

Council

31 January 2023

- Present:** Joe Docherty (Chair), Rebecca Askew, Joanna Barker, Jonathan Bewes, Kay Boycott, Richard Crisp, Leslie Ferrar, Michael Hampel, Alison Hastings, Denise Lievesley, Colin Macpherson, Joe McGarry, Amir Michael, Cheryl Millington, Liadi Mudashiru, Karen O'Brien, Ari, Sadanandom, Corinne Saunders, Terry Toney, and Jun Jie Wu.
- In Attendance:** Laura Curran, Amanda Wilcox, Stephen Willis and Kelly Knapp (Minutes) Jeremy Cook (Minutes 63, 64 and 65), Quentin Sloper (Minute 63), Sam Dale (Minute 65), as well as Cathy Cassell and David Loudon (Minute 66)
- Apologies:** James Grierson and Nigel Perry

Minutes of a Meeting of Council held in the
The Hub, Mount Oswald and Zoom**53. Welcome**

The Chair welcomed Council members to their first meeting in The Hub and noted that two Council members were joining the meeting exceptionally via Zoom. The Chair also welcomed Richard Crisp to his first meeting as Interim Deputy Vice Chancellor and Provost.

54. Declarations of Interests in relation to Agenda Items**Noted:**

- a) Amir Michael raised a conflict as the Head of Department: Accounting within the Business School in relation to the update for the Durham University Business School Relocation to the Waterside (Minute 66);
- b) Ari Sadanandom raised a conflict as a Professor within the Department of Biosciences in relation to the Finance Committee Report (Minute 67).

55. Minutes of Meetings held on 28 November and 6 December 2022 (C/22/49 and C/22/50 Confidential)

Approved: the minutes of the meetings held on 28 November and 6 December 2022 subject to the following revisions:

- a) [38 (g) (i)]: the DSU funded the student newspaper – funding had reduced in recent years for the print edition;
- b) [38 (h)]: a recent referendum revealed student support for UCU industrial action, including marking boycotts, however, the number of students that responded to the referendum was low.

56. Matters Arising

Noted: there were no matters arising.

57. Action Log and Schedule of Business (C/22/51 and C/22/52 Confidential)

Noted: the status of the Action Log and Schedule of Business.

58. Chair's Business

Received: a verbal update from the Chair on the following matters:

- a) *Deputy Vice Chancellor and Provost Recruitment:* six candidates had been shortlisted and were scheduled to meet the Interview and Stakeholder Panels – Council members were thanked for their involvement. The selection process was anticipated to conclude in the coming weeks and, in accordance with the University Statutes, Council would be asked to approve the appointment;
- b) *Joint Council & Senate Meeting:* there had been a joint meeting with Senate where the Faculty Heads presented an overview of their respective areas in relation to the Strategy

Refresh, which had resulted in challenging questions and a lively discussion. Organisers and presenters were thanked for their contributions.

59. Vice Chancellor Report (C/22/53 Confidential)

Noted:

- a) the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) submission had recently been presented to the Regulator and a copy made available to Council members. The Team that had prepared the submission were commended for their work and the resulting high calibre document;
- b) a recent news article incorrectly reported that the University had paid certain Postgraduate students below minimum wage. The impacted students were part of a specific scholarship scheme within the Law School that the University was reviewing;
- c) the University would be impacted by industrial action in the coming weeks with 18 days of strike action scheduled. The University continued conversations with the Universities and Colleges Employers' Association and the University and College Union to reach a settlement. Plans were also in place to help mitigate the impact on students;
 - i. students had been informed that any exercises / activities missed would not be included in their assessments. Certain students may need special consideration that would be flagged to the relevant Board of Examiners;
 - ii. "drop in sessions" would be arranged for students with staff;
 - iii. the impact of a marking boycott was being assessed and mitigation plans refined accordingly;
- d) the international student population had a high concentration of students from China. Activities were underway in other geographies to develop and promote the brand / reputation of the University to help diversify the international student population – there was interest in India and other markets – which would take time for a shift to be seen. Conversion plans were an area of focus as Chinese students that accept generally come to the University whereas students from other geographies tend to have a lower conversion rate;
- e) work in response to the Principles of Fair Workload were running slightly behind plan. A Steering Committee Chair had been identified and a draft terms of reference was pending final agreement. Staff were keen for an update;
- f) the Vice Chancellor was leading a review focused on improving the University's global rankings and reputation. In response to lessons learnt, the Provost was leading a campaign to ensure a full quota of nominations was submitted for the QS World Rankings survey.

60. Strategy Refresh Update (C/22/54 Confidential)

Noted:

- a) the Strategy Refresh was in a phase of internal consultation that included an upcoming discussion at Senate;
 - i. the Faculty Heads presentations at the Joint Council & Senate meeting would benefit from a clear articulation of their link to strategy delivery;
 - ii. socialisation of the proposed refreshed Strategy was underway across management teams within both the academic and professional services areas. Wider communications were required to help manage expectations, especially within the difficult operating environment and the associated financial pressures;
- b) there had been a useful discussion on the Estate Master Plan at Finance Committee that would help in refining the Plan, especially related to Science and Arts & Humanities. The Committee would be consulted on further updates to the Plan;
- c) the Pro Vice Chancellor (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) had facilitated a number of workshops with staff and students aimed at refining the University's purpose and values statement. A draft was forthcoming;
- d) whilst efforts were focused on continuous improvement in some areas of the University, there also needed to be a focus on maintaining areas that provided the foundation for the University's world-class reputation.

61. Heads of Colleges (C/22/55 Confidential)

Agreed: the appointment of the following College Principals: (i) Dr Sonia Virdee, Principal of Grey College from 17 April 2023; (ii) Professor Gillian Hampden-Thompson, Principal of

Josephine Butler College from 1 July 2023; and (iii) Mr Nathan Sempala-Ntege OBE, Principal of John Snow College from 1 July 2023. In the future, ensuring Council's approval had been obtained prior to announcing new College Principals.

62. Durham Students' Union (DSU) Report (C/22/56 Internal)

Noted:

- a) the DSU were satisfied with the University's industrial action mitigation plans. Students were anxious to ensure missed content would not be assessed;
- b) administrative requirements and associated financial impact for certifying short and long term disabilities were of concern to students;
- c) a number of students had raised concerns about asbestos within the estates. Following discussions with the University, the DSU did not have similar concerns but felt wider communications to students would help alleviate misinformation and provide clarifications.

Agreed: the University would engage with the DSU to review policies and procedures related to student disability certification, including a communication plan to help ensure both staff and students were familiar with the agreed approach. **KOB / DSU**

*Jeremy Cook joined the meeting for the following three items.
Quentin Sloper joined the meeting for the following item.*

63. Durham Student Organisations (DSO) Framework Assurance (C/22/57 Confidential)

Noted: the initial assurance report following approval of the updated DSO Framework in July 2022.

Agreed: ongoing oversight of the DSO Framework be delegated to Governance and Nominations Committee and that the Pro Vice Chancellor of Colleges & Student Experience be consulted as to the appropriate timing of the Report.

Quentin Sloper left the meeting.

64. Update on Student Accommodation (C/22/58 Confidential)

Noted:

- a) plans to refresh the residential strategy in connection with the wider Strategy Refresh that would see aspirations for 45% of the student population living on campus (compared with the current 34%);
- b) there would be a focus on what the current Colleges could accommodate – driven by the size and shape of the student population – versus trying to build / develop new Colleges;
 - i. generally, a College's size was capped at three times its bed space;
- c) the University provided a higher proportion of accommodation compared to its peers within the Russell Group and as such derived a higher proportion of income from accommodation. However, proposed accommodation fees would result in an operating loss for the University and were set at a level the University could absorb;
 - i. accommodation fees were a financial pressure for many students, which the University tried to mitigate by expanding the availability of hardship funding (e.g., Durham Grant, alumni grants, etc.);
 - ii. alternative pricings schemes (e.g., by type of room) would be investigated for future academic years as would be the type and level of services provided;
 - iii. the accommodation fees for the 2023/2024 academic year had been presented to Finance Committee at its last meeting. The Committee recognised the fees were not ideal for either the University nor students and were a compromise in the current environment that resulted in financial pressures for both parties.

*Jonathan Bewes left the meeting.
Sam Dale joined the meeting for the following item.*

65. Suicide: A Strategy for Making Durham University Safer Place (White Paper) (C/22/59 Confidential)

Noted:

- a) there was no regulatory requirement for the University to have a suicide prevention strategy. However, the University felt a strategy should be in place;
- b) the proposed strategy had been developed with a focus on guidance and mitigation plans for prevention, intervention, and postvention;
- c) the proposed strategy had been well socialised with favourable feedback;
- d) next steps focused on further socialisation of the strategy and associated training. An implementation discussion was also scheduled for Senate;
 - i. students were being encouraged to provide the University with a trusted contact that could be contacted, if deemed necessary;
 - ii. acknowledging international cultural differences, amongst other student characteristics, had been and would continue to be considered as part of the strategy.

Approved: the strategy and action plan “Suicide: A Strategy for Making Durham University Safer”.

Agreed:

- a) Sam, his Team, and College Heads were to be commended for their work in developing the Strategy, but more importantly for their “on the ground” activities in treating these difficult situations in such an empathetic and professional manner;
- b) an implementation update to be provided to Council in 12-18 months. JC

Jeremy Cook and Sam Dale left the meeting.

Cathy Cassell and David Loudon joined the meeting for the following item.

66. Update on Durham University Business School (DUBS) Relocation to the Waterside (The Sands) (C/22/60 Confidential)

Noted: the status of refurbishment plans to adapt the building purchased from Durham County Council for use by DUBS. The Full Business Case would be presented to Council at its May 2023 meeting. As the building cannot accommodate all of DUBS, options for supplementary space were being investigated.

Cathy Cassell and David Loudon left the meeting

67. Finance Committee Report 18 January 2023 (C/22/61 Confidential)

Noted: the matters discussed by the Finance Committee at its meeting on 18 January 2023 and that there was an error in section 2.1.2 of the Report related to The Sands – the years noted should be 2023 not 2022.

68. Audit and Risk Committee: 12 January 2023 (C/22/62 Confidential)

Noted:

- a) following Council’s last meeting in December 2022, the Audit & Risk Committee (ARC) had met to review the final set of financial reports prior to their submission to the regulator and publication;
- b) the matters discussed by ARC at its meeting on 12 January 2023.

69. Governance & Nominations Committee Report 18 January 2023 (C/22/63 Confidential)

Noted: the matters discussed by the Governance & Nominations Committee (GNC) at its meeting on 18 January 2023.

Agreed:

- a) the demise of the University Strategy Implementation Committee (USIC) with immediate effect; USIC Chairs, members, and contributors were to be thanked for their time and effort;
- b) the recommended approach for receiving assurance of strategic delivery that would be further defined as part of the Strategy Refresh;
- c) the appointment of Omar Ahmed and Navreet Badwal as Council Apprentices from 1 August 2023 until 31 July 2024 and that they may observe Council in the interim;

- d) following discussion at Council's last meeting in December 2022, the appointment of Nigel Perry to the Audit and Risk Committee from 1 February 2023 until 31 July 2025;
- e) appointments to the People and Organisational Development Committee as outlined in Appendix 1 of the GNC Report;
- f) the appointment of Jonathan Bewes – currently serving as Vice Chair – as Chair of Finance Committee from 1 August 2023 until 31 July 2025.

70. Wider Student Experience (WSE) across the University (Easter 2022) (C/22/64 Public)

Received: the Report on Wider Student Experience across the University for information.

71. Human Resources (HR) Report on Key Staffing Matters (C/22/65 Confidential)

Received: the HR Report on Key Staffing Matters for information.

72. Business Agreed by Circulation since Last Meeting

Approved via Chair's Action: John Parker as Head of Department: Mathematical Sciences with effect from 1 January 2023 for a further 12-months or until the Department has identified a suitable candidate and appropriate committee approvals have been received.

73. Dates of Future Meetings

Noted: the dates of future Council meetings: 14 March 2023, 16 May 2023 and 11 July 2023.