



**Minutes: Council**

**Time and date:** 17:30, Monday 8 September 2025

**Location:** MS Teams only

**Present:** Mr Mark Qualter (Chair of Council), Ms Annabel Awosika (Student' Union President), Ms Anthea Bailey (Professional Services), Mr Andy Dunkley (Independent Member), Mr Kamva Gcaza (Nominated Student), Mr Nick Hillman (Independent Member – from minute 4), Mr Chris Hollis (Independent Member), Mr Martin Kersey (Independent Member), The Lord Peter Lilley (Independent Member), Mr Nitesh Magdani (Independent Member), Mrs Sarah Myhill (Senate Representative – from minute 3), Dr Adekunle Osibogun (Nominated Alumnus – from minute 10), Professor Göran Roos (Independent Member – from minute 5), Mrs Milly Soames (Vice-Chair of Council)

**In attendance:** Mr David Cole (Chief Financial Officer), Ms Katie Gunn (Governance Manager), Mrs Diane Jackson-Gould (Director of Human Resources), Mr Chris Payne (Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer)

**Secretary:** Mr Sam Weston, Secretary to Council  
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## 1 Apologies for absence

There were apologies from Mrs Kristina Church, Professor Harriet Dunbar-Morris, Professor Tim Evans, Mr Graham Jones, Ms Katie Nykanen, Mr Phil Wolfenden.

Professor Jacqueline O'Dowd was no longer a member of Council as she had commenced her new role as Faculty Pro-Dean, within the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, which therefore made her an 'ex-officio' member of Senate by virtue of her new position. This meant that she was now unable to serve as an elected Senate member on Council.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor James Tooley, was not present due to ill health.

The Chair of Council thanked members for attending the meeting and for giving up their time in the evening. The Chair confirmed that the meeting had been scheduled to deal with the remaining matters Council was unable to consider at its meeting on 7 August 2025 due to time constraints.

## 2 Declaration of any pecuniary, family or other personal interests in relation to items on the agenda

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

## 3 Recruitment and admissions update

The Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer (RCAO) shared a presentation titled, '*Student Recruitment Update*'. Appreciation was expressed to the Head of Student Recruitment and Admissions for the work that they had undertaken in producing the presentation.

### Acceptances

- It was confirmed that, for September 2025, there had been an overall increase of 15.2% in student acceptances.

### Offers

- It was highlighted that, although numbers had increased, there were some significant 'cold spots' within the University, particularly within the Faculty of Business which meant that student numbers had become heavily reliant on the Faculty of Education which had a high level of acceptances in comparison to the other faculties.
- The overall position of offers for September 2025 had decreased by 3.1% in comparison to September 2024. It was highlighted that the decrease in offers was impacted by a higher entry criterion, a lengthier process and lower quality in applicants.

### Applications

- It was noted that there had been an overall increase of 4.1% in applications for September 2025 along with an increase on each internal metric for the University's clearing performance.

### Clearing Resources

- Appreciation was shown to the Head of Student Recruitment and Admissions and the Director of Marketing who, at a demanding time, had delivered an excellent outcome for the University's clearing process by working collaboratively together.
- It was highlighted that staff from within Marketing, Collaborations and the Faculty of Medicine had worked to support the Admissions team by answering inbound calls to the 'clearing helpline'. This was to ensure that all telephone enquiries were answered live which was noted as a considerable improvement in comparison to previous years.
- It was noted that the Marketing team had also provided further support by making outbound calls.
- It was felt that there had been a mismanagement of resources within the faculty admissions teams with annual leave and 'non-working' days having been approved during a particularly intensive period for university admissions despite there being no material circumstances to justify this.
- Enthusiasm for the process to be turned into a university wide event was noted.

### Structural Challenges

The following challenges were highlighted:

1. Fee gap
2. Outmoded portfolio / curriculum / learning delivery options
3. Ageing accommodation estate
4. Location / transport / lifestyle issues

## Visa Compliance

- It was noted that the University successfully passed the annual UKVI *Basic Compliance Assessment* exceeding the current thresholds.

RESOLVED:

That the recruitment and admissions update be noted.

## **4 National Student Survey (NSS)**

The Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer gave an overview of the results of the NSS 2025. The following updates were provided:

- Following the release of the 2025 NSS results, it was confirmed that the overall response rate had dropped to 65.2% in comparison to 2024; however, it was noted that there were some positive outcomes for the University. There had been encouraging improvements across several survey categories in comparison to the results from 2024. The University had successfully achieved two top ten positions for overall subject rankings. It was highlighted that Computing had ranked joint first place in *Teaching on my Course, Academic Support, and Mental Wellbeing Services* among other top ten category rankings. Additionally, Economics and International Studies had ranked fourth nationally with notably first in *Teaching on my Course, Academic Support* and joint first place for *Freedom of Expression* among other top ten category rankings.
- It was noted that several subjects achieved top ten rankings in specific categories and had made positive improvements. In contrast, there were three categories in which the University's performance was unfortunately some way below expectations; these included *Learning Resources, Assessment and Feedback* and *Organisation and Management*.
- It was acknowledged that *Learning Resources* had shown the biggest drop in comparison although, it was emphasised that this category had historically underperformed.
- The Students' Union was another key category that showed a need for improvement; however, it was confirmed that the President of the Students' Union and the Students' Union Vice President – Student Voice had actively worked to improve the engagement across the University. While improvement was required, the efforts undertaken were progressing in the right direction.
- It was highlighted that on average, the University had fallen 8% below the UK sector's overall satisfaction rate, although it was confirmed that this was difficult to correlate with previous performance due to the indexing of the results.
- The '*Demographic Highlights*' documented within the report showed that action would be required in relation to disabled students and students from ethnic minorities. It was confirmed that the full report had been shared with colleagues from the University's Inclusion Committee who had worked collaboratively with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Provost to develop an action plan.
- Following the publication of the full report, it was confirmed that the Marketing team had been working on material to highlight areas of positive performance along with reviewing the communication plan and additionally, further '*You said, we did*' communications were anticipated.

Following on from the update on the survey, the following points were raised:

- It was confirmed that under the leadership of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, the NSS working groups had been taken forward to develop action plans to address areas of weakness and monitor their implementation. It was then noted that this process would include the appropriate preparatory work for next year's NSS. It was confirmed that traditionally, the accountability of action plans had fallen under the remit of the Faculty Deans who had taken responsibility for their own faculty with the Pro Vice-Chancellor overseeing the process as part of her line management responsibility.
- It was noted that there would be a plan to complete a six-month review which would fall at the beginning of the campaign. This review would incorporate Council's view of the 'You said, we did' campaign along with highlighting preparation for the new survey. It was acknowledged that the University's KPIs in this area would be reviewed and reported to Council.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the results and analysis of the NSS 2025 results and the action being taken to address areas of poor performance be noted; and
- (b) That an update be provided in six months' time to Council concerning progress on the implementation of the action plans to address areas of poor performance.

## **5 Council Strategy and Transformation Sub-Group Impact Report**

It was confirmed by Professor Roos, Chair of the Sub-Group, that there was no significant update following on from the Sub-Group's previous meeting on 8 July 2025, although it was mentioned that a number of the Faculty Deans had proceeded to undertake several tasks that had been identified within the meeting.

It was raised as to whether the Council Strategy and Transformation Sub-Group had considered strategic planning within the context of the work being taken forward as part of the Cornerstone investment project. The Chair of the Sub-Group confirmed that a skeleton strategy had been drafted which had taken into account where the University currently sat regarding the various challenges it faced. The document had been drafted as a basis for discussion with various stakeholders across the University. It was highlighted that within the draft, they had considered the University's financial, teaching and reputational challenges.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

## **6 Office for Students – Conditions of Registration Assurance Report**

The Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer took Council members through the University's Conditions of Registration Assurance Report.

It was confirmed that, as of 1 August 2025, there were 28 ongoing Conditions of Registration 21 of which were applicable to the University as an 'approved' (i.e. non fee cap) provider.

To demonstrate compliance, it was stated that the University must have a robust set of policies in place. In addition, it was confirmed that the University must evidence that the policies, processes and practices delivered outcomes for students.

It was confirmed that, out of the 79 evidence types, 76 were rated 'green' which meant that they were up to date but not necessarily that the University was happy with performance in these areas in all cases. Three were marked as 'amber' which meant that they were not in place nor up to date and that these were a work in progress although it was confirmed that, since the drafting of the report, two of these had since been completed.

Thanks were expressed to numerous colleagues across the University including, the Chief Financial Officer and his Finance department who had ensured that the '*value for money statement*' was uploaded to the University website. In addition, thanks were expressed to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Provost and the Faculty Deans for the work that had been done on the '*Research Environment*' document.

#### Access and Participation (the 'A' Conditions)

- Council was asked to approve the 'Access and Participation Statement' for 2025.

#### Academic Standards and Quality (the 'B' Conditions)

- The 'B' conditions had been covered by supplementary documents which had been reviewed by the Audit and Risk Committee in May 2025. It was confirmed that feedback had been received in the meeting which resulted in a revised document.
- Council was asked to note the University's '*Academic Assurance Report*' for 2025.
- The overall conclusion for the 'B' conditions was that the University had met the requirements. Some key issues were highlighted, including student feedback which related to manual processes and systems used within the University. In addition, issues related to data quality were noted; it was confirmed that performance with statutory returns had improved, and hard work had been put in as part of the visual transformation to address issues with data ownership, data cleansing and interrogation.

#### Consumer Protection (the 'C' Conditions)

- Although no considerable changes had been made, the figures had been updated and so, Council was asked to approve the following two documents for publication for 2025:
  - *Consumer Protection Self-Assessment*
  - *Student Protection Plan*

#### Financial Sustainability (the 'D' Conditions)

- Council was asked to note the University's '*Financial Sustainability Self-Assessment*' for 2025. It was confirmed that this was primarily assessed and met through the financial annual return. It was highlighted that, although the University remained an ongoing concern, the University's accounts and financial returns were reviewed by the Office for Students.

#### Management and Governance (the 'E' Conditions)

- Council was asked to approve the University's '*Management and Governance Self-Assessment*'. Thanks were expressed to the Secretary to Council for updating the document which consisted of the most recent developments which arose from the Halpin Governance Effective Review.

### Information (the 'F' Conditions)

- Council was asked to note the University's most recent '*Transparency Information*', the '*Transfer Arrangements*' and the '*Register of Reportable Events 2018-2025*'.
- Council was asked to note the University's *Register of Statutory Returns 2024-2025*. It was confirmed that all statutory returns had been completed on time during this period. Thanks were expressed to the Higher Education Data Manager and their team as well as our HESA Consultant and colleagues in IT and Data Transformation who had delivered a marked turnaround in performance. It was also confirmed that the 'student return first due date' was exceeded by 17 days, and the second by 27 days.
- It was questioned as to how creative the University had been at encouraging individuals and faculties to move on from legacy manual data systems. It was highlighted that there was a variance in maturity in the faculties and Central Services departments. It was mentioned that the Higher Education Data Manager and the Executive Director of Digital Transformation and Technology were motivated around the need for the development of a data strategy and an improved culture around data.

### RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Access and Participation Statement be approved
- (b) That the Academic Assurance Report be noted
- (c) That the Consumer Protection Self-Assessment be approved
- (d) That the Student Protection Plan be approved
- (e) That the Financial Sustainability Self-Assessment be noted
- (f) That the Management and Governance Self-Assessment be approved
- (g) That the Register of Reportable Events 2018-2025 be noted
- (h) That the Register of Statutory Returns 2024-2025 be noted
- (i) That the OfS Conditions of Registration Mapping Document be noted

## **7 Trustee Code of Practice and Council Member Role Descriptions**

It was noted that, following the Halpin Governance Effective Review, the Governance Effectiveness Review Steering Group (GERSG) felt that it would be good practice to put in place a '*Trustee Code of Conduct*' as well as the requirement for a document that outlined Role Descriptions for Council members and those holding specific duties, such as committee chairs. Though it was noted that the Independent HE Code did not overtly require such a code of conduct be put in place, there were several references in the code to standards of behaviour for Council members and the GERSG therefore felt that it would be helpful to adopt a Code with some high-level principles of conduct.

Council was asked to approve the '*Trustee Code of Conduct*' document as well as the role descriptions for Council Members and those with specific duties. It was highlighted that, if Council were to approve the '*Trustee Code of Conduct*', it would be a requirement for all existing members and those joining Council to sign the document and adhere to its requirements.

It was questioned as to whether it was necessary to have an additional document in place that may add extra bureaucracy given the extensive requirements already in place around governance. It was noted that Halpin were keen for the University to have the requirements set out in one place and that a 'looser' version of the '*Trustee Code of Conduct*' was produced in 2021 after a request from the Charity Commission, but it was noted that the revised version was more detailed and therefore a positive development.

One member of Council expressed reservations about a requirement not to be permitted to divulge confidential Council business within a domestic setting. Another member was of the view that matters

discussed in Council meetings should not be discussed with others, even partners. It was noted that confidentiality was of critical importance, and therefore, each member of Council would be required to exercise their own judgment. It was further confirmed that the Secretary to Council would reconsider the wording in the Code and present back a revised version.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Council Member role descriptions be approved.
- (b) That the Trustee Code of Conduct be approved, subject to reconsideration of the requirements around confidentiality.

**8 [Redacted]**

**9 Date of next meeting:**

The next formal Council meeting that had been scheduled for 13 October 2025 would need to be rescheduled to a new date.

**10 Any other business**

Senate Review Report

Council members had been given access to the Senate Review Report in August. It was noted that, in order for Council to consider the Senate review, there were governance points that would need to be considered alongside the report itself. **[Redacted]**

Joint Strategic Away Day

It was confirmed that a decision had been taken to postpone the away day that had been due to be held on 18 September 2025. Instead, it would be replaced with a 'phase 1' meeting in the form of some small working groups of Council members alongside members of the Executive team and Senate in order to have a discussion move the University forward positively.

It was felt appropriate, in the current circumstances, to postpone the away day and it was confirmed that all members will be contacted in due course with a view to establishing a new date for the Away Day.

*(The Chief Financial Officer and the Registrar and Chief Administrative Officer left the meeting at this point.)*

**[Redacted]**

Elected Senate Representative Vacancy on Council

It was confirmed that there was a vacancy for a Senate Representative on Council in place of Professor Jacqueline O'Dowd who had recently been appointed as Faculty Pro-Dean, within the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences.

The Chair expressed thanks to Professor O'Dowd for being a good member of both Council and the Nominations and Governance Committee and for her contribution, support and challenge.

Meeting start: 17:30

Meeting end: 19:20