University of Sheffield | University Secretary's Office

Minutes — Meeting of the Council

Date: 14 July 2025

Present: Martin Temple, Pro-Chancellor (in the Chair)

Claire Brownlie (Pro-Chancellor), Adrian Stone (Pro-Chancellor), Rob Memmott (Treasurer), Professor Koen Lamberts (President & Vice-Chancellor), Ghislaine Allilaire, Gemma Greenup (Items 1-24), Professor Sue Hartley, Dr John Hogan, Varun Kabra, Alison Kay, Professor Janine Kirby, Frances Morris-Jones, Phil Rodrigo (Items 1-24), Professor Mark Strong, Dr Phil Tenney, Professor Mary Vincent, Daisy Watson (Items 1-24)

Secretary: David Swinn

In attendance: Jo Jones, Professor Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid, Dr Edward Smith, Daryl Ormerod (Item 5), Amy Jeffries and Heather Macleod Jones (Item 6), Linda Goodacre and Ashley Roberts (Item 8), Pete Holladay and Vicki Jackson (Item 27)

Apologies: Kia Delgado Derteano, Professor Robert Mokaya, Rob Sykes

1. Welcome and Introductions

1.1 The Chair welcomed Members and attendees to the meeting. Apologies as recorded above were noted.

1.2 The Chair noted that a quorum of the Council was present for a meeting in accordance with Section 3(5) of University's statutes and therefore that the meeting was duly convened.

2. Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

2.1 Council received and noted updates where conflicts had been declared and/or were being managed.

There were no conflicts of interest declared.

3. Approval of Category C Business

3.1 Council considered Category C business, which is covered in Minutes 12-24, below.

4. President & Vice-Chancellor's Report

4.1 Council received and noted the President & Vice-Chancellor's report, which provided information on the principal current and forthcoming developments in the policy environment and against each of the themes in the University's Strategic Plan. Attention was drawn to the following updates and developments since the written report was prepared:

(a) National Student Survey 2025:
In the latest set of NSS results, the University had been ranked at the top of the Russell Group for the third consecutive year and was placed seventh overall in a Top 10 that otherwise comprised smaller and specialist providers. Among several areas of pleasing performance, the students eligible to participate in the NSS had given the University the highest scores in the Russell Group across Learning Opportunities, the Student Voice, and Assessment and Feedback, the latter of which had been the focus of sustained recent attention. In addition, the University was rated top in the Russell Group across a range of subject areas, and the Students' Union had been ranked the best such organisation among all UK providers. These strong results were a testament to the dedicated work of staff across the University and an institutional commitment to continuous improvement.

(b) External Environment:
The latest indications were that UK Government announcements in respect of HE reform and post-16 skills would be deferred until after the Summer Recess. These announcements would take place amid significant financial pressures at the Treasury following the Government's welfare changes and an increase in the proportion of student loans not being paid off in full. It would therefore be important for the University to work with the Russell Group and other sector bodies to make the case for HE as a central part of the Government's agenda that warranted higher prioritisation.

(c) UG and PGT Confirmation and Clearing Strategy:
UEB approved the Confirmation and Clearing Strategy for 2025 on 3 June, alongside the core principles that would anchor all decision making ahead of registration in September. These principles had informed recent Faculty Scenario Planning meetings, which entailed a review of the forecast student recruitment position in order to ascertain risks, opportunities, and the tactics required to maximise intake across all cohorts. As Clearing approached, the expected international student intake position would become clearer as acceptances, the payment of tuition fee deposits, and conversion activities gathered pace.

(d) Free Speech:
In preparation for the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act coming into force on 1 August, the Free Speech Working Group chaired by the Vice-President for Education was holding regular meetings to assure itself and the University's senior decision-making bodies that the University was compliant with the published Office for Students (OfS) guidance across the range of its activities. The core part of this work involved the revision of the institutional Code of Practice on Free Speech, on which legal advice was being sought, and the review of a large number of relevant internal policies and related documentation to ensure both alignment with the OfS' expectations and the internal coherence of these documents.

(e) Central Vacancy Management:

Given the ongoing need to manage the University's cost base in the current uncertain operating environment, UEB had agreed that the Central Vacancy Management Group (CVMG) would be retained for 2025/26 as one of the tools for controlling expenditure.

(f) Skilled Worker Visa Changes:

On the back of the UK Government's Immigration White Paper in May 2025, Ministers had announced a series of changes to the Skilled Worker Visa that would come into effect from 22 July 2025. HR was working to understand the implication of these changes for the University's 167 sponsored staff on this visa type and establishing what action would need to be taken in response. In conjunction with this work, consideration was also being given in the processes pertaining to new starters requiring sponsorship.

5. Student Experience

(Daryl Ormerod in attendance for this item)

5.1 Students' Union Strategy

5.1.1 Council received and noted a presentation from the Chief Executive of the SU on the SU Strategy that had been agreed and implemented in 2024. Particular focus was given to the following:

5.1.1.1 The most significant of the perceived contributing factors to the SU's continuing status as the top-rated in the UK, including the central location of the SU building on campus; the longstanding strong relationship between the University and the SU and the support that underpinned this; and the investment of students into the premises, processes, and democratic activities of the SU.

5.1.1.2 The preparatory work that informed the new Strategy, following a comprehensive Student Voice Survey in 2023/24 that gleaned students' views on the SU, University, Sheffield region, and broader UK HE sector.

5.1.1.3 The main components and principal drivers of the Strategy, including the overarching mission to continue to deliver an excellent student experience; the values and core beliefs that shaped this mission; the vision for the future, which rested on development of the existing strong offer, greater cultivation of students' sense of belonging in the various spheres of SU, University, and city, and amplification of the SU's external influencing activities; and the enablers of the Strategy.

5.1.2 Council commended the work that had preceded the SU Strategy and agreed that it provided a robust and ambitious basis for continued excellence in an area where sector contributors were directing specific attention as part of their work on the student experience. During broader discussion, clarification was provided that the Strategy had been designed to be flexible enough to accommodate periodic updates in response to good practice elsewhere in the sector. Members also noted that there was no clear external reference point over student representation systems, and that the SU planned to review its current model to develop one that was adaptable to students' current and anticipated future needs.

5.2 Students' Union Update Report

5.2.1 Council received and noted a report from the SU, which comprised an update on the SU's compliance with the provisions of the Education Act 1994; a review of the SU's performance in 2024/25 against the KPIs underlying the SU Strategy; a high-level summation of the wide range of activities the SU oversaw in 2024/25; and external engagement work, including SU Officers' participation in the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on International Students. The report also detailed the SU's preparations for, and indicative timeline of, a review of the SU's Articles of Association as part of the SU's constitution, which was subject to quinquennial review by the University Council under the Education Act.

5.2.2 It was highlighted during discussion that the University would be due to undertake the next quinquennial review in 2025/26 and that there could be scope to join this work with the review of the Articles of Association rather than duplicating effort. The University Secretary and SU Chief Executive would discuss the scope to link the two reviews and provide an update in due course.

6. Access and Participation Plan Update
(Amy Jeffries and Heather Macleod Jones in attendance for this item)

6.1 Further to its virtual briefing on 19 May, Council received and noted an update on the Access and Participation Plan, which covered (i) progress against the current iteration of the APP 2020/21 to 2024/25, which was based on indicative data due to the postponement of the release of the relevant OfS data for 2023/24, and (ii) work to develop and implement the APP for 2025/26 and 2028/29 that the OfS had approved in August 2024. Particular attention was drawn to institutional performance against the present APP concerning reductions in participation and attainment gaps, for which improvements had been made across the current APP period. In relation to the new APP, the related paper detailed the "whole provider approach" being taken and the centring of the APP around five Intervention Strategies (ISs) and their associated objectives. This work included liaison with the Central Apprenticeships Hub on access to apprenticeships and a wider focus on other student groups such as mature learners. Recognising the lag in the OfS' publishing previous years' data, it was also noted that internal dashboards were being created to continue to provide indicative data for performance monitoring and reporting purposes.

6.2 During discussion, Members raised and/or noted the following points:

6.2.1 Chief among the reasons for ceasing the collaboration with Realising Opportunities, despite the success of the partnership in reducing various inequalities over the lifetime of the current APP, was its focus on rural cold spots instead of the urban cold spots that were of more immediate relevance to the University.

6.2.2 In the context of the persisting cost of living pressures, it was vital that the University had processes in place for supporting applicants from underrepresented backgrounds onto both apprenticeship and direct entry programmes. There should also be a "golden thread" to facilitate the passage of these students onto undergraduate programmes. At a wider level, there was an appreciation that these students often benefited from support in the areas of financial literacy and hardship funding, which required the effective alignment of services.

6.2.3 Although internal data dashboards would be a useful supplement to the data that the OfS provided, not least because of the time lag often involved in the return of the OfS data, it could only be considered unofficial and therefore indicative.

6.2.4 There were a range of possible reasons for award gaps narrowing during COVID-19, including the impact of the Safety Net Policy on graduate outcomes.

6.3 Council would receive a final update on the APP 2020/21 to 2024/25 in the autumn, when it was hoped that the OfS data relating to 2023/24 performance was available for analysis and information.

7. Environmental Sustainability Strategy

7.1 The item had been deferred to the next meeting of Council on 6 October 2025.

8. Estates Master Plan
(Linda Goodacre and Ashley Roberts in attendance for this item)

8.1 Council received and noted an update on progress with the development of the Estates Master Plan, which had been the subject of extensive discussion at both UEB Estates and Capital Sub-Group (ECSG) and UEB in recent months, in addition to previous updates and presentations to Council. During a related presentation, attention was drawn to the following:

8.1.1 The benchmarked position of the University's existing estate relative to sector peers in the Russell Group in terms of its total floor area, student FTE cohort, and non-residential income, and how increased efficiency through a rationalised estate might enhance these placings.

8.1.2 The proposed phased approach to transitioning to a smaller central campus.

8.1.3 The need for strong interlinking of the Campus Master Plan/Future Campus Framework and the University's Environmental Sustainability Strategy to ensure that decarbonisation targets could be realised across all four Focus Areas.

8.1.4 The anticipated positive impact of the Master Plan developments on students in supporting work to deliver strategic objectives across each pillar of the University Vision and Strategy (Education, Research and Innovation, and One University).

8.1.5 The indicative impact of the campus development programme on the capital forecasts from 2025-2030 and 2030-2040, including high-level costs and assumptions.

8.1.6 Subject to Council's endorsement at this stage of the proposed phasing of the campus transition outlined in Minute 8.1.1, above, the planned next steps for finalising the Campus Master Plan ahead of anticipated formal Council approval in November 2025.

8.2 Council welcomed the plans and endorsed both the direction of travel set out in the campus transition phases and the proposed timescale for final approval of the Campus Master Plan. During discussion, the following points were raised and/or noted:

8.2.1 The phased approach did not make allowance for two pressing projects and there would be merit in reflecting further on how these projects could be delivered in conjunction with the broader plans.

8.2.2 routine maintenance would continue.

8.2.3 EFM would liaise with Sheffield City Council (SCC) on a regular basis to ensure key stakeholders were apprised of developments and that there was broad alignment with the Master Plan and wider city planning.

8.2.4 It was expected that there could be a rise in commuter students in future, and the Master Plan should therefore aim to provide sufficient non-teaching space to accommodate these students during their periods on campus.

8.2.5 It was likewise important that the broader student experience sat at the core of all elements of the Master Plan. This included building adequate flexibility into the development of teaching spaces to adapt to the evolution in student needs and provide a degree of future-proofing.

9. Report of the Council Nominations Committee
(Meeting Held on 4 June 2025)

9.1 Having noted the relevant conflicts of interest (see Minute 2, above) Council received and approved the report, including recommendations for the appointment and reappointment of Members of Council and of University Committees, as set out in the related report.

10. Capital Report

10.1 Council received and noted an update on progress of ongoing and pipeline projects in the capital programme, including projects subject to recent consideration and approval at ECSG, UEB, and Finance Committee in accordance with the Council Scheme of Delegation.

10.2 Members considered a further update, following Council's approval earlier in 2025 of a full business case Council further noted that, in September, either a further request for project funding would be made or the requisite work would be incorporated into the Estates Master Plan.

11. Corporate Risk Register

11.1 Council considered and approved the updated 2024/25 Corporate Risk Register, noting the accompanying sets of minutes from the two most meetings of the UEB Risk Review Sub-Group (RRG). Particular attention was drawn to amended processes, actions, and risks concerning the Register, and to RRG's specific discussions in respect of two corporate risks.

12. Minutes of the Previous Meeting
(Meeting Held on 1 May 2025)

12.1 Council approved the Minutes as an accurate record.

13. Action Log and Matters Arising on the Minutes

13.1 Council approved the updated Action Log. There were no other matters arising.

14. Minutes of the Senate

14.1 Council received and noted the Minutes, and approved the change of school name from the *School of Allied Health Professions, Nursing and Midwifery* to the *School of Allied Health Professions, Pharmacy, Nursing and Midwifery*, to take effect from 15 October 2025.

15. Minutes of the Council Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

15.1 Council received the Minutes, and noted the particular emphasis placed on two positive internal audits conducted since the previous update. The outcome of a third internal audit was also reported, together with key issues and areas for response.

16. Minutes of the Council Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee

16.1 Council received and noted the Minutes, which contained updates on (i) EDIC's discussion of the UK Supreme Court Ruling on the definition of gender under the Equality Act and the possible implications for the University's facilities, and (ii) the work to ensure institutional readiness with the requirements of the OfS' Condition of Ongoing Registration E6 on Harassment and Sexual Misconduct prior to their implementation on 1 August. It was pleasing to note that the recommendations and actions arising from the PwC Audit of EDI Governance at the University had been addressed in full.

17. Office for Students Update and Conditions Compliance Register

17.1 Council received and noted the register of compliance with the ongoing conditions of registration and an accompanying report providing updates on the latest regulatory developments. Attention was drawn to the University's preparations for the introduction of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act and the continuing work towards full compliance with Condition E6 (see Minute 16, above).

18. Governance Matters

18.1 Confirmation and Amendment of University Regulations

18.1.1 Council confirmed and approved a small number of amendments to Regulations II and VI and the Code of Practice Relating to the Students' Union.

18.2 Council Scheme of Delegation

18.2.1 Council confirmed and approved the Council Scheme of Delegation (Regulation III), noting that further delegations of the powers of Senate would be proposed to Council in Autumn 2025 after further consideration and advice from Senate following initial consideration at Senate's June meeting.

18.3 Council Standing Orders

18.3.1 Council confirmed and approved the amended Council Standing Orders.

18.4 Council Code of Conduct

18.4.1 Council confirmed and approved the Council Code of Conduct.

18.5 Compliance and Assurance Framework

18.5.1 Council considered and noted the updated Framework and the future actions proposed.

19. Report on Action Taken

19.1 Council received and endorsed a report on action taken on its behalf since the previous meeting.

20. Council Business Plan

20.1 Council received and noted the latest iteration of the business plan.

21. Public Availability of Council Papers

21.1 Council received and approved recommendations concerning the publication on the web of papers presented at the meeting, in accordance with agreed proposals on the disclosure of information. It was noted that a number of papers were confidential and would not be made publicly available.

22. Any Other Business

22.1 Farewells: On behalf of Council, the Chair thanked the following, for whom this was the final meeting of Council before stepping down at the end of 2024/25, for their contributions and offered good wishes for the future:

22.1.1 Professor Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid, a Class (4) Member of Council from 2023-25 who was latterly in attendance following her promotion to Professor, which rendered her ineligible to continue on Council as the Regulations provided for a maximum of two Professors in the membership category "Members of the Council elected by the Senate'. Professor Nic Dháibhéid would assume the role of Chair of the Senate Academic Assurance Committee with effect from 2025/26, and so would have a central role in preparing the Annual Academic Assurance Report that Council received at each of its November meetings.

22.1.2 Gemma Greenup, a Class (5) Member of Council since 2021.

Elections for both vacancies would be held over the Summer, with the resulting recommendations for appointment proceeding to Council Nominations Committee and Council in due course.

22.2 Council Effectiveness Questionnaire: Council noted that the annual Effectiveness Questionnaire would be circulated to Members later in the Summer, having been deferred last year on account of the work to implement the recommendations of the Council Effectiveness Review. All Members were encouraged to complete the questionnaire, which was an important strand of the continuous work to improve the functioning of Council.

23. Feedback on the Meeting

23.1 The Chair expressed a hope that Members and Attendees had valued the tours of Factory 2050 and associated buildings, and thanked them for their contributions during the meeting, recognising that this had increased pressure on the time available for the business meeting, which would be considered carefully in future.

24. Date of Next Meeting

24.1 Monday 6 October 2025

25. Financial Forecasts 2025/26 to 2029/30

25.1 Council considered the updated five-year financial forecasts. During a related presentation, the following points were highlighted:

25.1.1 Changes from the forecasts submitted to the OfS in November 2024 as part of the Annual Financial Return.

25.1.2 Performance across the forecast period in relation to core financial metrics, including underlying income and expenditure, the total operating surplus, and year-end cash balances.

25.1.3 The status of the University's mitigating actions in response to the current financial pressures.

25.1.4 The anticipated capital income and expenditure over the next five years, in conjunction with the planned capital programme, which took into account continuing projects, those with an external funding source, and those connected to both IT and the University's environmental sustainability targets.

25.1.5 Cash balances and available cash, for OfS reporting purposes, over the forecast period.

25.1.6 Ongoing risks to the accuracy of the forecasts, chief among which were student recruitment performance, the completion of mitigating actions, the proposed international student fee levy outlined in the Government's recent Immigration of White Paper, and the impact of industrial action.

25.1.7 The updates required to the financial strategy and forecasts in the Autumn to reflect material variances.

25.2 Council approved the financial forecasts to 2029/30, noting the financial risks and opportunities associated with this position.

25a. Gillies Report

25a.1 As an adjunct to the financial forecasts, Council received and noted a high-level review of the Gillies Report, which detailed the outcomes of an investigation under the oversight of Professor Pamela Gillies into the recent financial collapse at the University of Dundee. Although the recommendations arising from the report were directed at other Scottish providers, their relevance to the broader sector was clear in the current period of financial turbulence that all institutions were experiencing. For this reason, a document comparing and contrasting the lessons from the Gillies Report with the University's own current governance arrangements in respect of financial management and governance and fostering a culture of constructive challenge was also provided to Council.

25a.2 Council welcomed both documents, noting that there was a sound basis for assurance that the University's governance structures for management, accountability, and committee culture were effective.

25a.3 Council also confirmed that the high-level review and accompanying compare and contrast document should be presented to ARAC at its next meeting on 13 October 2025 for further consideration.

26. Repurposing Underused University Endowment Funds

26.1 Council considered a proposal to release the capital of a permanent endowment fund to enable it to be repurposed. This was one of a number of University assets held in endowment funds that could not be spent due to these endowment's criteria for disbursal being too restrictive and/or no longer relevant. It was highlighted that changes to the objects of endowment funds required initial approval from Council, as the Trustees of the University's endowments, before being referred to the Charity Commission for final approval in line with Charity Law. The proposal to repurpose the funds held in the specific endowment had therefore been subject to relevant legal advice and, pending Council approval, would thereafter be presented to the Charity Commission for ratification.

26.2 It was noted that both Investment Group and Finance Committee had encouraged the fuller utilisation of funds locked in endowments, recognising the route set out above for enacting changes to the objects and conditions of these funds. To this end, Council would receive a proposal at its next meeting on 6 October 2025 to establish a process for repurposing endowment funds that offered appropriate scope for scrutiny without requiring Council to review the detail of each individual request. All such requests to repurpose funds, including that made at the present meeting, would be consistent with delivering the philanthropic ambitions articulated in the University Vision and Strategy.

26.3 Council:

26.3.1 Approved the resolution set out in the related paper to widen the scope of a permanent endowment and release the full capital amount to support talent acquisition.

26.3.2 Noted the forthcoming proposal to set out streamlined governance process route for decision-making and approval relating to endowment holdings, which respected Council's role as Trustees while also delegating some responsibilities.

27. CLOSED MINUTE

28. Minutes of the Council Finance Committee
(Meeting Held on 9 June 2025)

28.1 Council received and noted the Minutes.

29. Minutes of the Council Senior Remuneration Committee
(Meeting Held on 28 April 2025)

29.1 Council received and noted the Minutes.