

COUNCIL

21 November 2024 / Council Chamber

MINUTES



7725.0 Welcome and Quorum

For Information

Minute

The meeting was quorate. The Vice-Chancellor, Anthony Smith, Jo Rhoden and Sabina Gheduzzi were welcomed to their first meeting as members of Council.

7726.0 Declarations of Interest

For Information

Minute There were no new declarations of interest other than Pamela Chesters on 7734.0 Calum Mercer with respect to 7742.0

7728.0 Actions and Matters Arising - C24/25 - 02

For Noting

Minute

There were two actions on the Action Log.

Steering Groups

The first action was to answer the question of whether Council approval was needed for the setting up of a Steering Group. The Interim Head of Governance had provided a detailed note on Decision Time stating that the setting up of a steering group does not normally require the approval of Council with an exception to this being where Council itself is commissioning a project.

At the previous meeting clarification was requested as to the difference between Advisory Boards and Steering Groups. It was explained in the note that Advisory Boards are there to provide advice and support to the Executive (including the Vice-Chancellor) and Steering Groups are to provide accountability and oversight to a particular project.

KPIs

An update on the KPIs would be coming to the next meeting of Council.

Council was satisfied that the first action could be considered closed while the action relating to KPIs remained open.

The Chair noted that the Decision Time action log remained both difficult to access and had numerous actions allocated to individuals who were no longer employees. She asked that, if necessary, the IT department be asked to give support to the Governance team to bring pressure to bear on the supplier to effect the necessary improvements.

Action

KPIs to come to the next meeting

Decision time action log to be updated

7729.0 Institutional update - C24/25 - 03

For Noting

Minute

The Vice-Chancellor highlighted the following points:

- The increased income from the rise in home tuition fees had been more than offset by the increase in Employer National Insurance Contributions. When announcing the increase in tuition fees the government had also stated that universities would be expected to show improvements in areas including access and participation and value for money and being on a firm financial footing.
- The latest HESA data showed that the University had strong graduate outcomes with 92% of students in high-skilled roles within 15 months of graduating.
- The University had received the University Mental Health Charter award, becoming one of 15 universities nationally to hold this award.
- The SU Bath Top Ten for the next academic year had been launched.
- Bath was part of a six-year collaboration which would receive funding totalling £27.6million to seek to develop new technologies to treat lung conditions.
- The University, along with the other five SETsquared universities, had partnered with South-West-based venture capital firm QantX to announce plans for a £300million investment fund.

- The University had held a celebration event for Olympic and Paralympic athletes.

Strategy Development

Reported

The Vice-Chancellor gave an overview of the 2nd leadership team strategy day. During the day the two key areas - Global Excellence with Impact and Foundations for the Future - were discussed and defined in more detail. The draft decision-making framework was tested and consideration given as to where the University would like to be positioned in ten years time against a number of different domains and the performance aspirations/trade-offs which might be required to get there.

Members asked about the feasibility of increasing global profile unless this was underpinned by a commensurate increase in research intensity. In responding the Vice Chancellor advised that he saw research intensity is a ratio and that if student numbers are increased the research intensity would increase. It was acknowledged that global reputation and associated improvement in QS rankings could be accomplished by recognising our distinctive strengths and focusing on building those and ensuring appropriate international collaboration.

UEB would continue to enact the University's strategic plan, would refine and apply the decision-making framework, work on focus, and embed the People and Culture aspects. The Vice-President (Strategy & Planning) was working to get some international examples of what good strategic planning looked like.

Discussion

It was confirmed that the University was proposing the tuition fee increase would be applied to all students. It was stressed that in order to mitigate reputational risk that this decision would need to be communicated effectively. It was clarified that the maintenance loan increase would apply to continuing students.

The importance of increasing PGT students numbers was noted both from a financial perspective and also , subject to the right course and student mix, as this would contribute to the University's research standing. However it was necessary to be cautious about the entry qualifications of PGT students and their employment destinations. It was emphasised that a PGT offering was vital to the University. It was confirmed that the PGT Review, led by the PVCs Education & Global and Student Experience, was moving to phase 3.

The Health and Safety Report regarding the incident which took place at 7 West in July was noted by Council.

7730.0 Report from the Faculty of Science - C24/25 - 04

For Discussion

Minute Reported

The Dean of the Faculty of Science attended the meeting to provide Council an update of the work of the Faculty. The Dean noted that there was a clearer vision from the Executive as to the immediate priorities for the University. He said that there were three main areas of focus within the Faculty; research excellence and distinctiveness, the portfolio of education and the workplace culture.

Discussion

Council were pleased to note the Faculty's work on the research strategy. It was questioned whether the Faculty had the necessary staff to deliver the teaching portfolio and provide the necessary research excellence. It was confirmed that it would take some time for the necessary personnel changes to take place to reach the Faculty's goal but the turnover rate within the Faculty was relatively high with around 20 to 30 cases per annum. The Dean had been transparent with colleagues within the Faculty that while there were different focuses for academics the overarching priority was to provide a valuable contribution to the institution.

It was queried whether the University's academic promotions framework could be better utilised to promote areas of the Faculty strategy. There were criticisms of the paperwork associated with the academic promotions process but the current criteria were positive and ensured applicants were able to demonstrate grant income levels obtained together with other attributes. In some departments within the Faculty this was being embedded from Lecturer's initial appointment which was showing positive returns for the Faculty. There was a group within the Faculty who looked at larger grants which colleagues were applying for in order to ensure that there was sufficient support from within the Faculty through the process.

The Dean noted that they sat on the interview panels for all academic appointments to the Faculty and had been impressed with the quality of applicants but due to the competition within the sector there were still challenges in place in relation to recruitment. It was noted there was a sector wide culture which saw like for like recruitment for academic staff as the default position when someone left. While there were exceptions where specific specialties were required, the University focused on versatile recruitment to ensure that academics could teach across any year within a course and the question should be asked during recruitment whether an academic would be willing to teach in areas outside of their immediate specialities to improve the teaching portfolio of the Faculty.

It was queried whether the Faculty had the necessary leadership team in place to drive cultural change. It was confirmed that the Faculty was on a journey but there was a good team in place, the priority for the Dean was to look at the hierarchal decision making structure within the Faculty including the role of the Head of Department. The reintroduction of the SDPR had been beneficial to this as there was a limit to the number each reviewer could carry out which improved the quality of the process and had in turn added another layer within the leadership structure of the Faculty. The Faculty had worked closely with Human Resources around the Support and Report tool to empower Heads of Department to challenge inappropriate behaviour, proactively dealing with problems when they arose.

7731.0 Audit and Risk Committee - C24/25 - 05A-D

For Discussion and Approval

Minute

Reported

There were four matters for Council to approve:

- i) Terms of Reference (taken in item 7747.0)
- ii) The Internal Audit Annual Report
- iii) The ARAC Annual Report
- iv) The Annual Public Interest Disclosure Statement.

Three items from the Committee Summary Report were highlighted:

- 1) The new institutional risk management approach was still a work in progress, and it was not yet fully embedded. Creating the right culture with respect to understanding the importance of strong risk management and its use as a dynamic management tool would be essential and needed to be built in across the organisation. The session on risk at the Council Away Day had been a positive step forward.
- 2) There were clear lessons to be learned from the IAAPS fraud report, which covered the most significant fraud the University had seen in a number of years. The attack had been sophisticated but was not one that was uncommon.
- 3) ARAC had a comprehensive discussion about internal audit and if it could be assured from a coverage point of view that there is the right level of assurance across the University. The Committee concluded that it could be assured, partly due to the programming of audits to assess areas of expected risk.

Discussion

Council asked if more internal audits should be undertaken next year. It was answered that it was also not felt that more audits were necessary but there would be a revision of the construction of the audit programme to have more focus on strategy and culture. Internal Audit operates on a multi-year rolling five-year plan that is reviewed by ARAC annually and balance is carefully considered. As the strategic plan evolved internal audit would need to align with the key risks associated.

Council requested that the Strategic Risk Register and requested be brought to the next meeting.

Decision

Council approved the Internal Audit Annual Report, ARAC Annual Report, and Annual PID Statement.

7732.0 Finance Committee Report - C24/25 - 06

For Discussion

Minute

Reported

Council received the report from Finance Committee covering its meetings on 20th September and 8th November 2024.

The Chapter 1 business case had originally been submitted to Finance Committee, with the different works included to be approved individually. Finance Committee agreed that as the total cost of the works was £16 million, it would recommend the works to Council to approve.

The timings of the Government announcements on the increase to regulated fees for undergraduate students meant that this topic could not be discussed fully at the most recent Finance Committee meeting. Therefore Council were being asked to approved the increase in fees for new and continuing Home undergraduate students for academic year 2025/2026.

Discussion

Regarding the Chapter 1 package, Council questioned how governance would best be managed for numerous projects that fall under one large programme and stressed the importance of the approvals process as outlined in the schedule of delegated authorities. Council felt that it would benefit from a fuller explanation at a later date of what was included within Chapter 1 and not simply what it might cost so that it could consider estates matters in the round, over a longer term timeframe. It was explained that while a significant amount of work was intended to be carried out on the full estate, the Chapter 1 works covered maintenance works on the six buildings that the surveyors had identified as presenting the most risk. To expedite these works quickly, they had been submitted separately to Finance Committee, although it was acknowledged that the total costs were £16 million.

The degree of urgency of the Chapter 1 projects was queried. Emphasis was placed on the need to expedite quickly due to the risks to health and safety and/or business continuity. The works were intended to be carried out within one year with the understanding that the procurement process may cause some delays. Council highlighted the need for clarity on current risks within the estate and potential risks for the future and noted the importance of having oversight of bigger projects. Assurance was given that no other buildings on campus were known to be in a similarly critical condition.

In relation to the proposal to approve the regulated fees for all undergraduate students for 2025/26, the Students' Union representatives expressed their disappointment over the lack of student consultation and highlighted the possibility of a student backlash over the speed at which the decision was taken. They stated that they would not be able to support the tuition fee increase. The need for student consultation in future decisions was noted, although timing constraints had made this difficult in this instance as the fee changes had to be written into offer letters for new

undergraduate students.

Council asked whether the offers previously made to continuing undergraduate students had been checked far enough back to ensure that the new regulated fees could be applied to all continuing undergraduate students. Assurance was given that all offers had been reviewed back to 2018 and checks would be made on whether they needed to be reviewed any further.

Decision

Council approved the following:

- i) Finance Committee's Terms of Reference for 2024/25.
- ii) Chapter 1 Business Case expenditure of £16m
- iii) The increase in tuition fees for academic year 2025/2026 for Home undergraduate student to £9,535.
- iv) The signing of the Nomination Agreement for The Brook.

7733.0 Annual Financial Reporting - C24/25 - 07

For Approval

Minute Reported

James Bird of the external auditors, Grant Thornton (GT) joined the meeting.

It was explained it would not be possible to approve the Annual Report and Accounts for 2023/2024 due to Grant Thornton advising the University that it did not agree with the accounting treatment adopted for the private placement debt from Northern Western Mutual Life Assurance. Grant Thornton had assured the joint meeting of Finance Committee and ARAC on 8 November that they would be in a position to sign the Accounts as planned, but subsequently raised the issue on the private placements. Reflecting this in the accounts requires further external valuations and this meant that it was too late for the necessary amendments to be made to the Annual Report. James Bird apologised on behalf of Grant Thornton for the lateness of their informing the University that this was an issue. Council expressed its dissatisfaction with GT for raising this issue so late in the process noting that Council relies on its external auditor for assurance on the University's financial position and the efficacy of its finance team and processes. This delay undermines that assurance and puts added workload on the University and finance team in particular. While accepting that this is a legitimate technical accounting matter to raise, Council found GT's explanation as to the late identification of the issue unclear.

The Treasurer explained that the accounts that were currently being presented to Council were as they stood before Grant Thornton raised the issue relating to the private placement debt. The

Director of Finance said that changes to accounting treatment would change the three primary statements in the accounts which are referenced multiple times in the document and so many references to figures would need to be updated. He said that the underlying performance of the University remained the same though the change will make University's financial position appear better.

Ernst & Young have been instructed by the University to undertake a valuation of the debt and it was expected that this would be with Grant Thornton the following week. A further meeting of Council would need to be held in December to approve the Annual Report and Accounts. At this meeting the submission of the draft Annual Financial Return (AFR) and the letter of support for IAAPS Ltd could be approved.

The Director of Finance told Council that the draft Annual Financial Return would be submitted to the Office for Students at the beginning of December with the final version being submitted by the January deadline. As in previous years the final version would be approved by the Accountable Officer on completion of the validation process.

Decision

Council noted the following:

- i) The draft Annual Report and Accounts for 2023/2024 and the financial year-end commentary.
- ii) The Loan Covenant analysis
- iii) The Finance going concern review
- iv) The draft findings of the External Auditors

Council **approved** the following:

- i) The draft return to be submitted to the Office for Students
- ii) The letter of support to IAAPS Ltd

Action

Additional Meeting of Council

Action Description - An additional meeting of Council to be held before the end of the calendar year to approve the Annual Report and Accounts and the final return to be submitted to the Office for Students.

Due by - 5 Dec 2024 | Assigned to - Andrew Browning

7734.0 Update on the Recruitment of Chair of Council - C24/25 - 08

For Discussion

Minute

The Chair of Council left the meeting and the Treasurer took over as Chair for this item of the meeting only.

Reported

Council noted the update on the recruitment process for appointing a new Chair of Council. The paper confirmed the appointment of the Executive Search Firm, Minerva. A recruitment panel of approximately five members would be finalised by the end of the year. A balance of diversity and experience would be considered when appointing panel members.

The Chair of Council returned to the meeting.

7735.0 Senate Update - C24/25 - 09

For Noting

Minute

Paper C24/25 - 09 was a summary of the previous meetings of Senate to give context for the agenda items which were to give academic assurance from Senate. It was noted by Council

7736.0 NSS & PTES Analysis - C24/25 - 10

For Approval

Minute

Reported

Council received the reports analysing the results of the National Student Survey (NSS) 2024 and

the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) 2024. It was noted that the recommendation in the NSS report to approve targeted interventions in departments was intended for UEB and had been mistakenly included in the report for Council.

The University's results in the NSS were generally strong, but it had performed below the benchmark for the Assessment and Feedback theme, particularly in relation to feedback. Interventions were being carried out in selected departments.

While the University's PTES score for full-time PhD students was similar to last year, its ranking had dropped. This was likely due to the bunching of institutions in the rankings and because the University's performance in this area had not improved. Targeted interventions would be carried out in three departments and the results would be incorporated into the 2024-25 Education Annual Review and Enhancement (EARE) exercise.

Discussion

It was noted that while significant communications were usually carried out on the University's survey scores, plans were in place to increase awareness of subsequent actions taken. These communications were intended to be carried out sporadically, such as in departments where interventions were taking place, rather than through a single campaign.

Council discussed the variability between departments in the quality of feedback given to students, as well as the potential for students not to realise when they were receiving feedback. The desire amongst students for better feedback had increased as they faced more pressures to improve their performances incrementally rather than just between grades. There was a tension for staff members balancing additional time demands to increase feedback at the expense of furthering their research work.. The Department of Health provided an example of an area that had improved its feedback to students, without increasing the time spent on this.

The importance of acknowledging the University's weak results in PTES was highlighted. The strategic postgraduate review, which was being led by the PVC (Education & Global) and PVC (Student Experience), was intended to enhance the postgraduate experience. However, the University would need to determine where improving its postgraduate offering sat within its overall priorities so that could be reflected in the next financial plan. The institutional view on this did not necessarily need to be homogenous across all faculties or departments.

Members noted that the University would need to listen to students for their views on how both the feedback given to students and the postgraduate experience could be improved. Workshops were being held with students for this purpose.

Decision

Council agreed that a this should be reviewed again at the next Council meeting on 20th February 2025 and the outcome fed into the planning process.

7737.0 Degree Outcomes Statement - C24/25 - 11

For Approval

Minute

Reported

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education & Global) presented the Degree Outcomes Statement for approval. The statement provided an overview of the Degree Outcomes from the 2022/23 Academic Year which had previously been presented to the Education Advisory Board and Senate. As a result of these discussions future work was focusing on grade inflation and the awarding gaps which existed between students, linking with the University's Access and Participation Plan.

Discussion

The role of Senate in approving the Degree Outcomes Statement was discussed and what assurances it provided. It was confirmed that Senate were assured and approved the accuracy of the data but the majority of the work implementing recommendations for change took place at the Education Advisory Board which was looking for a Senate member to join their membership to ensure accountability and assurance that beneficial changes were made and implemented.

Work had taken place within DDAT looking into the data surrounding Degree Outcomes but it had not been effective so the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education & Global) was seeking approval from the University Executive Board for further resource to look into the data behind the Degree Outcomes. Council welcomed the commissioning of this work given the persistent differentials that were highlighted within the data sets.

Decision

Council approved the Degree Outcomes Statement for publication on the University website with delegated authority to the Head of Academic Registry to update the statement with the appropriate term to replace BAME once an institutional stance was agreed upon.

7738.0 Amendments to Ordinances - Self Archiving and Copyright Policy (Rights Retention) - C24/25 - 12

For Approval

Minute Reported

Council received the report proposing changes to Ordinance 22.3. It was explained that Senate had approved the new Self-Archiving and Copyright Policy, and the change to the Ordinances was needed to implement it.

Decision

Council approved the proposed amendment to University Ordinance 22.3 relating to intellectual property.

7739.0 Students' Union Top 10: Executive Plan - C24/25 - 13

For Noting

Minute Reported

Council received presentation slides giving an update on the methodology and approach for the 2024-25 SU Top Ten (a pdf of the slides is available on Decision Time). The SU Top Ten was unique in the sector and demonstrated how student experience was prioritised at the University of Bath. An extra column had been added this year to show measures of success. SU Officers owned each of the priorities, with the SU President maintaining oversight.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) reiterated the excellence of the Top Ten scheme and how many of the issues were aligned with what the University had already been working on.

Discussion

A question was raised about the impact that charging for some extracurricular courses, which were previously free to students, had on Goal 3 (Ensure students feel they belong by establishing and monitoring a comprehensive range of extracurricular opportunities which are financially accessible to all students.'). It was acknowledged that this was a factor that had fed into this issue becoming part of the Top Ten. There was a process in place whereby students could apply to courses free of charge which could be communicated more widely.

7740.0 Workforce Report - C24/25 - 14

For Discussion

Minute Reported

Council was told by the Director of Human Resources that the University's current workforce delivered what it needed today, but with the University's ambitions it would be necessary to develop the workforce for the future to work together better and deliver more. Leadership would be key, alongside structural changes, which would require freeing up of capacity in the HR team.

Discussion

It was asked if the paper covered both professional services staff and academics. It was confirmed that this was the case, and it was hoped that it would be possible to downplay the differences between the two groups of staff.

Council asked if HR currently had the capacity to do everything required of it, and if not, how would it be able to develop the workforce. It was suggested that HR was under-resourced and operating inefficient processes, and that freeing up capacity by ensuring tasks sat at the appropriate grade level, removing unnecessary bureaucracy, and managing expectations would be vital.

This would be a significant change, with more delegation, empowerment, accountability, tolerance, and reliance on judgement. It would require a clearer definition of what leadership means, alongside clearer defined delegation routes.

Council suggested that, although there was a lot of work being done in the EDI space, output did not necessarily reflect this and that more could be done. It was accepted that although the University had started on the EDI journey there was still a long way to travel.

Lay members who had been through this process in other sectors were encouraged to contact the Director of HR to discuss further.

7741.0 Governance Framework Review Project Board Update - C24/25 - 15

Purpose - For Discussion

Minute Reported

The Interim Head of Governance presented the update on the work of the Governance Framework Review Project Board. The Statutes had been approved by the Privy Council in September and work had commenced on further revisions to the Statutes and Ordinances so they would be ready for approval for implementation in the 2025/26 Academic Year.

Discussion

It was noted that the Chair of Council aimed to have revisions complete on most of the Statutes, bar Statute 25 which required more consultation in comparison to the other statutes, before the end of the academic year.

7742.0 Approval of Re-Appointment of Treasurer C24/25 - 16

The Treasurer left the meeting

Decision

Council approved the reappointment of Calum Mercer as University Treasurer and lay member of Council for a further three years until 31 January 2028.

The Treasurer returned to the meeting

7743.0 Remuneration Committee - C24/25 - 17

For Approval

Minute

Reported

Council noted the report from the Remuneration Committee after its meeting on 22 October 2024.

Decision

Council **approved** the Remuneration Committee Terms of Reference 2024/25, subject to an amendment to the membership composition to reflect that there were '2 lay members of Council plus Chair of Council ex officio'.

7744.0 Modern Slavery Report - C24/25 - 18

For Approval

Decision

Council approved the content and publishing of the proposed modern slavery and human trafficking statement for 2023/24.

7745.0 Annual Prevent Report C24/25 - 19

Purpose - For Approval

Decision

The Annual Prevent Report was approved without comment.

7746.0 Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee Summary Report - C24/25 - 20

Purpose - For Noting

Minute

Reported

Council received the summary report from the meeting of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee. The Chair of Council had acted as Chair for the Committee in the absence of the new Chair and noted that the Committee would likely be requesting more visible championing from the University Executive Board moving forward.

7747.0 Approval of Committee Terms of Reference - C24/25 - 21A - C

For Approval

Minute

It was noted that Council members on sub-committees were renewed annually.

It was requested that the ARAC Terms of Reference be updated to reflect recent membership changes.

It was noted that in relation to ASC Council would need assurance that the processes were working as expected by the Executive.

Decision

The Terms of Reference for EDIC, ARAC, and ASC were approved subject to these changes.

7750.0 Redundancy Committee - C24/25 - 23

For Approval

Decision

Council approved the cases for redundancy that had been referred by the Redundancy Committee from its meeting on 10th September 2024.

7751.0 Honorary Degrees Summary Report - C24/25 - 24

For Approval

Council noted the report from the Honorary Degrees Committee after its meeting on 16 October 2024.

Decision

Council **approved** the two recommended individuals for the award of a President's Award.

Decision

Council **approved** the Honorary Degrees Committee's Terms of Reference for 2024/25 subject to an amendment to the membership composition to show that Council members were renewable on an annual basis.

END

Attendees

Members Attended

Jimena Alamo

Maria Bond

Teslim Bukoye

Pamela Chesters – Chair

Kate Ehrig-Page

Timothy Ford (*To item 7734 only*)

Sabina Gheduzzi

Alun Griffiths

Dot Griffiths

Calum Mercer – Treasurer

David Moon

Jo Rhoden

Paul Shepherd

Anthony Smith

Amber Snary

Phil Taylor – Vice-Chancellor

In Attendance

Ghazwa Alwani-Starr – Chief Operating Officer

Richard Brooks – Director of Human Resources (*Item 7740 only*)

Andrew Browning – Interim Head of Governance (Meeting Secretary)

Julian Chaudhuri – PVC (Education & Global)

Jason Harper – Head of Library Research Services (*Item 7738 only*)

Andrew Ross – Observer

Cassie Wilson – PVC (Student Experience)

Martin Williams – Director of Finance

Apologies

Sarah Hainsworth

Tim Hollingsworth

Don McClaverty