the Associate Director (Development and Alumni) for the detailed presentation on the current position and future strategy.

Agreed:

The Associate Director (Development and Alumni) would meet with interested Council members to discuss opportunities for involvement and would then meet with the Chair of Council to consider how to best report back to Council in due course.

Action: Associate Director (Development and Alumni)

19. Partnerships Update

Received and considered:

- (i) The process for dissolving the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education.

Paper Council/1/G

Reported:

The governance and project management arrangements for overseeing the dissolution process had been established, which included oversight by a Joint Dissolution Oversight Group and a number of joint workstreams. A consultation process would be launched in January 2022 in relation to the changes to staffing structures and terms and conditions that would be required.

A reportable event had been submitted to the OfS but the OfS had responded that this was a matter that did not require reporting.

A meeting with staff would be held on 10 October 2021. The main concerns from staff related to pensions and terms and conditions.

The Finance Committee was reviewing the financial impact of the dissolution and further information would be reported to the Committee once the finance workstream had completed its work.

The Chair thanked the Academic Lead for Quality and Partnerships for the report, which provided assurance to the Council that the risk relating to the dissolution process was being managed appropriately.

Agreed:

That Council would receive a short update on feedback from the meeting with staff at its next meeting.

Action: Academic Lead for Quality and Partnerships

- (ii) A report on the termination of the franchise agreement with the University of Nicosia.

Paper Council/1/H

Reported:

A strategy and plan had been developed to provide a framework for managing the teach out phase. Council had previously raised concerns about the potential extra workload and the risk around maintaining quality of provision but it was noted that it was difficult to quantify the workload. The teach out plan had been submitted to the University of Nicosia and a number of proposed changes were being reviewed. The teach out phase could run until 2027 to take account of students who interrupt studies due to illness or other personal matter or who were required to repeat a year of study.

Agreed:

That a brief update under matters arising should be provided to the next Council meeting on the finalisation of the teach out plan.

Action: Principal

Student Matters

20. National Student Survey (NSS)

Received and considered: A report on NSS performance and action plan.

Paper Council/1/I

Reported:

The Covid-19 pandemic was perceived to have impacted the NSS results particularly for programmes with larger cohorts of students as it was more difficult to mitigate the impact of the disruption and to support affected students. This was the case for the BSc Biomedical Sciences and the MBBS programmes, which saw large drops in student satisfaction.

Assessment and feedback remained a priority area and considerable work was being undertaken to make improvements. It was acknowledged that this metric could be affected by feedback on areas not directly related; this was identified by the free text comments and included issues such as the release of exam results and the availability of the self-directed learning room for practising clinical skills. A number of operational excellence projects were being taken forward in relation to assessment, which were hoped to improve this metric, including the standardisation and streamlining of schemes of assessment.

A series of NSS summits had been held to identify actions to be taken forward immediately and best practice, which could then be shared with other courses. The themes identified included communications with students, the need to develop community and a sense of belonging, and ensuring consistency in hearing the student voice across courses and cohorts. The actions were being overseen by the Student Experience Acting Group and as part of the Annual Programme Monitoring process overseen by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee. It was planned in future to develop dashboards for each course.

The review of student satisfaction data had identified some areas of differential student satisfaction and this was being fed into the work that was ongoing to develop the inclusive education framework.

Discussed:

The impact of the pandemic was perceived to have been felt much more acutely at St George's owing to the specialist nature of our provision, including laboratory work and placements, and the challenge this posed to moving provision online. Where issues were identified with the changes

made then steps were now being taken to address them. An example of this was online exams, which were felt to have worked well overall but would be brought onsite to address the issues students experienced from sitting exams offsite. There were areas of good practice, such as 3D anatomy that would be retained as enhancements to curriculum delivery. There remained underlying issues with the integration of systems as a result of the infrastructure; St George's could do more to support students, such as through an engagement monitoring system, and to enhance the online learning environment if these issues were addressed.

From 2023, it was planned to remove the clinical transfer from the BSc Biomedical Sciences to the MBBS programme as it had been identified that this had created an intensely competitive culture among students and impacted negatively on student learning and satisfaction. It also created a huge volume of work to support the interview process that was felt could be better spent on improving the student experience. Around one third of the cohort were understood to be seeking a career in medicine and so there was potential for an impact on recruitment by withdrawing the transfer. However, it was planned that the programme would be redeveloped and a feature of this would be preparing students for postgraduate medical study by including anatomy teaching, for example, which could be highlighted in the marketing materials in addition to the other features of the course.

Recruitment to the programme in 2021-22 had been very successful and it had not been necessary for the programme to enter Clearing. A much higher proportion of applicants had applied directly this year (75 per cent) whereas in other years higher numbers of students had originally applied for Medicine. There was a strong market for Biomedical Sciences in the UK and steps were being taken to ensure effective recruitment and marketing activity.

It was acknowledged that the Council KPI on student satisfaction was overly ambitious and this would be reviewed as part of the development of the new St George's Strategy.

Agreed:

That Council would like to understand more about the plans to redevelop the BSc Biomedical Sciences in due course and the steps that would be taken to improve student satisfaction, including addressing welfare provision for students which was a high priority.

Action: Deputy Principal (Education)

21. Access and Participation

Received and considered: A presentation on the Access and Participation Strategy from the Associate Dean for Access and Participation.

Paper Council/1/J

Reported:

In December 2018, the Office for Students (OfS) announced a new approach to regulating access and participation, which focused on outcomes and supporting national priorities over a longer time period, in addition to increased powers and regulatory sanctions including the ability for higher education institutions to charge higher fees. In response, St George's established an Access and Participation Steering Group to oversee the development of a five-year Access and Participation Plan and performance against a Council KPI.

The Plan included targets for access, success and outreach. Current projects included the introduction of a contextual admissions scheme, the development of an inclusive education framework, outreach targeted through specific partnerships, and enhanced careers advice for BSc Biomedical Sciences students. Performance was strong against the metrics for success and the differential attainment gap had been reduced. Performance was less strong on access metrics which were aligned to national priorities and which were less relevant to St George's as a London based university where participation was typically higher.

Approval was sought from Council for a new metric for inclusion in the Plan which would focus on reducing and ultimately eliminating the differential attainment gap of BAME MBBS students in the top 5 decile rankings by 2030. The current Plan did not address this issue as it was aligned to OfS guidance, which focused on the outcomes of classified degrees. As the MBBS programme was not a classified degree, it was felt that a specific metric relating to this programme was appropriate and, in 2019, it had been agreed with the OfS that research would be undertaken to identify an appropriate metric. This metric was important as the decile rankings impacted students' applications for jobs after graduation as part of the Foundation Programme.

Discussed:

The university and Students' Union was alert to the issue of decile rankings and the impact that this had on student wellbeing. However, other than feeding back concerns, it was outside of the university's control to change the way the Foundation Programme operated.

The Chair of Council thanked the Associate Dean for Access and Participation for the helpful presentation and overview of performance in this area and welcomed a further update on performance against the new metric in due course.

Action: Associate Dean for Access and Participation

Agreed:

To approve the variation to the Access and Participation Plan for submission to the OfS.

Performance Matters

22. League Tables

Received and considered: A report on league table performance from the Director of Planning.

Paper Council/1/K

Reported:

The different league tables used different methodologies, subject groupings, metrics, years of data and definitions, and this explained why performance could be very different across these tables for an institution and/or any of its subjects.

The data showed that St George's had achieved twice as many bottom quartile positions than top quartile positions in the league tables reported. The key areas of weakness were NSS scores, REF performance, and facilities spend per student FTE.

The League Tables Focus Group was primarily focused on ensuring that the data underpinning league table metrics was high quality and optimised. Actions to address the performance issues were discussed at the Group but action plans for improvement resided within other groups.

Governance

23. Council Working Group

Received and considered:

- (i) A report from the Working Group reviewing the way in which Council operates and the notes of the meeting held on 29 September 2021.
- (ii) The internal audit report on governance.

Paper Council/1/L

Considered and approved:

- (iii) A number of proposals to enhance the governance arrangements at St George's.

Reported:

The key areas covered by the recommendations included:

- Improvements to the planning of Council and committee business;
- Streamlining reporting from the committees to Council;
- Enhanced arrangements for induction, development and appraisal;
- A review of the governing documents and the delegation of responsibilities from Council to the committees;
- Routine evaluation of effectiveness at Council and committee level.

24. Reports from Sub-Committees

Received and considered:

- (i) The annual report of the Remuneration Committees.

Paper Council/1/M

Reported:

The Remuneration Committees continued to operate in line with the CUC Higher Education Remuneration Code with a dedicated committee to review the pay and performance of the Principal.

- (ii) A report from the Audit Committee meeting held on 5 October 2021.

Paper Council/1/N

Reported:

The Strategic Risk Register would be circulated with the minutes as it had not been included with the report.

Action: Clerk to Council

- (iii) The minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held on 29 September 2021.

Paper Council/1/O

Reported:

The achievement of an operating surplus of just under £1m in 2020-21 was an excellent result in an extraordinarily difficult year.

The Committee had received a helpful report on the financial aspects of education, which provided an overview of the gross contribution of individual courses, and the plans for growth being considered by the Portfolio Growth Steering Group. The report had identified a number of areas requiring investment and a number of issues that were more challenging to address.

The Committee had reviewed in detail the long term forecast and invited the Senior Leadership Team to update the forecast to include an aspirational but justifiable level of projected growth in student numbers and research funding. This would provide a comparative set of figures against which Council could compare the indicative financial position for the combined university in making a decision as to whether to proceed with the merger.

- (iv) A report from the Safety Management Committee meeting held on 23 September 2021.

Paper Council/1/P

Reported:

A new Assistant Director for Safety, Health and the Environment had been appointed but there remained issues around capacity in the team as two members of staff were currently on sick leave. The appointment of a Biological Safety Officer would be made on a temporary basis to provide interim cover.

A full investigation in relation to the Dissection Room was being undertaken but was not yet completed.

A further RIDDOR report had been made to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) following a fall by a member of Trust staff in Jenner Wing. Data on incidents and accidents had improved and more near misses were being reported, which had been previously identified as an area of concern by Council given the low level of reporting. The low incidence rate of Covid-19 suggested that St George's was managing the risk effectively.

New policies on fire safety and lab inspections had been approved and the risk register had been updated to take account of the issues around fire safety. Work to address fire safety was being taken forward and mitigating action had been put in place, including a waking watch and inspection of kitchens on a daily basis.

Good feedback had been received from the HSE following an inspection of category three laboratories with only a small number of suggestions for improvement, and this was thanks to the hard work of the Category Three Management Team and the Pathogen Management Committee. Excellent feedback had also been received on Covid-19 security.

There remained issues around the recording of safety training data but the available data suggested that the target rate of 95 per cent completion was not currently being met.

Matters for Information

25. Student Recruitment

Received and noted: A report on Student Recruitment for 2021-22.

Paper Council/1/Q

26. Statutory Returns and Consultations for Information

Received and noted: A report on statutory returns and consultations, with responses to date.

Paper Council/1/R

27. Student Cases

Reported:

- (i) A Fitness to Study or Practise Hearing Committee was convened to consider the case of a PhD student and determined that the student should be expelled.
- (ii) A Fitness to Study or Practise Hearing Committee was convened to consider the case of a Final Year MBBS student and determined that the student should receive a formal written warning.
- (iii) A Student Appeal Committee was convened to consider the case of a student enrolled on the BSc Biomedical Sciences programme and determined that the penalties applied for plagiarism should be upheld.
- (iv) Professor Sian Harding, acting as the Chair of Council's nominee, considered two cases under the *Procedure for considering Allegations of Assessment Irregularity* relating to students on the BSc Biomedical Sciences. Professor Harding upheld the decisions of the Principal made at the formal stage, and the students have received a range of penalties for cheating in an examination.
- (v) The Vice-Chair, acting on behalf of the Chair, considered the case of a BSc Biomedical Sciences student under the *Procedure for considering Allegations of Assessment Irregularity*. The Vice-Chair upheld the decision of the Principal made at the formal stage, and the student has received a range of penalties for cheating in an examination.
- (vi) Mr Godfrey Allen, acting as the Chair of Council's nominee, considered the case of a BSc Biomedical Sciences student under the *Procedure for considering Allegations of Assessment Irregularity*. Mr Allen upheld the decision of the Principal made at the formal stage, and the student has received a range of penalties for collusion.
- (vii) Mr Ewart Wooldridge, acting as the Chair of Council's nominee, considered two cases under the *Procedure for considering Allegations of Assessment Irregularity* relating to students on the BSc Biomedical Sciences. Mr Wooldridge upheld the decisions of the Principal made at the formal stage, and the students have received a range of penalties for collusion.
- (viii) The Vice-Chair, acting on behalf of the Chair, reviewed the decision of the Discretionary Panel, under the *Procedure for consideration for a final discretionary attempt at an assessment 2020-21*, with regard to a student on the MBBS programme, not to permit the student a final attempt at an assessment. The Vice-Chair determined that there were grounds to refer the decision back to the Discretionary Panel for further review.
- (ix) Professor Sian Harding, acting as the Chair of Council's nominee, reviewed two decisions of the Discretionary Panel, under the *Procedure for consideration for a final discretionary attempt at an assessment 2020-21*, with regard to one student on the MBBS programme and one student on the BSc Paramedic Science programme, not to permit the students a final attempt at an assessment. Professor Harding determined that there were grounds for review of the decisions by a Student Appeal Committee.

- (x) The Vice-Chair, acting on behalf of the Chair, considered an appeal from a student on the BSc Occupational Health programme under the *Student Concerns and Complaints Procedure 2020-21*. The Vice-Chair upheld the decision made at the informal stage.

28. Dates of Meetings 2021-22

17 November 2021 – Extraordinary meeting
30 November 2021
14 December 2021 – Extraordinary meeting
8 February 2022
29 March 2022
11 May 2022 – away day
28 June 2022

Any Other Business

29. Any other business

There was no further business discussed.

SM/18 November 2021

Action Points

Minute	Item	Action	Responsible
13	Minutes	That the minutes of the 16 September 2021 meeting would be revised to clarify that St George's was stronger on research impact and enterprise activity [minute 3].	Clerk to Council
15	Research Day	Research Day would be held on 8 December 2021 and all Council members were invited to attend. An invitation would be circulated by email.	Deputy Principal (Research and Enterprise)
16	Report from the Student's Union	<p>a. The Principal and Deputy Principal (Education) would work closely with the Students' Union to ensure students were able to engage and provide feedback on the proposed merger.</p> <p>b. The report had raised a number of issues around equality, diversity and inclusion, and student welfare, and Council was keen to receive further reports on both matters in future. This also aligned with an action from a previous Council meeting to report in future on EDI performance metrics.</p>	<p>Principal, Deputy Principal (Education), Students' Union President</p> <p>Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion</p>
18	Development and Alumni	The Associate Director (Development and Alumni) would meet with interested Council members to discuss opportunities for involvement and would then meet with the Chair of Council to consider how to best report back to Council in due course.	Associate Director (Development and Alumni)
19(i)	Partnerships Update: Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education	That Council would receive a short update on feedback from the meeting with staff at its next meeting.	Academic Lead for Quality and Partnerships
19(ii)	Partnerships Update: University of Nicosia	That a brief update under matters arising should be provided to the next Council meeting on the finalisation of the teach out plan.	Principal
20	NSS	That Council would like to understand more about the plans to redevelop the BSc Biomedical Sciences in due course and the steps that would be taken to improve student satisfaction, including addressing welfare provision for students which was a high priority.	Deputy Principal (Education)
21	Access and Participation	The Chair of Council thanked the Associate Dean for Access and Participation for the helpful presentation and overview of performance in this area and welcomed a further update on performance against the new metric in due course.	Associate Dean for Access and Participation
24(ii)	Audit Committee	The Strategic Risk Register would be circulated with the minutes as it had not been included with the report.	Clerk to Council