



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Minutes Meeting of Council

Date:	24 October 2022
Present:	A Belton, Interim Pro-Chancellor (in the Chair); A Wray, Interim Pro-Chancellor; R Memmott, Treasurer; Professor Lamberts, President & Vice-Chancellor; D Bagley, Professor Gee, L Hand, Professor Hartley, A Kay, Professor Kirby, Dr Kitchen, P Rodrigo, M Temple, Professor Valentine.
Secretary:	J Strachan
In attendance:	J Jones, R Franchi, D Swinn; I Wright (item 4); A Carlile (item 7); T Wray, C Vernon and S Thompson (item 12)
Apologies:	C Brownlie, Dr Gilvary, G Greenup, A Stone, Professor Vincent.

Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of 2022/23, including those new members who were attending their first Council meeting, and introductions were given by all attendees.

1. Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

- 1.1 It was noted that some members of Council were conflicted in relation to item 14, below, and would not participate in that item.

No other conflicts of interest were declared.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

(Meeting held on 11 July 2022)

- 2.1 The Minutes were approved as an accurate record.

3. Action Log and Matters Arising on the Minutes

- 3.1 Council received and approved the action log. There were no other questions or matters arising on the Minutes.

4. Health and Safety Update and Annual Report

(I Wright in attendance for this item)

- 4.1 Council received and noted the update and the annual report from the Director of Health and Safety. The report reviewed the previous year's activities and provided details of the University's future plans for the health and safety agenda, including building on previous discussions at Council. Members were pleased to note that the University was seeking to implement a range of actions in response to previous comments, and, in the context of the importance of promoting and developing a positive health and safety culture across the organisation, were pleased to note UEB's collective commitment to this area, and related supporting actions. It was recognised that different areas of the University had

highly variable health and safety risks but that it was necessary for all areas to place the requisite importance on health and safety. Members were assured about the extent and clarity of embedded processes and policies for higher risk areas of activity, and that the University was placing increased emphasis on health and safety across the whole institution. Similarly, one of the best performing questions in the recent Staff Survey had asked about the seriousness with which colleagues' department took matters of health and safety (see also Minute 6(b), below).

- 4.2 With respect to health, it was noted that mental health and wellbeing was dealt with extensively through HR processes, or in the case of students through Student Support Services, but further consideration would be given to including reporting on those elements through future health and safety updates and reports. Council also discussed how future updates, including relevant data, might best be presented to provide appropriate assurance that measures were being implemented and embedded successfully and were achieving their intended aims in a timely manner.

5. Category C Matters

- 5.1 Council considered Category C business, which are covered in Minutes 11-15, below.

6. President & Vice-Chancellor's Report

- 6.1 The President and Vice-Chancellor presented his report, in which he drew attention to the following:

(a) External Environment and National Policy: The selection of Rishi Sunak as leader of the Conservative Party and Prime Minister meant that the policy environment was highly uncertain, with the new PM having not made any policy-related comments since the earlier leadership election. However, it was likely that HE would not be a short-term priority for the government. Members noted several HE related policy comments made by Sunak during the previous leadership election, including proposals relating to technical and further education and a new British baccalaureate. There had also been suggestions of a review of universities research collaborations with China and the introduction of a funding threshold above which donations would have to be declared. With respect to research and development, Sunak had indicated a belief that the UK tax system did not promote business investment, but the extent of Treasury support for a UK alternative to Horizon Europe during Sunak's time as Chancellor was unclear.

(b) Staff Survey: The final response rate to the staff survey was 54% overall. Attention was drawn to the highest scoring questions: (i) Departmental leadership actively supports equality and inclusion; (ii) My manager seems to care about me as a person; (iii) supportive relationships with my colleagues; and (iv) My department takes matters of health and safety seriously. The lowest scoring questions, which had still scored at least an average of 6 out of 10, were in relation to: (i) levels of transparency at the University; (ii) career progression; (iii) having a say on matters that impact the work people do; and (iv) job pressures.

The survey was a key means of gathering feedback and comments from colleagues and the responses would be subject to analysis, including by different areas and staff groups, ahead of detailed faculty and professional services briefing sessions and a comprehensive staff update before Christmas. It was also reported that a survey would be undertaken every year, in a shorter more targeted format, to more regularly engage staff on key matters of institutional significance.

(c) Industrial Relations: UCU had announced that it had achieved national mandates in both of its latest aggregated ballots for industrial action in relation to the national pay bargaining outcome and changes to the USS pension scheme, the first time in four years that a mandate had been achieved for action at national level. The

ballots provided for both strike action and action short of a strike, including a marking and assessment boycott. National turnout was 57% on the pay issue and 60% on USS.

At present it was unclear what, if any, action might be planned and when, with an expectation that UCU would hold a special sector conference to debate the issues and agree next steps. However, there was the potential for significant further disruption across the sector and the University's priority would again be mitigating any impact on students' educational and broader University experience. The range of mitigating processes and accompanying guidance would be reviewed and reissued as the University resumed planning for any forthcoming strike or other action. This would include specific and tailored guidance for departments, and HoDS in particular, in areas that may experience the greatest disruption. The guidance would include lessons learned and successful measures adopted previously, including those intended to safeguard the important sense of collegiality between colleagues within and across departments given that the majority of staff were not UCU members and that UCU membership was not distributed evenly across departments.

During discussion clarification was provided that the University's position on USS, whereby it would favour increased benefits rather than reduced contribution rates if the financial position of the scheme improved at the next valuation, was based on clear feedback from colleagues. The issue of USS's affordability for members would be addressed by seeking the creation of a new lower contribution option. It was suggested that Council could receive a more detailed briefing in advance of its November meeting.

- (d) Research and Impact: Council was pleased to note recently reported analysis of the significant economic impact of the AMRC to the region and beyond. Members also discussed the University's latest performance in research awards (see also Minute 7, below), the uneven profile of these awards, particularly since the height of the pandemic, and related risks to funding given ongoing political uncertainty and the state of the UK economy.
- (e) League Tables: Council discussed the University position in several recently published and related workstreams, including the work of the Reputation Steering Group. Members also noted the different methodologies used to compile the different rankings and the significance of different rankings as a driver of applicant behaviour. The University's relative future performance would also partly depend on actions by other UK and global institutions.

7. University Vision: Annual Performance Update

(A Carlile in attendance for this item)

- 7.1 Council discussed an update on institutional performance against the strategic KPIs in the Vision and strategy, an overview of the current position of academic departments and a summary of performance against strategic objectives for the student population in 2022/23. The update also complemented the narrative provided in the University's Annual Report, as well as the Value for Money report that had been considered by the Audit and Risk Committee in October. Council was pleased to note that the report had applied relevant recommendations from the previous Task and Finish Group on Departmental Reviews, which would be reappraised to ensure that they remained appropriate. It was suggested that future performance updates would benefit from additional narrative to explain the implications of performance against the particular KPIs and the University's plans for achieving the agreed targets.
- 7.2 Council welcomed the intended approach to updating Council, whereby detailed presentations focusing on a particular Pillar of the Vision would be provided to Council meetings during the year.

- 7.3 Council received and discussed a related presentation focusing on the Research Pillar, in which attention was drawn to institutional performance against each research-related KPI, an explanation for this performance and actions planned or underway to enhance future performance. The presentation provided an analysis of the data for various metrics and a comparison against the previous six years, with additional detail about performance at faculty level. Clarification was sought about the University's relative research income performance against its key competitors, which would be shared with Council in due course.
- 7.4 Council would receive equivalent presentations in relation to performance against the relevant KPIs for the Education, Innovation and One University Pillars at future meetings.

8. Financial Matters:

8.1 Draft Annual Report and Financial Statements 2021-22

- 8.1.1 Council received and noted the draft and unaudited University Annual Report and financial statements 2020-21, which had been reviewed by UEB and the Council Finance and Audit & Risk Assurance Committees, and were shared with the external auditor for further feedback. The final Annual Report and audited financial statements would be presented to Council committees and to Council for approval in November ahead of publication in early December.

8.2 Going Concern

- 8.2.1 Council considered an assessment of the University's status as a going concern based on the financial results. Under the applicable accounting standards, management were required to make an assessment of the entity's ability to continue as a going concern, for assessment and testing as part of the external audit, taking into account a range of downside scenarios and the forecast impact of these risks crystallising. However, additional work was required in relation to the scenario modelling to reflect additional risks and regarding the revaluation of buildings, such that Council would receive an updated paper for formal approval in November.

9. Capital Report

- 9.1 Council received an update on progress of projects in the capital programme, including projects recently considered and approved by ECSG, UEB and Finance Committee in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation and other capital matters reported through those groups.

10. Brand Development Update

(T Wray, C Vernon and S Thompson in attendance for this item)

- 10.1 Council considered an update and related proposals for an evolved and refreshed University brand identity, following initial discussion at Council's previous. During a detailed presentation, Members welcomed the results of the recently completed and extensive pilot and testing phase, the development of a brand architecture framework to facilitate institutional implementation, and overall roll-out plans and immediate next steps.
- 10.2 Council approved recommendations for an evolved brand identity to rollout from November 2022 and noted the additional next steps, including updates to signage during 2022/23, as detailed in the related paper.

11. Equality, Diversity And Inclusion

11.1 Annual Report of the Council Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee

- 11.1.1 Council received and approved the Annual Report, including an appraisal of how the University was discharging the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equalities Act 2010. The report provided a detailed update on the activities of the Committee, to which Council had devolved responsibility to develop and implement actions, and its sub-committees in discharging the University's activities. Particular attention was drawn to updates in relation to five key workstreams progressed during the year: the development of a Religion, Belief and No Belief Strategy and Action Plan; a refresh of the LGBT+ Equality Strategy and Action Plan; the development and launch of the Disability Strategy and Action Plan; progress against the Gender Pay Gap Action Plan; and continued development of mandatory ED&I training. With respect to the latter, Members commented on the value and usefulness of a training session on Inclusion held immediately before the business meeting and led by an external facilitator, as part of planned programme of such sessions. It was also noted that the University had also produced an overarching Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy aligned with the One University Pillar of the Vision, which together provided a framework within which to progress these initiatives.
- 11.1.2 In approving the Annual Report, Council was pleased to note the progress made towards championing ED&I at all levels of the institution, and the specific strands of activity in support of this, and was delighted to note that the University had again achieved external recognition for its continued commitment to ED&I through the Athena Swan Awards. Clarification was provided that additional details about the impact of the various ED&I initiatives could be provided as implementation progressed and further data was available. Clarification was provided that EDIC's focus was on legally protected characteristics but that the actions contained under the various actions plans would support all under-represented students and staff, including different socio-economic groups. Council also welcomed the important consideration being given to issues of intersectionality.
- 11.1.3 Following discussion, in which it was suggested that comparative data about the University position relative to the city or wider regional may be helpful in future, Council commended the report and the University's achievements and future plans. These provided appropriate assurance as to the extent and effectiveness of institutional activities in this area. Points noted in discussion would be considered in more detail by EDIC, to inform its plan of work for 2022/23.

11.2 Annual Report on Preventing and Addressing Harassment and Sexual Misconduct

- 11.2.1 Council considered the report, which had been approved by the UEB Sexual Violence and Harassment Steering Group and UEB. The Report set out the extent of institutional activities in this area and reported on the strength of these arrangements as a means of assurance about the University's compliance with the OfS Statement of Expectations and requirements that had been published in 2021. A review of activities against the regulatory statement and requirements provided the necessary assurance to Council that the risk of non-compliance in each area was low, that the University's activities were well-aligned to the OfS' expectations and that there were several examples of particularly good practice that were sector leading. This was especially important in the context of a recent OfS announcement that it would consult on the introduction of a new ongoing

condition of registration in relation to sexual harassment and misconduct and would launch an investigation into the scale of these issues across the sector.

- 11.2.2 Council noted that, at present, the increase in incidents having been reported was positive, following work to encourage affected individuals to come forward and to seek help and support, in liaison with the Students' Union. Council also recognised the actions taken to facilitate reporting by staff as well as students, and provision of appropriate support. The University's new Staff Code of Conduct also included provisions relevant and complementary to this area. Clarification was provided about the number of disciplinary cases reported compared to the number of reported incidents, and that, under applicable institutional processes and procedures, there would not necessarily be a correlation between the two datasets.
- 11.2.3 Following discussion, in which the challenging and complex nature of this area was recognised, Council confirmed that it was assured that the University's approach was appropriate and was meeting the OfS Statement of Expectations and requirements.

12. Council Effectiveness Questionnaire Responses

- 12.1 Council discussed a report summarising responses to Council's annual effectiveness review, key overarching themes and possible actions in response, which would be discussed in more detail over dinner following the meeting. Members were also invited to send additional comments to the University Secretary. It was recognised that, overall, the responses were positive and indicated that Council was working well and effectively, but that the current arrangements and practices could be enhanced further.
- 12.2 Council agreed to receive a further paper at its November meeting that incorporated feedback from the meeting and forthcoming discussion over dinner, as well as an update on recommendations and actions agreed following the previous Council Effectiveness Review.

13. University-Students' Union Relationship Agreement

- 13.1 Council received and noted an updated Relationship Agreement setting out the key principles underpinning the excellent working relationship between the University and the Union. The previous iteration was last signed in 2019-20, before the impact of Covid-19. The Agreement would be signed formally by the President & Vice-Chancellor and the Students' Union President following the meeting. Members welcomed the University's longstanding positive working relationship with the Students' Union, which continued to be recognised as sector leading. The strength of this relationship helped the University deliver the highest quality education and experience for all students and ensured that the Students' Union could effectively support students and represent the student interest.

14. Chairs Transition

(A Belton, M Temple, and A Wray were not present for this item)

- 14.1 Council considered proposals to formalise the transition from Interim to Designate Pro-Chancellors and Chairs of Council and of Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, in line with previous approvals. Council agreed:
- (a) that Martin Temple assume the role of Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Council and that Adrian Belton resume his Class (3) membership of Council, and associated membership of other Council committees, with effect from 22 November 2022; and
 - (b) that Adrian Stone assume the role of Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Audit & Risk Assurance Committee and Tony Wray resume his Class (3) membership of Council,

and associated membership of other Council committees, with effect from 22 November 2022.

15. Governance Matters

15.1 Returning Officer's Report on Elections to Council 2022

15.1.1 Council noted the Returning Officers' Report on the recent elections to Council.

15.2 Council Business Plan 2022-23

15.2.1 Council noted the first iteration of the 2022-23 business plan, which would be reviewed and updated throughout the year. Members were invited to send any additional suggestions or comments to the University Secretary.

15.3 Report on Action Taken

15.3.1 Council noted the Report on action taken since the previous meeting.

16. Use of the University Seal

16.1 Council received and noted a summary of the application of the University Seal since the previous Council meeting.

17. Public Availability of Council Papers

17.1 Council approved arrangements for the online publication of Council papers in accordance with the University's Information Classification Scheme.

18. Other Business

18.1 Student Protest: It was reported that the Diamond Building had been occupied by a small group protesting against particular but apparently unrelated issues. The building had been evacuated and remained closed with necessary security arrangements in place. The University was prioritising minimising disruption to students' education, led by an Incident Management Team.

19. Feedback on the meeting

19.1 Members reported positively on the conduct of the meeting, the positive and constructive nature of discussions, and the engagement of all Members. Taking papers as read had helped to facilitate discussion but it was also suggested that additional attendees should only be invited for significant, detailed or complex items of business in order to minimise the burden on management. The Pre-Council Information Session on inclusion was welcomed as insightful and thought provoking.