

**COUNCIL
MINUTES**

This paper presents the confirmed minutes of the last meeting of Council held on 24 September 2024 in Library Seminar Room 4, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 4AA

Action Required

Council **approved** these minutes as a correct record at its meeting held on 19 November 2024.

Present

Malcolm Sweeting, Chair
Tim Blackman, Vice-Chancellor*
Robert McCracken, Treasurer
Natalie Baker, President, Open University Students' Association
Emma Barker, Senate representative
Hossam Kassem, Senate representative
Gary Elliott-Cirigottis, Senate representative
Eileen Scanlon, Senate representative*
Rob Parker, Senate representative
Andrew Kolapo, Student representative
Tony Cox, Associate Lecturer representative
Sas Amoah, member of non-academic staff
Ceri Doyle, external co-opted member
Julia Goodfellow, external co-opted member
Paul Gray, external co-opted member*
Nikki Humphrey, external co-opted member
Paul Kett, external co-opted member,
Jas Mann, external co-opted member
Rashik Parmar, external co-opted member

In Attendance

Josie Fraser, Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Dave Hall, University Secretary
Paul Traynor, Chief Financial Officer
Camilla Briault, Director, University Secretary's Office
Sue Thomas, Senior Manager, Governance
Jhumar Johnson, Chief of Staff, Vice Chancellor's Office

For specific agenda items:

Minute 5: Vikki Matthews, Group People Director

Apologies

Tevin Tobun, external co-opted member +
Andrew Dickinson, external co-opted member+

*Participation via Microsoft Teams
+ Proxy Votes submitted

1 WELCOME

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular new members attending their first meeting, Jas Mann, Emma Barker, Gary Elliott-Cirigottis, Natalie Baker and Andrew Kolapo.

In accordance with Ordinance XIX, Proxy Votes had been received from two external co-opted members unable to attend the meeting. The meeting was therefore quorate.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None recorded.

3 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHANCELLOR: UPDATE

C-2024-03-03

- 3.1 The University Secretary informed Council that the executive search partner, Perrett Laver, was preparing to present a long list of applications to the Joint Appointment Committee at its meeting in October 2024. There had been interest in the advertisement from a diverse range of applicants.
- 3.2 The Chair reflected that the Joint Appointment Committee had been working constructively and collaboratively in its work in preparing the brief for the post and the recruitment process.
- 3.3 Council **noted** the report.

4 TUITION FEES 2025/26

C-2024-05-02

- 4.1 The University Secretary and Vice-Chancellor:
 - a) Drew attention to the context of the proposed additional fee increased set out in the paper. The proposed 2% increase in addition to the 5% increase approved by Council in the budget for 2024/25 (giving a total increase of 7%) would partially mitigate the increased financial risks facing the University and protect planned investments in its offer and services to students.
 - b) Reported that Strategic Planning and Resources Committee (SPRC) had considered the proposed increase at its meeting on 19 September 2024. In making its recommendation, members had acknowledged that difficult choices had to be made and whilst persuaded by the arguments made for financial stability also expressed concern that reasons for the decrease in student numbers and potential impact on the quality of the curriculum offering needed to be fully understood.
- 4.2 Council:
 - a) Enquired whether competitors' fees had been considered as part of the fees review to determine the value of a qualification against its cost. The University Secretary informed Council that market research examined the amount students were prepared to pay for a distance learning module. Research had shown that a key decision factor was the financial commitment of a student loan rather than the price level itself.
 - b) Reflected that the requirement for students registering on postgraduate taught qualifications to pay fees upfront (pending receipt of a loan) could be impacting on student numbers. The University Secretary reported that this issue was being investigated.
- 4.3 The Chair confirmed that SPRC had discussed the proposals and their context very thoroughly and made its recommendation to Council with reluctance, fully appreciating the potential impacts of the increase.
- 4.4 Council **approved** the following increases to fees:
 - a) An increase of 7% in Undergraduate (UG) fees in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland

- b) An increase of 8.2% in UG “Wales Transitional” fees
- c) An increase of 5% in UG Republic of Ireland fees
- d) An increase of 9.5% in UG International fees
- e) An increase of between 0% and 10% (based on qualification) in postgraduate taught (PGT) UK and Republic of Ireland fees
- f) An additional increase of between -23% and 10% in PGT international fees.

**5 INDEPENDENT POST TRIBUNAL REVIEW REPORT
INITIAL MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO REPORT**

C-2024-05-03
C-2024-05-04

- 5.1 The Chair recorded his thanks to the Council Advisory Group and the Vice-Chair for their commitment to ensuring the integrity of the review. Council needed to agree further action and appropriate reporting on progress following the publication of the report.
- 5.2 The Vice-Chair:
- a) Introduced the report and reflected that although it might be difficult reading, it was extremely thorough, thoughtful and respectful. The review and resulting report were complete and the review lead, Dame Nicola Dandridge, had now completed her involvement with the task.
 - b) Emphasised the independence of the report and the assurances of confidentiality given to those who had contributed to the review. Professor Dandridge and the University and Council Advisory Group had received legal support during the process.
 - c) Requested that Council specifically discuss the recommendations and their implementation, publication of the report and communications, and support for staff.
- 5.3 The University Secretary read a legally privileged statement to Council from the University’s legal advisers.
- 5.4 The Vice-Chancellor and Chief People Officer:
- a) Expressed their thanks to the members of the Advisory Group for their support.
 - b) Reiterated the importance of an independent set of recommendations and actions for the University to consider. Many of these would be relevant to the remit of the new Pro-Vice Chancellor, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.
 - c) Reported that the intention was to publish the report in full on 26 September 2024. Key stakeholders and others including witnesses who had contributed would be contacted in advance of publication.
 - d) Confirmed that the Working Group referred to in the recommendations would be established shortly and would report to the Vice-Chancellor’s Executive (VCE) and to Council at its next and subsequent meetings.
- 5.5 Council:
- a) Welcomed the report and accepted the recommendations as set out within it. It was however acknowledged that the detail beneath the headline recommendations required careful consideration.
 - b) Expressed concern over the inclusion of verbatim quotations in the report and sought assurances that contributors were aware that their words might appear in the report.
 - c) Supported full and transparent publication of the report but was concerned that the proposed statements were not sufficiently explicit on whether the University accepted the recommendations.

- d) Requested an update at its next meeting on progress towards implementation of the recommendations.

5.6 The Chief People Officer and University Secretary:

- a) Explained that to maintain confidentiality, the University had no information on interviewees, or the information given to them about their contributions. The position would be clarified with Professor Dandridge and the University's legal advisers.

Action: Chief People Officer

- b) Proposed that for clarification the communications statements include the key recommendations from the report and state that the University management would be developing an action plan, taking into account the report's advice on implementation.
- c) Acknowledged the importance of ensuring senior management were fully briefed and in light of the Senior Leadership Team not being due to meet until the following week, it was agreed to defer publication until after that meeting.

5.7 The Chair thanked members for a thorough and helpful consideration of the report and summarised the discussion and further actions:

- a) Council accepted the key recommendations of the report.
- b) Communications statements would be revised to include reference to the headline recommendations.
- c) The statements would clarify acceptance of the recommendations and explain that an action plan would be developed taking into account advice in the report about implementation of the recommendations.
- d) The report would be published on a date to be confirmed to enable consideration by VCE and the Senior Leadership Team.
- e) Publication was subject to consent from contributors on inclusion of their verbatim comments and legal advice.
- f) An update would be brought to the next meeting on progress towards implementation of the recommendations.

5.8 Post Meeting Notes (at 30 September 2024)

- a) The Chair of the review confirmed consent had been received from the majority of those quoted in the report to publish their contributions. Two quotes had been removed prior to publication.
- b) The references to the legal context in Northern Ireland in the report had been updated.
- c) The communications statements had been revised to include reference to the recommendations.
- d) The Report would be published on 1 October 2024.

Future Meeting Dates
Tuesday 19 November 2024 10.00 to 16.30 in Milton Keynes Tuesday 4 March 2025 Nation Visit: Edinburgh (Arrival afternoon of 3 March 2025) 9.30 to 16.00 (timings to be confirmed) Tuesday 28 January 2025 at 10.00 to 13.00 via Teams Tuesday 13 May 2025 10.00 to 16.30 in Milton Keynes Tuesday 8 July 2025 10.00 to 16.30 in Milton Keynes

Dave Hall, University Secretary
Sue Thomas, Senior Manager, Governance
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