

- Present:** Joe Docherty (Chair), Rebecca Askew, Navreet Badwal, Jonathan Bewes, Kay Boycott, Leslie Ferrar, Freddy Fossey-Warren, James Grierson, Alison Hastings, Dan Lonsdale, Col Macpherson, Amir Michael, Cheryl Millington, Liadi Mudashiru, Karen O'Brien, Nigel Perry, Philip Plyming, Ari Sadanandom, Corinne Saunders, Rob Senior, Mike Shipman, JJ Thakkar, Terry Toney, and Junjie Wu
- In Attendance:** Oliver Foster, Neil Scott, Amanda Wilcox, and Stephen Willis (all items), Tony Fawcett for Minute 30, John Pritchard and Claire McDonald for Minute 32, and James Walsh (Minutes)
- Apologies:** Denise Lievesley.

Minutes of a Meeting of Council held in The Lindisfarne Centre, St Aidan's College

21. Welcome

the Chair welcomed Oliver Foster to his first meeting of Council as an Observer prior to becoming a Lay Member with effect from 1 August 2024, and Neil Scott the incoming Interim Chief Financial Officer.

22. Declarations of Interests in relation to Agenda Items

Noted: there were no declarations of interest.

23. Minutes of Meeting 24 October 2023 (C/23/22 Confidential)

Approved: the minutes of the meetings held on 23 October 2023, but with the following amendment: Minute 14 b) to read: Council was keen to understand the University's risk appetite and whether there was a prevalence of Strategic Risks (SRs) where the residual risk was greater than the target risk.

24. Matters Arising

Noted:

- a) in relation to Minute 17 a) i): to include as an action on the Council Action Log;
- b) in relation to Minute 20 a): although there were some legal agreements to resolve, a positive resolution to the Covenant Release was anticipated;
- c) in relation to Minute 18: confirmation had been received from Human Resources that the dismissal was of a member of staff in the Vice-Provost Education Division and not the Vice-Provost Education;
- d) in relation to the process for the recruitment of a new Chair of Council, the Special Independent Governor had met with the University Secretary in preparation for a paper being prepared for consideration by Governance & Nominations Committee on 30 January. This paper would include timescales for recruitment, with the plan for a shadowing period for the new Chair from March 2025, which was in line with Council's Regulations.

25. Action Log and Schedule of Business (C/23/23 and C/23/24 Confidential)

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

26. Chair's Business

Noted:

- a) the Chairs of Council and Audit & Risk Committee (ARC) had met with Grant Thornton, the University's External Auditor. Noting the delays reported at the last meeting of Council, additional meetings of ARC and Council may be required in January, with the Chairs to confirm once more information was in place;

- b) the Shadow Secretary of State for Education had accepted an invitation, from the Chair, to visit the University for a meeting with the Chair and the Vice-Chancellor.

27. Vice-Chancellor's Report (C/23/25 Confidential)

Noted:

- a) in relation to student enrolment the following:
 - i) the data return deadline to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) was in December and final figures were still being confirmed, although Council would receive a more comprehensive update in Epiphany Term;
 - ii) home Undergraduate (UG) targets had been slightly exceeded within the threshold allowed and compensated for international UG figures which were slightly under;
 - iii) international Postgraduate Taught (PGT) were higher than anticipated, possibly as a result of the accommodation offer;
 - iv) home PGT student numbers had not reached their target, which was reflected across the sector, although more analysis was required about the impact of the Dean's Scholarship for PGT students in the Arts & Humanities and Social Sciences & Health Faculties;
 - v) due to the ongoing financial environment, the University had taken a decision to reduce PhD scholarship funding and this reflected the number of enrolled PhD students;
 - vi) indications were the overall student enrolment would confirm the University's Q1 Financial Forecast was on budget.
- b) recent Government announcement on tightening immigration rules required further consideration. Although Postgraduate Research (PGR) students were unlikely to be affected, it was interpretation of the message by international students which may be impact on future student numbers;
- c) in relation to para 5.1 2024/25 University Funded Durham Doctoral Scholarships (DDS): Council welcomed the reintroduction of the DDS for one-year. This initial reinstatement would allow the Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PGR) time to consider the DDS within the current review into the University's response to PGR, as outlined in the Strategy Refresh.

28. Senate Report (C/23/26 Internal)

Noted:

- a) Senate considered the submission to Research England of the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF), which contributed to the Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF) the University received, and was available for Council members to read;
- b) in relation to the Strategic Reviews the following:
 - i) the reviews would be paused to allow for an assessment of the process, noting the variability of the output from some of the reviews;
 - ii) one aspect of the pause would be to consider the relationship between the Strategic Reviews and the Integrated Planning Process;
 - iii) the newly announced Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), would examine how appropriate the Strategic Reviews were in relation to the department quinquennial review of the quality of teaching and learning.
- c) although the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) reported international students tended to be more positive in their response to their PGT experience, this was a historical outcome and did not correlate to the recent decline in home PGT applications.

29. Students' Union Report (C/23/27 Confidential)

Noted:

- a) the Postgraduate Academic Officer reported on the positive consideration of the Durham Students' Union's (DSU) PGR review as part of the holistic PGR review being undertaken by the Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PGR);
- b) the Israel-Gaza conflict continued to be a concerning situation and the President of the DSU continued to have positive communications with the Vice-Chancellor, enabling responses to be provided in relation to questions raised by students about the University's response to the conflict;

- c) although the DSU was pleased by the decision to raise the Durham Grant, this had been tempered by the increase in accommodation fees, with the DSU asking for clearer justification for price rises to be communicated;
- d) in relation to the use of University communication channels by the DSU the following:
 - i) a lack of clarity had occurred in relation to what the University felt able to issue on behalf of the DSU;
 - ii) although the DSU could contact students directly, they preferred to work in partnership with the University;
 - iii) the University was not willing to circulate information which either confused or went against information it had already issued;
 - iv) in moving forward, the DSU was happy to work with the Director of Advancement, Marketing & Communications and UEC in understanding appropriate messaging, so that similar problems did not occur in future.

30. Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Response (C/23/28 Confidential)

Noted:

- a) the outcome to the TEF 2023 had been disappointing, with the University moving from gold to silver rating, however, only seven Russell Group universities had received a gold overall rating;
- b) although the University was rated silver overall, student outcomes were rated gold and student experience silver. This included very high quality evidence for some student experience areas;
- c) feedback from the TEF panel had leant on the weaker areas highlighted in the National Student Survey (NSS) particularly in relation to student voice and assessment & feedback;
- d) although a lot of work had been undertaken by departments into improving assessment & feedback, more progress was needed to translate into better NSS outcomes;
- e) in relation to student voice the following:
 - i) the University was working closely with the DSU to address NSS outcomes relating to student voice;
 - ii) often students felt disconnected from the formal metrics that the University saw as being the source of student voice, such as MEQs;
 - iii) 'softer' interactions between students and departments was often where richer examples could be gathered in relation to student interpretation of what they thought of when the NSS asked about student voice;
 - iv) addressing issues relating to student voice would not be at the detriment to academic rigour;
 - v) departments which were successful in having more positive student voice outcomes, were often those where there was a prevalence of practical components or unstructured work. This model could not be easily applied to all disciplines.

Agreed: Council to receive an update on the progress made in responding to the areas highlighted in the TEF. **TF**

31. Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) Report: 23 November 2023 (C/23/31 Confidential)

Received: ARC Annual Report (C/23/31a Confidential), Occupational Health & Safety Policy Statement & Arrangements (C/23/31b Confidential), Fire Risk Management Policy (C/23/31c Confidential), Research Integrity Statement (C/23/31d Confidential), Prevent Monitoring Report (C/23/31e Confidential), DSU Annual Assurance (C/23/31f Confidential).

Noted:

- a) in relation to the External Audit the following:
 - i) it was likely that Grant Thornton may need to change their lead auditor. This did not mitigate delays which had occurred internally, due to changes noted at the last Council meeting, although it did not help in meeting the revised deadline;
 - ii) the University's contract with its current external audit partner was due for renewal in December 2024.
- b) the Occupational Health & Safety Policy Statement & Arrangements and the Fire Risk Management Policy had been subject to significant scrutiny by the Health & Safety Committee and UEC, prior to presentation at ARC and Council;

- c) the DSU Annual Assurance report had been endorsed by Governance & Nominations Committee by-circulation for approval at Council.

Agreed: to approve the: Occupational Health & Safety Policy Statement & Arrangements; Fire Risk Management Policy; Research Integrity Statement; Prevent Monitoring Report; DSU Annual Assurance.

32. Strategic Performance Indicators and Strategy Update (C/23/29 Confidential)

Noted:

- a) following approval of the Strategy Refresh, the Strategic Performance Indicators (SPIs) had been updated to ensure that progress against the Strategy could be measured;
- b) several SPIs related to sustainability. With recognition for the exceptional work by the teams led the PVC (Global) and Director of Strategy, Planning & Insights, in evidencing the University's response to the United Nation's (UNs) Sustainability Development Goals (SDG). This had contributed to celebratory improvements in the University's positioning in the QS Sustainability University Rankings 2024;
- c) the University had been working with the DSU in developing a mental health charter and would refresh its Access & Participation Plan in response to changes to OfS guidance;
- d) Council agreed that the SPIs were clear and welcomed the approach taken by the Strategy, Planning & Insight Office in communicating how progress against the Strategy would be measured. Council would receive a 6-monthly progress update of progress in relation to the Strategy;
- e) in relation to the ambitious target set for research income generation, as noted in the Strategy Refresh, confidence in this figure had been based on several factors:
 - i) the University's performance in relation to similar sized institutions and other Russell Group universities;
 - ii) changes in research income generation which had been achieved in the 2022-23 Academic Year;
 - iii) analysis of the funding landscape available for research grants, including horizon scanning for the likely future direction of research funding.

33. Remuneration Committee Report: 14 November 2023 (C/23/35 Confidential)

Noted: the report of items discussed at the Remuneration Committee meeting held on 14 November 2023, with particular note of the agreed decision by the Committee to discontinue the Pay in lieu of pensions scheme for new entrants, but to continue for current members.

34. Council and Joint Senate and Council Committee Terms of Reference

Noted: the consideration of Terms of Reference by the sub-committees of Council and the joint sub-committees of Council and Senate.

Agreed: to approve the Terms of Reference.

35. Finance Committee Report: 15 November 2023 (C/23/32 Confidential)

Received: 2022/2023 Financial Outturn (C/23/32a Confidential)

Noted:

- a) the report of items discussed at the Finance Committee meeting held on 15 November 2023;
- b) in relation to the 2022/2023 Financial Outturn the following:
Closed Minute

36. Ethics Committee Reports: 27 October and 16 November 2023 (C/23/33 Confidential)

Noted:

- a) the report of items discussed at the Ethics Committee meetings held on 27 October and 16 November 2023;
- b) in relation to the KSA-UK Joint Institute for Clean Hydrogen the following:
 - i) the research proposal was at a letter of intent stage, with Ethics Committee asked for its input in relation to the ethical matters culminating from the proposal;

- ii) Ethics Committee had considered issues relating to the challenge of the project funding potentially coming from a fossil fuel exporter and the issue of human rights in the country;
 - iii) the research proposal was not thought to be state funded and Ethics Committee would receive a further update at a future meeting, advising Council of the outcome.
- c) The issue of international security risks and the challenges the University faced, was a topic which had been proposed for consideration at the Joint Senate Council Event, scheduled for 26 February 2024.

37. People and Organisational Development Committee Report 2 November 2023

Noted: the report of items discussed at the People & Organisational Development Committee meeting held on 2 November 2023.

38. Statutes and Regulations Update

Noted: the approval of the updated University Statutes by the Privy Council on 11 October 2023.

39. Business Agreed by Circulation since Last Meeting

Noted: the approval by Council by-circulation of the following decisions:

- a) Professor Clive Roberts as the Executive Dean for the Faculty of Science;
- b) Professor Tony Fawcett as the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education).