

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2023

Members:	John Hinchcliffe (Chair)	Matthew Atkinson	Professor Shirley Congdon
	Faiz Ilyas	Professor Maryann Hardy	Terry Hartwell
	Hamza Khan	Victoria McKay	Sally Neocosmos
	Professor Amir Sharif	Iqra Tabassum	Professor Vishanth Weerakkody
In attendance:	David Harris	Director of People, Culture and Wellbeing (for items 3&4)	
	Jacqui Holgate	Assistant Head (Governance)	
	Andrew Lang	Chief Finance Officer	
Apologies:	Raja Waseem Ahmad	Dr Stewart Davies	Dame Sally Dicketts
	Paul Donovan	Professor Zahir Irani	Kate Ireland
	Simon Lewis	Ibrahim Mahmood	Sanjay Patel
	Ash Mehta		

The meeting was preceded by a presentation on the University's 'Capabilities for Collections in Human Bioarchaeology and Digital Collections', with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Research and Innovation, outlining the new capabilities to deliver world-class science and develop opportunities for innovation following the award of £3M capital funding by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Secretary's Note: Due to not having a majority of lay members present at the meeting, Council was not quorate and therefore no formal decisions could be made. Approval of Document C3/23-24 would be requested from Members of Council by email circulation following the meeting (M4/23-24 refers).

1.23-24 **Welcome and Report from Interim Chair of Council**

- 1.1 The Interim Chair of Council welcomed Members to their first meeting of 2023/24, noting that five new lay members had been appointed to Council (from 1 August 2023) but were unable to attend this meeting due to prior commitments:
 - Kate Ireland: lay member of Council and Chair of Audit Committee (Chief Internal Audit Officer and Chair, Diversity Equity and Inclusion Forum, Yorkshire Building Society).
 - Raja Waseem Ahmad: lay member of Council (Non-Executive Director, Disasters Emergency Committee; Chief Executive Officer, Islamic Relief Worldwide).
 - Dr Stewart Davies: lay member of Council (Chair, Sustainable Development Partnership, City of Bradford Metropolitan District; Former Chief Executive Officer, Xiros).
 - Simon Lewis: lay member of Council (Independent Member, ACAS; Deputy District Judge, UK Government).
 - Ash Mehta: Graduate Representative of Council (Chief Financial Officer, D4t4 Solutions plc).
- 1.2 The Interim Chair provided some opening comments to the meeting, noting that the University's growth and sustainability plan would progress using an iterative approach of continuous improvement and refinement during which the risks relating to the achievement

of the target student numbers would be continually monitored. The five-year plan was the basis on which Council agreed to proceed for the 2023/24 financial/academic year and the 3+9 financial forecast would provide the first opportunity to assess progress against that plan. If progress was not as planned, then any necessary remedial action would be implemented, and the contingency reserve and mitigations reviewed.

1.3 The Interim Chair also reported:

- that the recruitment process for the new Chair of Council was progressing, supported by external search agent, Perrett Laver who would undertake a comprehensive search and recruitment process aligned to the University's values.
- following the resignation of the former Chair of Council and the departure of the University Secretary, the Council External Effectiveness Review had been put on hold, noting it would resume in the Spring once new Council Members, including the Chair of Council were embedded into their roles.

2.23-24 **Vice-Chancellor's Report (Document C1/23-24)**

2.1 Council discussed the Vice-Chancellor's report, in which she provided information on key matters affecting the University since the last meeting and against each of the University's sub-strategies. Among topics highlighted were:

- the complex and competitive environment in which the University continued to operate, including the fragility in the sector with regards to its funding regime, noting that funding per student had been falling in tuition fees and grants over the last decade. Funding for 2025/26 would be the lowest in over 25 years and worth only £5.8K in 20211/12 prices.
- that the University would continue to be prudent, considered, and deliberate in the allocation of its resources.
- the publication of a [new report](#) by the Industry and Regulators Committee on the Office for Students, England's HE regulator.

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- the University's position in several recently published league tables, with Council noting the variable methodologies used to compile the different rankings and the significance of different rankings as a driver of applicant behaviour.

Note: part of the above minute has been redacted as it is considered to be exempt information as defined by section 43 (2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 which covers commercial interests.

2.2 Council sought clarification on the University's current recruitment position against its student number target for 2023/24, noting the likely shortfall in undergraduates and postgraduates in Semester 1. In response to a question regarding whether additional marketing spend would be beneficial, it was confirmed it would not be impactful at this point

in the cycle. International recruitment was also discussed with Council noting the University had worked to diversify its international markets to increase student diversity and manage business risks. The January intake for the international market was expected to improve the diversity of students, and intake numbers at this time were projected to be higher than in January 2023, but may not be as high as budgeted. The importance of student retention and progression was discussed, noting the financial implications associated with this, and an update would be shared with Council in due course. It was further noted that a more focussed approach to marketing would be deployed for 2024 to ensure the main scheme featured more significantly in future recruitment cycles.

2.3

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2.4 Council also noted the lack of diversity in the recent senior leadership roles and was assured the University was being intentional in ensuring diversity was embedded into its recruitment processes in order to ensure the University had a diverse workforce.

2.5 **ACTION: share update on student returners and progression (Chief Finance Officer)**

3.23-24 **People Update (Document C2/23-24)**

3.1 Dave Harris, the new Director of People, Culture and Wellbeing, was welcomed to the meeting, and provided an update from his Directorate. Attention was drawn to the People Strategy delivery plan; national-level industrial relations; the USS pension scheme valuation; and key workforce KPIs.

3.2 Council noted that the Executive Board had approved a business case to implement a joint HR and Finance cloud-based system over two years which would provide a step change in system capability, and an enhanced user experience for staff, managers, and new recruits. Council was assured that the project would be appropriately resourced in terms of staffing backfill to support implementation of the new system.

3.3 Other points of note included the University's values proposition to employees noting the need for this to be more visible to existing staff and to feature more strongly in the

recruitment offer in order to distinguish the University from its competitors. The need to link staff and student engagement activities was also noted. The workload model, including staff/student ratios and staffing capability, was also discussed noting this was being addressed via the People Strategy delivery plan to maximise efficiency.

4.23-24 **University Secretary Recruitment Process (Document C3/23-24)**

- 4.1 Council considered a report on the recruitment and selection process for the University Secretary, which was being supported by an executive search consultant, Anderson Quigley. The importance of the role was noted with the University Secretary providing a pivotal role in the relationship between Council and the University Executive, with responsibility for ensuring the good governance of the University, and compliance with relevant legal and regulatory requirements.
- 4.2 In light of the discussion, the Job Description would be updated to remove reference to 'communications' and links to the Chair of Council would be strengthened, noting that the role would report to the Vice-Chancellor for line management purposes. Anderson Quigley would also be instructed to include larger further education colleges in their search for potential candidates. The suggestion to include a Sabbatical Officer on the Selection Panel was noted and would be considered by the Director of People, Culture and Wellbeing.
- 4.3 As the meeting was not quorate, the request to empower the Selection Panel to agree the successful candidate would be presented to Council via email circulation following the meeting.
- 4.4 **ACTION: request approval from Council via email circulation, and circulate revised Job Description, for information (Assistant Head, Governance)**
- 4.5 Secretary's Note: following the meeting, it was confirmed that a Sabbatical Officer would be included on the University Secretary Selection Panel.

5.23-24 **Report from the Students' Union (Document C4/23-24)**

- 5.1 Council discussed a report from the Students' Union on their activities for the 2023/24 academic year, namely:
 - the plans for freshers' events noting the activities that had been organised by societies and sports clubs.
 - that the four 'Kickstart' weekend retreats were now fully booked. Kickstart events aimed to engage student in UBU projects, give them the opportunity to develop and gain transferable skills, and to create social networks. The value and impact of this programme was noted.
 - and the recruitment process for the Chief Executive Officer of the Students' Union, noting the current CEO would remain in post until December 2023.
- 5.2 Council welcomed the updated, noting the work that was being undertaken by the Students' Union to support and enhance the student experience.

6.23-24 **KPI Dashboard (Document C523-24)**

- 6.1 Council discussed the headlines from the KPI dashboard noting that the core set of 28 KPIs were tracked against and reported on regularly at governance meetings, with relevant Executive leads for each KPI. Work continued to move from annual measures to more frequent 'in-year' measures to assess progress against strategic objectives and enable appropriate intervention where required.
- 6.2 Clarification was provided on the BME awarding gap KPI, which led to a discussion on operational definitions, and categories of ethnicity, and how the data were analysed and reported. It was noted that the actions included within the University's Access and Participation Plan were intended to reduce the gap in future year. The University was in process of developing a new APP, for submission to the Office for Students in Summer 2024, and an update on the emerging APP would be presented to Council, noting the new plan would take effect from the 2025/26 academic year. It was also confirmed that the capital expenditure budget was reported via the 'strategic development investment' KPI. The need for investment was critical to ensure the ongoing financial sustainability of the University in a responsible and measured way.
- 6.3 **ACTION: schedule a briefing on APP (Governance Team / Pro Vice-Chancellor, EDI)**

7.23-24 **Student Recruitment Update (C6/23-24)**

7.1 [Redacted content]

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- 7.2 Points noted in discussion included that student retention and progression was being closely monitored and mechanisms were in place to maximise students completing repeat assessments / returning to study, and that a more deliberate approach to enhancing the University's website / online presence would be undertaken thereby making it easier to use and navigate. Council also noted the importance of delivering a meaningful, engaging, and inclusive on-campus student experience with regards to student activities in line with the University's EDI Strategy. It was agreed that a deep dive on what influenced student's

choices, including patterns that were emerging in subjects that were steady state versus growth areas would be shared with Council, alongside an analysis of conversion numbers at clearing versus conversion numbers at main cycle. The resource allocated for main cycle would also be shared.

- 7.3 It was vital that alongside the University's growth ambitions, there was also a need to enhance efficiency and effectiveness, noting that a targeted plan to deliver cost efficiencies and enhance business processes was being developed; this was key to becoming a cost-conscious institution. Delivering services in an efficient way, challenging the need for expenditure and re-investing savings prudently would be an important element of the University's financial delivery in 2023/24. A brief update was also provided on the 'student hardship fund' which was used to support students who were suffering financial hardship.

8.23-24 **Summary of Financial Position, September 2023 (Document C7/23-24)**

- 8.1 Council considered a report which provided an update on financial issues at the start of the 2023/24 academic year, including the provisional financial outturn for 2022/23 which was the University's strongest financial outturn for more than 10 years; early indications of student recruitment; cash outlook; long-term investment portfolio; pensions; and the impacts associated with the cost-of-living crisis.

- 8.2 The University was in a solid position to invest in its future following a strong financial performance in 2022/23; however, and as previously discussed, student recruitment 2023/24 would not meet budget aspirations in relation to home undergraduate and international postgraduate students. Therefore, whilst the University had good cash liquidity for its planned capital expenditure investment, careful choices would need to be made on revenue investment in 2023/24 in order to hit the budgeted surplus for the year. Hitting financial targets would have to be balanced with the potential additional revenue investment required to deliver the ambitions of the growth and sustainability plan, namely the need to secure stronger undergraduate recruitment, as well as increasing the number of international students in line with the plan.

- 8.3 Budgeted capital expenditure in 2023/24 was expected to be circa £31M, comprising of £20M as per the five-year plan, £5M brought forward from 2022/23, and external funding of circa £6M. This level of expenditure required significant effort to manage and spend in-line with plans and the focus on delivery was paramount as the University continued to significantly upgrade and develop its campus after limited expenditure during the last ten years.

8.4

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9.23-24 **Register of Interests (Document C8/23-24)**

9.1 Council received and noted the report.

10.23-24 **Minutes of the Meeting on 26 July 2023 (Document C9/23-24)**

10.1 The minutes of the meetings held on the 26 July 2023 were approved by circulation prior to the meeting.

11.23-24 **Action Tracker (Document C10/23-24)**

11.1 Council received a report on matters arising from the Council meeting on 26 July 2023 and the actions taken since that meeting to address them.

12.23-24 **Council Terms of Reference and Membership (Document C11/23-24)**

12.1 Council received and noted the report.

13.23-24 **Draft Council 2 Agenda, November 2023 (Document C12/23-24)**

13.1 Council received and noted the report.

14.23-24 **Council Schedule of Business (Document C13/23-24)**

14.1 Council received and noted the report.

15.23-24 **Any Other Business: Update on RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete)**

15.1 The Vice-Chancellor provided an update on RAAC noting that following a review of the estate by external specialist surveyors, a small number of teaching and office spaces had been identified as containing RAAC and had been quarantined as a safety measure whilst further investigation work was undertaken. Mitigation plans had been developed to reduce any impact on teaching and research and this had been noted on the Estates Risk Register as an operational risk and would be considered by the Risk Oversight Group (in October) and the Audit Committee (in November).

16.23-24 **Closing Comments**

16.1 The Interim Chair thanked Council for a positive but challenging meeting and for their valuable contributions.

Secretary: Jacqui Holgate, Assistant Head (Governance)

Date: 2 October 2023