

CONFIRMED Minutes for 232nd Meeting of Council held on Wednesday, 12th July 2023 at 1400 in HNZW223/224, Heinz Wolff Building

Attendees

Members of Council:

Prof Stuart Palmer (Chair);
Prof Andrew Jones (ex-officio)
Mr Mukhtar Ahmed
Prof David Delpy
Mr Mark Garrett
Prof Paul Hellewell
Ms Lucinda Hunt
Mr David Kennedy
Ms Josie Mangan
Ms Tone Rosingholm
Ms Amanda Rowlatt
Mr Suraj Shaw
Ms Wiktoria Swoboda
Dr Kevin Thomas
Dr Peter Thomas

In Attendance:

Ms Gemma Bailey
Dr Peter Cross
Prof Trevor Hoey
Prof Stephen Langdon
Ms Maddie McGowan
Mr Andrew Murphy
Dr Nicola Rogers
Prof Geoff Rodgers
Dr Rosa Scoble
Prof Claire Turner
Prof Hua Zhao

Secretary/Officers:

Mr Eliot Glover

Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed the interim Director of Finance, Dr Peter Cross to the meeting.
Apologies had been received from Dr Vineta Bhalla, Mr Chris Maw and Ms Anne Waltham.

Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations made.

Minutes of the 231st Meeting held on 15th March 2023

The minutes were approved.

Matters Arising

All actions within the summary sheet had been completed, with items 001 and 002 being discussed later in the meeting.

Chair's Business

Chair's action – Dr Vineta Bhalla would be standing down from Council and as Deputy Chair from 1st August 2023, for a period of 12 months. Vineta will be succeeded by Ms Amanda

Rowlatt during this time. Mr David Kennedy will be replacing Amanda as Chair of the Audit Committee from 1st August 2023. These appointments were approved by Chair's action following a recruitment process having taken place.

Approval of the unregulated fee increase and the change made to Council Ordinance 5, the sub-committee terms of reference had also been done through Chairs action following email consultation with Council..

OfS Reportable Events

There were none.

FOR DISCUSSION

Vice Chancellor's Business

The highlights of the Vice Chancellor's Report were briefed to Council. Members noted that the university has climbed 69 places in the 2024 QS World University Rankings and work was in progress to better understand the significant rise in rankings. In order to act as ambassadors for the university, a member requested that a small card be produced, regularly updated and sent out to members that provided key information and statistics for them to be able to talk positively about Brunel. The university was in the process of developing bullet points for staff to use, in a similar way. The bullet points could include: how many students were studying, the turnover and its research status and was work in progress.

The university's new strategy had been circulated by the Chief of Staff and comments had been received from members and incorporated into the current draft. The final version will be word-smithed before it is published. The Vice Chancellor emphasised that the strategy was high-level and designed to motivate staff, through giving them a clear sense of direction as to where the university was headed and what it was and was not going to do. The strategy was not designed to be externally facing, which was a matter for the branding.

Ms Amanda Rowlatt, the Chair of the Strategy Oversight Group, explained that in parallel to the development of the new strategy, work had been undertaken upon the vision and values as well as understanding what the strategic direction will mean for headcount across the university, student and staff numbers and the estate.

The Chair recognised that there was a question as to what role Council wishes to play in the forthcoming academic year, as the university enters into phase two of the strategy.

One member requested that at the next meeting, it would be helpful if Council were provided with an update on how the university saw the next stage of the process moving forward, what will inform the strategy and the basis of the university's current competitive position and where it wants to be.

The Director of HR briefed the Council upon the work that had been undertaken with Baxter & Bailey and the Executive Board workshop in order to produce values that were more compelling. It was proposed to have three values, these being: open, courageous and pioneering, as set out in the Brand Proposition paper.

The Director of Communications, Marketing and Student and Staff Services Group explained the rationale behind the brand proposition, that incorporated extracts from the listening exercise and the strategy development process. Members were invited to send any comments back to the Director. Members raised questions concerning how the university proposed to demonstrate the aspirations, the utility of a vision statement as opposed to a mission statement and distinguishing the brand from messaging. The Director explained the next steps to be taken, once we are satisfied that the brand proposition is right and that work will give rise to a visual identity exercise which will be brought back to the Executive at the end of August, with Council being updated thereafter. It was noted that the university's heritage needed to be reflected within the brand.

Council were content to **APPROVE** the next steps, these being the development of the visual identity options and continue discussions in respect of the brand narrative.

Union of Brunel Students Report

Ms Wiktoria Swoboda provided highlights of the report. Council noted that the request for financial support from the university to trial Unitu, an online platform to analyse student feedback, was currently being looked at by the Chief Financial Officer and involved examining the prioritisation of resources.

It was suggested that future reports contain bullet-point references highlighting where the UBS would wish specific Council support, or perhaps problems that Council could assist with. Council **NOTED** the report.

Financial Matters

The budget paper provided members with a one-year outlook. However, in the autumn the finance team would be undertaking a five-year outlook, given the launch of the new strategy and in the context of the sector challenges. The Chief Financial Officer explained the rationale for the generation of the anticipated small surplus and the amount available for strategic investment.

The finance team have agreed with the Finance committee to revisit the student number targets in October after clearance, to reassess the budgetary position on the capital side.

Members raised questions around the university's confidence in respect of attaining the projected student numbers and the implications it may have on the proposed increase in spending and discussed the factors affecting the sector and university. Council was reminded that fees had increased, which had made an impact on numbers, but this was a necessary step in the university's repositioning and it also had to tighten its UKVI exposure. Consequently, post graduate taught student numbers have also been impacted.

Council **APPROVED** the 2023/24 budget.

The Chief Financial Officer provided members with an overview of the financial summary in respect of period 9 of 2022-2023. Council **NOTED** the summary.

Audit Committee

The Chair of the committee provided further detail upon the topics discussed at the last meeting, set out in the report. In response to a question concerning AI, the Pro Vice Chancellor Education confirmed it was too early to determine if the university needed to make an investment to build this capability, however, it was recognised that staff would need to be upskilled. A working group regularly meets to monitor the university's needs in the light of the rapid AI advancement. Council **NOTED** the report.

The Risk Register had been presented to and approved by the Audit Committee, following substantial review and will be refined once the strategy has been finalised. The register presently contained plans that are being put in place and will be monitored over the forthcoming months to assess their impact before starting to reduce the residual risk score.

The Chair of Council reminded members that Council was ultimately responsible for the health and safety of everyone at the university, however, there were no mitigations referred to in the register as to how the red, amber green (RAG) rating might be reduced. The register will be updated accordingly.

The register will also be updated to include a direction of travel and timescale for change to occur, as had been discussed at the Audit Committee at its last meeting. The Risk register was **APPROVED**, subject to the provisos discussed.

Estates Update

Council **APPROVED** the funding of Gateway 3 of the John Crank Site.

In respect of St Johns CPS, the next stage will involve the conversion of three floors of Eastern Gateway back to the Business School. Whilst this would have a cost associated with it, the Chair commented that the conversion should also produce a significant income stream and Council would wish to see a business plan for the complete project, including St Johns. Following discussions concerning the business case, Council **APPROVED** Gateway 2 of the St Johns CPS project, with the move of the administrative staff over to St Johns and the conversion of the space in Eastern Gateway for academic use. Ms Amanda Rowlatt, Chair of the Audit Committee offered to assist with the preparation of an academic financial case..

Council members discussed the Celandine Route and **APPROVED** Gateway 2 of the project, whilst encouraging the Executive Director of Campus Services to look for opportunities to involve funding partners.

The Chair commented that the Student Building project had generated a long debate at the Finance Committee as to whether it should be a permanent or temporary building, which concluded with the committee supporting a permanent building, due to the cost differential and limited saving of time.

The Chair of the Finance Committee explained that they recognised that the most significant elements of the package were the office accommodation for the executive team and a new bar for the students, as opposed to, for instance, research or teaching space. Given the cost, whilst this project could be afforded without borrowings, it would require us exploring ways to raise capital over the next two to three years to enable the funding of improvements within research and teaching.

Council discussed at length the cost of the project and likely rise in costs due to inflation, the disruption caused to students by the major works and the need to cater for commuter students. The Chair reminded members that Council was responsible for the long-term sustainability of the university and the buildings discussed need to be updated. The proposal was also structured upon an incremental step basis. Council **APPROVED** taking the next step, namely Gateway 2 of the project.

Council **APPROVED** the purchase of 9 Church Road, the proposal for which had been previously circulated to members.

Members were asked to approve Gateway 3 of the CDEPS IT Lab. The Executive Dean of CDEPS presented a business case, highlighting the projected income stream from the additional students recruited. Other options had been considered, with this being the preferred one. The proposal would also benefit other disciplines, besides computer science, such as engineering. The Executive Director of Campus Services confirmed that his team had looked at the possibility of utilising the ground floor of the Wilfred Brown building. The Chair recommended that these two options be left to the Executive to decide upon.

The Executive Director of Campus Services assured members that his team possessed the resources to undertake what was an ambitious range of infrastructure projects and had the capacity to increase the number of project managers when required. A member raised a concern with using value engineering, that in the short term cut costs, but resulted in buildings specifications being reduced often resulting in longer term increased costs.

Council was presented with the draft terms of reference for an Estates Committee. An amendment was suggested in respect of the number of independent and co-opted members needed for quoracy. It was recommended that there be at least three independent members on the committee. It was noted that there was no representation from the Executive Deans and it was suggested that one be included within the membership. Council **APPROVED** the concept of an Estates Committee.

UKVI Compliance Action Plan

The Compliance & Sponsorship Manager explained that Brunel has a UKVI sponsor licence that enables it to sponsor the visas of international students. To maintain the licence requires the university to pass an annual assessment from the Home Office and to monitor its

effectiveness as a recruiter of 'genuine students' who are academically suitable for their course and have a commitment to study. The assessment includes information on visa refusal rate, course completion rate and enrolment rate. The whole sector has experienced a dip in enrolment and course completion rates and the university was contacted by UKVI in April in respect of its assessment rates. This led to a meeting with UKVI and the action plan. The VC confirmed that this matter had been fully briefed to the Executive Board. Council **NOTED** the plan.

Reports from Committees

Council **NOTED** the reports from the Finance Committee and Remunerations Committee. In respect of the Governance and Nominations Committee, Council **APPROVED** the minor amendment to its terms of reference.

Cyber Briefing: Risk Assessment

Council deferred this item to the next meeting.

TO NOTE

(Matters that were APPROVED or NOTED not requiring discussion).

Honorary Degrees Committee - Recommendations

Senate Updates

Secretary's Business

The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2017

University & Union of Brunel Students MOU

FOR INFORMATION

OfS Matters

University Events

Brunel Media Coverage

Meetings of Committees

Staff Appointments, Resignations and Leave of Absence

Any Other Business

None.

Date of Next Meeting

22nd November 2023

Council Meeting Schedule 2023-2024

22nd November 2023

31st January 2024 (Away Day)

13th March 2024

10th July 2024