

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM  
COUNCIL

4th October 2017 at 3.45 p.m.

MINUTES

Members present: Mr Ed Smith CBE (Pro-Chancellor, in the Chair); Mr Derrick Anderson; Ms Rose Bennett (Postgraduate Officer); Dame Christine Braddock; Mr Alan Davey CBE; Mr David Davies OBE; Mr Martin Devenish; Professor Sir David Eastwood (Vice-Chancellor and Principal); Mr Malcolm Harbour CBE; Mr Richard Haywood (Deputy Pro-Chancellor); Dame Lin Homer; Professor Tim Jones (Provost and Vice-Principal); Ms Ellie Keiller (President of the Guild of Students); Mr Mick Laverty; Professor Hisham Mehanna; Mrs Caragh Merrick (Treasurer); Sir Terry Morgan; Dame Una O'Brien; Professor Corey Ross; Professor Karen Rowlingson; Mr David Stead; Professor Nicola Wilkin.

Also present: Professor David Adams (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor Kathleen Armour (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)); Ms Hannah Bumford (Governance Assistant); Mr Chris Granger (Director of Finance); Professor Robin Mason (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International)); Mrs Colette McDonough (Assistant Secretary); Professor Myra Nimmo (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Mr Lee Sanders (Registrar and Secretary); Professor Andy Schofield (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor Glyn Watson (Interim Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College); Professor Michael Whitby (Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of College).

Apologies: Dr Ranjit Sondhi CBE; Professor Tim Softley (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Knowledge Transfer)).

Papers: The minute book contains copies of all written papers or reports to which reference is made below unless indicated otherwise.

17/57 Membership and Terms of Reference

Noted: the membership and terms of reference of Council (CO.17.10.01).

17/58 Minutes of previous meeting

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 28th June 2017 be approved (CO.17.10.02).

17/59 Matters Arising

Reported: that there were no matters arising.

17/60 Pro-Chancellor's Items

**Considered:** a report from the Pro-Chancellor on the one-to-one meetings held over the Summer (CO.17.10.03)

**Reported** that:

- (a) the overall feedback from the one-to-one meetings with members of Council had been positive and constructive. There was a strong consensus amongst members of Council that governance was strong and individual comments/suggestions made were in pursuit of Council's commitment to continuous improvement;
- (b) the Pro-Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor had reflected on the feedback in relation to Strategy, Planning and Resources Committee (SPRC) and had decided to extend meetings of Council by 30 minutes to give members of Council more time to focus on key issues debated at SPRC;
- (c) in response to the desire expressed for greater engagement with students, the next Council Strategy Day in April 2018 would focus on the themes of student experience and welfare and graduate employability and would include a visit to the Guild of Students;
- (d) the Chair would specifically ask academic members of Council for their views on a proposal in the same way that the views of student members were specifically invited;
- (e) the reporting of Remuneration Committee would be enhanced. Further details would be provided to the next meeting of Council in the annual report of Remuneration Committee;
- (f) Membership Committee would be advised of the suggestion at Paragraph 3(c) of Paper CO.17.10.03;
- (g) specific individual requests would be followed up outside of the meeting;
- (h) the next round of one-to-one meetings would be held during Summer 2018.

17/61 Vice-Chancellor's Items

**Considered:** a report from the Vice-Chancellor (CO.17.10.04)

- (1) Paragraph 8, PGT Induction Changes

**[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**

- (2) Paragraph 9, OFFA Access Agreement

**Reported:** that the University was undertaking a major review of its next OFFA Access Agreement.

- (3) Paragraph 10, Commonwealth Games 2022

**Reported** that:

- (a) the City of Birmingham had been selected as the UK's candidate city for the 2022 Commonwealth Games;
- (b) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**

17/62 Recruitment and Admissions Update

**COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE**

**Considered:** the report on the outcome of the 2017 recruitment cycle (CO.17.10.05).

**Reported:**

- (a) that the overall recruitment performance for 2017 entry had been strong:  
(i) to (vi) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**
- (b) the success of Welcome Week;
- (c) that the President of the Guild of Students asked what provision had been made for the additional intake of home undergraduate students. Council was assured that early provision had been made by the University, including the securing of more third party student accommodation places and the provision of extra teaching posts and support. The University was also continuing to invest in its learning spaces across the campus, including the plans for the new Teaching and Learning Block which had been approved by Council in June 2017;
- (d) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**

**Resolved:** that the Director of External Relations and all those who had contributed to the admissions success be congratulated on the outcome and thanked for their work.

17/63 National Student Survey - 2017 Results and Strategy for 2018

**Considered:** a summary of the NSS results for 2017 and actions arising for NSS 2018 (CO.17.10.06).

**Reported:**

- (a) the University's overall satisfaction score remained almost unchanged at 88.55% (89%), the sixth successive year it had been in the range 88%-89%. It had improved its ranking to fourth in the Russell Group from seventh in 2016. Nonetheless, the 2017 NSS outcomes had identified some areas where further work was required to ensure that the University remained among the best performers in future iterations of TEF. The main areas of concern were learning resources (which had higher absolute scores, but was not as strong relative to others in the Russell Group) and assessment and feedback (where absolute and relative scores were not strong). These would be the two key priorities for Colleges and Schools for NSS 2018;
- (b) that Schools and relevant Professional Services had already updated or submitted action plans, agreed with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), but Heads of School would need to be proactive in taking leadership in preparation for subject-level TEF and ensuring delivery of the action plans. Some Schools had already appointed a senior member of staff as 'TEF lead' and this should be considered by other Schools, particularly those whose NSS performance was of concern. University Education Committee (UEC) and University Quality Assurance Committee (UQAC) would receive updates from Colleges to ensure the process was being followed and that progress in key areas was on track across the institution;
- (c) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**
- (d) new wifi infrastructure had been installed in the Library to improve wifi and early indicators were that this was significantly improving student satisfaction. This was important for the Learning Resources area;
- (e) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**
- (f) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**
- (g) that the Guild Postgraduate Officer requested that a report on the 2017 Postgraduate Taught and Research Experience Surveys be submitted to Council. This would enhance Council's understanding of the postgraduate student experience, noting that this report would be submitted to SPRC in the first instance.

**Resolved:** that the response of the University to the NSS results for 2017 and the strategy for NSS 2018 be endorsed, noting in particular the importance of:

- (i) proactive management and ownership of the NSS at School level;
- (ii) the actions to address the two key priorities for NSS 2018 of assessment and feedback and learning resources;
- (iii) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**
- (iv) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**

17/64 Research Grants Performance 2016/17

**Considered:** the University's research grants performance for 2016/17 (CO.17.10.07).

**Reported** that:

- (a) to (e) **[NOT FOR PUBLICATION]**

**Resolved:** that the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Knowledge Transfer) and all those who had contributed to the success of the University's Research Grants Performance for 2016/17 be thanked for their work.

17/65 Triennial Valuation of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS)

**Considered:** an update on the actuarial valuation of USS and the University's response to the employer consultation (CO.17.10.08).

**Reported** that:

- (a) USS, a defined benefit multi-employer pension scheme, was in a deficit position which had been made more challenging by further interest rate reductions since the previous valuation. The USS trustee had demonstrated flexibility in its approach to this valuation, adopting a less prudent approach overall compared with the 2014 valuation that, although still acceptable from an actuarial perspective, resulted in a continuing deficit and a required notional increase in contributions of 6.2% if the current level of benefits accrual was to be maintained. However, the Pensions Regulator had set out a series of concerns about the valuation in a recent letter to the Chair of USS;
- (b) there was little appetite across the approximately 350 employer sponsors to increase contributions and it was highly likely that substantial changes would be required to the benefit levels and structures as part of any agreed funding solution;
- (c) the University had adopted a number of key principles in responding to the consultation, consistent with the approach taken to the 2016 Birmingham Pension and Assurance Scheme valuation and consistent with prior consultations in respect of USS. The response had been approved by the Council Sub-Group, noting that the University Executive Board had also supported it.

**Noted:** that the overall valuation had to be finalised by June 2018 and it was intended that the valuation and associated funding position would be agreed by USS and the JNC by the end of the year. If agreement could not be reached by JNC, it would go to the vote of the Independent Chair. A further consultation was planned on the valuation results, future benefits and required contribution levels in February to April 2018. It was also expected that there might be industrial action by UCU against any proposed changes to the pension scheme, although academic members of Council were pleased with the University's balanced response to the USS consultation.

*[Note: The Vice-Chancellor and Principal declared an interest in this agenda item by virtue of his position as Chair of USS].*

17/66 Amendment of Guild of Students Bye-Laws

**Considered:** the proposed amendment of the Bye-Laws for the Guild of Students (CO.17.10.09).

**Resolved:** that the proposed amendment of the Bye-Laws for the Guild of Students be approved as set out in Paper CO.17.10.09.

17/67 Scheme of Delegated Powers of Council

**Considered:** an amendment to the Scheme of Delegated Powers of Council (CO.17.10.10).

**Reported:** that, in advance of the enhancement of the reporting of Remuneration Committee, it was recommended that the Scheme of Delegated Powers of Council be updated to provide further transparency on the role of the Remuneration Committee.

**Resolved:** that the amendment of the Scheme of Delegated Powers of Council be approved as set out in Paper CO.17.10.10.

17/68 Council Code of Practice on Corporate Governance

**Noted:** that the Council Code of Practice on Corporate Governance and Related Matters had been updated (CO.17.10.11).

17/69 Forward Programme of Business 2017/18

**Noted:** the forward programme of business for Council for 2017/18 (CO.17.10.12).

17/70 Capital Projects over £10m

**COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE**

**Received:** a report from the Director of Estates (CO.17.10.13).

17/71 Affixing of the University Seal

**COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE**

**Received:** a report noting the transactions which had required use of the University Seal since the last meeting of Council (CO.17.10.14)

17/72 Items Approved Between Meetings of Council

**Received:** a report noting items of business which had been approved since the last meeting of Council (CO.17.10.15).

17/73 Any Other Business

**Reported:** that there were no items of Any Other Business.

17/74 Programme of Meetings

**Noted:** the programme of meetings of Council for 2017/18:

Tuesday 28th November 2017, 5.00pm, Council Presentation and Dinner  
Wednesday 29th November 2017, 9.00am, Council Meeting  
Tuesday 30th January 2018, 5.00pm, Council Presentation and Dinner  
Wednesday 31st January 2018, 9.00am, Council Meeting  
Tuesday 24th April 2018, 9.00am, Council Strategy Day and Dinner  
Tuesday 26th June 2018, 5.00pm, Council Presentation and Dinner  
Wednesday 27th June 2018, 9.00am, Council Meeting