



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

## **Minutes Meeting of Council**

<b>Date:</b>	18 October 2021
<b>Present:</b>	A Pedder, Pro-Chancellor (in the Chair); A Hope and C Brownlie, Pro-Chancellors; J Sutcliffe, Treasurer; Professor Lamberts, President & Vice-Chancellor; D Bagley, A Belton, D Forrest, G Gee, G Greenup, Professor Hartley, Professor Kirby, Professor Layden, Dr Nicholls, P Rodrigo, Professor Vincent, A Wray
<b>Secretary:</b>	Dr Strike
<b>In attendance:</b>	Professor Valentine, J Jones, M McArthur, D Swinn, Professor Petley (items 6 and 7); R Sykes and B Abrams (item 9)
<b>Apologies:</b>	E Croxford, Dr Gilvary, A Kay

### **Welcome**

The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of 2021/22, including new Class (2) members and elected members in Class (4) and Class (5) who were attending their first Council meeting.

### **1. Declaration of Conflicts of Interest**

No conflicts of interest were declared.

### **2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting** (Meetings held on 12 July 2021)

2.1 The Minutes were approved as an accurate record.

### **3. Action Log and Matters Arising on the Minutes**

3.1 Council received and noted the action log, including revised timescales for certain items following a review of the business cycle in liaison with key colleagues. With respect to the TESH (Minute 11), clarification was provided that monitoring of expenditure and delivery would be undertaken through the management accounts and existing governance arrangements, including UEB's IT Sub-Group and theme leads for the four pillars of the University Vision. These arrangements may be strengthened further the Council Task and Finish Group on Estates and Digital Infrastructure governance made its recommendations. When Council had approved TESH Phase 3 in July, the key milestones and deliverables had been made clear and consideration would be given to providing an interim progress update.

There were no other questions or matters arising on the Minutes.

#### **4. Health and Safety Update**

- 4.1 Council received and noted the update, including the annual report from the Director of Health and Safety. Council commended the annual report and the plans for the period to 2024. There was a discussion about the ongoing cultural challenge in the context of the importance Council places on seeking to have an exemplary health and safety culture, which also meets all HSE guidelines. The One University Pillar provides an overarching institutional framework within which to effect positive organisational change. The planning framework provides a further opportunity to embed health and safety considerations at departmental level, building on the positive direction of travel for staff training figures. Council advised that increasing the level of near miss reporting would also help to achieve an increasingly mature and highly effective health and safety culture. Council also asked to receive additional quantitative data in relation to staff training completion against targets in a future report.

#### **5. Category C Matters**

- 5.1 Council considered Category C business, which are covered in Minutes 11-15, below.

#### **6. President & Vice-Chancellor's Report**

(Professor Petley in attendance for this item)

- 6.1 The President and Vice-Chancellor presented his report, in which he drew attention to the following:

(a) Covid-19: arrangements for the new academic year:

The University had restored as much of the 'normal' on-campus experience as possible for the benefit of both students and staff. The expectation and current plan was to deliver face-to-face teaching in 2021/22 and students were expected to attend in person, on campus, from the start date of their studies; feedback from students had been overwhelmingly positive to date. Staff were also encouraged to return to the office, following the hybrid approach where roles allowed.

In line with government guidance, many of the controls that were required last year had now been removed. However, the University remained committed to the safety of staff and students, recognising that the pandemic had not ended. Therefore, a number of mitigations were in place to achieve a safe campus environment and the University continued to model good practice and encourage compliance with applicable guidelines.

Furthermore, the University was strongly encouraging all eligible students and staff to take up the offer of both doses of the vaccine. A recent student poll, with 4,000 responses, indicated that 98% of students had already had at least one vaccine dose and 93% expected to have had both before the start of term – figures that were significantly higher than local and national averages. The vast majority of staff were expected to be fully vaccinated. In order to support the local effort, the University was also hosting a pop-up vaccination centre on campus, in partnership with the local NHS, and sought to continue this arrangement. The on-campus Covid-19 Test Centre remained operational and staff and students coming on to campus were strongly encouraged to take regular Lateral Flow Tests, which could be collected from sites across campus as well as through the Government website and pharmacies.

- (b) Admissions: The University had approached the 2020-21 student recruitment and admission cycle conscious of a number of risks, e.g. travel restrictions – particularly for overseas students, and had been proactive in seeking to mitigate these risks and maximise student registrations for 2021 entry. Council noted the

latest registration figures for all categories, and the cumulative impact on institutional finances. Home undergraduate numbers were likely to settle, by the 1 December census date, higher than the target and the University expected to have significantly improved the proportion of students with higher A Level tariff, with good progress in relation to its Access and Participation targets. International numbers remained more uncertain and the current expectation was for final overseas UG numbers to settle at just short of the overall target.

With respect to PGT Home, the University continued to receive applications, although acceptances remained lower than target. This position may improve if the vaccination programme continued at pace, but the current forecast suggested a shortfall against target. There had also been a drop in PGT applications from overseas this year, particularly from China, and it was expected that final overseas PGT registrations would be significantly below target.

Clarification was provided that comparative figures from key competitors and the wider sector were not yet available, but it appeared that applicants from key markets were exercising greater caution and were prepared to wait before deciding to apply or enrol. No specific additional threats or risks had been identified and the remote start option for certain groups had been effective in supporting students to commence or resume their studies.

- (c) Research and Knowledge Exchange: The total value of new research awards won during 2020/21 was the highest on record. The overall research position was one of strength, e.g. ten new awards for over £1m since the last meeting from across all faculties. Research Net Contribution for the 12 months to August 2021 had increased by 39% compared to the previous 12 month period. These achievements demonstrated the vibrancy of the University's research portfolio and provided a firm basis from which to further the institutional research excellence agenda. It was noted that the lag in published data from across the sector made accurate timely comparisons with key competitors challenging, including whether the University had increased market share as well as volume. Further analysis was also taking place into the rate of success from research grant submissions and available data would be added to future reports where possible. Clarification was provided that the University was confident in its ability to deliver on the increased amount of grant funded projects, including recruiting and retaining the necessary staff.
- (d) League Tables: The 2022 league table rankings showed improved institutional positions in all of the Guardian, Times, THE World and Shanghai Jiao Tong rankings, with each table using different measures and metrics to evaluate providers. It was recognised that continued strong league table performance was especially important for student recruitment, particularly overseas students. With respect to the latter, as noted in the KPI report (see Minute 7, below), the University was undertaking a significant amount of work around reputation and branding. This was particularly relevant to performance in the QS World rankings, which was a key determinant in applicant choice, especially overseas applicants.

## **7. University Vision: Annual Performance Update**

(Professor Petley in attendance for this item)

- 7.1 Council considered and accepted the annual performance update, which provided a progress update against the strategic KPIs in the One University Vision. It was noted that due to the extension of the Vision period, to 2027, to cover a full five year period following transitional work and delays caused by the pandemic, this report took the form of a bridging report to provide an update Council following the approval of Strategic Delivery Plans for each of the four themes in the Vision but pending the development and approval of Faculty and Academic Department Five Year Plans. Attention was drawn to areas of particular progress and success and those areas where enhanced performance

was required. Council also noted future planned actions, including the implementation of dashboards, continuing modelling work to assess the extent of improvements required to achieve targets, and confirmation of the targets for KPI6 in due course.

Further updates from the four theme leads were provided as follows:

- 7.2 Research: Particular achievements were noted in relation to research income (see also Minute 6(c), above), the institutional REF submission, which was one of the largest in the sector, and subsequent action to review processes and any lessons learned before and after the outcomes were published in 2022 including impact case studies. A dedicated working group was developing a shared understanding and definition of research excellence, which would inform a more detailed evaluation of areas of strength and opportunity, including ways in which the University could enhance the ways in which that excellence was celebrated and communicated. Additional priorities were noted with respect to ensuring a fit for purpose research infrastructure and the key priority around enhancing the PGR student experience and improving submission rates within students' fee paying periods.
- 7.3 Innovation: The University had developed related KPIs with reference to the KEF, in order to give a broad range of activities that were benchmarked externally. Five out of seven targets had been achieved to date, with a late change to the research partnerships metric having an adverse impact on institutional performance; however, the University was one of the best performing institutions for "in kind" partnership working, as opposed to cash receipts, and additional investment and revised structures were expected to drive improved performance. With respect to the CPD-related target, in 2019-20 UEB had agreed to prioritise effort on strengthening the undergraduate portfolio. However, the University's approach to CPD would be reviewed in due course, alongside ways in which to support and invest in student entrepreneurship. A comprehensive Regional Engagement Plan, "Made Together" had been welcomed by the SCR; the University's performance in regional engagement was at least comparable to any other institution but it needed to do more to celebrate and share its successes, as well as considering opportunities across the whole of the city region. Members were pleased to note the significant opportunities presented by Northern Gritstone in raising investment, at scale, to support spin out companies and build on the positive trend which had seen the University's average number of newly created spin out companies increase to at least seven per year. Clarification was provided about the strength of these companies' respective performance the pipeline of potential new, investable opportunities identified by the company.
- 7.4 Education: Although the University expected to have improved its average undergraduate entry tariff, further work was taking place to attract highly qualified applicants, and to enhance student recruitment activities more generally. Although the University remained a residential, campus-based provider, the rapid development and deployment of digital skills and understanding necessitated by the pandemic offered a range of opportunities to enhance pedagogies and the overall student experience through the development of digital strategies commencing later in 2021/22. Priority actions including ensuring greater consistency, notably in relation to NSS performance given variations in performance across departments, through an evidence-based focus on organisation and management and the introduction of a University-wide student-evaluation system to capture the views of all student groups. The Portfolio Review was now a mandatory requirement for all academic departments and provided an overarching framework within which these enhancement activities could occur in a way that was understandable and visible for students whilst facilitating greater and more effective sharing of knowledge and good practice between departments and faculties. It was clarified that the need for consistency applied to all aspects of the student experience for all students on all programmes, and was not limited to learning and teaching. The introduction of the departmental planning framework, and related engagement activities were additional key enablers.

- 7.5 **One University:** This Pillar was a key differentiator in the University Vision and had emerged through the extensive staff and student consultation exercise, emphasising the importance of the University community and its values. Although the theme covered a range of diffuse elements, the overriding objective was to foster a collaborative, supportive and respectful culture that enabled staff and students to realise their full potential, thereby also supporting the achievement of strategic objectives under the other three Pillars. Key achievements to date included signing up to the Student Minds University Mental Health Charter and new initiatives and activities under Mind's Mentally Healthy Universities Pilot Programme. The University had also launched new iterations of its Race Equality Strategy and Action Plan and, although progress against the staff diversity KPI had been hampered by the slowdown in staff recruitment due to the pandemic, there was confidence that measures in place or planned would support delivery against the relevant targets. The institutional Sustainability Strategy was complemented by a detailed action plan to achieve the University's ambitions in this area, with a range of projects and actions being undertaken in relation to estates and buildings, travel and waste; the University was the best performing Russell Group institution for carbon emissions per square foot. Council noted the range actions planned for 2021-21 to drive further achievements, including establishing appropriate leadership structures through the new Faculty Director of One University posts and dedicated network, strengthening and standardising departmental leadership roles, and launching the new Sheffield Connect online community portal for students and alumni.
- 7.6 Following discussion, Council commended the report and agreed that the overview of KPI performance should be supplemented with additional information showing the trajectory towards achieving each of the targets.

## **8. Financial Matters:**

### **8.1 Draft Annual Report and Financial Statements 2020-21**

- 8.1.1 Council received and noted the draft and unaudited University Annual Report and financial statements 2020-21, which had been reviewed by UEB and the Council Finance and Audit Committees, as well as having been shared with the external auditor for further feedback. The University was also waiting for confirmation from the OfS as to the regulator's requirements regarding approval and signature, and publication, which was expected to take place in December, after Council approval in November. It was pleasing to note that the Draft Annual Report and Financial Statements 2020-21 were being provided to all October committees in order to provide an earlier opportunity for review and feedback prior to receiving the final version in November, which would be updated to incorporate additional cash flow information and take into account further work around the accounting treatment and reporting of certain areas of expenditure. Members were invited to provide feedback to the Chief Financial Officer.

### **8.2 Going Concern**

- 8.2.1 Council considered an assessment of the University's status as a going concern based on the financial results. Under the applicable accounting standards, management are required to make an assessment of the entity's ability to continue as a going concern, which is assessed and tested as part of the external audit, taking into account a range of downside scenarios and the forecast impact of these risks crystallising. It was noted that this modelling indicated that, even without any remedial actions, the University would remain compliant with its bank covenants and would not trigger any USS metrics, with cash balances remaining strong. Having discussed and noted the related paper, Council confirmed that it considers that the University is correct to state that it remains a going concern.

## **9. Closed minute and paper**

## **10. Equality, Diversity And Inclusion**

### **10.1 Annual Report of the Council Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee**

- 10.1.1 Council received and approved the Annual Report, which set out the University's continued progress and performance, including an appraisal of how the University was discharging the Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equalities Act 2010. The report provided a detailed update on the activities of the Committee, to which Council had devolved responsibility to develop and implement actions, and its sub-committees in discharging the University's activities. Attention was drawn to updates in relation to the three existing agreed strategic priorities and the Committee's decision to add an additional priority covering the experience of staff and students relating to religion and belief equality, as well as the five most significant work streams to deliver on these objectives. It was recognised that the pandemic had had an adverse impact on the University's ability to engage with staff while sustaining critical core operations. However, further progress had been made in reducing the gender pay gap and the Students' Union had been used as a case study of good practice in a recent HE Commission report. The University has also prioritised the development of a University-wide LGBT+ Strategy, in liaison with the SU, and would look to re-engage with the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index when that work was complete.
- 10.1.2 Council welcomed the report and commended the University's achievements and future plans. It was agreed that further consideration should be given to a further briefing session for members of Council.

### **10.2 Annual Report on Preventing and Addressing Harassment and Sexual Misconduct**

- 10.2.1 Council considered the report, which had been approved by the UEB Sexual Violence and Harassment Steering Group and UEB. The Report set out the extent of institutional activities in this area and reported on the strength of these arrangements as a means of assurance about the University's compliance with the OfS Statement of Expectations and requirements that had been published earlier in 2021. A review of activities against the regulatory statement and requirements indicated a low risk of non-compliance in each area and a number of examples of good practice and success. However, in the spirit of continuous improvement, four broad areas had been identified for enhancement through the existing action plan: communications and accessibility of information; training and development; HR procedures; and disciplinary procedures and outcomes. It was recognised that the University's previous activities in relation to preventing and addressing sexual harassment and misconduct placed it at the forefront of developments in the sector, with a strong foundation upon which to build further.
- 10.2.2 Clarification was provided that the increased number of incidents being reported was the result of increased awareness and understanding from complainants, and greater confidence in the systems and processes in place to facilitate this. With respect to the outcome of cases in which disciplinary action had been taken, it was confirmed that the University's Discipline Regulations were aligned with sector practice but were monitored on a regular basis. A further challenge was the need to balance the institutional duties of care owed to both complainants and alleged perpetrators, with universities being unable to take internal action in any case that was the subject of a criminal investigation.

- 10.2.3 Following further discussion, in which attention was drawn to a number of key initiatives and activities, including close liaison with the Students' Union, Council approved the contents of the report and confirmed that it was assured that the University's approach good and appropriate and was meeting the OfS Statement of Expectations and requirements.

## **11. Capital Report**

- 11.1 Council received an update on progress of projects in the capital programme, including projects recently considered and approved by ECSG, UEB and Finance Committee in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation.

## **12. Report of the Estates Committee**

- 12.1 Council received and approved the Report.

## **13. Governance Matters**

### **13.1 Office for Students Registration Conditions Compliance Register**

Council noted an update on regulatory developments and the register of compliance with ongoing registration conditions and reportable events. In particular, Council noted that, after an 18 month delay, the OfS had approved the University's Student Protection Plan for publication.

### **13.2 Returning Officer's Report on Elections to Council 2021**

Council noted the Returning Officers' Report on the recent elections to Council.

### **13.3 Report on Action Taken**

Council noted the Report on action taken since the previous meeting.

### **13.4 Council Business Plan 2021-22**

Council noted the first iteration of the 2021-22 business plan, which would be reviewed and updated throughout the year. It was noted that the review of estates governance arrangements may result in additions or amendments in due course.

### **13.5 Constitution of the Students' Union**

Council approved amendments to the Students' Union Constitution and consequent changes to the Code of Practice relating to the Student's Union, in accordance with the requirements of the Education Acts. Clarification was sought as to the gender balance of candidates for election to SU Officer roles but Members noted that there had been a good mix of male, female and non-binary candidates in recent years.

### **13.6 Chair of Council, Treasurer and Chair of Audit Committee Succession**

Council received and approved role profiles for the Chair of Council, Treasurer, and the Chair of Audit Committee, noting a planned timeline for recruitment and appointment during 2021-22. Council also noted that the University Secretary would be inviting expressions of interest for any of the three positions from existing lay members of Council, for consideration by the Appointing Committee.

### **13.7 Council Effectiveness Questionnaire Responses**

Council received and noted a summary of responses to the Annual Council Effectiveness Questionnaire and actions proposed in response to comments. It was pleasing to note that responses were positive overall, with improved scores in many areas since the previous exercise. Where actions were proposed, these were largely focused on enhancements, and were consistent with the action plan agreed in response to the full Council Effectiveness Review during 2020-21. Council would return to consider the findings and actions in greater detail at its November meeting.

### **14. Use of the University Seal**

- 14.1 Council received and noted a summary of the application of the University Seal since the previous Council meeting.

### **15. Public Availability of Council Papers**

- 15.1 Council approved arrangements for the online publication of Council papers in accordance with the University's Information Classification Scheme.