



**Minutes:** Council

**Time and date:** 13:00, Monday 24 February 2025

**Location:** Winslow Room, Mount Pleasant Campus, Ring Road South, Buckingham, Buckingham Railway Walk, Buckingham, M18 1RY

**Present:** Mr Mark Qualter (Chair of Council, Independent), Dame Mary Archer (Chancellor – for Minute 1 only), Ms Annabel Awosika (Students' Union President, ex-officio), Ms Anthea Bailey (Professional Services), Ms Kristina Church (Independent), Professor Harriet Dunbar-Morris (Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic) & Provost, ex-officio), Mr Andy Dunkley (Independent), Professor Tim Evans (Independent), Mr Kamva Gcaza (Students' Union Member – from Minute 8 onward), Mr Nick Hillman (Independent), Mr Chris Hollis (Independent), Mr Graham Jones (Senate), The Lord Peter Lilley (Independent), Ms Josephine Mbuya (Alumnus), Mrs Sarah Myhill (Senate), Ms Katie Nykanen (Independent), Professor Jacqueline O'Dowd (Senate), Professor Göran Roos (Independent), Mrs Milly Soames (Vice-Chair of Council, Independent), Ms Nadia Strone (Independent), Professor James Tooley (Vice-Chancellor, ex-officio), Mr Phil Wolfenden (Independent)

**In attendance:** Mr David Cole (Chief Financial Officer), Mr Chris Payne (Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer)

**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)

## 1 Chancellor, Dame Mary Archer introduction

- [Redacted]

## 2 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no new declarations, however it was noted that the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), of which Mr Hillman was Managing Director, received funding from Mills & Reeve (the University's external lawyers), though Mr Hillman did not benefit personally from this funding.

## 4 Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2024 be approved as a correct record and published on the website, absent the redaction that had been applied and agreed.
- (b) That the minutes of a confidential meeting of Council held on 27 January 2025 be reconsidered following the meeting to enable the comments on the content of one member to be considered prior to re-circulation to Council for approval.

## **5 Matters arising**

There were no new matters arising.

## **6 Decisions taken by correspondence**

There were no new decisions taken by correspondence.

## **7 2025 Council Cycle of Business**

The meeting pack included a Cycle of Business for Council which outlined the planned substantive agenda items for its meetings for the calendar year, which would be amended from time to time to take account of other matters that emerged through the year.

RESOLVED:

That the 2025 Council Cycle of Business be approved.

## **8 Appointment of Students' Union nominated member of Council**

The Council considered the appointment of Mr Kamva Gcaza as the Students' Union-nominated member of the Council, a position that had been vacant since Annabel Awosika had taken up the role of Students' Union President.

In considering Kamva's appointment, Council had access to Kamva's biography and a fit and proper verification form which indicated no concerns regarding Kamva's status as a fit and proper person in the terms of the Office for Students' Public Interest Governance Principles.

RESOLVED:

That Kamva Gcaza be approved as the Students' Union-nominated member of Council to serve in the role up to 31 December 2025.

*(Following the approval of his appointment, Mr Gcaza joined the Council meeting and was warmly welcomed by members.)*

## **9 Chair's Welcome and introduction**

**[Redacted]**

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

The Vice-Chancellor began by referencing Sir Ken Livingstone, recalling how, after the abolition of the Greater London Council in 1986, Livingstone was later elected as the first Mayor of London in 2000. He recounted how Livingstone had brushed himself down at his first meeting and remarked, "Now, where was I?" The Vice-Chancellor expressed that he felt much the same way upon his return, eager to pick up where he had left off.

He shared his excitement about being back and his gratitude for the warm and supportive reception he had received from colleagues. He mentioned a recent dinner with the Chair of Council and other meetings that had reassured and encouraged him in his return to duties.

Addressing the recent media coverage, he admitted to being frustrated with the ongoing press attention, particularly regarding matters that were personal to him. He emphasised the damaging

nature of leaks from Council and urged members to maintain confidentiality, stressing the importance of private discussions within the University.

Reflecting on the Council's visit prior to the meeting to the Faculty of Business, Humanities and Social Science, he acknowledged both the challenges, and the positive feedback received from students. He highlighted students' appreciation for the University's personalised approach to education, mentioning in particular an Achieving Scholarship recipient from Ecuador who had chosen Buckingham University over other UK universities due to its expertise in security studies. While celebrating such praise, he also recognised areas also required improvement, including the National Student Survey (NSS) scores in Medicine. He looked forward to working with the new Interim Faculty Dean to address these concerns.

He referenced a paper he had written for consideration at Council's meeting on 14 October 2024, which was later presented by the Pro Vice-Chancellor at Council's meeting on 3 December 2024. This paper outlined his perspectives on the evolving landscape of higher education and the need for adaptability. He stressed the importance of preparing for a range of possibilities, including the role of artificial intelligence, the relevance of traditional academic disciplines, and Buckingham's areas of expertise.

The Vice-Chancellor requested patience as he transitioned back into his role on a phased return over the next two weeks. He expressed deep gratitude to the Chief Financial Officer, the Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) & Provost for leading the University in his absence and to the Council members for their continued support. He concluded by reaffirming his enthusiasm for returning and his commitment to working with colleagues to move the University forward.

## **11 President of the Students' Union (SU) and Committee Chair updates:**

### President of the SU

- The President provided a brief update on recent improvements to student services, highlighting successful restructuring efforts that streamlined access for both students and staff. She noted that engagement with the Student's Union, the WSD, the Careers Service, and other services had become more efficient.
- The SU's focus this year would be placed on strengthening the student voice by properly training part-time officers and academic reps. She emphasised that the Union was not just a support body, but a friendly and approachable presence for students.
- Student activities had been highly engaging, with increased participation helping the Union better understand student interests and areas for improvement. Overall, she expressed satisfaction with the Union's progress.
- The Pro Vice-Chancellor added that the Debating Society had been re-established and encouraged Council members to support by securing speakers. A debate was already scheduled for April, and the President agreed to follow up on additional speaker arrangements.

### Chair of Audit and Risk Committee

- The Committee's most recent meeting had taken place on 12 February 2025 via MS Teams.
- The interim financial audit, which examined the processes and data migration for the new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, TechOne, identified no new or major concerns. Most past issues had been resolved, with progress expected on those that remained outstanding.

- In the CFO's absence, the Head of Finance provided a comprehensive update at the meeting on key financial matters, none of which appeared to be a major concern at this time. The financial one-offs for the 2024 year were explained, including the transfer of ABA students, the scaling down of operations at Crewe, apprenticeships, and legal and PR fees related to recent leadership issues. The Committee had been amenable to a suggestion to streamline the financial statements by incorporating a joint statement from the Vice-Chancellor and the trustees.
- The Internal Audit progress report had demonstrated that, while rectifying outstanding points had slowed due to recent challenges, good progress was still being made. The most recent audit, which was yet to be completed, focused on Student Admissions and had led to the establishment of workshops that facilitated valuable cross-departmental collaboration.
- Regarding compliance, various regulatory authorities had been kept informed about University matters and had remained supportive throughout. There was no indication that enrolment numbers had seen any significant impact as a result of recent issues. Regulatory requirements were being submitted on time following a period of inconsistency. Additionally, the Office for Students had announced an audit of the EPA provision for apprenticeships.
- The Committee had noted the revised Risk Register, where the net risk score had increased to 13 from 11 in November, particularly in areas related to collaborations and governance. All committee members expressed concern over Council information leaks, deeming them to be unacceptable. It was strongly felt that any Council member who did not understand or respect their obligations should resign. The risks associated with Council leaks, along with the need for an effective process regarding the Vice-Chancellor's return to work, were identified as critical.
- Significant progress had been made on the Business Continuity Plan, with particular thanks extended to the Continuous Improvement Manager. The Committee had approved the plan, noting that IT disaster recovery and cybersecurity plans would soon be added for completeness. A communications plan and training were also anticipated to ensure effective implementation across the University.
- The Committee had approved the Data Protection compliance policies, which covered internal policies, archiving and retention procedures, and the associated system requirements.
- Finally, an update was provided on infrastructure and security improvements. While still in progress, the improvements demonstrated solid advancements. The most significant current risk in this area remained data integrity.

#### Chair of Finance and Resources Committee

- The Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee provided an update after completing his first six months in the role. The most recent meeting of the Committee had taken place on 4 February 2025. The Chair aimed to give an overview of the current financial standing of the University and its overall position. Emphasising the importance of confidentiality, they acknowledged the inherent risks associated with any balance sheet and financial operations. A cautious approach was being taken in assessing the numbers to ensure that all potential risks were recognised.
- The Chair highlighted the University's ongoing financial challenges and uncertainties. In 2022, a deficit of £3 million had been reported, which had improved to a £340,000 deficit in 2023. However, the most recent figures indicated a £2.1 million deficit. Some of this was attributed to investments in future projects, including a transformational initiative that had cost £1.4 million. Despite these deficits, the University's balance sheet reflected reserves of approximately £21 million. Of this, £11 million was tied to restricted reserves and endowments, while £10 million

remained unrestricted. Cash reserves stood at £13.8 million, though £5 million of that had been borrowed against other assets from NatWest. Thus, underlying reserves actually totalled only £13 million, of which £5 million of this was borrowed funds.

- Accruals had been set aside for future expenses, but no actual funds had been allocated, instead, these were recognised as credits. Over the next two years, £2 million of creditable unwinding cash was expected to leave the University, which required careful consideration. Additionally, the Chair acknowledged contingent liabilities and risks, with reference to pensions.
- To bolster reserves, the University needed to either improve profitability or secure additional endowments and/or external investment. These were the only viable options for financial growth. The Chair emphasised the importance of forward-thinking strategies and the necessity of establishing a strong foundation for the University.
- Financial projections for the coming year posed significant challenges, in line with the broader sector. Tuition fees had not been increased due to market conditions, limiting the University's ability to improve its financial position. A voluntary severance scheme, estimated to cost up to £2.5 million, was being considered to achieve immediate savings while shaping the future financial landscape. The Chair recognised that the University was not immune to the various external pressures currently facing the sector. The need was stressed for the University to take control of its own narrative.
- While the University presently remained in a relatively stable position, the Chair acknowledged the desire for a stronger financial foundation. In light of this, an agreement had been reached with the Chief Financial Officer to extend the NatWest credit facility, providing a £5 million cash flow buffer. However, trustees and Council members were advised that the facility came with a series of covenants that would need to be met. The Chair noted that financial institutions often recalled funds when they were needed most. Despite these concerns, the Committee had been reassured that the University's situation was not unique and aligned with the broader challenges faced by businesses and educational institutions.
- Looking ahead, the Chair underscored the importance of executing financial strategies effectively. While there were positive aspects to acknowledge, the University needed to implement its plans efficiently and explore further endowments and external support. The update concluded with a call for strategic focus and careful financial management to ensure long-term success.

## **12 Strategic and Transformation update**

The Registrar provided a presentation of the University's progress regarding strategy and transformation, including an update on the Transformation of the Student Journey.

The following topics were covered:

- While transformation efforts had advanced rapidly, progress on strategic initiatives had been slower. This was partly due to the foundational nature of the Transformation Programme, which included digital, academic, and governance elements which were designed to be front-loaded. However, 18 months after launching the Strategic Plan and over a year since setting detailed targets, progress in implementing functional strategies had been insufficient.
- It was questioned whether University targets should be revised downward due to slow implementation. While it was considered premature for such a review, the discussion highlighted concerns about breaking down strategic goals into specific actions. The leadership challenges of

the past six months, alongside the demands on senior staff managing daily operations, had further delayed progress.

- The Council was encouraged to reflect on whether the University's focus had been too narrow, particularly regarding its emphasis on independence and academic freedom. While these were foundational values important to the University's history and establishment, they might have overshadowed the need to focus on other key principles such as academic excellence, student partnership, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Additionally, concerns were raised about whether institutional behaviours presently aligned with the University's core values of community, authenticity, responsibility, and excellence.
- Financial sustainability remained a critical issue, with contributions from core activity still too low to make the University's operating model viable in the medium to long term. Reducing direct costs and improving efficiency had not been adequately prioritised. While the Transformation Programme aimed to address overheads, tangible benefits were expected to take some time to materialise.
- A structured approach had been implemented to ensure cohesion across strategic and transformation efforts. A Change Approval Panel was overseeing all projects, supported by Programme Managers for both digital and non-digital initiatives. Despite improvements in resourcing, leadership bandwidth remained a constraint. Council members acknowledged that student engagement reflected priorities beyond independence and academic freedom, emphasising academic excellence and community. However, leadership efforts needed to better capture and support this spirit.
- It was then questioned whether the University was benchmarking itself against appropriate others when assessing costs and overheads. The Registrar explained that comparisons were made with 'micro-universities' of under 5,000 students. Previously, the University ranked lower in this group but had since moved towards the upper end. He noted that larger universities benefited from economies of scale, often employing significantly more staff in key areas. The institution aimed to balance costs, overheads, and surplus, following the 50-40-10 strategy to ensure financial stability. However, non-operational income, such as fundraising and commercial investments, remained crucial as core activities alone would not generate sufficient funds.
- Concerns were raised about senior leadership's capacity to implement strategic change, questioning whether prioritisation was necessary. It was acknowledged that the Change Approval Panel was addressing this, though managing activity without appearing overly directive remained a challenge. The need to align projects with overall strategy while maintaining enthusiasm was emphasised. Time constraints were identified as the primary limiting factor, especially given financial restrictions. Success in key objectives were seen as critical to improving the University's financial model.
- The Registrar presented updates on ongoing transformation initiatives. The University had completed the first iteration of the new Academic Regulations, with the transition proving smoother than expected. Work continued on the development of a University-wide Ethics Policy, balancing institutional alignment with discipline-specific needs. Discussions were ongoing about re-establishing a University Ethics Committee to oversee the application of policy in this area. A workload model was being developed, drawing on best practice from across the sector, though progress had been slowed due to bandwidth constraints.
- **[Redacted]** An internal audit prompted two workshops for Admissions Officers, fostering collaboration and best practice sharing. A formal project plan was expected to be put in place soon, alongside improvements to student contracts, the fees policy, and offer letters.

- Data Protection policies had been revised for legal compliance, marking the first update since 2018. Next steps included integrating data storage with Digital Transformation plans and implementing University-wide training.
- On financial control and compliance, progress continued with the pricing framework and absorption model, though its application in current finances remained uncertain. Significant work had been undertaken on policies and procedures, with the Head of Finance leading efforts to align financial compliance. As of the last update, only two audit findings remained, a substantial reduction from the multiple audits conducted within four months in 2022.
- Progress continued on the Governance action plan that arose from the Halpin Governance Effectiveness Review. Though progress has slowed in recent months, a good amount of progress had already been made in implementing a large number of improvements.
- Student journey transformation focused on unifying faculties under a three-term framework, improving compliance and student experience. Senate discussions targeted a 26 September launch alongside Technology One for efficiency.
- On Digital Transformation, significant work had been done on network configuration, addressing issues from late 2023 into 2024.
- **[Redacted]**
- Concerns were raised about recruiting staff for dentistry programs, mirroring issues faced by institutions like King's College, London. The University planned to collaborate with experienced professionals to address this challenge. Additionally, ensuring AI-driven diagnostics training for medical and dental students was a priority to meet evolving industry requirements.

RESOLVED:

That the Strategic and Transformation update be noted.

### 13 Student Recruitment and Admissions

The Registrar provided a presentation on the latest position regarding student recruitment and an update on action taken in response to recruitment challenges. Gratitude was expressed by the Registrar to the Head of Recruitment and Admissions for their contribution to this report.

The follow topics were covered:

- As of January 2025, the provisional outturn showed 613 students completing registration, aligning with previous years (637 in 2024, 579 in 2023). The Home: International split (368: 245) suggested progress toward the 60:40 target, though some caveats remained. Faculty distribution was balanced, though Computing and Psychology lagged slightly. The MBA in Strategic Leadership and Educational Leadership programs played a key role in leveraging demand from Health Sciences and Education to support other disciplines.
- Looking ahead to September 2025, applications showed a moderate 7.3% decrease, reflecting a challenging market. As a recruiting institution, the University faced later decision-making from applicants, complicating planning and admissions processes. Discussions were ongoing about the timing of formal deadlines to better structure application, acceptance, and registration.
- Offer numbers had dropped due to IT issues with the revised offer letter, but these issues had since been resolved, and numbers were now expected to recover. Acceptance rates were slightly

down, albeit the position was early in the cycle. Small intakes in April and July, particularly in Education, were growing but remained limited. Marketing efforts continued to target 2025 admissions.

- Milton Keynes was highlighted as a key recruitment area, given its rapid growth and present lack of a local University. **[Redacted]**
- Transport accessibility was raised, with suggestions to explore dedicated bus services, as seen at other institutions. Partnerships with local sixth forms were strengthening, especially in Bedfordshire, with plans to extend into Milton Keynes **[Redacted]**.

RESOLVED:

That the Student Recruitment and Admissions update be noted.

## 14 Risk Register and Regulatory Compliance

An update was given, from the Registrar, regarding the updated Risk Register and the University's Regulatory Compliance position.

The following points were raised:

### Regulatory Compliance

- Over the past four months, there had been 16 engagements with the OfS regarding regulatory compliance, including two 'Reportable Events' and two 'F3 Notices'.
- **[Redacted]**
- The Charity Commission had been engaged eight times via the 'Serious Incident' portal and had been satisfied with the updates provided. Other regulators such as DfE, Ofsted, ESFA, and LADO were expected to close their engagements once the Accountable Officer role was reinstated.
- **[Redacted]**
- A new OfS Chair was expected to be appointed soon, as the Interim Chair would not remain after April. While a successor had been identified, final approval was pending. This change could impact the OfS's approach to regulation to some degree.
- The government's higher education reform plan included discussions on modifying the OfS's powers. A November letter to Vice-Chancellors highlighted five key areas: access, civic participation, universities' economic roles, and broader reforms. The DfE was assessing whether legislative changes were necessary.
- It was indicated that there appeared to be no intention to reduce the OfS's oversight of the sector. While comprehensive, the framework mainly consolidated existing, rather than introduce new, power. Though engagement with the OfS could be demanding, their processes were considered fair and straightforward. However, evidence requests could significantly increase workload, as seen in previous regulatory challenges.

### Risk Register

- The University's risk profile had been significantly impacted by recent issues. Key concerns included governance, HR recruitment and retention, and reputation. Discussions had raised

questions about whether institutional behaviours aligned with the proper functioning of the University. The impact of information leaks on the University, staff and students was also a point of reflection. There was disappointment that, years after resolving a Charity Commission inquiry, some individuals had chosen to act in a manner that undermined trust.

- **[Redacted]**
- Reputation had also suffered due to recent events, whether from staff behaviour, media narratives, or leaks. There was discussion about forming a working group to examine these risks in an integrated manner rather than addressing them in isolation.
- In response, various Council and Senate representatives highlighted the ongoing communication gap between the two bodies. Some members felt Senate had been excluded from key discussions, exacerbating tensions and fuelling external speculation. There was consensus for the need for greater transparency and engagement, though it would need to be recognised that Council would continue to need to conduct some business confidentially and communicate decisions at the appropriate time. Suggestions included a more structured dialogue between Council and Senate and a renewed effort to build trust. Some pointed to past issues, stressing the importance of learning from them. Others emphasised the need to focus on the future and move forward positively.
- It was noted that Council itself had taken a number of steps to increase transparency. This included publication of redacted minutes and an invitation to Faculty Deans to join its meetings.
- There was presently some lack of clarity regarding Senate's role and the extent to which its business was properly reported through to Council, noting that there had previously been an approach of having Senate members provide a report at each Council meeting regarding its recent business and any key issues for Council's further consideration.
- A survey ran in the summer of 2024 regarding communications between Council and Senate had gathered limited responses but suggested possible solutions, such as having an independent Council member observe Senate meetings to strengthen the connection between the two bodies. It was also noted that Senate itself needed to clarify its role and function within the University. The Halpin governance effectiveness review had assessed Council governance, but it was proposed that Senate should undergo a similar effectiveness review process, with some advocating for an external review to improve its effectiveness and strengthen its links with Council.
- Ultimately, the discussion underscored the need for a concrete, constructive approach to rebuilding relationships and reinforcing transparency across the institution.

RESOLVED:

That the updated Risk Register and Regulatory Compliance position be noted.

## 15 Financial Matters

The Chief Financial Officer provided an update on the 2024 full year accounts and financial forecast, as well as the renewal of the NatWest loan and the revolving credit facility.

The following points were raised:

- The update covered two key areas: a review of the 2024 performance and discussions regarding the University's banking. In January, the Chief Financial Officer and the Registrar and Chief

Administrative Officers were invited to a meeting with the OfS regarding financial sustainability across the sector. The timing of this meeting was notable, as it took place prior to governance considerations around the University's financial position and data.

- The University entity reported a worse than anticipated deficit of £2.1 million for 2024. In December, the expectation had been a deficit between £1 million and £1.5 million. The budget had been set at £400,000, meaning the University fell short by £2.5 million. The ABA situation had contributed significantly to this shortfall, with an expected income of £1.6 million but only £200,000 received. Faculty collaborations also underperformed, missing their income budget by £3.2 million and overspending by approximately £200,000.
- In the fourth quarter, £400,000 of previously recognised apprenticeships income had to be derecognised due to missing documentation, leading to a weaker than expected quarter. Additional costs included £250,000 in legal fees, communications, and investigation expenses, as well as £400,000 in unbudgeted one-time costs. Furthermore, £4 million was invested in Digital Transformation initiatives, adding to the overall financial strain.
- Recruitment numbers remained relatively stable year-on-year, but against the strategic goal of 9% growth, the flat figures were a concern. The mix of students also worked against the University's financial stability, with undergraduate numbers declining while graduate numbers increased. Since undergraduate students typically generated higher income, this shift negatively impacted overall finances. The September intake had underperformed, and the final January figures were expected to reflect a similar trend, though Medicine enrolment may prove to provide temporary stability.
- The OfS focused on student recruitment and the cash position. While the University reported a £2.1 million deficit, the consolidated group deficit, including University and Buckingham Foundation and subsidiary entities, was projected at £1.4 million. The Foundation achieved a small surplus of £500,000, largely due to investment gains. The MPML subsidiary recorded a minor property sale, but this was offset by VAT provisions.
- Cash reserves appeared stable at £14 million, including £12 million held by the University, £1 million by MPML, and £700,000 by the Foundation. However, this included proceeds from the sale of the Milton Keynes Academic Centre, meaning the University effectively used £4.5 million in cash over the year. The deficit, combined with £2 million invested in capital projects such as Chandos Road refurbishments and computer equipment, contributed to this cash outflow. Additionally, a lack of focus on working capital in the final quarter led to outstanding student debt collection issues.
- A meeting with NatWest was held to discuss financing facilities as a result of a £5 million loan and a £5 million revolving credit facility being due to expire in the first quarter of the following year. NatWest suggested renewing the facilities early, given the sector's financial uncertainty. A broker confirmed that NatWest currently offered the best deal for the sector, making alternative market options less viable. While renewal of these facilities would not support major investments, it would provide some financial stability.
- The discussion acknowledged the broader financial struggles faced by UK universities at the current time, with concerns that a major institution could soon become insolvent. If this occurred, banks and credit risk committees might reassess their lending positions, potentially leading to tighter financial constraints across the sector. The government's response would likely depend on the size and political impact of any university collapse. Unlike past interventions, the OfS, as a market regulator, lacked the discretionary funds that had previously been made available through the former Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Legal firms and policymakers were now pushing for a new failure regime tailored to universities.

- The importance of renewing financial facilities before any major sector-wide financial crisis was emphasised. Tighter banking covenants were anticipated, particularly given the £2.1 million deficit in 2024. The University's ability to maintain compliance with financial agreements remained a key concern moving forward.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the 2024 full year accounts and financial forecast be endorsed; and
- (b) That the renewal of the NatWest loan and revolving credit facility, as endorsed by the Finance and Resources Committee, be approved.

## **16 Governance Effectiveness Review Steering Group – Impact Review with Halpin**

The Secretary to Council provided an update on the Governance Effectiveness Review Steering Group and the progress of implementing actions from the Halpin review. As previously mentioned by the Registrar, the implementation had slowed due to recent issues at the University. However, significant progress had already been made since Halpin completed their review toward the end of 2023.

A summary of the implementation process for various governance improvements was included in the report.

- As part of their contractual obligation, Halpin had conducted a follow-up 'impact review' call with the University in January 2025. The purpose of this call, held roughly a year on from delivery of their report, was to assess the University's progress in implementing the recommended actions and to consider any blockers or challenges to delivery. Halpin had been given access to a progress document to aid the discussion.
- The findings included reference to the earlier mentioned independent review of Senate's effectiveness. The intelligence gained by Halpin in conducting the Council effectiveness review was likely to add value to a review of Senate should they be commissioned to conduct the process. A view
- Overall, Halpin expressed great satisfaction with the progress the University had made in implementing the actions proposed via the review. They also commended the University's approach in having a group of Council members oversee the process.
- During the call, Halpin emphasised the importance of regularly reviewing the proposed actions to ensure their continued alignment with the University's objectives as its, and the sector's, circumstances evolved.
- It was considered that the short pause in implementation, along with the fact that one year had passed since the review, represented an opportunity to reassess the remaining actions and how they may be prioritised, considering the University's circumstances in the here and now and the various other transformation programmes that were presently being delivered.

RESOLVED:

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

**17 [Redacted]**

**18 Date of the next meeting**

The next meeting of Council was scheduled to take place on Monday 19 May 2025.

**19-25 Supporting Papers**

It was RESOLVED that the following Supporting Papers be noted:

- (a) The Council Register of Interests
- (b) The Executive Register of Interests
- (c) The approved Constitution and Terms of Reference of the Audit and Risk Committee
- (d) The approved minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee's meeting of 21 November 2024
- (e) The approved Constitution and Terms of Reference of the Finance and Resources Committee
- (f) The approved minutes of the Finance and Resources Committee's meeting of 20 November 2024
- (g) The unconfirmed minutes of the Finance and Resources Committee's meeting of 4 February 2025
- (h) The unconfirmed minutes of the Senate's meeting of 20 November 2024
- (i) An update report of the President of the Students' Union
- (j) An update report of the Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer concerning Academic and Student Services
- (k) The December 2024 Financial Management Pack and Commentary

**26 Any other business**

Lessons learned exercise

A point was raised by a Council member regarding the importance of learning from recent events to ensure the institution was prepared should it face similar situations in the future. While acknowledging that this particular case had reached a conclusion, it was noted that such incidents were not uncommon in public life. An example was shared from another university where a Vice-Chancellor had faced serious accusations from a student and the matter had been handled privately, without suspension or announcement. Ultimately, the individual had not returned for a second term, suggesting a resolution had been reached in a different way.

It was suggested that the University should review its current policies to ensure they were appropriate and fit for purpose. While legal and/or institutional rules may have dictated how the recent case was managed, other universities may have approached similar situations differently.

In response, the Chair agreed that reviewing the rules would be a reasonable step forward. While it was important to follow established procedures, they acknowledged the need to evaluate whether those procedures were still appropriate for the University's current needs.

Joint Strategic Away Days

The need was emphasised of the University re-commencing its programme of joint Strategic Away Days involving Council, Senate and Executive members and the SU Executive team.

Work was underway with a view to establishing a date for a joint session in the Spring or Summer of 2025, pending the availability of trustees and staff.

Start time of meeting: 13:00  
End time of meeting: 16:35