



**Minutes:** Council

**Time and date:** 13:00 on Monday 20 May 2024

**Location:** The Winslow Room, Mount Pleasant Campus, Ring Road South, Buckingham Railway Walk, Buckingham, MK18 1RY/ MS Teams

**Present:** Mr Mark Qualter (Chair of Council), Ms Anthea Bailey (Professional Services), Ms Kristina Church (Independent Member), Mr Toby Corbett (President of the Students' Union), Professor Harriet Dunbar-Morris (Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic)), Mr Andy Dunkley (Independent Member), Professor Tim Evans (Independent Member), Sir Francis Habgood (Independent Member), Mr Chris Hollis (Independent Member), Mr Graham Jones (Senate Representative), The Lord Peter Lilley (Independent Member), Ms Josephine Mbuya (Alumnus Representative), Mrs Sarah Myhill (Senate Representative), Professor Jacqueline O'Dowd (Senate Representative), Mr Toluwani Osamolu (Student Member), Professor Göran Roos (Independent Member), Mrs Milly Soames (Vice-Chair of Council), Ms Nadia Stone (Independent Member), Professor James Tooley (Vice-Chancellor), Mr Phil Wolfenden (Independent Member)

**In attendance:** Mr David Cole (Chief Financial Officer), Professor Karen Heard-Lauréote (KHL Consulting Ltd – Item 10), Mr David Holliman (Director of Collaborations and Business Development – Item 11), Miss Olivia Jeffs (PA to the Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer), Mr Clive Mackintosh (General Counsel), Mr Chris Payne (Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer), Miss Ellie Pegram (Project Administrator (Governance)), Mr Sudhir Singh (MHA – Item 15), Mr Daniel Xu (Director of Fundraising and Alumni Relations – Item 12)

**Secretary:** Mr Sam Weston, Secretary to Council  
Tel: +44 (0)1280 820166 (Internal Ext 2166)  
Email address: [Samuel.weston@buckingham.ac.uk](mailto:Samuel.weston@buckingham.ac.uk)

## 16 Apologies for absence

There were apologies from Ms Katie Nykanen and Mr Nick Hillman.

## 17 Declarations of interests in respect of items on the agenda

No declarations of interest were made in respect of items on the agenda.

## 18 Minutes of the previous meeting

For the benefit of the new members of Council, it was noted that certain parts of the minutes were redacted for publication on the website. The text to be redacted was highlighted in yellow for Council's approval.

The minutes and proposed redaction for publication of the Council meeting held 26 February 2024 were approved as a correct record.

## 19 Matters arising

The flowchart within the Donations Policy had been updated and had been circulated for Council to review. It was noted that a Donations Panel was to be established, the membership of which would

require three independent members of Council. The Secretary to Council would seek nominations to serve on this Panel following the meeting.

## **20 Approvals between meetings**

Council noted the following approvals which had been granted by Council between meetings:

- the extensions to the terms of office for Mr Nick Hillman and Mr Chris Hollis.
- the appointment of Mrs Milly Soames to the Nominations Committee.
- the appointment of Ms Kristina Church, Ms Nadia Stone, Mr Philip Wolfenden, Ms Katie Nykanen and Mr Andy Dunkley as trustee members of Council and as members of Council's committees.
- the co-option of Mr Martin Kersey and Mr Nitesh Magdani to the Finance and Resources and Audit and Risk Committees, respectively.
- the appointment of Mr Toluwani Osamolu to Council as the Students' Union-nominated member.
- the revised 2024 Ordinances.

## **21 Chair's welcome and introduction**

The Chair of Council provided the following updates:

- An extensive search had been undertaken for new Council members looking for experts in the areas of HR, Finance, Digital/IT and Sustainability. The Chair was pleased with the talent uncovered and the enthusiasm shown by the new members of Council. It was noted that an announcement of the new members of Council would be made on the Staff Gateway and externally.
- Work was ongoing within the Governance Effectiveness Review Steering Group. It was intended that a structured series of faculty-based visits would be facilitated to ensure Council members had exposure to the wider institution. The group would further explore opportunities for Council members to meet students. The Chair noted the seriousness of the commitment required from Council members and added that the University was grateful for the time they gave to the University.

## **22 Vice-Chancellor's update**

The Vice-Chancellor provided the following updates:

- Welcomes to the new members of Council were reiterated by the Vice-Chancellor who asked all to ensure they were on the appropriate invitation lists for events taking place across the University including upcoming visits from Lord Luce and the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Ghana as well as the annual meeting of the Friends of the University.
- Two recently published reports were noted for their relevance to the work of the University:
  - The first was an Office for Students (OfS) report on financial sustainability which had been based on the annual returns of providers submitted between 2022 and 2024 as well as future predictions for the sector. The report showed that forty percent of providers were expecting to be in deficit by the end of the financial year, with a total of eighty-three percent likely to report a deficit by 2027. It was suggested that the reasons for this were the continuing decline in the real term value of income from the UK undergraduate market, the apparent reduction in UK and international applications, the dependence of the financial model for international students, and the cost-of-living

difficulties. The Vice-Chancellor was hopeful that the University would contradict the predictions of the report with the University's 2023 Financial Statements reporting an increase in tuition fee income and reduction in expenditure. It was noted that the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) would highlight relevant caveats in the 2023 Financial Statements but that the overall picture was felt to be a comparatively positive one.

- The second report was the Migration Advisory Committee's Report on the graduate employment route. Under current regulations, migrants were permitted to stay in the UK for one to two years after their studies concluded. The report questioned whether this was sustainable and had been received negatively in the media. There was criticism of universities encouraging students to study in the UK for the visa as opposed to the course offering.
- Student numbers appeared reasonable for the upcoming recruitment cycle **[Redacted]**. Whilst international numbers were down, home numbers were increasing.
- Following the University's decision to exit the Crewe campus a phased relocation would conclude by the end of 2026. Collective consultation had been concluded and individual consultations with affected staff were underway.
- A member sought further clarity as to how the University would respond to changes in the Higher Education sector including the reduction of the education premium combined with other demographic activities, and additional technological changes and the effect of these on the labour force.
  - In response to the decline in international students, which appeared likely to be the result of changes to visa regulations, the University would look to diversify its portfolio. This activity was being led by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and would ensure courses were attractive to a wide variety of students.
  - The Vice-Chancellor noted that the reduction of the education premium was subject-specific, adding that the graduate premium was not in decline for a number of the University's courses such as Education, Medicine and Computing. It was further noted that the University scored high on its graduate employment rate.
  - The Chair of Council questioned what actions were being taken to strategically flex the University's cost base. The Vice-Chancellor noted that the University could look at possibilities for outsourcing some elements of its work and that an absorption model had been brought together to understand how resources are allocated across the institution. The Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer, was interested to look at comparative metrics with other institutions across the sector in order to understand where costs could be reduced. It was further noted that the costs of some of the University's activities could be reduced by changes made through the Digital Transformation programme.

## 23 Update reports

### President of the Students' Union (SU)

- The SU had been working in collaboration with the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences to ensure that the student experience was upheld for those based at the Crewe campus. The primary concern had been for societies and groups which the SU was working to ensure continued to exist beyond the closure of the campus.

- The SU had received an invitation to the FEDU residentials to meet with students and discuss what could be offered to them. It was anticipated that this would prompt further developments in the SU's work with the Faculty of Education.
- The SU President noted that his report contained a section on student consultation which was both an operational and cultural discussion. The viewpoint expressed in the report was subjective but intended to identify an opportunity for improving the student experience at Buckingham.

#### Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC)

- The minutes of the committee's last meeting held on 8 May 2024 would be provided to Council for its August 2024 meeting.
- The committee was pleased by the running of the first normal audit cycle following the historic challenges faced by the University. Credit was paid to the Finance team by MHA, the University's Auditors. The majority of the actions arising from MHA's amalgamated 2020 – 2022 Audit Findings Report had been addressed with only a small number of new audit findings included within the 2023 Audit Findings Report. A solution had been found for the previous shortcomings in obtaining related party transactions from those who had left the organisation and a large amount of work had been done on accounting for restricted and endowment funds, the employment tax review, and the consolidation of the University of Buckingham Foundation. The 2023 Financial Statements reported a surplus of £6.2 million, however this was reduced to a £300k "Operational" surplus after the removal of 'one-time' impacts. Uncertainty around student numbers and inflationary pressures meant that caution was still needed. The Chair of ARC gave thanks to the Marketing Team for their work on the presentation of the 2023 Financial Statements.
- Internal audits had progressed as planned with audits carried out on sector themes of Harassment and Sexual Misconduct, the Faculty of Education, and Academic Partnerships. Actions arising from these audits were underway and would be prioritised appropriately.
- There had been no significant changes to the University Risk Registers. The increased risk around IT infrastructure and the new audit findings would be included in a new format of the register to be presented at its next meeting.
- The OfS's report, referenced in the VC's update, had signalled historic under-investment in Estates which would lead to future impacts, and this suggested the University was not unique in this issue, though it was noted that the under-investment at Buckingham was likely to pre-date that of most institutions. Overall, the University was on a more solid ground than other providers in relation to compliance matters but still had further work to do.
- The Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer had noted that a number of actions on the Crewe Student Action Plan were campus-specific and as such would be closed following the University's exit from Crewe. Remaining actions would be merged with the Faculty's Action Plan and Risk Register and the unique risks associated with different placements would be managed appropriately.

#### Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee (FRC)

- The current and newly appointed members of FRC met on 16 May 2024. The headlines from the committee meeting were the persistence of some legacy issues in both Finance and Human Resources (HR), including issues around bad debt, which would continue to be

addressed over time. The Chair of FRC noted thanks to the CFO, Head of Finance Operations and the Director of HR, for their work to refine policies and manage outstanding issues.

- The committee had approved a revised approach to tuition fees for the following year.
- It was noted that the 2024 March Management Accounts had highlighted a number of 'one-off' benefits and that it would be important to develop student numbers for the 2024 September intake in order to maintain the positive picture of the University's finances shown in the year so far.
- The committee had reviewed a Gender Pay Gap Action Plan as the University had one of the highest gaps in the sector. Whilst there were some explanations for this, it would be important to address appropriately and articulate clearly why this was the University's position. The action plan would be owned by the Executive Group and overseen by the committee going forward. The introduction of the University's new HR system would improve the quality, and therefore reliability of the data available on this subject.
- The Chandos Road Building renovations were on track for completion in line with the transition from Crewe. Brief discussions had been held regarding the University's Tingewick Road site, with Council discussions to follow on the principles around the project.
- The University's IT Services required investment of time and money in order to ensure the foundations were in place ahead of the implementation of new systems. There was some funding in place for this, but further provision would be needed.

#### Elected Senate Representatives

- There were no Senate matters to report to Council.

RESOLVED:

That the updates provided be noted.

## **24 Strategy and Transformation update**

The Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer noted that there were seven themes which underpinned the portfolio of strategy and transformation work:

- Improve appeal to Home Undergraduate market;
- Invest in communications provision;
- Invest in IT;
- Support people with development and training;
- Raise capital;
- Improve the operating model and;
- Find or reinvigorate the differentiation sweet spot

Progress had been made in all seven areas which would then feed into ten sub-strategies and the transformation programme.

It was noted that there was a risk of overloading staff with numerous initiatives and improvement programmes. As it stood, resources were presently stretched by the current workload but a high degree of enthusiasm for the portfolio remained. Staff continued to buy into the work and no

resistance had been observed thus far. Maintaining enthusiasm as work continued would be crucial which created a need for careful management of messaging and expectations.

The transformation programme was progressing in line with the timescales and budget originally planned, notwithstanding the need for additional investment that had been identified in relation to IT.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were taking shape and due to be reported at the next meeting.

The Strategy and Transformation Steering Group had met for the first time the previous week, the purpose of which was to maintain oversight of all elements of change and allocate resources appropriately.

Arising from discussion the following points were noted:

- The Strategy and Transformation Steering Group would keep a watching brief on whether the skills and resources allocated to projects were sufficient.
- There were two aspects to work: the methodological component, and the content component. Whilst there were apparent synergies between workstreams there was work to be done to translate into a sequency which forms part of the methodology. The Programme Manager (Transformation) would work to develop this methodology.
- There had been some progress on project definition documents which would include the setting of input KPIs for individual projects. The Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer would ensure input KPIs were aggregated into institutional portfolio level work.

RESOLVED:

- (a) The updates on the University Strategy and Transformation Programme be noted; and
- (b) That the Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer would bring a report on KPIs to the next meeting of Council.

## **25 Council, Senate, Executive and SU Strategic Away Days – 29 and 30 April 2024**

Professor Karen Heard-Lauréote delivered a presentation on the feedback and outcomes from the joint Strategic Away Days held on 29 and 30 April 2024. The slides forming the presentation were filed on the Council SharePoint site.

It was noted that the aims of the Away Days had been to reflect and celebrate the University's successes since the 2023 Away Days, consider what was working well at the University, and identify persistent barriers to progress highlighting areas for improvement within the organisation.

**[Redacted]**

Arising from discussion the following points were noted:

- It was noted that there was a strong sense of 'family' at the University with a strong cohesiveness among staff which set it apart from other universities. This was in part achievable due to the smaller scale of the University. There was a sense that all colleagues had bought in to the University Strategy.
- The Vice-Chair of Council suggested a future Away Day would require less time to warm-up colleagues and provide more of an opportunity to get into the details of the work to be done.

- Following the Away Days, the Executive Group and other relevant stakeholders would pick up on the feedback received to inform the further work required. The Chair of Council suggested it would be beneficial for the Executive Group to provide an update on the work done following the Away Days at the next Council meeting. The Vice-Chancellor noted his plans for an Executive Group Away Day to explore these outcomes, adding that the event had further provided an opportunity to develop the relationship between Council, Senate, the Executive Group, and the SU.
- It was noted that various communications would be needed to inform those who were unable to attend the Away Days of what the outcomes were.
- The SU President noted that a number of the student representatives saw the University Strategy for the first time at the Away Days. Their reaction to it had been positive.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Professor Heard-Lauréote be thanked for facilitation of the University's joint strategic Away Days and the feedback provided;
- (b) That the Executive Group provide an update at the next Council meeting on work done to action the outcomes from the Away Days.

## **26 Strategic Partnerships Strategy 2024-2028**

The Director of Collaborations and Business Development delivered a presentation on the department's 2024-2028 Strategy. The slides forming the presentation were filed on the Council SharePoint site.

- Efforts had been made by the Collaborations team to align work with that of the wider University. The mission was to inspire current and future partners and students through research, education and innovation while generating income for the University. There was a balancing act to Collaboration's work between maintaining quality and raising income. The departmental strategy highlighted five objectives:
  - Establishing new and developing current partnerships
  - Expanding Collaborations' activity into markets not currently covered
  - Looking at alternative types of provision
  - Ensuring an appropriate balance between commercial and philanthropic opportunities
  - Ensuring the Collaborations team was fit for purpose for both present and future operations.
- The University Collaborations Committee (UCC) had been re-established with its first meeting due to take place on 31 May 2024. This would allow for strategic oversight of Collaborations' activity. The committee included the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic), the Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer and the Deans to ensure that work was aligned with the faculties and schools' plans.
- A traffic light system was to be proposed to the UCC whereby opportunities would be assessed and evaluated to determine the level of resources needed to manage the partnership.
- Partnerships could be initiated by the Collaborations team proactively or reactively or by other staff members across the University. An assessment would then be made as to whether it

was an opportunity that the University could or would want to pursue taking into account the views of all relevant stakeholders. Due diligence checks were then carried out and a business case drawn up which would be reviewed and approved by relevant parties before submission to the Portfolio Development Group (PDG) for further scrutiny. Once approved by the PDG, a collaboration could be recommended to the Executive Group for final approval.

- The Collaborations team were looking at other areas where they could provide substantial contributions including fundraising and student recruitment.
- It had been suggested that partners could deliver the majority of a programme to students overseas with them transferring to Buckingham for study in their final year.
- Requirements of the OfS in relation to collaborative partnerships had changed significantly. This had created the need for more extensive caution when balancing the risks and opportunities offered by partnerships.
- Arising from the internal audit of Academic Partnerships, a number of actions were being taken forward, including the establishment of a single repository for Collaborations contracts. The team were looking to ensure a co-ordinated approach with other departments across the University which would avoid the duplication of efforts when exploring new partnerships. The annual review process would ensure partnerships were monitored correctly and that the balance between risk and reward was maintained. The reviews would be centrally co-ordinated and presented to the Executive Group along with other relevant stakeholders.
- There were at present circa three thousand collaborative partner students, eight partners, a gross revenue of £3,000,000, and a moderate risk profile. The aim was for the University to have ten thousand collaborative partner students, twenty-five partners, a gross revenue of circa £10,000,000, and a lower than present risk profile. It was further intended that the focus would extend beyond the faculties to work on areas like international recruitment with the Marketing team and explore opportunities with corporate partners to fund research projects.
- The work of the department would require continued support across the University, the alignment of principles and practice, and the building of capacity when needed.
- The Collaborations team included three Collaborations Managers, two Collaborations Co-ordinators (one a 0.6 FTE), a Collaborations Administrator and a Registry Officer. There was potential for positions to have dotted reporting lines to the faculties if working on projects that sat within schools. The structure was flexible and could be adapted as needed.

Arising from discussion the following points were noted:

- The team intended to complete the central register of partnerships by July 2024. The new TechnologyOne system would have a repository for contracts which the Director of Collaborations and Business Development would have access to.
- Bandwidth often limited the team's focus to academic partnerships, but the Collaborations department had worked with apprenticeship providers and perceived there to be opportunities to grow and expand corporate partnerships.
- The team had visited and met with other institutions to share best practice. The University's process for approval and quality assurance was in line with others across the sector but Buckingham's size and agility allowed it to explore opportunities that others were unable to.
- Partners included the Sarajevo School of Science and Technology, IBA and Learna.

- The progress of the department on its targets would be clearer by the end of 2025. There were targets in place for each year, but the primary work was being done at present to develop new partners. The uplift in later years would come with the introduction of year three and four students.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation on the Strategic Partnerships Strategy 2024-2028 be noted.

## 27 Strategic Fundraising and Alumni Relations Plan

The Director of Fundraising and Alumni Relations provided a summary of the Fundraising and Alumni Relations Strategy, with the slides of a presentation on this subject having been circulated with the Council papers.

- Activity of the Fundraising and Alumni Relations team was intended to strengthen both existing and new relationships with donors and alumni. An importance was placed on highlighting the purpose for donating which, for many donors, was founded upon its mission and values or a historical association with the University.
- A priority was placed on major donors and significant alumni due to the size and bandwidth of the team.
- It was important to work with student facing functions and bring students and alumni together through meaningful experiences.

Arising from discussion the following points were noted:

- It was suggested that the strategy could be enhanced by the inclusion of concrete actions, KPIs, a list of priorities for fundraising and more details on plans for projects. The alumni network should be further leveraged to promote the University and opportunities to contribute toward its future success.
- **[Redacted]**
- The Director of Fundraising and Alumni Relations was in conversations with a number of areas across the University on their needs and wants. He was supporting projects with the Clore Laboratory, the History of Art, the Dyslexia Hub, and giving frequent tours of the campus to understand where contributions could be made. The priorities for the team were the University's Tingewick Road site and the Margaret Thatcher Chair.
- Feedback from the event held last year at 10 Downing Street had suggested that potential donors were keen to engage with the University but had not been able to see a list of priorities that they could contribute to.
- Delivery of the University's strategy was reliant on a significant contribution via fundraising activity. At present, it was felt that there was not a clear plan or set of priorities that Council could see aligned with the Strategic Plan.

RESOLVED:

That the Director of Fundraising and Alumni Relations report to the next Council meeting on progress made in advancing the University's fundraising activities, including:

- (a) upcoming planned events and activity; and
- (b) prioritisation of projects which donors could contribute toward delivery of, and the details of the funds required in these areas.

## **28 Independence, Academic Freedom, and Freedom of Speech**

The Vice-Chancellor delivered a presentation on Independence, Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech, which responded to questions raised by the Chair of Council. The presentation, the slides for which were filed on the Council SharePoint site, would form part of a paper due to be circulated to Council at its next meeting.

- The University had been founded with the intention of seeking independence from the Government for moral, economic, and social reasons. In the modern context, the scope of independence could be broadened to include 'independence of thought'.
- As a result of its independence, the University had historically been able to do some things that others were unable to such as the two-year degree. The University was also able to set its own fees which could prove valuable in the context of a sector struggling with the decline in real term income from home undergraduate fees. The University had campaigned for a greater level of regulatory freedom following the implementation of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017.
- The question had been raised as to whether the University would be in a better financial position if it relinquished its independence, but it was felt that costs and income would net out. For example, entering the Research Excellence Framework cost £1 million but may secure £1 million in funding. Careful modelling would be needed in order to reach a definitive position.
- In terms of the value of independence to the University's stakeholders, it was suggested that it meant little to current and/or prospective students but was of higher importance to donors. It also provided a tool for unifying staff and identifying priorities.
- It was suggested that the University could take one of three approaches: maintain the status quo; relinquish independence; or explore opportunities for finding a middle ground.

Arising from discussion, the following points were noted:

- The regulatory regime was fast moving which had an effect on the degree of freedom that the University was able to exercise as an independent institution. The University was subject to almost all of the Conditions of Registration that 'public' universities were subject to.
- In the present context, independence allowed the University to take a stance against regulations impacting its work. It was felt the University had been able to bring an influence to bear in this area of that beyond of an institution of its scale.
- The messaging around what Buckingham was able to do that others were unable to would need to be carefully managed. For example, a number of institutions were now able to offer accelerated degrees. Messaging would likely change depending on the intended audiences.
- It was suggested that the emphasis on independence could be lessened in favour of the other founding value of innovation.
- Independence had allowed the University to be more adaptable. This could be utilised to enhance the support given to students. The gap between fees and student loans along with

the reduced time available for paid work would need to be considered when growing the home undergraduate population. It was suggested that the Lifelong Learning Entitlement and proposed three-term calendar could help to alleviate some of the financial pressures students faced.

- The University could exercise its independence in other ways by further utilising the flexibility of not being governed by public procurement processes, opportunities offered by commercial businesses in relation to research, and opportunities to make programmes more relevant for the future plans of commercial businesses.
- The University could look to allocate some resource to do a scoping exercise on the benefits of independence.
- Stakeholders needed to understand the tangible benefits of independence and its impact on their roles by bringing the concept to life throughout the institution.
- The University would need to explore if there was an option of a middle ground and if so, what this would look like.
- The advantages of independence for international students could be explored but was often dependent on visa policies. The Vice-Chancellor would look into possibilities and discuss these with the SU Vice President.

RESOLVED:

That the Vice-Chancellor undertake further scoping of the tangible benefits of independence and of alternative options and models, as well as exploring possible advantages for international students with the SU Vice President and submit this as a report to Council's next meeting.

## **29 Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom Code of Practice**

Council received the first draft of the Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom Code of Practice. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) noted that it had been developed by a small working group and was due to be implemented by 1 August 2024. The draft was subject to further changes based on the ongoing consultation by the OfS but had been sent to a number of committees and stakeholders for feedback. The working group would use the feedback to develop the next draft before seeking approval via correspondence from Council ahead of the 1 August 2024 deadline.

RESOLVED:

That feedback on the Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom Code of Practice be sent to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) following the meeting.

## **30 2023 Financial Statements**

The Chief Financial Officer provided a summary of the 2023 Financial Statements:

- Thanks were noted to the Marketing team for their contributions towards the final presentation of the Financial Statements.
- There were a small number of audit findings whilst a number of those from previous years had now been resolved.

- The Financial Statements showed a healthy surplus which was largely due to a number of 'one-time' impacts such as the reversal of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (pension) and Crewe provisions.
- **[Redacted]**
- There was only one matter to highlight in relation to the Letter of Representation which was a missing related party declaration that had not been received from a trustee before their departure from Council, despite a request to have made a submission.
- MHA, the University's Auditors, had completed all work and reported to the ARC and the University of Buckingham Foundation. MHA were comfortable that the 2023 Financial Statements were in a position to be signed off.
- MHA were comfortable that the University was compliant with all regulations as they stood. MHA suggested climate-related reporting would likely increase in future years as would reporting of disclosures around financial viability.
- Tuition fees accounted for 85% of the University's total income with 9.6% growth seen in this area during the 2023 reporting period. Accommodation and SU Bar income had increased by 19% whilst Research income had declined by 64% as a result of a number of projects coming to an end. It was noted that diversification of income streams would help to improve the University's financial resilience moving forward.
- Staff costs had increased by 14% in 2023 with the rest of the University's expenditure growing at 1%.
- The 2023 Financial Statements showed a surplus of £6.2 million for the Group and £7.2 million at the University level, however the removal of one-time impacts reduced this to a £350,000 "operation" surplus.
- The University reported its highest level of capital investment for some years in 2023 at £2.7 million which was driven by the refurbishment of the Franciscan Building.
- Medical Property Management Limited (MPML) and the University of Buckingham Foundation (both subsidiaries) contributed £0.5 million to the overall cashflow.
- **[Redacted]**
- Tuition fees for the next year were frozen meaning that inflation would need to be dealt with by a reduction in expenditure and increased student numbers.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the MHA's 2023 Audit findings Report be approved;
- (b) That the University's 2023 Financial Statements; the 2023 Financial Statements for Medical Property Management Limited; and the 2023 Financial Statements for the University of Buckingham Foundation be approved; and
- (c) the Letters of Representation be approved.

31 [Redacted]

32 **Recruitment and admissions update**

The Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer provided a summary concerning recruitment and admissions:

[Redacted]

RESOLVED:

That the update on recruitment and admissions be noted.

33 **Executive Group - scope and powers**

The Vice-Chancellor noted that a summary of the Scheme of Delegation, Ordinances and Statutes and how they applied to the Executive Group had been included within the report provided to Council, which was in response to a recommendation that was included in Halpin's Governance Effectiveness Review report. A proposal for the Secretary to Council to sit as an observer of Executive Group meetings had been agreed, as per Halpin's recommendation.

RESOLVED:

That the content of the Vice-Chancellor's Report to Council 20.05.24 (Executive Group) be noted.

34 **Governance Effectiveness Review Steering Group – update**

The Secretary to Council provided a summary of the process undertaken in order to improve governance at the University. Halpin's Governance Effectiveness Review had been undertaken in 2023 and a report had emerged at the end of the year which was available on SharePoint.

A steering group of Council members had been appointed to oversee the implementation of recommendations and met every three weeks. It has been agreed that actions would be undertaken in six phases, leading up to the summer of 2025. The first phase had been completed and a status update was provided in the report to Council. Phase two had commenced and would continue until the end of June.

The Chair of Council noted that the engagement with the report and recommendations had been good and momentum for the implementation of changes remained strong. The Halpin report had been published on the website where regular updates would also be provided for stakeholders.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the Governance Effectiveness Review Steering Group be noted.

35 **Date of the next meeting**

- Wednesday 7 August 2024: 12:00 (Teams/Buckingham)
- Thursday 19 September 2024: Joint Council, Senate, Executive, SU Executive Strategic Away Day
- Monday 14 October 2024: 13:00 (Teams/Buckingham)
- Monday 9 December 2024: 13:00 (Teams/Buckingham)

**36 Any other business**

There was no other business to report.

Start time of meeting: 13:00

End time of meeting: 17:00