

UNIVERSITY COUNCIL

Thursday, 21 March 2024

CONFIRMED MINUTES

Author:	Ms Alison Jones, University Secretary, 3 April 2024
Present:	Mr Jonathan Thornton (Chair), Mr Ajaz Ahmed, Ms Sally Baines, Professor Sarah Bastow, Mr Robert Cox, Ms Sally Crosland, Professor Bob Cryan, Mr Rhys Davies, Mr Mark Fisher, Mr Taha Khan, Mrs Clare Morrow, Mr Krish Pilicudale, Baroness Kathryn Pinnock
In attendance:	Dr Laura Chambers, Ms Lydia Devenny, Ms Alison Jones, Ms Siobhan Moss (items 1 to 3 only), Professor Tim Thornton
Apologies:	Mr Bernard Ainsworth, Professor Isobel Pollock-Hulf

PRELIMINARY ITEMS

PAPER REFERENCE

This Chair welcomed Professor Sarah Bastow to the meeting as a new member of Council. The Director of Human Resources was also welcomed.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 1.1 The Chair declared an interest in item 8 (Chair of Council succession planning).

2. COUNCIL SHAREPOINT DEMONSTRATION

Presentation

- 2.1 The Senior Governance Officer provided members with a demonstration of the new Council Sharepoint site (replacing the old portal), highlighting that access would be available via a direct link from the University home webpage. A University email address would be required to log in to the site, and further details would be sent to external members. Members were asked to forward any feedback on the site to the Senior Governance Officer and Council thanked the governance team for its work on creating the new Sharepoint area.

3. MAJOR ITEM FOR DISCUSSION

Financial Sustainability

Presentation

- 3.1 The Vice-Chancellor briefed members on the findings of a recently published report by PwC on the financial sustainability of the higher education sector.¹ Members noted that the projections outlined within the PwC report were likely to be optimistic, and it was now predicted that over half of all higher education institutions (HEIs) were expected to be in a deficit position.
- 3.2 The Vice-Chancellor summarised the substantive issues affecting HEIs at the current time, which included changes to the external job market, the continued cost of living crisis, and the increasing availability of employment opportunities, which had resulted in certain demographic groups choosing not to enter higher education. In turn, this had created recruitment

¹ PwC (2023), *UK Higher Education Financial Sustainability Report* (available to download [here](#)).

challenges for those HEIs that traditionally recruited from these markets. Furthermore, recent government policy changes to visas for dependants, increased visa and health surcharge costs for international applicants, the potential uncertainty around the future of post-study visas, and increased competition from other international markets such as Canada and Australia had already impacted on overseas recruitment within the sector, creating increased competition for Home and international students among UK HEIs. Steps taken by HEIs to mitigate these actions included changes to entry tariffs, increasingly aggressive marketing campaigns, and redundancy programmes.

3.3

[REDACTED]

3.4

[REDACTED]

3.5

[REDACTED]

3.6 University Council **resolved** to amend two key performance indicators relating to the Financial Sustainability and Growth and Efficiency elements of the Strategy Map.* The Vice-Chancellor expressed his thanks to SLT for its work in addressing the challenges facing the University and sector more widely.

The Director of Human Resources left the meeting.

4. MINUTES

4.1 **Resolved:** that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2023 be accepted as a correct record.

UC_2024_03_21_P4

5. MATTERS ARISING

5.1 There were no matters arising.

6. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

6.1 The Chair had no items of business to raise.

7. VICE-CHANCELLOR'S BUSINESS

Presentation

7.1 The Vice-Chancellor updated members on a wide range of news from across the University, including:

- The Huddersfield Business School had been awarded the Times Higher Business School of the Year as part of the Times Higher Education (THE) Awards 2023.
- Construction of the new National Health Innovation Campus celebrated a key milestone with a topping out ceremony held at its first building named after Daphne Steele, the UK's first black matron.
- The latest figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) showed that the University had maintained its outstanding reputation for investing in the quality and qualifications of staff. The University of Huddersfield is the national leader across the three main measures for teaching qualifications, higher qualifications, and doctorates.
- The University achieved a top 5 ranking in reducing equality, promoting a peaceful and inclusive society, addressing sustainability issues, providing inclusive and quality education for all, and providing decent work and economic growth as part of the THE Impact Rankings 2023. More than 1,500 institutions from across the world participated in this survey.
- The University also ranked among the world's best for nine subjects in the QS World University Rankings (Performing Arts, Communication and Media Studies, Petroleum Engineering, Education, English Language and Literature, Sociology, Mechanical Engineering, Aeronautical and Manufacturing, Business and Management Studies, and Computer Science and Information Systems).
- Emeritus Professor Anne Gregory led the creation of a new tool for World Health Organization Europe, which would be used to bring the right mix of skilled people together to best respond to large-scale health emergencies.
- The University received almost £250,000 from the Office for Students (OfS) to strengthen its range of degree apprenticeships, introducing new degree apprenticeships in Registered Nursing, Diagnostic Radiography and Chartered Management.
- The University's Centre for Precision Technologies had been successful in its joint bid to Horizon Europe for a grant of €377,000 to work in conjunction with 17 European partners. The research project would combine the expertise of academia, manufacturing and enterprise to develop a flexible laser-based manufacturing system over a period of three years.
- The School of Human and Health Sciences had been awarded the Athena Swan Bronze Award for gender equality in recognition of its commitment to progressing equality within the School.
- Laura Forester-Green, a Knowledge Transfer Partnership Manager at the University, had received the Knowledge Exchange (KE) Professional of the Year award at the KE Awards 2023 for her work on establishing the central office for managing knowledge transfer partnerships at the University.

- Sarah Shaw, Clinical Services Manager in the School of Human and Health Sciences, had been named as a Queen's Nurse, one of the highest accolades available to the profession for nurses who have demonstrated a high level of commitment to patient care, nursing practice, learning, and leadership.
- University of Huddersfield student Mariam Habib was named the overall winner at the 2023 Yorkshire Asian Young Achiever awards. The awards recognise the efforts of young people of South Asian heritage in Yorkshire.
- Dr Yan Wang Preston in the School of Arts and Humanities had received the new Royal Photographic Society environmental prize.
- The University of Huddersfield was delighted to welcome Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Edinburgh to the University campus when she visited key facilities and met staff and students. The tour involved visiting the University's Jo Cox More in Common Centre to meet CMI Chartered Managers and the refurbished science facilities in the Joseph Priestley Building, including the Optometry department and Valli Opticians.

8. UNIVERSITY SECRETARY'S BUSINESS

8.1 The University Secretary briefed members on a range of governance matters which had been considered by the Governance and Membership Committee at its meeting on 20 February 2024, including:

UC_2024_03_21_P8

- Revisions to the University's Freedom of Speech Policy, and associated amendments to the Instrument and Articles of Government. It was noted that the OfS had opened a consultation period regarding freedom of speech which would result in further amendments to OfS guidance. In turn, this was likely to require further amendments to University governance documents and policies.
- The positive outcome of the recent Prevent accountability and data return from the OfS.
- Succession planning matters, including a proposal to extend the current term of office for the Chair of University Council by twelve months, and the appointment of the next Chair of Estates and Finance Committee.
- A recommendation for a new external member to join University Council.
- The updated governance action plan, noting that all actions had been completed.
- An updated schedule for governor engagement, designed to aid Council members' further understanding of the broad range of business undertaken by the University.
- The application of the University Seal since the last meeting.

The Chair of Council stepped out of the meeting at this point. Mr Mark Fisher temporarily assumed the role of Chair during the Chair's absence.

8.2 The University Secretary briefed members on the discussions held at Governance and Membership Committee regarding succession planning for the Chair of Council, and the proposal to extend the term of office for the current incumbent by twelve months. Given the uncertainties and financial pressures facing the HE sector as a whole, it was agreed that the expected financial forecast and associated actions to address this (as outlined in item 3) would require an extended period of oversight and reflection, and the

University would benefit from the experience and knowledge of the current Chair of Council in overseeing the implementation of the actions proposed. The University Secretary confirmed that an extension of office beyond the defined term of office (and any future extensions) were categorised as a reportable event by the OfS and may require OfS approval. To date, a response to the University's submission had not been received, and it was noted that it was often the case that a non-response indicated that the OfS did not have a concern.

- 8.3 Council members **resolved** to approve the recommendation to extend the current term of office of Mr Jonathan Thornton as Chair of Council by one year to July 2026 (to include the continuation of his associated Council Committee roles), subject to any representations from the OfS.

The Chair of Council rejoined the meeting.

- 8.4 University Council **resolved** to approve the following matters, as recommended by Governance and Membership Committee:

- The amended Freedom of Speech Policy and updated Instruments and Articles of Government.
- The nomination of Professor Isobel Pollock-Hulf as the next Chair of Estates and Finance Committee for a three-year period from 1 August 2024 (following the end of Mr Mark Fisher's term of office). Members noted that this concurrently extended her term of office on University Council by three years as permitted within the University's rules around Council and Committee membership.
- The nomination of **Bishop Smitha Prasadam** as a new external member of Council.

Baroness Kathryn Pinnock joined the meeting at this point.

INSPIRING:

9. STUDENTS' UNION REPORT

- 9.1 The Huddersfield Students' Union (HSU) President updated members on a range of SU activities, including:

UC_2024_03_21_P9

- The outcomes of the recent HSU Sabbatical Officer elections. Voter turnout was higher than in previous years, despite voting taking place over a shortened period.
- The appointment of Lydia Blundell, currently the HSU's Head of Engagement, as the new Chief Executive Officer of the HSU.
- Collaboration with the International Office and Finance around implementing tuition fee instalments for international students. This action had been taken in response to the Big Idea initiative run by the HSU.
- Work around Freedom of Speech and updating associated policies.
- Working with Estates, Disability Services and HR on the accessibility of the campus for persons with a disability.
- An overview of HSU Societies activity, including sporting successes, fundraising activities, and notification of this year's Varsity on 17 April.
- On-going awareness raising around voter registration in advance of this year's general election, including engagement with local MPs

and the National Union of Students (NUS) on creating a NUS manifesto.

- Focusing on sustainability via events, campaigns and surveys.

9.2 Members queried what steps had been taken by the HSU to inform students about the revised identification requirements for voting at the next general election. The HSU President reported that work was on-going to ensure that students were fully briefed on all voting requirements and aware of the option to vote by post, and confirmed that a student organiser would be appointed to work with students, lead a registration campaign, and liaise with local candidates once the date of the election had been formally announced. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the University would support the HSU in these activities.

9.3 Members congratulated the HSU for its continued commitment in providing students with a wide range of support and associated activities, and wished the SU President success in his bid to become the next NUS President.

10. DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT

10.1 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor reminded members of the University's responsibility to publish an annual degree outcomes statement as evidence of compliance with OfS conditions of registration. This provided a summary of the overall trends in awards made, outlined the regulations and policies in place that were used to protect the University's degree standards, and noted any subsequent actions needed to address any challenges identified. The report highlighted that the number of First and Upper Second class degrees awarded was in line with the previous year, although a correction in final degree outcomes was taking place following the pandemic. Members suggested that this was clarified within the report.

UC_2024_03_21_P10

10.2 University Council **resolved** to approve the degree outcomes statement (subject to the amendment above), which would be published on the University's website.

GROWTH AND EFFICIENCY:

11. HOME AND INTERNATIONAL APPLICATIONS, ENROLMENTS AND RETENTION

11.1 University Council received an update on the latest applications, enrolments and retention figures for Home and International students from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. This data had also been considered under item 3 on the agenda.

UC_2024_03_21_P11

11.2



FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY:

12. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 12.1** The Deputy Vice-Chancellor presented the updated Corporate Risk Register, which had been discussed extensively and challenged by both the Senior Leadership Team and by Audit and Risk Committee. It was noted that the process for updating the Risk Register had been amended this year following changes made to the services planning round, and further analysis of service risk registers would take place prior to final approval of the Corporate Risk Register in July by University Council.
- 12.2** Members were informed of the proposed revisions made to the International and Growth and Efficiency themes of the Register, noting the reduction in the overall risk associated with the National Health Innovation Campus development (following reduced construction costs and the expectation of delivering the final project on time) and the increased risk rating for international student recruitment. In response to a member suggestion, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor confirmed that the re-presented Corporate Risk Register would refer to staff morale as a risk under the People First theme.
- 12.3** University Council **resolved** to approve the 2024 Risk Register as recommended by Audit and Risk Committee, subject to confirmation of the services planning round and the addition of any further amendments. An updated version would be presented as part of the next governance meetings cycle for final approval.

UC_2024_03_21_P12

13. FINANCIAL REPORT

- 13.1** University Council received the latest set of management accounts for the period to 31 January 2024 (as received at Estates and Finance Committee on 1 March 2024), and the Director of Finance provided members with an update on the University's financial performance.* Members congratulated the Executive on the financial position achieved.

UC_2024_03_21_P13

OTHER COUNCIL MATTERS:

14. COMMITTEE MINUTES

- 14.1** The minutes of the following meetings were noted:
- Audit and Risk Committee, 7 March 2024.
 - Estates and Finance Committee, 1 March 2024.
 - Governance and Membership Committee, 20 February 2024.
 - A summary of the Senate meeting held on 6 March 2024.
- 14.2** The Chair of Audit and Risk Committee highlighted the progress made by the internal auditors in meeting this year's planned programme and commended the Executive for the audit outcomes achieved to date. These outcomes provided the Committee with substantial assurance that risks were being appropriately identified and managed by the University.
- 14.3** The Chair of Estates and Finance Committee reported that extensive discussions had taken place at the last Committee regarding progress with the National Health Innovation Campus and associated on-going negotiations with partners.

UC_2024_03_21_P14

OTHER BUSINESS:

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

15.1 There were no further items of business.

16. AVAILABILITY OF AGENDA, PAPERS AND MINUTES

16.1 **Resolved:** to exclude the following papers from the open version under Standing order 11.8:

Agenda item 3	Major item for discussion	UC_2024_03_21_P3
Agenda item 8	University Secretary's Business	UC_2024_03_21_P8
Agenda item 11	Home and International Applications, Enrolments and Retention	UC_2024_03_21_P11
Agenda item 12	Risk Management	UC_2024_03_21_P12
Agenda item 13	Financial Report	UC_2024_03_21_P13
Agenda item 14	Committee minutes (confidential supplements)	UC_2024_03_21_P14

17. DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETINGS

Thursday, 4 July 2024 at 13:00 in the McClelland Suite, Schwann Building.

(* = Further details in the Confidential Supplement to these minutes, excluded under Standing Order 11.8)