



Minutes: Extraordinary Council Meeting

Time and date: 13:00 on Monday 31 July 2023

Location: Vinson Building, Room 5 & 6, Hunter Street, Buckingham / MS Teams

Present: Mr Mark Qualter (Chair of Council), Dr Keith Bothongo, Mr Toby Corbett (President of the Students' Union), Professor Hongbo Du (Senate Representative), Professor Tim Evans, Sir Francis Habgood, Mr Nick Hillman, Mr Chris Hollis, Professor Adolfo Paolini (Senate Representative), Mr Callum Roberts (Professional Services), Mr Mark Rushton, Mrs Milly Soames, Professor James Tooley (Vice-Chancellor).

In attendance: Mr David Cole (Chief Financial Officer), Mrs Maureen Hampson (Governance Secretary), Mr Clive Macintosh (Head of Legal Services), Mr Chris Payne (Registrar & Director of Professional Services), Ms Alison Sealey (Interim Director of Student Support Services).

Secretary: Mr Sam Weston, Secretary to Council
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72 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from The Lord Peter Lilley, Ms Josephine Mbuya, and Professor Jaqueline O'Dowd.

73 Declarations of interests in respect of items on the agenda

There were no new declarations.

74 University Strategy 2023 - 2028

The Chair of Council and the Vice-Chancellor led a joint Senate, Council, Executive, and SU Executive briefing earlier today, to present the proposed University Strategy 2023-2028, which had included a presentation and a Q&A session and a group lunch. This session followed a period of review to analyse the views expressed at the joint Away Days held on 4 & 5 May 2023 concerning the University's new strategic approach. Following the briefing, Council had been convened to consider for approval the new headline University Strategy 2023 – 2028 and associated guiding principles.

The Chair of Council, Vice-Chancellor and Registrar noted the following points from the briefing session held earlier in the day:

- Since the Away Days were held in May 2023, the ensuing consultation process had enabled the significant amount of feedback to be distilled and synthesised, including feedback previously taken from a number of departments of the University. Socialisation of the work produced had taken place with a number of internal groups including the Operations Group, the Deans' Group, Senate, and the SU Executive.
- Detailed plans were being developed to sit below the Strategic Plan to enable outcomes to be closely monitored via the University's governance mechanisms and tracked for progress, ensuring that the aims and objectives were fit for purpose, provided accountability, and were driven by solid data, including as relating to the University's financial position. It was important

that the Strategy was not set in stone, and was responsive to markets, changes in business practice and/or regulation and world events. The rationale for any deviation from agreed plans as a result of these factors would be proactively managed and documented. All workstreams, including the transformation and enabling programme, would be mapped to the four guiding principles and the Institutional Risk Register.

- The University's Vision, Mission, and Values Statements were felt to be fundamental to the University's strategic aims and sat alongside four guiding principles which were felt to be distinctive and a means through which the future growth and sustainability of the University would be secured. An ability to summarise concisely what the University stands for and to explain its vision and its ambition were crucial components of key messaging with relevant stakeholders.

Council members made the following comments:

- Following a request from a Council member to increase the role of Associate Deans for specific aspects of programmes and for marketing purposes, the Registrar confirmed that this would be a matter raised for discussion by the University's Deans' Executive Group.
- Responding to a question raised regarding strategic growth attributed to student numbers, the Vice-Chancellor reported that the University's student growth within the past few years was approximately 10 percent year-on-year. It was intended that growth and professionalisation would not negatively impact the 'Buckingham way', which was for intimate and high-quality education. Student number increases did not explicitly feature within the strategy; the University would instead focus on measured, manageable and sustainable growth. Financial sustainability was crucial and required generating income in order to be able to afford the necessary investment in facilities. It would be important that income generation was not focused solely on student growth. Global partnerships were considered to be a potential opportunity for growth.
- On a point raised regarding the use of the word 'integrity' not being explicitly referenced within the Strategy, it was explained that this was implicit to some of the values of the Strategy.
- The Strategy would provide key stakeholders with information they could tangibly use in their interactions with the University, and it would be important to stress that the Strategic Plan be delivered within a sustainable economic envelope. The working plans that would sit beneath would require an amount of pragmatism and innovation to ensure the University delivered its objectives. Being ambitious was important, whilst remaining realistic in regard to the capacity and the capability for the University. The Chair of Council highlighted the importance of strong communication at all times and keeping people updated regularly regarding the status of the Plan via a variety of mediums. A clear communication strategy was being developed to ensure that staff were regularly engaged on delivery.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the University of Buckingham Strategy 2023 – 2028 and Guiding Principles be approved.
- (b) That the underlying plans be presented for consideration by Council at its October meeting.

75 Date of the next meeting

- Monday 11 September 2023 – 11:00 Extraordinary Meeting with Halpin Partnership
- Monday 30 October 2023 – 13:00 (Teams/campus)
- Monday 11 December 2023 – 13:00

76 Any other business

Grade inflation

- On 21 July 2023, The Times newspaper had referred to the University of Buckingham as having the highest unexplained percentage of 1st Degree Awards. The Vice-Chancellor reported that this was a complex issue which incorporated many factors. Reassurance was provided that the right level of academic rigor was being applied and in order to evidence this for Council members, he would circulate a paper to Council members explaining the University's position. It was noted that the Times article had not resulted in any further adverse press coverage.

Joint meetings with Senate and the Executive

- Following the success of the recent joint Away Days and Strategic Plan briefing, a request was made by a member to consider including more joint meetings for future calendars. It was planned that future joint meetings would take place on at least an annual basis.

Start time of meeting: 13:00

End time of meeting: 14:10